

Matthew 1 - 12

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Part 1 of Lectures on the Gospel of Matthew.

Preface

The author trusts that the volume may prove a help to those who accept Scripture as the word of God and have confidence in the gracious guidance of the Holy Ghost, who is sent down from heaven to glorify our Lord Jesus. Critical questions have been sparingly discussed here: elsewhere they may be entered into more fully; for truth has nothing to fear, much to gain, from the most thorough sifting, if it be but competent and candid. On the present occasion, however, direct interpretation has been the aim, and the practical profit of souls."

Guernsey, *Feb.*, 1868.

INTRODUCTION

That the Spirit of God, when inspiring Matthew, had in view the aspirations and wants of the Jews, the evidence of the Messiahship of Jesus, and the consequences of His rejection both for them and the Gentiles, is a truth which has forced itself on most Christians who have examined the Gospels with any discriminating care. So large and varied are the internal proofs of such a design that the only wonder is how an intelligent mind could dispute the facts or the inference. Yet we are told that, had a Jewish aim been steadily kept before the Evangelist, the visit of the Gentile Magi could not have been exclusively related by Matthew, any more than the circumcision of Jesus and His frequenting the passovers at Jerusalem could have been exclusively related by Luke if he had written for Gentiles. The

objection has no force when it is seen that the Spirit meant by Matthew to trace the alienation of the Jews from such a Messiah as their own Scriptures portray, not alone externally glorious, but first as a divine person though a man, intimating in His very name that He was Jehovah, coming to save His people from their sins, and not merely from their enemies (chap. 1). What a picture follows in chapter 2! Jerusalem troubled at the tidings of His birth, and distant Gentile Magi from the East coming up to do Him homage! Is this the refutation of Matthew's special design? What more beautiful illustration of it could be looked for? And if Luke gives us the most charming glimpses at the godly remnant of Israel, and the Lord Jesus presented first in their midst with the most exact heed to every requirement of the law, how does this set aside the testimony of a Gospel which teems with evidence that God gives us there Christ as traced up to "Adam, which was the son of God," not down from Abraham and David, the depositary of promise and the stock of the kingdom in Israel? Did the objectors forget that the great apostle of the Gentiles regularly carried out the principle on which he insists — "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek?" The inspired writers reflected the richness of God's ways of grace, not the technicality of a human routine.

It is evident also that the apparent discrepancies in the concurrent accounts of the synoptic Gospels must spring either from the infirmity of the human instruments or from the far-reaching wisdom of the Spirit who impressed on each a special design, and so inserted, suppressed, or variously presented, the same substantial fact or truth in pursuance of that design, never giving anything but truth, yet only thus giving the whole truth. Why does unbelief affirm that such a difference of design is an *à priori* theory? The habitual testimony of each Gospel must decide this question. What can be more manifestly *à priori* than to impute, on such a ground as this, "demonstrable historical inaccuracies" to the inspired historians of the weightiest matters ever given to man to record? If the sole method of writing a life were that of simple sequence, there might be some appearance of reason; but some of the most famous biographies among men depart in general or in part from the mere order of occurrence. What would be thought of assailing their credit for such a reason as this? The fault lies in those who object, not in Scripture.

It is to me certain that Matthew and Luke were led to follow an exact order, one dispensational, the other moral; that they are far more profoundly instructive than if one or other, or both, had adhered to the very elementary manner of an annalist; and that it is a mere blunder therefore to characterize any resulting difference of arrangement (such as Matt. 8: 28, etc., compared with Mark 5: 1, etc., and Luke 8: 26, etc.) as a real discrepancy. Let such defenders of the faith do their worst: the Christian has nothing to fear, but only to believe, and he shall see the glory of the Lord and the beauty of the truth. Undoubtedly a different arrangement consists with and supposes the same incident variously placed, and with deliberate design, so as to bring out the truth more fully; but how does it prove a "real" discrepancy?

It is allowed on all hands that the Lord may have repeated the same truth, as He often repeated similar miracles. But a difference of design alone accounts for all the phenomena of the Gospels, and this not to the dishonour of the writers, but to the praise of their true and divine Author. Eye-witness and apostolicity fail to meet the case, for two out of the four Evangelists were neither. The foundation of the new building consists of prophets as well as apostles; and though God did supply eyewitnesses, He proved His supremacy by furnishing the most graphic details of our Lord's ministry by the very two who had not seen what they describe with more lifelike touches than are found in those two who describe what they saw. So false is this criterion even in the two apostles, that John alone does *not* give either the scene of the agony or that of the transfiguration, yet he alone of the Evangelists was among the nearest to both. He alone gives the fall of the armed band to the ground, yet Matthew

beheld it equally With himself. And Matthew gives with the greatest fulness the prophetic discourse on Olivet; John not at all, though he is the only Evangelist who was present to hear it.

The Spirit's purpose is the true and only key in every instance. Thus, as to the inscription on the cross, nothing is simpler than the perfection of each report for each Gospel; while it may be that the actual writing contained John's with the addition of Matthew's opening words, the Holy Spirit appropriating each form to His aim in the respective Gospels. Plenary inspiration in no way excludes, but accentuates, special design. The true question is, Are we to attribute their differences of form to the wisdom of God or to the weakness of man? Again, difference of reading is a question of human copies, not of the inspired original. Lastly, the apostle insists not merely that the men were inspired, but that the book — yea, every scripture — is divinely inspired.

There is the strongest evidence to prove that the Greek of Matthew is the original and not a version, though possibly the Evangelist may have also written it in Hebrew for the early Church in Judea. This might lapse, and what was permanently needed abide.

LECTURES ON THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Matthew 1

I have thought. it would be profitable to take up one of the Gospels, and to trace, as simply as the Lord enables me, the general outline of the truth revealed there. It is my desire to point out the special object and design of the Holy Ghost, so as to furnish those who value God's word with such hints as may tend to meet some of the difficulties that arise in the minds of many, and also to put in a clearer light great truths that are apt to be passed lightly over. Here I may assume that the Spirit of God has not given us these accounts of our Lord liable to the mistakes of men, but that He has, on the contrary, kept His mighty, unerring hand over those who in themselves were men of like passions with us. In a word, the Holy Ghost has inspired these accounts in order that we might have full certainty that He is their author, and thus they are stamped with His own perfection. As He has been pleased to give us various accounts, so He has had a divine reason for each of them. In short, God has sought His own glory in this, and has secured it.

Now there can be no question, to any one who reads the Gospels with the smallest discernment, that the first is most remarkably adapted to meet the need of Jews, and that it brings out the Old Testament prophecies and other scriptures which found their realization in Jesus. Consequently, there are more scripture citations as applying to our Lord's life and death in this Gospel than in all the others put together. All this was not a thing left to Matthew's discretion. That the Holy Ghost used the mind of man in carrying out His own design is clear; but that He was pleased perfectly to guard and guide him in what he was to give out is what I mean in saying that God inspired Matthew for the purpose.

Besides presenting our Lord in such a way as best to meet the right or wrong thoughts and feelings of a Jew; besides furnishing the proofs more particularly wanted to satisfy his mind, it is evident from the character of the discourses and parables that the rejection of the Messiah by Israel, and the consequences of it to the Gentiles, are here the great prominent thoughts in the mind of the Holy Ghost. Hence there is no ascension scene in Matthew. The Jew, if he had understood the Old Testament prophecies, would have looked for a Messiah to come, suffer, die, and be raised again, "according to the Scriptures." In Matthew we have His death and resurrection, but there He is left; and we should not know from the facts related by him only that Christ went up to heaven at all. We should

know it was implied in some of the words that Christ spoke; but in point of fact Matthew leaves us with Christ Himself still upon the earth. The last chapter describes, not the ascension of Christ, nor His session at God's right hand, but His speaking to the disciples here below. Such a presentation of Christ was peculiarly that which the Jews needed to know. It was more suitable to them than to any other people on the earth.

And who was the agent employed, and with what fitness? — one of the twelve who companied with our Lord from the beginning of His ministry till He was taken up from them. So far, of course, he was an evidently competent witness for the Jew, and far more suitable than Mark or Luke would have been, who were not, as far as we know, personal companions of the Lord. But there was this peculiarity — that Matthew was a publican, or tax-gatherer, by profession. Although a Jew, he was in the employment of the Gentiles, which position would make him specially odious to his countrymen. They would look upon him with more suspicion even than upon a stranger. This might make it appear at first sight the more extraordinary that the Holy Ghost should employ such a one to give the account of Jesus as the Messiah. But let us remember that there is another object all through the Gospel of Matthew; that it is not only the record of Jesus as the true Messiah to Israel, but that it shows us His *rejection* by Israel, and the consequences of their fatal unbelief: — all the barriers which had hitherto existed between Jew and Gentile thrown down — the mercy of God flowing out toward those who were despised, and blessing the Gentile as readily and as fully as the Jew. Thus the admirable propriety of employing Matthew the publican, and its consistency with the scope of his task, are apparent.

These few remarks may help to evince that there was the utmost fitness in the employment of the first of the four Evangelists to do the work appointed for him. If it were our object to examine the rest, it could just as easily be made manifest that each had exactly the right work to do. As we proceed through this Gospel, you will be struck, I doubt not, by the wisdom which chose such a one to give the account of the rejected Messiah, despised by His guilty brethren after the flesh.

But I shall confine myself at present to showing with what wisdom Matthew introduces such an account of the Messiah. For many must have been more or less arrested by the prefatory record of names, and may perhaps have asked, What profit is there to be had from a list like this? But let us never pass over anything in Scripture as a light or even doubtful matter. There is a depth of blessed meaning in the account Matthew gives us of the Lord's genealogy. I must therefore dwell a little on the perfectly beautiful manner in which the Spirit of God has here traced His lineage, and direct attention briefly to the way in which it harmonizes with the divine account of Jesus for the Jew, who would be constantly raising the question whether Jesus was really the Messiah.

It will be observed that the genealogy here differs totally from what we have in Luke, where it is not given at the beginning, but at the end of chapter 3. Thus, in the latter Gospel we learn a great deal about the Lord Jesus before His genealogy appears. Why was this? Luke was writing to the Gentiles, who could not be supposed to be equally, or in the same way, interested in His messianic relations. But when they had learned in some degree who Jesus was, it would be very interesting to see what was His lineage as man, and to trace Him up to Adam, the father of the whole human family. What more suitable than to link Him with the head of the race if the object were to show the grace that would go out toward all mankind, the salvation-bearing grace of God that appears unto all men? One might put that word in Titus 2 as a sort of frontispiece to Luke's Gospel. It is God's grace in the person of His Son, who had become a man, connected as to humanity with the whole family of man, though the nature in Him was ever, only, and altogether holy.

But here, in Matthew, we find ourselves on a narrower ground, circumscribed to a certain family, the royal seed of a certain nation, God's chosen people. Abraham and David are mentioned in the very first verse. "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham," Why are these two names thus selected; and why put together here in this brief summary? Because all the hopes of Israel were bound up with what was revealed to these two persons, David was the great head of the kingdom, the one in whom the true line of Messiah's throne was founded. Saul was merely the fleshly king whom Israel sought passingly for themselves out of their own will. David was the king God chose, and he is here mentioned as the forefather of the Lord's Anointed — "the Son of David." Abraham, again, was the one in whom it was said all the nations of the earth should be blessed. Thus the opening words prepare us for the whole of the Gospel. Christ came with all the reality of the kingdom promised to David's Son. But if He were refused as the Son of David, still, as the Son of Abraham, there was blessing not merely for the Jew, but for the Gentile. He is indeed the Messiah; but if Israel will not have Him, God will during their unbelief bring the nations to taste of His mercy.

Having given us this general view, we come to particulars. We begin with Abraham, tracing Jesus not up to him, but down from him. Every Israelite would begin with Abraham, and would be interested to follow the stages of the line from him on whom they all hung.* "Abraham begat Isaac, and Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren" (ver. 2). This comprehensive notice, "Judas and his brethren," seems to be of importance, and in more ways than one. It does not consist with the notion that our Evangelist in this part of the chapter simply copies the records kept by the Jews. We may be sure that men never register in this fashion. Yet it is evidently in the strictest harmony with this Gospel, for it gives prominence to the royal tribe of whom was the Messiah (Gen. 49: 10), while it reminds the most favoured that others, too long out of sight, were not forgotten of God now that He is giving the genealogy of His Messiah.

* Note that it would be an impossibility now for any Jew to produce his genealogy from Abraham or David, as must be to authenticate the Messianic claim This is given us both on the legal, or Joseph's side, and the natural, or Mary's side, in Matthew and in Luke. The Messiah having come, and being rejected by the Jews, the Romans were permitted to come and destroy their temple, city, and nation; and their genealogical records might well come to an end, as they did. [Ed.

"And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar" (ver. 3). What is the reason for bringing in a woman, for naming Tamar here? There were women of great note in the lineage of the Messiah — persons whom the Jews naturally looked up to as holy and honourable. What Jewish heart would not naturally glow with strong feelings of respect in hearing of Sarah and Rebekah, and the other holy and well-known women recorded in Old Testament history? But there is no mention of them here. On the other hand, Tamar is mentioned. Why is it so? Grace lay underneath this, most rebuking to the flesh, but most precious in its way. There are four women, and only four, who appear in the line, and upon every one of them there was a blot. It is not that all the sources of reproach or shame were of the same kind. But to a proud Jew, with all these women there was connected what was humbling — something that *he* would have kept in the dark. Oh, wondrous way of God! What can He not do? How striking that the Holy Ghost should not here attract attention to those who would have brought honour in the eyes of Israel — nay, that He should single out these that a carnal Israelite would have held in contempt! The Messiah was to spring from a line in which there had been dismal sin. And where all that is in man would try to hide this and keep it back, the Spirit of God brings it plainly out, so that it shall stand not only in the eternal records of the Old Testament history, but here rehearsed. These, on whom there were such foul blots in the judgment of men, are the only women brought specifically

before us. What is man? and what is God? What is man that such things should ever have taken place? And what is God that, instead of covering it, He should have drawn the story out of obscurity and set it in full revealed light, emblazoned, if I may so say, on the genealogy of His own Son! Not at all as if the sin were not exceeding sinful; nor as if God thought lightly of the privileges of His people — still less of the glory of His Son, or what is due to Him. But God, feeling the sin of His own people to be the worst of all sin, yet having introduced in this very Messiah the only One who could save His people from their sins, does not hesitate to bring their sin into the presence of the grace that could and would put it all away. Did the Jew think this was a scandal or dishonour done to the Messiah? From that same seed their Messiah must spring, and from no other line. It was narrowed to the house of David, and to the line of Solomon, and they were in the direct line of Judah's son Phares. No Jew could get out of the difficulty. What are we not taught by this! If the Messiah deigns to link Himself with such a family — if God is pleased so to order things that out of that stock, as concerning the flesh, His own Son, the Holy One of Israel, was to be born — surely there could be none too bad to be received of Him. He came to "save His people from their sins," not to find a people that had no sins. He came with all power to save: He showed grace by the very family whereof He was pleased to be a — or rather the — Branch. God is never confounded; neither, through grace, is he that believes, because he rests upon what God is to him. We never can be anything for God till we know that God is everything for us and to us. But when we know such a God and Father as Jesus reveals Him to us, on one side full of goodness, and on the other no darkness in Him at all, what may we not expect from Him? Who might not now be born of God? Who is there that such a God would reject? Such a hint in Matt. 1 opens the way for the wonders of grace which appear afterward. In one sense no man has such a position of ancient privileges as the Jew; yet, even as to the Messiah, this is the account that the Holy Ghost gives of His lineage. No flesh shall glory in the presence of the Lord.

But that is not all. "Phares begat Ezrom and Salmon begat Booz of Rachab" (vers. 3-5). And who and what was she? A Gentile, and once a harlot! But Rahab is taken out of all her belongings — separated from everything that was her portion by nature. And here she is, in this gospel of Jesus written for the Jew — for the very people who despised and hated Him because He would look upon a Gentile. Rahab was named for heaven already, and no Jew could deny it. She was visited of God; she was delivered outwardly and inwardly' by His mighty grace, brought into and made a part of Israel on earth — yea, by sovereign grace part of the royal line out of which the Messiah must come, and out of which, in point of fact, Jesus, who is God over all, blessed forever, was born. Oh, what marvels of grace dawn upon us while we dwell even on the mere list of names that unbelief would disparage as a dry, if not incorrect, appendage to the word of God! But faith says, I cannot do without the wisdom of God. Certainly His wisdom shines in all that He has written here. He that glories must glory in the Lord.

Might it be thought that Rahab was called in at some distant epoch? But no: "Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; and Jesse begat David the king." Ruth, loving as she was, yet to a Jew was from a source peculiarly odious. She was a Moabitess, and thus forbidden by the law to enter the congregation of the Lord to the tenth generation. Even the Edomite or the Egyptian was held in less abhorrence, and *their* children might enter in the third generation (Dent. 23: 3-8). Thus was given a still deeper testimony that grace would go out and bless the very worst of the Gentiles. Whether the Jews like it or not, God has Rahab, the once immoral Gentile, and Ruth, the meek daughter of Moab, brought, not only into the nation, but into the direct line from which the Messiah was to arise.

"And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her [that had been the

wife] of Urias" (ver. 6). With only a few generations intervening, we have these three women, who would, for one reason or another, moral or ceremonial, have been utterly despised and excluded by the same spirit which rejected Jesus and the grace of God. It was, then, no new thought — the divine mercy that was reaching out to gather in the outcast of the Gentiles, that would look upon the vile to deliver and make them holy. It was God's way of old. They could not read the account He gives of their own Messiah's stock without seeing that it was so. And that this was the divinely prescribed channel no Jew could deny. They must all own that the Messiah was to come in no other line than that of Solomon. Oh the grace to us who know what we have been as poor sinners of the Gentiles, what wretchedness was ours, and this because of guilt and sin! "Such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

Hence the first words which introduce the Messiah give the same blessed truth, if there was an ear to hear, or an eye to see, what God had in store and was now pointing to in them. In the case last mentioned there was something more humbling than in any other. For though, of old, Tamar's story had been wretched, yet there were other features, false and lustful and violent, which met in her case that had belonged to Uriah. And this was so much the more dismal because the chief guilt was on that man's part whom God had delighted to honour, even "David the king." Who knows not that it has drawn out the deepest and most touching personal confession of sin ever inspired by the Spirit of God? (Ps. 51) Yet here again we find that he who had to do with this tale of horrors, and who uttered this psalm of sorrowful confession, was the direct forefather of the Messiah. So that, if the Jew looked to those from whom the Messiah had sprung, such must He be according to His earthly ancestors. But God records the blessed display of His ways, both for the winning of the hardest, proudest, and most sinful, and for the unfailing comfort and refreshment of those who love Him.

I need not dwell particularly upon the names that follow. We might see sin upon sin, stain upon stain, interwoven into their various histories. It was one continuous tissue of that which would cause a Jew to blush — what a man never would of himself have dared to bring out about a king that he honoured. God, in His infinite goodness, would not permit these things to slumber. Not a word is said of women who came after the Scripture record terminated; but what Jew could gainsay the lively oracles committed to them? To leave out what a Jew gloried in, and to bring in what he would have concealed through shame, and all in tender mercy to Israel, to sinners, was indeed divine. We may see from this that the mention of these four women is particularly instructive. Man could not have originated it: our place is to learn and adore. Every woman that is named is one that nature would have studiously excluded from the record; but grace made them most prominent in it. Thus the truth taught thereby ought never to be forgotten, and the Jew who wanted to know the claims of Jesus to be the Messiah might learn here what would prepare his heart and conscience for such a Messiah as Jesus is. He is a Messiah come in quest of sinners, who would despise no needy one — not even a poor publican or a harlot. The Messiah so thoroughly reflected what God is in His holy love, so true to all the purposes of God, so perfect an expression of the grace that is in God, that there never was a thought, or feeling, or word of grace in His word, but what the Messiah was come now to make it good in His dealings with poor souls, and first of all with a Jew.

This, then, is the genealogy of Christ as given us here. There are certain omissions in the list, and persons of some learning have been alike weak and daring), enough to impute a mistake to St. Matthew which no intelligent Sunday scholar would have made. For a child could copy what was clearly written out before him; and certainly Matthew could easily have taken the Old Testament and have reproduced the list of names and generations given us in the Chronicles and elsewhere. But there was a divine reason for omitting the particular names of Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah from verse 8 —

three generations. Why is it, we may be permitted to ask, that the apostle Matthew drops, of course by inspiration, some of the links of the chain? The Spirit of God was pleased to arrange the ancestry of our Lord into three divisions of fourteen generations each. Now, as there were actually more than fourteen generations between David and the Captivity, it was a matter of necessity that some should be discarded in order to equalize the series, and fourteen only are therefore recorded. Indeed, if you examine the Old Testament Scriptures, you will find that it is not at all uncommon in genealogies to drop some of the links of the chain. More than twice as many as in our verse are omitted in one place (Ezra 7: 3). Now it was Ezra himself who wrote that book, and of course he knew his own descent far more familiarly than we do. And if any of us, by comparison with other parts, can find out the missing links, much more could he. And yet, in giving his own genealogy (chap. 7), the Spirit of God is pleased by him to omit no less than seven generations. This is the more remarkable as no one could exercise his rights as a priest unless he could trace his line up to Aaron without any question as to the succession. I have no doubt that there were special reasons for the omission elsewhere no less than in our Gospel; but the motives for it are a very different question. One of them I have named. There were more than twice seven generations in at least the second division; and this may have been one reason why the writer should omit several of them. But why these in particular? Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, king of Israel, and wife of Jehoram, had thus entered by marriage the royal house of David; and a sorrowful hour it was indeed for Judah. For Athaliah, enraged at the premature end of her son, king Ahaziah, was guilty of a too successful attempt to destroy the seed-royal. But it could not be complete; for that family was selected out of all the families of God's people, never to be entirely extinguished till Shiloh came. There was but a single youthful scion, whom Jehoshabeath saved by concealment in the house of the Lord. The light was covered with a bushel for a time; but it was not put out. The then son of David appeared. It was a time when Judah had fallen into manifold and ever-deepening evil. But as surely as that young Joash was brought out of his darkness, — as truly as the priest was there to anoint the king, and the union of the two things accomplished the great purpose of God, so it will be when the years of man's rebellion against God are full. He will come forth who has been long hidden and forgotten, and all the enemies shall be trampled down; and then will Judah flourish indeed under the King, the true Son of David. For all this was the type of the reappearing of the true Messiah by and by. But my design is not so much to dwell upon that now as to inquire and suggest briefly why it is that we have these few kings omitted. The answer seems to be, that they sprang from Athaliah. Hence they were completely passed over. We find God thus marking His resentment at the introduction of that wicked and idolatrous stock from the house of Ahab. Athaliah's descendants are not mentioned even to the third generation. This appears to be the moral reason why we find three persons left out at this particular point. Then, in verse 11 we read, "And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren at the time of the removal to Babylon." It is evident that the method is summary, Jehoahaz, whom the people made king, and who reigned for but three months, not being specified, and Jehoiakim being often called by the same name as his son Jechonias.

But I will not dwell upon the minuter features of the genealogy. The word of God is infinite; and, no matter what we may have learned, it only puts us in a position to find out our ignorance. When persons are altogether in the dark, they think they know all that is to be known. But as we make real progress, we acquire a deeper sense of how little we know, and at the same time more patience with others who may know a little less and, very possibly, somewhat more. Spiritual intelligence, instead of puffing up the loving heart, produces an increased feeling of our own littleness. Where it is not so, we have reason to fear that the mind outruns the conscience, and that both are far from being subject to the Holy Ghost.

The generations are divided into three different sections. The first is from Abraham to David,

the dawn of glory for the Jews. When David "the king" was there, it was noontime in Israel — sadly chequered, it is true, and clouded through sin; but still it was noon of man's day in Israel. The second division is from thence till the carrying away to Babylon. The third is from that captivity until Christ. This last was clearly the evening history of Israel's past. But that evening is not the close. It ends with the brightest light of all — type of the day when at evening-time there shall be light. just as the prophet Haggai speaks of the house of God, as it then was, being as nothing in comparison of its first glory, and says, "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts," so a greater than Solomon was here. Although there had been the decline of the splendour of Israel, and Israel was now broken and subject to the Gentiles, the recorded decline ends in the birth of the true Messiah. Throughout the lingering captivity no persecution could destroy that chosen family; because Jesus, the Messiah of God, was to be born of it. The moment that Jesus concludes His career here below, the chain may seem forever broken as regards the earth, but it is only to be riveted to the throne of God in heaven. Jesus is there, alive again for evermore. And Jesus shall come again, and the Jews shall see and weep, even those written in the book; and Jehovah their King, even Jesus, shall reap in joy what He sowed in tears and His own blood.

But let us look for a little at the remaining view given us of our Lord Jesus in this chapter. Joseph is made very prominent. The genealogy itself is that of Joseph, not of Mary. On the other hand, Mary is the principal figure of the two in Luke, and there it is, I believe, *her* genealogy. Why is this? It was of necessity, for a Jew, that Jesus should be the heir of Joseph. The reason is that Joseph was the direct lineal descendant of the royal branch of David's house. There were two lines that came down unbroken to those days — the house of Solomon and the house of Nathan. Mary was the representative of Nathan's family, as Joseph was of Solomon's. If Mary had been mentioned without her connection with her husband, there would not have been a legal right to the throne of David. It was necessary that the Messiah should be born, not merely of a virgin, nor of a virgin daughter of David, but of one legally united to Joseph, i.e., in the eye of the law, really his wife. This is carefully recorded here for the special instruction of Israel; for an intelligent Jew would at once have asked that question, and everything must be fenced round with holy jealousy. Let people calumniate as they might, Mary must be espoused to Joseph; else the Lord Jesus would not have a proper title to the throne of David, and therefore the stress here is not laid upon Mary but upon Joseph, because the law would have always maintained the claim of Joseph. On the other hand, had Joseph been the real father, there could have been no Saviour at all. As it is, the wonder of divine wisdom shines most conspicuously, making Him legally the son of Joseph, really the son of Mary, who in the truth of His nature is the Son of God. And all three met and merged in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He must be the undisputed heir of Joseph according to the law, and Joseph was espoused to Mary. The child must be born before Joseph ever lived with Mary as his wife, and this we are carefully shown here.

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ* was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream," etc. (vers. 18-20). Here the angel appears to *Joseph* in a dream. In Luke the angel appears to Mary. It is thus in Matthew because Joseph was the important person in the eye of the law; and yet the Messiah must not be, in point of fact, the son of Joseph. All the wit of man could not have understood these ways beforehand; all his power could not have arranged the circumstances. If the law demanded that Jesus should be the heir of Joseph, the prophet demanded that he should not be the son of Joseph, but of a *virgin*. God humbling Himself was the need of man; man exalted was the counsel of God. How was this, and far more, to be united and reconciled in one person? Jehovah Jesus is the answer.

"The angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (ver. 20).

* Many ancient versions omit "Jesus" from this verse.

God meets the scruples of the godly Israelite, and signifies that most distinguished honour which He had put upon Mary under a guise which for a season had clouded and distressed her. She was the very virgin God had predicted hundreds of years before — "She shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus." Here again Joseph was to be the one who publicly acts, while in Luke (Luke 1: 31) Mary names. The difference arises from the point of view the Holy Ghost gives us of our Lord's person in the two Gospels. In Luke He was proving that Jesus, though divine, was very man — a partaker of humanity apart from sin. In our case it is sinful human nature; in His case it was holy. Therefore, in speaking of Him simply as man, it is said in Luke, "Therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." So He was most truly and properly a man — the child of His virgin mother; and as such, too, He is called the Son of God. In that Gospel one great point was to prove His holy manhood; to show how fully and fitly He could be a Saviour of men, and take up the woes and wretchedness, and on the cross suffer for the sinfulness of others — Himself the Holy One. He was the Son of God, who had actually taken human nature into His own person, who was perfectly and really a man as much as any of us; but a man without sin, yet holy, and not merely innocent. Adam was innocent; Jesus was holy. Holiness does not mean mere absence of evil, but inward power according to God, and so power to withstand evil. When Adam was tempted, he fell. Jesus was tried by every temptation, and Satan exhausted his wiles in vain. All this, however, is most suitable to the Gospel of Luke, where it is accordingly shown that the proper humanity of Jesus flowed from His birth (i.e., from His mother). His legal right to the throne of David flowed from Joseph, and Joseph accordingly is the prominent personage in the Gospel of Matthew.

But He had a title greater than any which Joseph could transmit even from David or Abraham; and this was to be attested in His name, His lowly name of Jesus, Jehovah, the Saviour. "Thou shalt call His name JESUS; for He shall save His people from their sins." Jehovah's people were *His* people; and He should save them, not merely from their enemies, but from their sins. What a testimony *to* Him and *for* them! Blessed for any sinful soul to hear; how especially needed for a people then inflated with boundless hopes of earthly aggrandizement in their expected Messiah!

Here, too, alone in any of the Gospels, it is that we hear of Jesus as "Emmanuel." This is equally instructive and beautiful, because the Jew was apt to forget it. Did he look for a divine Messiah — for one who was God as well as man? Very far from it. Comparatively few of the Jews expected anything so astonishing as this. They craved and looked for a mighty king and conqueror, yet still a mere man. But here we find that the Holy Spirit, by their own prophet Isaiah, besides speaking of Him as man, takes care to show that He was much more than man, that He was God (vers. 22, 23). Matthew alone brings out this clear testimony of the great evangelical prophet — "God with us." So perfectly did God provide for these poor Jews, and develop the neglected seeds of their prophecies, and reflect light on the obscure parts of their law; so that if a Jew rejected the Messiah, he did it to his own eternal ruin. Besides being the son of David and Abraham, then, He was *God with us*. Such was the true Messiah, and such the witness produced to Israel. Could they reject Matthew's history, if they received Isaiah's prophecy? In vain they worshipped God, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

"Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife, and knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son; and he called His name JESUS" (vers. 24, 25). Some of the best authorities (the Sinai., Vat., etc.) omit "her first-born," and so

present simply "a son." But there is no doubt that these words are genuine in Luke 2, whence they may have been introduced here. The shorter form appears to me sufficient for the purpose of our Evangelist.

We have been tracing what would have been of peculiar interest for a Jew; but may we also find the blessing of these truths for our own souls. Whatever exalts Jesus, whatever displays the grace of God and puts down the pride of man, is pregnant with blessing for us. By the blessing of God, pursuing these lessons still farther, we shall find how the wisdom of every word of His is justified as we wait on this most illustrious testimony to Jesus the Messiah, to His rejection by Israel, and to the blessings which thence flow out to us once poor Gentiles.

Matthew 2.

I think we shall find in the chapter before us abundant confirmation of the account I have already given of the Holy Ghost's special design by Matthew. That is, we shall see proofs that there is a most careful presentation of Jesus as the true Messiah of God, and of His rejection as such by the Jews; and that God, at the same time, takes advantage of Israel's fall to work out larger and deeper purposes.

The very first incident in the chapter illustrates it. Jesus was born. We do not meet with the same interesting facts, which are given us in Luke, of the very early days of our Lord's infancy: all are passed by, save that we have Christ presented as born in Bethlehem of Judea, the worship of the Magi from the east, and the flight into Egypt. The first fact that the Holy Ghost gives us here is the affecting one that there was no heart for the Messiah in Israel. And this was proved by the most significant circumstances. "Jesus having been born, in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship (or do homage to) Him." We are not told how soon this was after His birth. No doubt a considerable time had elapsed. People are often deceived as to this in looking at the scene through the notions of their infancy. We have all seen the pictures of the Babe in the manger, and "the three kings" coming in to worship Him. But the truth is, that the Lord was not just born, as such associations would convey, when the Magi arrived. For His earliest condition in this world we must consult, not Matthew, but Luke.

Some might, it is true, gather a wrong impression from the Authorized Version of verse 1: "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king." This does not intimate that the visit followed immediately upon our Saviour's birth, but leaves room for a time more or less considerable afterwards. It simply means, that after He was born these easterns came: many months, or upwards of a year, might have intervened. What confirms this is that the wise men had first seen the star in the east, and most probably at the time of our Lord's birth. After seeing the star, they had of course many a preparation to make before they could set out, and then a long way to travel; and travelling in those days was a hard and tedious matter in the eastern parts of the world. Even when they arrive in Judea, they go up first to Jerusalem to enquire there. All this supposes necessarily the lapse of no little time. Their questions are answered by the scribes. Herod, hearing of it, is troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. He gathers together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, and demands of them where Christ should be born. They tell him in Bethlehem of Judea, upon which he calls the wisemen and sends them there. All this took place before the scene of their worship.

They, when they had heard the king, departed. "And lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was." We are not to imagine,

according to traditional notions, that the star tracked the way before them to Jerusalem. They saw it in the east, and connected the sight with the promised Messiah; for at that time the prophecies about His speedy appearance had been spread over a considerable part of the world. Many Gentiles were expecting Him, especially in the east. And the greatest and most opposed in the west were aware of such hopes. The last man that was known in the east as a prophet, before the Gentiles were broken in the presence of Israel, was Balaam. No doubt he was a wicked man; but God took advantage of him to utter the most remarkable predictions of Israel's coming glory. And that very prophecy had closed with a reference to the Star that should rise out of Jacob. And now, after many hundred years had passed away, the traces of this prophecy still lingered among the children of the east. It is unlikely, too, that Daniel's prophecies in Babylon, especially that of the seventy weeks, etc., could be unknown, considering his position and the extraordinary events of his day. We can understand that these prophecies would not only be such as the children of Israel would treasure up, but the knowledge of them might spread, especially in those lands. Much of his prophecies might not be clearly understood. Still, they looked for a wonderful personage to arise — a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre out of Israel.

When these strangers, then, saw the star, they set forward to His traditional capital, Jerusalem. It is clear that the star was a meteor of some kind. As it shone in the east, they put the fact of this remarkable phenomenon along with the expectations of the coming king. And this the more, because the easterners were great observers of the heavens, and were therefore more alive to any uncommon appearance. It may have recalled the prophecy of Balaam. Certain it is that they soon started for Jerusalem, where universal report among the Gentiles maintained that the great King was to reign. Having got there, God meets them; and it is remarkable how He does so. It is by His word, and His word interpreted by those who had not the smallest interest of heart in the Messiah. They were quite right in their interpretation; they knew where Messiah was to be born. The Magi probably thought that Jerusalem was to be the spot; but they were told by the scribes that Bethlehem was the predicted birthplace. Alas, the very men who could answer so pertinently showed the not less solemn, because it is a common fact, that it is possible to have a measure of clear knowledge of Scripture and at the same time to have no love for Him of whom all testifies! As to the Magi, ignorant as they were, and though they might have been in the dark as to other things, still their desire was true, and God overruled all. Through these Gentiles, indeed, He sent a testimony to Jerusalem as to the birth of the Messiah. God knew how to accomplish this and to rebuke, through their testimony, those who ought above all to have watched for and hailed their own Messiah. If there was a queen who came from the distant parts of the earth to see king Solomon and to hear his wisdom who was the type of Christ, so was it now. The Holy Ghost wrought on and for these pilgrims from a far country to bring them in presence of the true King. The scribes could answer the questions, but there was no care for the Messiah, and it was for Him that these wise men came. This at once detects the awful state that Jerusalem was in. The effect of the tidings that God's King was born is that, instead of seeking the promised One, instead of being filled with joy to hear of One whom they had not sought, they were all troubled, from the king downward. More particularly, as we learn here, the chief priests and scribes are those whose state demonstrates the utter heartlessness of the nation. They had enough religious knowledge, they had the key in their hand, but they had no heart to enter in.

"Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared" (ver. 7). I call your attention to that, as confirming what I said before. It was after the diligent enquiry of the king from the wise men that he settled in his own mind at what time the Child must have been born. When they, warned of God, had withdrawn themselves instead of returning to Herod, he sent forth the cruel command to kill the children in Bethlehem and all the coasts "from *two years old and under*" - he naturally inferred that there had been a considerable lapse

of time between the birth of Christ and the giving of his wicked order.

If we turn to the Gospel of Luke, we shall see the importance of this. We have there our Lord born, as Matthew shows, in the city of David; but we are told here the circumstances that account for this, for Bethlehem was not the place where Mary and Joseph ordinarily dwelt. It was a village to which they repaired because of the commandment of the Roman emperor, who had sent forth a decree that all the world should be taxed, or enrolled. They, being of the royal family of the Jews, go to Bethlehem, which was the city of David. Thus God brought to pass the accomplishment of the prophecy of Micah through the decree of Caesar Augustus. Nothing was farther from the Roman's thought than the result which his decree was to subserve — the birth of the Messiah in the very place where prophecy demanded it. It appears that the census was not carried out then, but begun, and then stopped for some time. For it is said in Luke 2: 2, "And this taxing was *first made* when Cyrenius was governor of Syria," which was several years after. People, not understanding this, have concluded that there was a mistake in Luke. They knew that Cyrenius's government of Syria was subsequent to Christ's nativity, and too hastily inferred that our Evangelist laboured under the impression that the going up of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem took place in his time. But it is they who err, I believe. The decree of Caesar Augustus did not come into full operation or effect till then. It was just sufficiently carried out, when the order for enrolment was given, to induce Joseph and Mary to go up to the city of their lineage; and that was enough. God's object was accomplished. Joseph and Mary went there, and while there her days were fulfilled and she brought forth her firstborn Son, and "wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in the manger." There we have a scene totally different from what we had in Matthew, though this too was at Bethlehem. In all probability they paid more than one visit to the place. It was not far from Jerusalem, and we know that they went there every year to the feast of the passover. I see no reason to doubt that the visit of the Magi took place at another visit on the part of the parents to Bethlehem.

Mark how the circumstances recorded in Matthew differ from those in Luke.

In Matthew, Jerusalem is all troubled by the tidings of the Messiah's birth, while strangers from afar come up to do homage to the King of the Jews. They had seen His star; they knew it was the promised King, and now they are come to worship Him. They arrive at Jerusalem, and when they leave it, on their way to Bethlehem, they are again encouraged of God. The star which they had seen before in the east, re-appeared and went before them till it came and stood over where the young child was — plain evidence that the star had not accompanied them all the way. And we shall find it true in our own experience, that where we act in simple obedience, we find all that is necessary. God always takes particular care of those who are true to the light, even though it be ever so little; while nothing is more abhorrent to Him than great pretensions to light, without any heart for the true light, which is Christ.

We may observe that, of the reputed parents, Joseph is ever made the prominent person here, as in chapter 1. The vision, of verse 13, was to Joseph. Nevertheless, the Magi, "when they were come into the house, saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped *Him*," not her. Their homage was to Him. "And when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto *Him* gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." They acknowledged Him, as poor strangers whose greatest honour was to be owned of Him. Jerusalem is outside all this. A usurper was there; an Edomite was ruling. And, as when Christ returns again to the earth there will be a false king in Jerusalem under the influence of the western powers, and in conjunction with the religious heads of Israel, so it was at His first coming. All was entirely opposed to the recognition of Jesus.

In Luke we have quite another order of things. It is not so much one acknowledged as a king, though He was a king, but He is seen there in the lowliest possible condition. The persons that own Him are Jewish shepherds, who had the news made known to them from heaven. The heavenly hosts sing — their hearts delight in the ways of God, in the Saviour — for as such had He been announced to them: "Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be the sign unto you; ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in the manger." This was the very opening of our blessed Lord's life here below, evidently taking place immediately after His birth. The incident of the homage rendered by the Magi was long subsequent. There is not the slightest ground for confounding the two occasions. Each Gospel is true to its special purpose. In Matthew it is a question of His royal rights over Israel and the Gentiles; in Luke we have the perfect lowliness, from His very birth, of the Saviour-Son of Man; heaven's interest in the birth of the earth — despised Christ the Lord, and those poor of the flock, whose hearts are awakened to receive this blessed One — the expression, the means, and the substance of divine grace. "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people," or rather, "to all the people," for it means the Jews. A much wider circle appears afterwards, but it does not go beyond the Jews yet. To the Jew first, was the divine order.

How beautifully these various accounts harmonize with the Gospels in which they are found? In the one, the King, born some time before, is seen in Bethlehem, but none welcome Him save strangers from the east. From Matthew, we should not be aware of the slightest recognition of the Saviour up to the time of their coming. On the contrary, when the first breath of these tidings is brought to Jerusalem, consternation was the result in all. The king, the priests, the scribes, all are in a state of ferment. *There was no heart for Jesus.* But God always will have a testimony. If the Jews will not have Him, the Gentiles come; and grace it is that effects this. Unbelieving Jews tell the Magi where the King should be born. They at once act upon it, and the Lord, meeting them on the way, puts them in presence of the King, to whom they present their gifts. It is the Messiah of Israel, but rejected by Israel from His very birth. Jerusalem is with the false king, and cares not to receive Him. Those who were despised as dogs, whom the Jews themselves had to instruct in the first lessons of prophecy, have the glory of being the true recognizers of the claims of the Messiah. How humbling! It is the Messiah come, and owned by the ends of the earth; but slighted and rejected of His own nation. "He came to His own, and His own received Him not." It was important that Israel should know it. Here, through the earliest of the Evangelists, let them learn that it does not arise from any want of evidence on God's part. How did these Gentiles know? And where were the Jews all this time, that they had not recognized their own Messiah? It was a terrible tale, for the truth was the strangest of all things in their ears. Such is God's way: He gives testimony, but man dislikes it because it is of God. To recognize the person of Christ was the difficulty. To see from Scripture that their King was to be born in Bethlehem of Judah, was an easy thing; it did not test the conscience, nor put the heart to the proof. But to own that the ignored and despised One, the child of Mary and the heir of Joseph, was the Messiah — this was indeed hard to the flesh. To those who had seen the sign of it in the heavens, who had looked for it in the midst of great darkness, but who had their eyes toward it, all was simple, and they hastened to do Him honour. Now that He was born, they rejoiced, and came from far to have the joy of seeing Him and offering their gifts at His feet.

"And being warned of God in a dream, that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him" (vers. 12, 13). The unbelief that refused the word of God, is now allowed to show how thoroughly it was under

the power of Satan, who proves himself, as from the beginning, to be a liar first, then a murderer. But God revealed Herod's purpose; and Joseph, in obedience to His word, takes the young child and His mother by night and departs into Egypt, "and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son."

I have a word to say about this prophecy, and the application of it to our Lord. We shall have to take into account many prophecies cited in Matthew, but the present quotation has evidently a remarkable character attached to it. It had been said that Israel was God's son, God's firstborn, in Egypt. To them pertained the adoption. The prophet Hosea, seven hundred years after their departure from Egypt, again applies this word to Israel; and now it is used of Christ, as that which fully came within the intent of the inspiring Spirit. How is it that God's taking Israel out of the land of Egypt should be so illustrated in Christ's history? Because Christ is the object of the Holy Ghost in Scripture. It matters not what may be the place of His people: in all their troubles or deliverances, Christ must enter into all. There is no kind of temptation (save, of course, of inward evil) that He has* not known; nor of blessing on God's behalf that He has not proved. Christ goes through the history of His people; and on that principle it is that such scriptures as these are applied to Him. Christ Himself is carried into the very place that had been the furnace of Israel. There it is that He finds His refuge from the false king of Judea. What a picture! Because of the anti-king then reigning in Jerusalem, the true King must flee, and flee, into Egypt. Christ was the *true* Israel. Compare Isa. 49.

We see from this that no miraculous power is put forth to preserve Emmanuel. It was accomplishing the prophecies — filling up the outline of desolation, morally and nationally, that the Holy Ghost had sketched many a long year before. God was showing how precious to Him was every footstep of His Son. It might seem a trifling circumstance in itself that the Lord was carried into Egypt and came out of it another day. But whatever was the place of Christ — and His place was wherever His people were in their sorrow — He will not permit them to feel a pang without His sharing in it. He knows what it is to be carried into Egypt, and that too in a far more painful way than Israel had experienced. For the bitterest trouble of Christ was from His own people; the most murderous blow aimed at Him was by the king then sitting on the throne in their midst. Failing in this, he sends forth and slays all the children "that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not" (vers. 16-18). How clearly we find that the Holy Ghost is here providing for the Jew the proof that they were precious in His sight, and that if Christ entered into their they must not wonder if His presence will bring upon themselves the bitterest suffering through their rejection of Him. If Christ has the smallest connection with Israel, they become the object of Satan's animosity. It is Herod, led on by Satan, who issued the order to slay their little ones; but the Messiah is taken away from the scene of his rage. In Israel they have weeping and great mourning. Such were some of the troubles that Israel bring upon themselves; and this is but a little picture of what will befall them in the latter day.

"But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young Child's life. And he arose, and took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel" (ver. 19-21). It is sweet to find "*the land of Israel*" occurring here. It was not merely the country, as known among men, where poor Jews lived by permission of their Gentile lords. How few look on it as "*the land of Israel*" now! But God's thoughts are toward His

people in connection with the glory of His Son. if Jesus had His earthly tie there, if Emmanuel were now born of the virgin, why should not the land be called the land of Israel? It was the divine purpose completely to expel the foot of the Gentile that was now treading it down. If the people would only bow and receive Him to take His place as their King, how blessed their lot! But would Israel receive Jehovah-Jesus now returning from Egypt? — There was no readiness for Him yet. One Herod passed away; another followed. Hence, when the young Child was taken back into the land of Israel, and Joseph heard "that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene" (vers. 22, 23).

The method of citation is worthy of note here. Note that it is not one particular prophet, but "the prophets". And by that we are to gather, not that any one inspired writer said these words, but it is the spirit of the prophets who do speak of Him. When we read in one prophet, "They shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek"; in another, "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief "; and again, what they should give Him for meat, and in His thirst for drink, and how He should be taunted up to the last — we can understand this application of the prophets. It was the well-understood language expressive of contempt in that day: He should, in other words, be called a Nazarene. Nazareth was the most scorned of places. Not only did the men of Judea proper look down upon Nazareth, but the Galileans themselves despised it, though it was part of their own district. Later on we read of a guileless Israelite who, when he heard of Jesus being there, exclaimed, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Thus, if one spot in Palestine, more than another, would accord with the rejection that was the portion of Christ, it was Nazareth. A striking picture, surely, of One who, while He was the true King, was yet refused by His own people! Gentiles might have done Him reverence; but His own nation was indifferent. How little fruit was there to answer to the culture that God had bestowed upon them! But here was the blessed One who pursues His path of obedience unto death, who would not show His glory by protecting Himself. His people went down into Egypt: He goes down there also. He has to be called out of Egypt: that was His portion. He would not screen Himself from the sorrows of His people: He would share them all. When He does come forth, Israel is still unprepared for Him. His parents turn to Nazareth once more, Joseph having been again divinely instructed in a dream. This is the last mention that we have of him in Matthew. Luke gives us later circumstances; but Joseph wholly disappears before our Lord entered upon His ministry.

When He is called out of Egypt, He cannot go to Jerusalem, nor to Bethlehem either. He was to be despised and rejected: the prophets had said so: their words must be accomplished. Archelaus reigned in Judea a usurper was still there. Joseph, at the warning of God, turns aside to Nazareth, and Jesus dwelt with them; that the word of the prophets might be fulfilled in our Lord's proving to the full what it was to be the most despised of men. He knew it pre-eminently on the cross; but it was His all through. And this is the way that God speaks of the Messiah to Israel. He shows what their hardness of heart and unbelief would entail — even if it were to the Messiah Himself. What a picture of man, and especially of Israel, when such must be *His* portion! He comes and calls, but no answer greets Him. The unbelief of man hinders the blessing of God. It was the sin of Israel that thus complicated the early history of the King. But future chapters will show that God would turn the very unbelief of Israel into the means of blessing for the despised Gentiles, and that if the Jews rejected the counsel of God, to their own perdition, the Gentiles would hear and receive all blessing in the blessed One.

Thus we find from the beginning of this wonderful book the germs of all that the end will

display. We find one who is really the Messiah, ready to accomplish the promises and to take the throne, but the people in no way ready for Him. Israel were steeped in sin; they had no heart for Him. They were full of their own ceremonies, their own light, and the pride of their privileges. All was turned to self-exaltation. Hence Jesus is rejected from the very first. This is the story of man. The after chapters will show us the glorious consequences which God, in His grace, causes to flow even from the rejection of His own Son. Upon that happier theme we may dwell on other occasions.

Matthew 3

We are now carried forward from the return of our Lord into the Holy Land to the days when John the Baptist came insisting upon the grand, essential truth of repentance. And John's ministry is viewed here entirely in connection with the Lord's relation to Israel. It is interesting to compare the different ways in which the Gospels present John himself, as illustrating the manner in which the Holy Ghost uses His divine right to shape and group the materials of our Lord's history according to the exact object in view. A casual reader might scarcely recognize that John the Baptist in John's Gospel was the Baptist of Matthew. The manner in which they are viewed, and the discourses that are recorded, take their form from the particular book in which the Holy Ghost has given them. This, so far from being imperfection, is a part of that admirable method in which God impresses the design which He has in view, and which suits the place which each portion of Scripture has to fill. And what can be of deeper interest, or more strengthening to faith, than to find that the very passages on which unbelief puts its finger as its alleged proofs of the imperfection of Scripture (varieties of statement insuperable to the mind of man), on the contrary, when viewed as part of God's plan for commending His beloved Son, all range into their own places in this great scheme, which is to the glory of Christ. This is the true key to all Scripture; and if that key be of great value from Genesis to Revelation, there is no place, perhaps, where its value is so conspicuous as in the Gospels. In finding four different accounts of our Lord, each presenting things in a different manner, the first thought of man's heart is that each succeeding Gospel must add to or correct what had gone before. But such thoughts only prove, either that the truth was never known, or that it has been forgotten. Is it adequately borne in mind that God is the author of the Gospels? Once admit that simple truth, and it would be evidently blasphemous to suppose that He makes mistakes. Look at the meanest thing that God has made, the minutest insect that the microscope can discover upon the least blade of grass — what does not fill the particular niche for which God created it? I do not deny that sin has brought all kinds of derangements into the natural as well as into the moral world. I admit that man's infirmities may appear even in the word of God: first, in not keeping the sacred deposit free from all corruption; and then in interpreting that word through some feeble medium of his own; and thus, one way or another, hindering the pure revealed light of God.

I have made these few remarks because all readers may not be equally familiar with the great truth of the difference of design in the Gospels, and therefore I do not scruple to draw attention to the immense help it furnishes to the understanding of Scripture, and especially of its apparent discrepancies.

In the chapter before us John the Baptist is presented as fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah. He came "preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is He that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight." In Luke you will find that the prophecy is carried farther down. More is given us than the words we have here. "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight,

and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God." The range of Luke is wider. "Every valley shall be filled," etc. "All flesh shall see," etc. I ask, Why is that quotation continued farther there? It is the more remarkable because usually Luke does not quote much from the Old Testament, as compared with Matthew. How comes it that Luke departs in this particular instance from his habit? The reason is obvious. His task was to show the grace of God that brings salvation, and that has appeared to all men. The Holy Ghost leads him therefore to fasten upon those words that display the universal range of God's goodness to man.

But there is another expression that I must dwell upon for a little — "the kingdom of heaven." We are all familiar with it as a phrase often used in Scripture; but possibly not many are equally familiar with its force. Indeed, it is understood very vaguely even by most Christians. To many it conveys the idea of the Church — sometimes the visible, and sometimes the invisible Church. By others it is supposed to mean something tantamount to the gospel, or heaven itself at the end. The expression is derived from the Old Testament, and that is the reason why it appears in Matthew only. As we have already seen, our Evangelist writes with a view to Israel, and therefore lays hold of a phrase which is suggested by the Old Testament, and taken from the prophecy of Daniel, who speaks of the days coming when the heavens should rule. Before that (Dan. 2), we hear that the God of heaven is to set up a kingdom that should never be destroyed — the kingdom of heaven. And again, in Dan. 7, we are told of the Son of Man's coming, and of a universal kingdom which is given Him. Chapter 2 does not give us the person, but the thing itself: so that there might still have been a kingdom without the revelation of the person in whose hands it was held. But chapter 7 completes the circle, and shows us that it is not merely the heavens ruling in the distance, nor a kingdom opening with judgment on earth; but, besides that, there is a glorious Man to whom the rule of heaven will be entrusted. The Son of Man will not simply destroy what opposes God, but will introduce a universal kingdom.

This kingdom John the Baptist came preaching. I do not believe that he was at all aware of the particular form it was to take first. He simply preached the kingdom of heaven as at hand, himself the public and immediate forerunner of the Shepherd of Israel, with the thoughts of a godly Jew, and a special witness that the Messiah was there — that He was about to be manifested, who would execute judgment upon the evil, and introduce good in the power of God, and bring in the glory promised to the fathers; and that all this was about to be inaugurated and established in the person of Christ here below. This, I believe, was the general thought. And we shall find subsequently that for the rejection of Jesus by the Jews John was not at all prepared. This too it was that led to the twofold form taken by the kingdom of heaven. While the old or Jewish view of a kingdom established by power and glory as a visible sovereignty over the earth is postponed, the rejection of Jesus on earth and His ascension to God's right hand lead to the introduction of the kingdom of heaven in a mysterious form; which is, in point of fact, going on now. Thus it has two sides. When Christ went up to heaven and took His place as the rejected here, but the glorified One there, the kingdom of heaven began.

This is a view of the kingdom that we do not find in the Old Testament. To it pertain the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, that were only opened out as the Lord was manifestly rejected by Israel. Thus we see in Matt. 11 John sends two of his disciples to ask whether Jesus was really the Messiah, or were they to look for another? Whether he was himself staggered, or his disciples, or whether both were, it matters little — such was the result. It sounds like an unbelieving question to the Lord. He might well be astonished that Jesus did not deliver the Jews, and bring in the glory for which patriarchs had waited and which prophets had predicted. Strange that instead of this His messenger was in prison; Himself and His disciples despised! Our Lord at once referred to those deeds of power

and grace which bespoke the presence of God acting in a new way, and introducing a power evidently in grace — bringing in totally new thoughts, above the habits or hopes of the most godly Jew. These they were to report to John. But He goes farther, and says, "And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me." This apparently conveys a rebuke to John, and implies that he had been more or less stumbled. Yet it is beautiful to see how at once, after the departure of the messengers, our Lord vindicates the Baptist before the multitude. But after pronouncing John to be the most blessed among those born of women, He suddenly introduces a most startling truth, namely, that great as John was, the least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than he. This does not refer to the kingdom coming in power and glory, because, when that day comes, Old and New Testament saints must all be raised or changed to have their part in it; as it is said of those who are being called now that they shall sit "with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." What then does our Lord mean? Does He not refer to some form of it that John had not spoken of? And what was this? He goes on farther, and says, "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." What an extraordinary statement must this have appeared to those who listened to it then! The Lord is contrasting the kingdom of heaven, in a public, manifest form, with that kingdom as opened to faith — only more blessed as known to faith than to sight. As the Lord afterward said to Thomas, "Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." This holds good in every dealing of God. Abraham was more blessed when, though in the land of Canaan, he possessed it not, than if it had all been actually his own. He gained a better place in the ways of God from the very fact of his not having one foot of the land in possession. So with David. His reign was morally far more glorious than that of Solomon. His heir had the place of power; but David had that which was unseen, yet nearer to God. We never find that Solomon enters into what was taught by the ark, whereas it was always the great attraction to David's heart. Solomon was found before the great altar which the whole world could see. The ark was within the holiest, where God sat. It was the throne of His Majesty in the midst of Israel. To it the heart of David ever turned. The blessing of faith is always better than the blessing of sight here below, how great soever this may be.

There has been no time in the ways of God so blessed for a soul as the ways of God now. To be born in the Millennium is not at all to be compared with it. It is true that *then* all will be in subjection to Christ, and the heart might say, Would that we might be born then! But even the believers found in that day on the earth will not know what it is to enter within the veil, or to have the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. Neither will they know in the full sense the joy of the Holy Ghost with the privilege of being cast out and scorned by the world for Christ's sake. So that both in the matter of suffering, the enjoyment of what Christ has gone through for us, and His present glory in heaven, our present place is far beyond millennial privileges. For those who suffer now, it will be the best of heavenly blessings then. The peculiarity of the present time is this, that while we are on earth we are consciously dwellers in heaven. We are not of the world, as Christ is not of the world. Our life does not belong to it; our blessing does not spring from it; all our portion is outside this world. And this is communicated to us while we are in the world, to raise us above the world. It is not, as with John here, going into the wilderness — a most seasonable and beautiful expression of what God thought of the city of holiness, Jerusalem, where the priests themselves ministered. John retires from it all. He is outside it in sympathy: the very act in itself declared that the wilderness is better than the city, even though it contain God's temple. But what a solemn declaration of the ruin, not only of the world, but of the favoured people who were the great link between God and men generally!

In this scene behold another thing altogether. It is not man blest, and the earth brought also into blessedness under the personal reign of Christ; but here the heavens were opened upon the Lord Jesus.

Never had they opened before upon any one on earth, except as a sign of God's judgment (Ezek. 1). But here first of all the eye of Heaven, of the Father who is in heaven, is directed upon the beloved One. By and by He takes up His place in heaven as the Man who had suffered for sins and brought in the revealed righteousness of God.

The kingdom of heaven then began. From the time that Jesus goes up into heaven till He comes back again the New Testament view of the kingdom of heaven runs on; and in that sense the privilege of the feeblest soul brought to the knowledge of Christ now, transcends anything that ever entered into the heart or mind of men, or even of saints, before the Lord died and rose again. You may dwell upon the blessed walk of Enoch and the bright faith of Abraham; but still this remains true — "Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist; notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." There is no honest escape from the conclusion that has been drawn. If persons argue, Is a little child believing in Jesus now more holy and righteous than the blessed saints of old? I answer, That is another matter altogether. He *ought* to be. But that is not what is said. The Lord lays down that "the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." In a word, it is not a question of what men are; but God is glorifying Christ. Upon Him God is putting honour, and therefore gives such privileges to the least one that believes in Him. Since His death and resurrection, the worshippers once purged have no more conscience of sins. Think of what such a thing would have been to an Old Testament saint! They might look forward to it, but they could not say that it was an accomplished fact. It would have been contrary to the holiness of God, and positive presumption for man, to have this till Christ came and wrought the work that blotted sins completely out.* Now it is presumption not to take with confidence what Christ has done; for He has commanded that remission of sins should be preached in His name. When we enter into the position in which we are set by the work of Christ, it is not only that we have remission: we are made the righteousness of God in Christ: we stand in the relation of sons of God, and are entitled by Christ Himself to say that His God is our God, His Father is our Father. We are entitled to know that we are one with Christ, and that the glory that God has conferred upon His beloved Son He shares with us. The glory *conferred*, I say; for of course there is His essential divine glory in which none can participate. God never gave Christ to be God. Deity was His own right from all eternity. He could not have Godhead bestowed upon Him. But Christ became man, and as man He was the Son of God; He was not merely so as God. He was the Son of God as born into this world, and as such He has been raised up from the dead; in virtue of which He brings us into the same place before God that He Himself has acquired. He has entirely delivered us from the place into which He entered for us, enduring the wrath and judgment of God. He brings us into the place to which He is not only entitled Himself, but has acquired a title for us.

*In Gen. 7: 1; Gen. 15: 6, and Ps. 32: 1, 2, 5, etc., we see that some saints of old, as taught of God, may have anticipated blessing beyond the dispensation in which they lived. — [Ed.

But John had no conception of such a compass of blessing. The Jews looked upon the kingdom as the state when Israel would be blessed of God as a nation; and even those that may have more fully understood, still looked for all the power of the kingdom to be brought in, entirely independent of anything on their part. "But the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." The Lord shows that there is an action of faith needed now; that the kingdom of heaven here presented demands the rupture of natural ties and the giving up of previous associations. In the sense of power and glory introduced by a personal Messiah upon the earth, John had already pressed on consciences that it was not a thing of mere ordinance or privilege by birth — that God would not be content except with moral realities. And allow me to say that it is a very solemn thing indeed to claim

the privileges of grace for that which is contrary to the nature of God. I am not speaking now of the lost one found by grace, to whom God gives a new life fresh from Himself. But the effect of a soul's receiving life in the person of Christ is that there are produced feelings, thoughts, judgments and ways acceptable to God and akin to His nature. If a person is a child of God, he is like his Father; he has a nature suitable to God, a life that dislikes sin and is surely pained by what is iniquitous in others, but more particularly in himself. Many bad men are strong against evil in others; they are weak where it might touch themselves. But a Christian always begins with self-judgment. That is the reason why, now that there was to be a moral preparation for the Messiah, John preaches, "Repent." Repentance is the soul's moral judgment of itself under the eye of God; the soul's acceptance of His judgment of its state before Him, and bowing to it. John called upon them to repent because the kingdom of heaven was at hand. "For this is He that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight." This clearly implied two things — that he was but a voice, pretending to nothing, and that the work would be done by another. The voice only was on his part; but the other, whose way he was preparing, was the Lord, Jehovah Himself. "Prepare ye the way of Jehovah."

Then we have the account of John the Baptist himself. "The same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey" — all perfectly suitable to this summons to repentance. As yet it is not grace introduced; this belongs to the kingdom of heaven, when it is fully brought in. But John did not know it thus. He knew that the Messiah was coming, a Messiah who would introduce the power of God and deliver His people. But the deep unfolding of grace, the mighty victory which a suffering Messiah would accomplish for the soul, and the way in which God would be magnified most of all by the putting away of sin by the death of His Son, were thoughts that must wait for another season — not for utterance more or less, but for adequate intelligence. The ark of the Lord must stand still in the waters of Jordan first. Not a foot can pass that way scatheless till the ark has passed in. Most fittingly, therefore, John does not bring out the fulness of divine grace, but the moral call to repentance.

John accordingly is found outside the religion of man, as well as outside his profanity. He was not in Rome, but he was also away from Jerusalem; and this, in the predicted messenger of Jehovah, was a most solemn feature. "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Here is a part of that truth which is exceedingly startling, when we reflect upon it. The Pharisees were, religiously, the most influential in Israel. The Sadducees were the loose, secular, self-indulgent class; the Pharisees, those who stood very firm for what they considered the truth. Yet when John sees them both coming to his baptism, he says, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance" — fruits of a kindred character. He maintains that the day of ceremonialism, or of birthrights, was completely past. The Pharisee might rest upon his religion; the Sadducee upon the fact that he was a child of Abraham. The desire to escape wrath and to have part in the kingdom might be no more than nature. Humbled souls suit the kingdom. Descent from the fathers, the law, the promises even, may be turned into a right against God, who will not allow it, and can raise out of the stones children to Abraham. But there must be, if they would draw near to God, ways of a nature morally suitable to God. "Bring forth, therefore," he says, "fruits meet for repentance." He is not explaining here how a sinner is to be saved, or how God remits sins; but that, if persons take the stand of having to do with God, there must be, what becomes His presence. So the apostle says to the Hebrews, "Follow peace and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." He is not speaking there of

what is imputed, but of holiness as a practical thing. This is written to Christians; and the Holy Ghost does not hesitate to insist upon it. So strong is the tendency to reaction in human nature that the very baptized Jews, who had been pleading for the law, might fall into the opposite extreme and think that sin is compatible with the salvation that God gives through grace. But God never allows that His nature can coexist with sanctioned iniquity.

Here then was evidently a stern rebuke for the leading Jews. But, more than that, John adds, "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees" — that is to say, judgment is just at hand (ver. 10) — "therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance" — he does not go beyond this. The remission of sins that he speaks of appears to have been rather a question of the government of God than of that complete putting away of sin which was the fruit of grace when the work of atonement was done. But even so, it was in view of Messiah's advent.

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (ver. 11). There he brings together the two grand features of the first and second comings of Christ. He did not know but that both would go on together. All that might lie between the two was hidden from his eyes. The Old Testament Scriptures did present the first and second advent of the Messiah, but not in such a way as to convey the thought of two distinct epochs. Even after the Lord's death and resurrection, the disciples did not understand this. So John joins these two things — the baptizing with the Holy Ghost and with fire. We know that the baptizing with the Holy Ghost is the power of God's blessing in the kingdom of heaven as it now is. The baptism of fire is that which will accompany the kingdom of heaven as it will be when Christ comes again. There is no such thing in the word of God as the baptism of fire to designate what took place at Pentecost. Baptism with fire is the application of the judgment of God in dealing with men; whereas the day of Pentecost was the outpouring of the grace of God, and the giving of the Holy Ghost to dwell in the saints of God, which referred to the power of the Holy Ghost going forth so as to bear testimony in such sort as would not bear a single evil thing in the heart of men, even while it showed out the grace of God. This is Christianity — the perfect love of God shown to a man that has no claim upon it: all his evil condemned by the grace of God in the death of Christ! And thus it is that a man is made honest in the sight of God and men. He can afford to be guileless about himself, because he knows that God imputes nothing to him. When we read on the day of Pentecost of the tongues being divided, it was to show the going forth of the testimony of God to the Gentile as well as to the Jew. But when Matt. 3 speaks of our Lord's baptizing with fire, the allusion is not to these tongues of fire, but to the execution of righteous judgment when Christ comes again. This appears still more clearly from what follows: "Whose fan is in His hand; and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (ver. 12). It is not at all what He does in saving a soul, but the very contrary. It refers to the time when, men having refused the gospel, nothing remains but the outpouring of vengeance upon them.

"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him" (ver. 13). What a cluster of wonders! Jesus coming to be baptized of John, who was avowedly preaching repentance and remission of sins. What could bring the Lord Jesus there? for He never confessed sins, and had none to confess. He challenges even His enemies to convince Him of sin. A man without sin — without the smallest particle of self in any form or degree — the lowliest and most blessed of men — the One who judged everything according to God; and yet He comes to be baptized! John at once felt it — Jesus coming to be baptized of him! To be baptized at all, but, above all, of him whose baptism was that of

repentance! What is the clue to this? It is *grace* — the source and the channel of everything in Jesus. It was not the judgment of God that put Him there; it was not any need in Himself that brought Him there; nothing that He had to acknowledge or confess; but it was grace. For on whom in Israel did God's eye look down with compassion? Upon those that were confessing their sins. Upon such does His eye ever rest. For the next best thing to not being a sinner at all is to confess our sins. We find that this is the first great movement produced by the Holy Ghost in a sinner's soul — the feeling of his true place in the sight of God. Here was the blessed One; and though not one thing naturally could claim His presence, yet grace led Him there. And when John was earnestly hindering Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" what blessed grace and truth does not our Lord's answer unfold! "Suffer it now; for thus it becometh *us* to fulfil all righteousness." It is *all* righteousness now to be fulfilled, and not merely the doing of the law. Now it was the righteousness of acknowledging the true state in which even the best part of Israel lay. For if there were any in Israel that showed a feeling for God, it was those who were baptized of John — those who repented in view of the kingdom of heaven. They desired God's promises, and they wished to be ready for the King. And the Lord's heart was there at once; the sympathies of His soul were with those that were humbling themselves in the sense of their sin before God.* The same principle is true of us in proportion as the Spirit of Christ is ungrieved in our souls. Even if it is a question of acknowledging anything to man, who is the person you can most open your heart to? The spiritual man — he who is walking most above sin — his is the bosom to which you can open out your sin more fully than to another. "If a man be overtaken in a fault, *ye which are spiritual* restore such a one in the spirit of meekness." It was exactly the perfection of the holiness of Christ that could enable Him so to act: another might have feared appearances. If Christ had been merely innocent, instead of holy, should we have found Him there? Never. Holiness implies divine power against sin; innocence is merely the absence of sin. Thus we find our Lord, in the full consciousness of His own perfect holiness, coming to the baptism of John, and taking His place with those in Israel who felt aright toward God.

* We may say that the Lord, in being baptized in Jordan, was identifying Himself with the true-hearted in Israel who came confessing their sins. Grace brought Him where sin had brought them, and us all. The Good Shepherd "entereth in by the door" and takes His place with the sheep He had come to save by the sacrifice of Himself. His baptism pointed to this. — [Ed.]

"And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Does it not seem that this wonderful testimony of God the Father was the consequence of Christ's fulfilling all righteousness in the waters of Jordan? It was the answer of God to the place that Christ, in His grace, had taken. It was God, jealous for the glory of His Son, who would not permit that a suspicion should rest upon this loveliest and lowliest of acts. And therefore, lest the full grace of it should not be felt, how quick is God the Father to say, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"! Do not think *He* has sin. But if you are there, He is with you: if the sheep are in the waters, the shepherd must enter them too. The Father at once vindicates His Son: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." It is not that He was well pleased with that act merely, but it is the retrospective expression of God's delight. It refutes all that the poor mind of man might have — has — gathered out of this transaction. It is always thus in the word of God. If there be, so to speak, a locked door, the key is always beside it. If there is a heart that counts upon God, and knows the perfection of His character, and is jealous over the honour, of His beloved Son, God is always with such. Man has endeavoured to take advantage of the Lord's grace, taking thus His place with the godly in Israel, in order to lower His person and His position even in relation to God Himself. But when we read with chastened spirits,

what do we hear? "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." We shall by and by find the importance of this in connection with what follows; but I leave the subject for the present. There is nothing in the whole compass of God's word so full of blessing to the believer as the person of Christ and His ways; but it requires great jealousy over self and the special guidance of the Holy Ghost; for who is sufficient for these things?

Matthew 4.

There are two things that we may notice before our Lord is tempted of the devil. The first is that He is most emphatically recognized as the Son of God by His Father; secondly, that He is anointed as man by the Holy Ghost. Now a similar thing is true of the believer — of course in an inferior way. Still the believer is owned as a son of God, and has the Spirit of God given to him before he becomes the proper object of the enemy's temptations. And this is an important distinction to bear in mind. Strictly speaking, the relation which the sinner bears to the enemy is not as subject to be tempted. He is a captive; he is led by the devil at his will. This is a very distinct thing from temptation; for it supposes a person thoroughly under the power of Satan. We are tempted when we are out of the enemy's power, and because we are sons of God. Thus, you see, all men have to do with Satan in one way or another. The mass of mankind are his slaves; but those delivered by the power of God, those who by grace are God's children, become the objects of his assault in the way of temptation. It is not so much his power that such have to dread; for when the soul has received Jesus, Satan's power is really void; it is completely broken for the believer. And therefore it is that we are warned rather against his wiles. In certain cases there may be the suffering from his fiery darts; but even this is not his power, which is nothing to the believer while he is looking to Christ; he has only to resist, and the devil will flee from him. If Satan had really power, it is clear that he would not flee. But he has lost it as regards the soul that has received Christ. But then, while to faith the power of Satan is a thing destroyed in the cross of Jesus, his wiles are a very serious matter; and we ought not to be ignorant of his devices. Now God has been graciously pleased to give us his manner of dealing with our blessed Lord. That this is intended for our use, and the great pattern and principle of the temptations of Satan at any time, is clear from many obvious and weighty considerations.

Besides, we know from the Gospel of Luke that in the case of our Lord there was a very long-continued temptation of Satan, of which we have no details. We are only told the fact that Jesus was tempted of the devil during forty days. But the great temptations which the Holy Ghost has been pleased to record for us are those that took place at the end of the forty days. May we not gather hence that in the temptation of our Lord there were two parts: first, that not common to man, but peculiar to our Lord? For we are subject to no such circumstances as being driven into the wilderness for forty days. But, secondly, we are exposed to such as are given to us at the close. The Lord seems to cast a veil over the first, and discloses carefully what in principle every child of God may be tempted by some time or another. We shall see that these three temptations, presented by Matthew and Luke in a different order, give us an admirable insight into the ways of Satan when he thus assails the children of God. But it is exceedingly sweet to see that before Satan is allowed to tempt at all, the blessedness of the Son's recognition by the Father is most fully brought out. And indeed it is something akin which renders any one obnoxious to the hatred of Satan. The enemy is well aware when God converts and quickens a soul hitherto dead in trespasses and sins; and at once he is prepared with his temptations. They need not, of course, come in the same order as our Lord's; but they seem to be, more or less, of a similar character with those revealed here.

It is clear that the first temptation grew out of our Lord's actual circumstances. He had been all

this time in the wilderness without food, and at the end of the forty days he was a hungered. When Moses was without food on the mount for the same time, he was with God, and miraculously sustained. But the wonderful thing here is that the time was spent with the enemy. None had ever been so, or will be so again. To be all that time in the presence of Satan, dependent on God, was the greatest moral honour, though the severest trial, that man had ever passed through. Throughout the Lord is seen as Son of man, though also as Son of God.

The introductory notice shows us that temptation was going on all the time our Lord was in the wilderness. "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward a hungered. And when the tempter came to Him, he said, If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." Whatever may be the aim of Satan, this is one main part of his tactics — he insinuates a doubt, a doubt of our own relationship with God. "If Thou be the Son of God." Now, search the word of God as you may, never will you find His Spirit leading a soul to doubt. Nor can anything, indeed, be more opposed to His way than sanctioning mistrust of God. And it shows the exceeding subtlety of Satan that he has actually made the children of God themselves to be his instruments, not only by permitting doubts in themselves, but helping to raise them in others, often on the mistaken plea that not to be confident with God is a sign of humility, and of a desire to be lowly! But faith says, "We are always confident." Not that we are to shrink from self-examination: we do find this pressed in Scripture. Thus, in 1 Cor. 11 the believers are evidently exhorted to examine themselves, but not with any idea of producing doubt. On the contrary, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat"; for the question was about the Lord's Supper. On the strength of His grace, the believer is to examine himself in the thought of going to the table of the Lord. It is not a question whether he is to go or stay away: we do not find this in Scripture. Nor do I find, on the other hand, that because I am a Christian it is no matter what state I may be in spiritually. But a man is to examine himself, and so to eat. He is sure to find that which calls for humiliation. It is important for a soul to draw near to God, and to have His light cast upon all that is there. This will give ground for humbling oneself, not for staying away. Such is what the Spirit of God lays down as a general rule for the Lord's Supper. Of course, I am not speaking now of cases of open sin, where the vindication of the Lord's glory is required. These suppose a man's practising sin, and not examining himself. But I am speaking now of the ordinary walk of the child of God, and what we read there is careful inquiry as to what he finds within himself; but "so let him eat."

"If Thou be the Son of God." Our Lord did not look like it. There was nothing outwardly to carry the demonstration of it. If it had been so, there would have been no room left for faith at all. Satan takes advantage of the lowliness of our Lord in the place that He took as man. And indeed nothing could be more singular than His being found in the wilderness', and, as we read in Mark., with the wild beasts. If He was really the Son of God, Maker of heaven and earth, what a place to be in, and led there by the Spirit, after the Father had spoken from heaven and acknowledged Him to be His beloved Son! But so it was. And so it is now, in a lower sense, with the children of God. For no matter how much blessed they may be of God, or how truly owned as His sons and having His Spirit dwelling within them, they also, in their measure, have their wilderness. "As My Father hath sent Me into the world, even so send I you into the world." Not into some pleasant place where there is no room for trial, but the very contrary. Because we belong to God and to heaven, because we have the Holy Ghost sealing us unto the day of redemption, we have to encounter Satan, but with the certainty that his power is broken, and that his wiles are what we have to resist. This questioning the relationship of Christ with God shows how truly Satan was at work. But the Lord does not pronounce him to be Satan until open rebellion is manifested against God. When it is mere subtlety, He does not call him Satan. There are two ways in which the enemy is described in Scripture. He is called Satan and the devil. The

latter is the term which implies his accusing character and his wiles; the former refers to his power as adversary.

We must wait, even when we suspect it is the power of evil at work, before we pronounce it absolutely. For if there is such a fact as the devil tempting, God also puts a soul to the test, and this may be very sharp. Moreover, even God Himself does not act till a thing is manifest. He shows wonderful patience, most contrary to the haste of man. He comes down to see whether the evil is so great, as in the case of Adam, yea, of Sodom and Gomorrah. But it always remains true that whatever God may be in other things, quick as He is to hear the cry of His own in sorrow, He is exceedingly slow to judge; and there is nothing that more marks the knowledge of Christ practically, and the effect of it in our own souls, than where the same thing is made true in us. Hastiness to judge is man's way in proportion to his want of grace; and patience is not a question of knowledge, but of love that lingers over another, unwilling to pronounce till every hope is gone. The rising in the flesh, which looked so threatening, might turn out after all to be only on the surface, and not deep-seated. So here we see patience even in our Lord's dealing with the adversary. It is only when he thoroughly makes manifest what he is — only when he demands the worship due to God alone — that our Lord says, "Get thee behind Me, Satan." The adversary then flees instantly. But the Lord lets him thoroughly discover himself first. This is divinely wise. Because, although the Lord knew him to be Satan all the time, what pattern would this be for us? The Lord is here the blessed man in the presence of Satan, showing us how we have to carry ourselves in the temptations that come upon us as saints of God.

And let me say another word with regard to temptation. In the sense we have it here, it is entirely from without. Our Lord never knew what it was to be tempted from within. He was "in all points tempted like as we are." But the Holy Ghost qualifies this by adding, "yet without sin."* It was not merely that He did not yield to sin, but He never had the principle of it — never the least motion of any thought or wish contrary to God. He never *knew* sin. It is in this we so differ from Him. We have cause of deep humiliation sometimes, because, besides having to do with the devil without, we have an evil nature within — what Scripture calls "the flesh," i.e., the self, the spring of insubordination and of enmity against God. It is the fountain of unloving, wilful, ungodly desires in us, which naturally never seeks God's will, save only in a spirit of fear; never seeks it as that which is loved — we never do till born of God. Even afterward the same wicked principle is still there; but we have a new life implanted of God in our souls, which delights in His will.

*The exact translation of the Greek expression is, "Who was in all things like-tempted, sin apart." — [Ed.]

But though the temptations of our Lord which we have here were from without, still Satan adapted them to the circumstances in which our Lord then stood. He had been for forty days without food, and the first word of the tempter is, "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (vers. 3, 4). Our Lord refers to Deuteronomy, alluding to the manna, the daily food of Israel, which involved dependence upon God, and showed that Israel did not need the resources of the world to sustain them. They did not require some rich country to supply them out of its abundant harvest; neither did they depend upon gold and silver. Israel, before they had a land to cultivate and the means of gathering from it, were taught alone with God. In the wilderness, where He had brought them out as His first-born son, He puts them to the proof; and the way of it was, whether they were content with God and with the fare that God provided for them day by day. Alas, they were not!

Here the scene is entirely changed. It is a man in the wilderness; and *Satan* is there — not God. In spirit He ever dwelt with His Father; for even when on earth He was "the Son of man which is in heaven." He combined thus two things in His own person. Day by day He was the man dependent upon God for everything. And this was the first great temptation of the devil — the appeal to His earthly natural wants. It was no sin to be hungry; but it would have been a sin to distrust God because of the desert place. Did not God know that there was no bread there? and was it not His Spirit who had led Him there? Had God told Him to leave the wilderness, or to make the stones into bread? He would not use His own power independently of God's word. And it is the constant mark of the way of the Holy Ghost in the children of God that they do not use miraculous power for themselves or for their friends. If we look at it in the New Testament, we find Paul working miracles and using the power of God to heal the sick around. But was it ever used for his own circle? On the contrary, Paul leaves Trophimus sick at Miletus, and displays about him all the anxiety of one who might never have had power to heal the body. When Epaphroditus was sick, we see the exercise of a faith which knew that the will of God, with acquiescence in it, was worth a thousand miracles. Miracles had not in themselves the high character of exercising the soul in dependence upon God. To obey God, to submit to Him, to have confidence in Him, is that of which the natural man is incapable. Power alone never reaches so high. Therefore, in the case of our Lord Himself, we never find that He puts His works of might on a level with obedience. Nay, He even speaks of His disciples as those who should do greater works than He Himself had done. But obedience was what characterized Christ: this never was found in a mere child of Adam.

Here, in the face of Satan, our Lord finds His strength; not in doing miracles, or in any provision that He might have made for Himself, but in the word of God. Hunger might have legitimate wants, but here He was, tried by Satan, and He will not step out of the trial till it is over; He will not shift His circumstances or lift one finger for Himself: He waits upon God. "Man shall not live by bread alone," He answers, "but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." God's word had led Him there, for the Holy Ghost acts by the word, and He would not leave the wilderness till God's word led Him out. This completely set aside Satan's temptations. But more: it brought out the real secret of living in dependence upon God day by day, for the food of the new life is the word of God. Of what immense importance this shows the written word to be, and having it as our household bread day by day; not merely reading it as a task or formal duty, but, as it is indeed, the divinely-suitable provision for the child of God! It is good for every one to study it, because it is in every way for the good of the soul day by day to read it intelligently, heartily, as those that receive it from God Himself. And God does not give that which the heart of man cannot take in, but what is adapted to our daily wants, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

This, then, is the answer of our Lord to the first temptation. Why should He turn the stones into bread? He hung upon God's word: His Father had not told Him to do so. So should it ever be with us. Where we have no clear expression of the mind of God, it is always our place to wait till we have. Sometimes it may show our weakness that we do not know the mind of God, and this is distasteful to us. Restlessness would like to go somewhere, or *do* something, but this is not faith. Faith proves itself in waiting for God to manifest His will.

The next temptation was not a personal one, but connected with religion, as the first had been in respect of bodily wants. We shall find that the order is different in Luke. But here, in the second temptation mentioned, is what I may call the religious temptation. The Lord had said that man should "live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." The devil then takes Him up into the holy city, sets Him upon a pinnacle of the temple, and founds his temptation upon that very point in

our Lord's answer — the word of God. He says, as it were, Here is a word of God for you: "He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee, and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone." Very true. It was God's word, and evidently spoken of the Messiah. But what was Satan using it for? He says, "If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down; for it is written," etc. This was making a move without God — doing something by oneself. Scripture did not say, Cast Thyself down, because God has given His angels charge concerning Thee, lest Thou shouldst dash Thy foot against a stone. The Lord would not turn aside from Scripture because Satan had misused it. He shows us, in the most instructive way, that we are not to be moved from our stronghold because it may be turned against us. Our Lord does not enter into nice distinctions, nor analyze what Satan had said, but He has given us that which ought to be, if I may so say, the standard mode of dealing for every Christian man. There are those who might have spiritual discrimination to see that Satan was perverting the scripture which he quoted; but many might not. The Lord takes a broad ground in dealing with the adversary. He stands upon what each Christian should know and feel, and this is, "*It is written again*, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord Thy God . He cites a plain positive word of God which Satan was destroying by the use he made of psalm 91. Now that is the stronghold of a believer who may have to do with one that reasons subtly from Scripture, "It is written again." He can appeal to that which is palpable and clear. It will be found that where a person systematically misapplies Scripture, he destroys some fundamental principle of the word of God. Whatever is false is contrary to some plain passage of Scripture. Now this is a great mercy. The believer holds fast to what is sure; he will not quit what he does understand for something that he does not. He may be perplexed by what the adversary is producing, and may have only a growing suspicion that he is wrong. But he may say to himself, I never can give up that which is beyond a doubt for that which I do not know. In other words, he holds the light, and refuses the darkness.

It is thus, it seems to me, our Lord deals with Satan. He could at once have set him aside on grounds of reasoning, and have shown the perverted end to which Satan was applying Scripture; but He rather deals with him on moral grounds, which every Christian is capable of judging. Do I find a scripture used for the purpose of making me distrust God? At once I take my stand on "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." What is meant by this? I am never to doubt the Lord will be for me. If I do anything to prove Him, to see whether He will be for me, this is at once unbelief and disobedience. It is an allusion to Israel's history again, and another quotation from the book of Deuteronomy. Indeed, our Lord quotes every answer to the temptations, as has been long ago remarked, from the book of Deuteronomy. You will find in Exodus 17 that the Israelites tempted the Lord by asking, Is He among us or no? This does not mean that they provoked Him by idolatry, or refusal to do His will. It is not a question there of open sin, but of unbelief of His goodness and presence — unbelief, in a word, of God's being for us. This is exactly what our Lord pleads. Cast Myself down in order to find that the scripture is true and that the angels will bear Me up! I do not need to do such a thing; I am very certain that if I were cast down the angels would be there to sustain Me. If you have a person whom you suspect of dishonesty on your premises, you may perhaps be disposed to test him in some way or other. But who would think of testing one that he had full confidence in? Now that is exactly the import of our Lord's answer, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." His soul resented the idea of trying God, to see whether He would sustain His Son. God might try Him; Satan might put Him to the test; but as to His tempting the Lord, as if the Lord His God required to be put to the proof whether He would be true to His word — away with such a thought! He would not hear of it for a moment.

The temptation which is second in Matthew, Luke gives as the third. Why is this? Surely we ought not to read Scripture as if such differences were not intended to suggest inquiry. We have to take care that we do not misinterpret Scripture; but Scripture is meant to be understood. I say of these

different orders in which the temptations are put, both are right, both are inspired of God. If they were both intended to report the temptation exactly as it took place, it is clear they are not right; but God had a much higher object. God wrote for our instruction, and God has been pleased, in the different Gospels, to put the facts in the way that is most instructive. Matthew simply gives the temptation historically, as it took place. Therefore in Matthew we have notes of time: "*Then* the devil taketh Him up," etc. In Luke there is no such thought; it is simply, "*And* the devil," etc. This word at once prepares us for it. It is clear there were these different temptations, but Luke puts them so as not to tell us the order in which they occurred.

This is a general remark, true of the whole Gospel of Luke, that he habitually departs from the mere order of fact to give an arrangement suited to the design which he had in view. As a whole, the Gospel of Luke is characterized by 'putting the facts of our Lord's life in an order that suited the doctrine He was teaching. Thus you will find in Luke that even the genealogy of our Lord is not given in its regular place; there is a departure from the mere natural series; and there is, instead, a moral order. Take the case of the Lord's prayer: Luke puts that in a totally different place from Matthew, who gives it in the wondrous discourse commonly called the sermon on the mount; and as prayer formed a most important part of the new principles the Lord was bringing out, so it formed one of the main subjects of the Lord's discourse. Luke reserves that prayer till Luke 11, because our Lord is pointing out there the grand means of spiritual life, how it is to be kept up and sustained in the soul. And this he shows us from the history of Martha and Mary (Luke 10). Why was it that Jesus approved of the path and walk of Mary rather than of Martha? It is not that He did not love them all, nor was it that Martha had not a real personal love to the Saviour, and that her heart was not true to Him. But there was an immense difference between them. What and why was it? Luke gives us the moral difference. When Martha was all busied with what she could do for the Lord, to show her love to Him, Mary was occupied with the Lord Himself — seated at His feet, listening to His word. The one was full of what *she could do* for Christ; the other, full of *Christ Himself*; and nothing that she could do was of the smallest consequence in her eyes, compared with Christ Himself. Thus we find, in another instance, Mary breaking the alabaster box to anoint the feet of Jesus — an action little accounted of by others; yet what she had done should be recorded throughout the whole world. Our Lord brings out in Luke this great point — the word of God, the waiting upon Jesus, being the first great means of strengthening the new and spiritual life; and therefore, immediately after this account of these sisters, we have the request of the disciples to be taught how to pray. It really took place long before; but they are put together in that special form by Luke to mark the connection of the word of God with prayer.

So, in the temptation, Luke departs from the order of fact and gives us the moral sequence. Matthew simply names the facts here as they took place. Luke puts them in the order of magnitude, and rises from the natural trial to the worldly one, and then to the religious temptation. For it is perfectly plain that the temptation by the word of God was much harder for one who valued His word above everything than that which lay in an appeal to natural wants or to worldly ambition. Therefore Luke keeps this temptation to the last. In Matthew it is not so, but we have, in the third place, the temptation by the world. "Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me" (vers. 8, 9). Here at once the devil was manifest. The very idea of presenting any object of obeisance and worship between the soul and God was at once to detect that he was either the devil himself or an instrument of the devil. The Lord therefore at once pronounces him "Satan." "Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve" (ver. 10). If it had been an apostle, it would have been just the same. If such a one had been so completely led away as to hint

such a thing, the Lord would have said "Satan" all the same. Is not this most solemn with us in dealing with Christians even who may have become for the time instruments of Satan? The Lord did not hesitate on one occasion to say, "Satan" to Peter himself; and yet he was the chief of the twelve — the first in dignity among the apostles of the Lamb. And yet our Lord Himself, after He had put signal honour, upon Peter and given him a new name, does not hesitate to say "Satan" to Peter as to the enemy himself. All this brings out an important principle, for our own ways in having to do even with a child of God.

In answering the third and last temptation, our Lord still confines Himself to the book of Deuteronomy. Why? Because Deuteronomy is the book that regards Israel after they had completely failed under the law, and when God brings in the new principle of grace and shows not the mere righteousness of the law, but that which is of faith. The apostle Paul also quotes from Deuteronomy for the same purpose. It is the book that indicates the place of obedience when it is no longer a mere question of observance under the law. The Lord Jesus is here taking that very place. He is not witnessing what He could have done as a divine person. As such He would have taken ground where we could not follow Him. But throughout this temptation He takes the posture that becomes us and all that desire to follow Him. The only thing right and becoming for a godly man, in meeting temptations, is the ground of the obedience of faith: one thus stands in the confidence of what God is in His goodness. The Lord would on no account swerve from what was the due and comely place for a servant of God in Israel. If a person was godly, his place was to confess and to be baptized with the baptism of repentance. Our Lord at once finds Himself with such, though in His case it was the fulfilling of righteousness, while with us it is the acknowledgment of sin. He who alone could have taken His stand upon legal righteousness, takes it as in every way vindicating God, not upon the mere righteousness of man. Satan may put temptation before Him in every form; but it is of no use. His only care is to vindicate God, and never to arrogate anything to Himself. The enemy was foiled, to God's glory, by an obedient and dependent man.

I believe that the principles brought before us in this chapter are of the greatest practical importance for the children of God. The few remarks I have made may help to direct souls to the value, practically, of these temptations of our Lord for guidance in our own path. I therefore commend the whole subject to the attention of the reader, as one that, although it may have come before us many a time, and we may have often meditated upon its practical value, may still claim our thought, as it will surely repay our prayerful study.

It may be instructive to compare the different ways in which the Holy Ghost introduces our Lord's ministry in the Gospels. And when I speak of His ministry, you will understand that I mean His public service, for there was much appertaining to the Lord — miracles performed and remarkable discourses uttered — before His ministerial course was formally entered on. What I desire now to notice is the wisdom with which He has given us a distinct view of our Lord in each of these different inspired accounts. We may reverently follow Him who has been pleased to furnish them so variously — omitting certain statements in some, and presenting them in others; altering now and then the order of narrating events to accomplish thus His purpose more perfectly. In comparing these accounts we may see that the Holy Ghost always preserves the grand design of each Gospel, and this is the basis of all just interpretation. We shall find, steadily keeping in view what He is aiming at, that we have in this the principle on which the Gospels were written, and consequently what alone will enable us to understand them aright.

I have already shown, to commence with the Gospel of Matthew, that throughout the Holy Ghost is setting before us the Messiah with the fullest proofs of His mission from God, but, alas, a

suffering and a rejected One, and this specially by His own people; and, among them, rejected most of all by such as, humanly speaking, had most reason to receive Him. Were any peculiarly remarkable for their righteousness in the estimate of the nation? If Pharisees were so, who so bitter against Him? Were any celebrated for their knowledge of Scripture? The scribes were those combined with the Pharisees against Him. The priests, jealous of their position, would naturally oppose one who brought out the reality of a divine power, administered by the Son of man upon earth, in the forgiveness of sin. Now all these things come out with striking force and clearness in the Gospel of Matthew. But although we are not arrived at these details as yet, still the main design of the Holy Ghost discovers itself in the manner in which our Lord is presented as entering upon His public ministry in the portion that is now before us.

First of all, no notice is taken in Matthew of all that passed at Jerusalem. Humanly speaking, Matthew was as likely to have known and inquired into the earlier circumstances of our Lord, and particularly His connection with that city, as the beloved disciple John. Yet of a great deal given in John not a word appears in Matthew. In the fourth Gospel we have a deputation from Jerusalem to see John the Baptist first, and then our Lord is acknowledged as Lamb of God and as He who baptizes with the Holy Ghost. Then we have our Lord making Himself known to various persons; among them, to Simon Peter, after Andrew his brother had already been in the company of the wondrous Stranger. Then Philip is called, who finds Nathanael; and thus the work of the Lord spreads from one soul to another, either by the Lord attracting to Himself directly, or through the intervention of those already called. All this is entirely omitted here. Then, again, in John 2 is given the first miracle, or sign, in which Christ set forth His glory — the turning of water into wine; after which our Lord goes up to Jerusalem and executes judgment upon the covetousness that then reigned even in the boasted city of holiness. We have also a little incidental view of what our Lord was doing during this time at Jerusalem. He was working miraculous signs there, and many were believing on Him, though in a natural way. Jesus, it is said, "did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men"; but He does open the great doctrine of the new birth, and brings out the cross — Himself to be made sin thus, as the serpent had been lifted up by Moses in the wilderness, that whosoever believed in Him "should not perish, but have everlasting life." All this took place before the circumstances recorded by Matthew. When this is seen, it must strike any observing reader of the word of God. It could not be that those things were unknown to Matthew: they could not fail to be named and dwelt on if, apart from inspiration, you look at him as a mere disciple. Andrew, Peter and John, and the rest, would have conversed on their first acquaintance with the Saviour over and over again. Yet Matthew does not say one word about it; neither does Mark or Luke — only John. Now, when we examine the Gospels themselves, we find the real solution. It is not the ignorance of one Evangelist, nor the knowledge of another, that accounts either for the omissions or for the insertions. God gives such an account of Jesus as would perfectly impress the lesson He was teaching in each Gospel.

Why does all we have noticed appear appropriately in John? Clearly because it falls in with the truth that is taught there. In John we have the utter ruin of man — of the world — from the outset. The first chapter shows us the practical evidence of what Judaism was — the Lord not received by His own, however duly coming, and thus calling His own sheep by name, and leading them out. For the testimony of John Baptist had no abiding effect upon the mass; it might pass from mouth to mouth, but it fell unheeded upon the ears of those that had no faith: "Ye are not of My sheep, as I said unto you." Now we have the sheep individually called by name, and one of them receiving a new name thoroughly in keeping with the character of John's Gospel. In Matthew we have none of these striking incidents, because therein the Holy Ghost brings before us Jehovah-Jesus, the Messiah, working miracles, accomplishing prophecy, expounding the kingdom of heaven — but in want, despised, and

the companion of such in Galilee; for He is not seen here as the Son of God, whether from everlasting or as born into the world; but He Himself takes a place in separation, to make good the great oracle that the prophet Isaiah had been inspired of God to reveal hundreds of years before. For you will remark that our Lord's leaving Nazareth and coming to dwell in Capernaum is brought in here as the fulfilment of that which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, "The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles." It was outside the regular allotment of Israel, in that part of it which is yet to belong to Israel, which certain of the tribes had taken possession of, though, strictly speaking, it was beyond the proper limits of the promised land. The Lord goes through Galilee of the Gentiles, and in all that He was doing He fulfilled the prophecy. The Jews ought surely to have known it. The people which sat in darkness thus "saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. "

Now, if we turn to the prophet Isaiah, we shall find the importance of this quotation somewhat more. It is part of a grave prophetic strain, in which the Lord lays bare the exceeding rebelliousness of Israel, and the judgments falling upon His people, because they would not hearken to His voice. His hand was stretched out against them: "For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still" (Isa. 5: 25). In the midst of these dealings of God we have the glory of the Lord revealed (chap. 6). Now we know, as John 12 declares, that this glory is in the person of Christ. Accordingly it is announced in Isa. 7 that there was to be a birth wholly above nature. It was no longer One sitting upon a high throne, removed from men, though men receiving a message of mercy from Him in the midst of judgment, but chapter 7 reveals the great fact of the incarnation. The King of glory, Jehovah of hosts, was to become a babe, born of a virgin. The next chapter reveals another fact. Israel no more cared for the glorious Child of the virgin than for the warnings of God before. On the contrary, they despised and rejected Him. Consequently, chapter 8 supposes a godly remnant more and more isolated in the midst of a fearful state of things in Israel, who, joining with the Gentiles, will be saying, "A confederacy." Israel then takes the place of utter unbelief. The Jews will be leaders in this rebellion against God. But in the midst of it all, what is He doing? "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among My disciples. And I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for Him. Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and wonders in Israel, from the Lord of hosts which dwelleth in Mount Zion." That is, there is a distinct declaration that God will be pleased to have a little remnant in the midst of Israel; and while Israel rejects the Messiah, a separated remnant appears, and the blessing would come at last in all the fulness of grace. Still it would be a small, despised thing in the beginning; and this is exactly the circumstance that our Lord now was bringing out in evidence. "And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits . . . should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Accordingly the prophecy goes on: "Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first He lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light [the Messiah]: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." He shows afterward in this prophecy that (while the Gentile affliction upon the nation would be heavier than ever, and the Roman oppression far exceed the Chaldean of old, yet) the Messiah would be there, despised and rejected of men, nay, of the Jews, and that at this very time, when thus set at naught by the people that ought to have known His glory, great light, would spring up in the most despised place, in Galilee of the nations, among the poorest of Israel, where Gentiles were mixed up with them — people who could not even speak their own tongue properly. There should this bright and heavenly light spring up; there

the Messiah would be owned and received. Thus we can see how thoroughly this prophecy suits the Gospel we are considering. For we have here one who is Jehovah-Messiah, a divine king — not a mere man, but slighted by the nation and despised by the leaders, making Himself known in grace to those who were the most scorned in the outskirts as you go out toward the Gentiles. What kings had looked for in vain, what prophets had desired to see, it was for *their* eyes to look upon. The Lord begins to separate Himself a remnant in Israel in Galilee of the Gentiles. This keeps up and confirms the object of Matthew from the first.

But there is more than this. "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (ver. 17). It is clear that this begins His public preaching. The discourse to Nicodemus was entirely different. Why have we nothing like the Samaritan woman in Matthew? How does it fit in with the Gospel of John? In Matthew the subject is the accomplishment of the prophecies about the Messiah, and God showing there was on His part no failure of testimony till the Baptist's work closes. Jesus awaits this in Matthew. In John He waits for nothing. He gives there the grandest possible testimony about the kingdom of God; the necessity of a life which man has not naturally, that God alone can give; and the necessity of the cross as the expression of God's judgment of sin in grace to sinners — to the world. So that the discourse in John 3 consists of these two parts — a life given of God that is perfectly holy; and Jesus dying in atonement for the sins of the old life, which never could enter into the presence of God. For though believers must have the new life, yet this cannot blot out sin. Death is needed as well as life, and the Saviour provides both. He is the source of life as the Son of God, and He dies as the Son of man. And this is what He strikingly brings out in the beginning of John's Gospel.

In Matthew, as I have said, we have Jesus waiting till the testimony of John the Baptist is closed, and then He enters upon His public ministry. These things are perfectly harmonious. If it had been said our Lord preached the kingdom of heaven to Nicodemus, there might have seemed to be a contradiction; but He did not. To him He showed the necessity of a new birth for any to see the kingdom of God. But in Matthew He is looking at what concerns the earth — the kingdom of heaven according to the prophecy of Daniel. He therefore waits till his earthly forerunner had finished his task. Hence Matthew leaves out all allusion to anything public about Christ before John is cast into prison. He presents to the Jews the kingdom of heaven as that which was according to their prophets.

In the Gospel of Luke let us see how our Lord's ministry is opened. Chapter 4 will suffice for my purpose. The Lord returns in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: "And there went out a fame of Him through all the region round about. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up." This is a previous scene; He is not in Capernaum yet. Matthew leaves it all out. This is the more striking because Luke was not one of those personally with our Lord, while Matthew was. But unless you believe that it is God who has guided the hand of every writer, and put His own seal upon it, you are incapable of understanding Scripture; you will add your own thoughts, instead of being subject to the mind of God. What we want is to confide in God, who is shedding on us His own blessed and infinite light. Why does God give us this incident at Nazareth in Luke and nowhere else? Is it the Messiah? No; such is not the object of Luke. Nor is it His ministry in the order in which it occurred: this you will find in Mark. But Luke, as well as Matthew, changes the order of events, for the purpose of bringing out the moral object of each Gospel. Luke gives us this circumstance in the synagogue; Matthew does not. If any one has read the Gospel of Luke with spiritual intelligence, what is the uniform impression conveyed to the mind? There is the blessed Man, anointed of the Holy Ghost, who goes about doing good. Indeed, this is precisely the way in which Peter sums up the life of Jesus in the Acts, when preaching Him to Cornelius — "How

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him." And then he gives an account of His wonderful work in His death and resurrection, and its fruits to the believer.

Opening, then, Luke's Gospel, what is the first incident of our Lord's ministry recorded there? At Nazareth, the most despised village in Galilee, the place where our Lord was sure to be scorned — in His own country, where He had been living all the days of His private life of blessed obedience rendered to man and of dependence upon God — in this same place He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read from the prophet Isaiah where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor: He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, . . . to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And He closed the book." He stopped in the very middle of a sentence. Why so? For the most precious reason. He was come here as a herald of grace, the minister of divine goodness to poor, miserable men. There was judgment mingled with mercy in the prophecy of Isaiah. The Gospel of Matthew points out judgment upon the Jews and mercy to despised Galilee. But here it is a larger thing. In Luke there is not a word about judgment; nothing appears but the fulness of grace that was in Christ. He was come with all power and willingness to bless: the Spirit of Jehovah was upon Him for the purpose. He was sent to preach the acceptable year of the Lord — and there and then He closed the book. He would not add the next words, which announced "the day of vengeance of our God." He most significantly stops before a word is said of that day. As to the actual errand on which Jesus was come from heaven, it was not to execute vengeance: this was only what man would by and by compel Him to do by refusing grace. But He came to show divine love flowing in a perfect, unceasing stream from His heart. This was what our Lord opened out here. Where does such a scene as this suit? Exactly the place where it occurs — the Gospel of Luke only. You could not transplant it to Matthew, or even to John. There is a character about it that pertains to this Gospel and none other. Some of the circumstances of our Lord's ministry are given in all the Gospels, but this is not: because it flows in the current of Luke, there it is found, and there alone.

This will help to illustrate the characteristic and divinely-arranged differences of the Gospels. Harmonizing is the attempt to squeeze into one mould things which are not the same. Thus, if I may add a few words as to the account in Luke, we have more in corroboration. While they hung upon His lips to hear the gracious words, as the Holy Ghost characterizes them, all eyes fastened upon Him. "He began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. . . . And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?" Such was their blindness of heart. He was despised and rejected of men; not only of the proud men of Jerusalem, but even at Nazareth. This is Luke's object, who demonstrates the deeper thought still — that it was not only men who might be built up in the law, but that the heart of man was against Him wherever He was. Let it be at Nazareth, and let Him utter the most gracious words that ever fell from the lips of man, still scorn followed. "And He said unto them, Ye will surely say unto Me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also, here in Thy country." We learn here that the Lord had done many things elsewhere, and things that had taken place previously to this; but the Spirit of God records this first at length. The Lord accordingly brings in another thing that I must refer to. He takes instances from Jewish history to illustrate the unbelief of the Jews and the goodness of God to the Gentiles: "I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up; . . . but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta," etc. That is to say, He shows that in the unbelief of Israel God turns to the Gentiles, and that they should hear. There was this grand point in Luke's Gospel — not only the display of the fulness of the grace that was in Jesus, but God going out to the Gentiles, and in mercy to them. The first recorded discourse of our Lord in Luke brings out the very object of the Gospel.

Accordingly, when the Lord uttered these words, they "were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust Him out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong. But He, passing through the midst of them, went His way, and came down to Capernaum." And then we have the Lord dealing with a man that was possessed with a devil. This is the first miracle detailed here; and it is only in the next chapter that we find our Lord calling Simon Peter, Andrew, and the rest, to follow Him; all which is given with the greatest possible care. At once we are struck with the difference.

For when we turn back to Matthew there is not a word about Nazareth, or the casting out of a devil from a man possessed; but simply our Lord, when He began to preach, was walking by the sea of Galilee, and "saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers. And He saith unto them, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (vers. 18, 19). The account is given very succinctly. The particulars are not found; but we do get them in Luke, and, I presume, for this reason, that his is specially the Gospel where we see the moral analysis of the human heart. There are two things specially brought out in Luke — what God's heart is toward man, and what man's heart is naturally toward God; and, besides this, what he becomes through the grace of God. Take the parable of the prodigal, for instance. Have you not there God's grace and the wickedness of man's heart fully brought out? and then his coming to himself and being lost in the goodness of God toward him? This is just the Gospel of Luke, the sum and substance of the whole book. It is one reason why you have the experience of Peter when first called to service; how the Lord met his fears, and fitted him to become a fisher of men. And Peter is there made a prominent person: such experience is worthless except in an individual. Experience must be a thing between the soul and Christ; and the moment it becomes vague, or a matter of public notoriety, all is gone; it becomes then rather a snare for the conscience. There is the danger of repeating what we have heard from others, or of keeping back what is bad as to our own souls. It must be a matter of individual conscience with the Lord. Hence Luke gives us one individual singled out, and the minute account of what he passes through with the Lord.

This is not Matthew's point. There it is the rejected Messiah, now that His forerunner is cast into prison, who will Himself soon find that there is worse than a prison in store for him. But for all that, the Lord will accomplish the prophecies. He is, in the most despised place, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah that predicted the law bound up among His disciples at the very time that the Lord was hiding His face from Israel. Now He wants to have persons who are suited to be the representatives of this godly remnant in Israel. Therefore He calls first two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother. It would be a mistake to suppose that this was our Lord's first acquaintance with them. They knew the Lord long before. How do we know this? John tells us. If you examine the point, you will find that all the incidents in the first four chapters of John's Gospel occurred before this scene. The circumstances recorded of our Lord in Jerusalem, in Galilee, and with the woman of Samaria even, all took place before Simon and Andrew were called away from their work. In order to call for a special line of service, there is a second work of Christ necessary.

It is one thing for Christ to reveal Himself to a soul; it is another to make that soul a fisher of men. There is a special faith needed in order to act upon the souls of others. The simple saving faith that appropriates Christ for one's own soul is not at all the same thing as understanding the call of Christ summoning one away from all the natural objects of this life to do His work. This comes out here. The Lord, in His rejection, calls, and causes His voice to be heard by these four men, and by others also. They had already believed in Him, and had everlasting life; but even with everlasting life a man may be following a good deal of the world, and, being occupied with what contributes to his

own ease here below, remain a member of the society of men. Many that are godly still continue mixed up with the world; but in order for the Lord to make them to be the companions of His own service, and to fit them for carrying out His own objects, He must call them away. But they have got a father: what is to be done? No matter; the call of Christ is paramount to every other claim. They were casting a net into the sea; and He saith unto them, "Follow Me." But they might have caught ever so much fish: what of that? "They straightway left their nets, and followed Him. And going on from thence, He saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them" (vers. 20, 21). No doubt it was a struggle. They were mending their nets with their father when the Lord called them; but they immediately left their nets and their father, and followed Him. And for this reason: they knew who Christ was; that He was the Messiah, the blessed object of hope that God had from the beginning promised to the fathers; and now the children had it. He called them. Could they not trust all they had in His hands, and confide in His care for their father? Surely they could. The very same faith which gave them to follow Jesus, not alone as a giver of everlasting life, but as One to whom they now belonged as servants, could enable them to confide all that they had pertaining to them in this world into His keeping. Surely, if the Lord called them, His call must be superior to their natural obligations. This was an extraordinary case. We do not find that persons in general are called to such a work as this; but it may be there are occasions where the Lord has those that He summons to serve Him in this special way. How could one be of use to the souls of others unless he have known somewhat of this trial for his own soul? The Lord is presented here as thus forming this godly remnant for Himself from the very beginning. "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel." This was what the Lord was now doing; but it is not all. "Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And His fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those which had the palsy, and He healed them" (vers. 23, 24).

Now, mark, there is nowhere, except in Matthew, such a series of the Lord's works and teaching compressed into a couple of verses. In Matthew they are crowded into a cluster, before we have the teaching commonly called "the sermon on the mount." Why is it that the ordinary current of the Lord's ministry is brought before us here in this comprehensive form? It is intended to show, after the Lord had called these disciples, the universal attention that was drawn to His doctrine. The Lord had been giving a full testimony everywhere through all Galilee, and his fame had spread through all Syria; persons had been attracted from all quarters; and the Holy Ghost then gives us the outline of the kingdom of heaven in its objects and character. The circumstances are so arranged by the Holy Ghost as to show the universal attention directed to it. When all are on tip-toe to hear Him, then the Lord unfolds the character of the kingdom of heaven. Matthew knew perfectly well that the sermon on the mount was really uttered long after. He heard it himself. Yet Matthew's own call is not given till chapter 9. It was subsequent to the call of the twelve disciples that our Lord took His place upon the mount; but Matthew records it long before. The object is to mark, not the time when our Lord uttered this discourse, but the *change* announced. There were, first, all these mighty deeds that witnessed to His being the true Messiah; and then His doctrine was perfectly brought out. The sermon on the mount need not be considered, historically, as one continuous discourse, but may have been divided into different parts. It is nowhere said that it was all uttered in strict consecution. We have only the general fact that then He spoke thus on the mount, and there He taught the people. It may have been given in several discourses, with the circumstances giving rise to this part or that omitted in Matthew. The

human mind compares these things together, and finding that in Luke different portions of it are given in a different connection, while in Matthew all are given together, instead of confiding in the certainty that God is right, jumps at once to the conclusion that there is confusion in these scriptures. There is really perfection. It is the Holy Ghost shaping all according to the object He has before Him.

Another time I hope, if the Lord will, to enter carefully into this most blessed discourse of our Lord's, to evince its grand importance in itself, and its appropriateness in Matthew, where alone we have it so fully. In Mark and John it is not given at all; in Luke only in detached fragments; in Matthew as a whole. But now I merely commend to you the subject we have been looking at, trusting that the general remarks Already made may prove an incentive to further and prayerful examination. May the hints thrown out help some to a more profitable reading of God's word, and more intelligent entrance into His mind, beside., giving a key to apparent difficulties in the Gospels.

Matthew 5

It has been already explained, though briefly, that one reason of the Spirit of God in putting the sermon on the mount out of its historical place in Matthew, if we may so speak, and giving it to us before many of the events which took place subsequently, was this: that the whole Gospel was written upon the principle of convincing Jews; first, to show who Jesus was — their Messiah (a man, but Jehovah), the LORD God of Israel; then to give full proofs of what He really was as their Messiah, according to prophecy, by miracle, moral principles and ways, both in His own person and in His doctrine.* In order to give the greater weight to His doctrine, the Spirit of God, in my opinion, has been pleased, first, to give as a general sketch the deeds of miraculous power which roused universal attention. The report went abroad everywhere, so that there was no possible ground of excuse for unbelief to argue that there was not sufficient publicity; that God had not sounded the trumpet loud enough for the tribes of Israel to hear. Far from that: throughout all Syria His fame had gone forth, and great multitudes followed Him from Galilee, and Decapolis, and Jerusalem, and Judea, and from beyond Jordan. All this is brought forward here and grouped together at the end of chapter 4.

* A third point, I may add here, of immense moment was to make evident the consequences of His rejection by the Jews, not only to *them* but to the Gentiles; that is, the change of economy which turned on that solemn fact.

And just as there is this grouping of the miracles of Christ, which might have been severed from one another by a long space of time, so, I apprehend, the sermon on the mount was not necessarily a continuous discourse, unbroken by time or circumstances, but that the Holy Ghost has seen fit to arrange it so as to give the whole moral unity of the doctrine of Christ as to the kingdom of heaven, and specially so as to counteract the earthly views of the people of Israel.

Luke, on the contrary, was inspired of the Holy Ghost to give the questions that originated certain portions of the discourse, and the circumstances that accompanied it; and, again, to keep certain parts of that discourse back, connecting them with facts that occurred from time to time in our Lord's ministry, the actual incidents being thus interwoven in moral correspondence with any particular doctrine of our Lord. In some places of Luke the Spirit of God takes the liberty, according to His sovereign wisdom, of keeping back certain portions, and bringing in a part here and there according to the object He has in view. The great feature of Luke's Gospel, which runs through it from beginning to end, being its moral aim, we can perfectly understand how suitable it was that, if there were circumstances in Christ's life which were a sort of practical comment on His discourse, there you should have the discourse and the facts put together.

Now, as to the discourse itself, the Lord here clearly speaks as the Messiah, the Prophet-King of the Jews. But besides, all through you will find that the discourse supposes the rejection of the King. It is not brought clearly out yet, but this is what underlies it all. The King has the sense of the true state of the people, who had no heart for Him. Hence there is a certain tinge of sorrow that runs through it. That must ever characterize real godliness in the world as it is: a strange thing for Israel, and specially strange in the lips of the King, of One possessed of such power that, had it been a question of using His resources, He could have changed all in a moment. The miracles which accompanied His steps proved that there was nothing beyond His reach, if it were only a question of Himself. But you will find in all the ways of God that while He always makes good His counsels — so that if He predicts a kingdom and takes it in hand to set it up He will certainly accomplish it — nevertheless, He first presents the thought to man, to Israel, because they were His chosen race. Man has thus the responsibility of receiving or rejecting that which is the mind of God, before grace and power give it effect. But man always fails, no matter what God's purpose may be. His purpose is good, it is holy, and true; it exalts God but abases the sinner: this is enough for man. He feels that he is made nothing of, and he rejects whatever does not gratify his vanity. Man invariably sets himself against the thoughts of God: consequently there is pain and sorrow — rejection of God Himself. And the wonderful thing that the history of this world exhibits is God submitting to be rejected and insulted; allowing poor weak man, a worm, to repel His benign advances and refuse His goodness; to turn everything that God gives and promises into the display of his own pride and glory against the majesty and will of God. All this is the truth about man, so the tinge of it runs through this blessed discourse of our Lord. And as He is now bringing out (which is the great purport of the early part of this chapter) the character of the people who would suit the kingdom of heaven, He proclaims that their character was to be formed by His own. If there was men's dislike and contempt for what was of God, He shows that those who really belong to Him must have a spirit and ways characterized by, and in sympathy with His own. I only say "sympathy" here, because the truth of a divine life given to the believer is not spoken of in this discourse. Redemption never is touched upon, as it is not the subject of the sermon on the mount. If a person, therefore, wanted to know how to be saved, he ought not to look here with the thought of finding an answer. It could not be found in it, because the Lord is bringing out the kingdom of heaven and the sort of people that are suitable to that kingdom. It is clear that He is speaking of His own disciples, and therefore is not showing how one alienated from God could be delivered from such a position. He is speaking about saints, not about sinners. He could lay down what is according to His heart; not at all the way for a soul consciously at a distance from God to be brought near. The sermon on the mount treats not of salvation, but of the character and conduct of those that belong to Christ — the true yet rejected King. But when we examine these beatitudes closely, we shall find an astonishing depth in them, and a beautiful order too.

The first blessedness, then, attaches to a fundamental trait which is inseparable from every soul brought to God, and that knows God. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Nothing more contrary to man! What people call "a man of spirit," is exactly the opposite of being poor in spirit. A man of spirit is one who — such as Cain was — is determined not to be beaten; a soul who would fight it out with God Himself. He who is "poor in spirit" is the very opposite of this. It is a person who is broken, who feels that the dust is his right place. And every soul that knows God must, more or less, be there. He may get out of this place; for although it is a solemn thing, yet it is easy enough to rise again, to forget our right place before God; it is even a danger for those who have been brought into the liberty of Christ. When there is sincerity of heart a man is apt to be low, specially if not quite sure that all is clear between his soul and God. But when full relief is brought to his spirit, when he knows the fulness and certainty of redemption in Christ Jesus, if then he look away from Jesus and take his place

among men, there you will have the old spirit revived, the spirit of man in its worst form — so terrible is the effect of a departure from God in order to mingle with men. The poor in spirit, first in order, the Lord lays down as a sort of foundation, as being inseparable from a soul that is brought to God: — he may not even know what full liberty is, but there is this stamp, never absent where the Holy Ghost works in the soul — that is, poverty of spirit. It may be encroached on by other things, or it may fade away through the influence of false doctrine, or worldly thoughts and practice, but still there it was, and there, in the midst of all the rubbish, it is; and God knows how to bring a man down again, if he has forgotten his true place. "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (ver. 3). If He is speaking about the kingdom, He forthwith says these are the people to whom it belongs. By the "kingdom of heaven" He does not mean heaven: it never means heaven, but always takes in the earth as under the rule of heaven. You will find that many persons are in the habit of confounding these things. "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven," they think means "theirs is heaven." Whereas the Lord is not referring to heaven, but to the rule of the heavens over an earthly scene. It refers to the scene of the ruling Messiah; those who are poor in spirit belong to that system of which He is the Head. He does not speak of the Church here. There might have been the kingdom of heaven and no Church at all. It is not till the sixteenth chapter of this Gospel that the subject of the Church is broached, and then it is a thing promised and expressly distinguished from the kingdom of heaven. There is not in all Scripture a single passage where the kingdom of heaven is confounded with the Church, or vice versa. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This is the primary foundation, the broad characteristic feature of all that belong to Jesus.

"Blessed are they that mourn" is the second feature. There is more activity of life, more depth of feeling, more entrance into the condition of things around them. To be "poor in spirit" would be true if there were not a single other soul in the world; he thus feels because of what he is in himself; it is a question between him and God that makes him to be poor in spirit. But "blessed are they that mourn" is not merely what we find in our own condition, but the holy sorrow that a saint tastes in finding himself in such a world as this, and, oh, how little able to maintain the glory of God! So there is this holy sorrow in the second part. The first is the child of God experiencing the earliest feelings of holiness in his soul; the second is the sense of what is due to God — a feeling it may be of great weakness, and yet of what becomes the honour of God, and how little it is upheld by himself or others. "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (ver. 4). There is not a single sigh that goes up to God but He treasures and will answer it; "Ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves." Here, then, we have the sorrowing of the godly soul.

But in the third case we come to that which is much deeper and more chastened. It is a condition of soul produced by a fuller acquaintance with God, and is especially the way in which God elsewhere describes the blessed One Himself. He was "meek and lowly in heart;" and this was what the Lord said after He had been groaning in spirit, for He knew what it was to have a deeper sorrow than we have spoken of, over the condition of men and the rejection of God that He witnessed here below. He could only say "Woe" to those cities in which He had done so many mighty works; and then Capernaum comes in for the deepest condemnation, because the mightiest works of all were done there in vain. And what could Jesus do but groan in spirit as He thought of such utter spurning of God, and indifference to His own love? But at the same hour we find He rejoices in spirit, and says, "I thank Thee, O Father." Such is the blessed proof of matchless meekness in Jesus. The same hour which sees the depth of His sorrow over man sees also His perfect bowing to God, though at the cost of everything to Himself. Conscious of this, He says, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me: for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Now, then, I think I may be bold to say that this

meekness, which was found in its absolute perfectness in Jesus, is also what the gradually deepening knowledge of the ways of God, even in the sense of the abounding wickedness of this world and of the failure of what bears the name of Christ, produces in the saint of God. For, in the midst of all that he sees around him, there is the discerning of the hidden purpose of God that is going on in spite of everything; so that the heart, instead of being fretted by the evil which it witnesses and which it cannot set aside, instead of the least feeling of envy at the prosperity of the wicked, finds its resource in God — "the Lord of heaven and earth" — an expression most blessed because it marks the absolute control in which everything is held by God. Jesus is the meek one, and those that belong to Jesus are trained to this meekness also. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (ver. 5). The earth — why not heaven? The earth is the scene of all this evil, causing such sorrow and mourning. But now, having better learnt God's ways, they can commit all to Him. Meekness is not merely to have a sense of nothingness in ourselves, or to be filled with sorrow for the opposition to God here below; but it is rather the calmness which leaves things with God, and bends to God, and thankfully owns the will of God, even where naturally it may be most trying to ourselves.

The fourth blessedness is much more active. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (ver. 6). Perfect soul-satisfaction they shall have. Whatever was the form of the spiritual feeling of the heart, there is always the perfect answer to it on God's part. If there was sorrow, they shall be comforted; if there was meekness, they shall inherit the earth, the very place of their trial here. Now, there is this activity of spiritual feeling, the going out after what was according to God, and what maintained the will of God, especially as made known to a Jew in the Old Testament. Therefore it is called hungering and thirsting after righteousness. We learn deeper principles in the New Testament still, which had to be brought out when the disciples were able to bear them.

This closes what we may call the first section of the beatitudes. You will find that they are divided, as the series of Scripture often are, into four and three. We have had four classes of persons pronounced "blessed." All the traits ought to be found in one individual, but some will be more prominent in one than another. For instance, we may see great activity in one, astonishing meekness in another. The principle of all is in every soul that is born of God. In verse 7 we enter upon a rather different class: and it will be found that the last three have got a common character, as the first four have.

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (ver. 7). As righteousness is the key note of the first four, so grace is that which lies at the root of the latter three; and, therefore, the very first of them demonstrates not merely that they are righteous and that they feel what is due to God, but they appreciate the love of God, and maintain it in the midst of surrounding evil. Yea, there is something more blessed still: and what is that? "Blessed are the merciful." There is nothing on which God more takes His stand (as the active principle of His being in a world of sin) than His mercy. The only possibility of salvation to a single soul is that there is mercy in God; that He is rich in mercy; that there is no bound to His mercy; that there is nothing in man, if he only bows to His Son, which can hinder His constant flowing spring of mercy. "Blessed," then, "are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." It is not only a question of the forgiveness of their sins, but of mercy in everything. It is a blessed thing to hail the smallest sign of mercy in the saints, to take the little, and look for much more. "Blessed are the merciful." They will find, not that there is not difficulty and trial, but that though they shall know the cost of it, they shall know the sweetness of it; they shall taste afresh what the mercy of God is towards their own souls, in the exercise of mercy towards others. This is the characteristic feature of the new class of blessing; just as poverty of spirit was the introduction to the first blessings,

so mercy is to these.

The next is the consequence of this, as in the former class. If a man does not think much of himself, men will take advantage of him. If a man is bold and boastful and self-exalting, even saints may suffer it (2 Cor. 11). If he does well to himself, men will praise him (Ps. 49). But the contrary of all this is what God works in the saint. No matter what he may be, he is broken down before God: he learns the vanity of what man is; he is content to be nothing. And the effect is that he suffers. Poverty of spirit will be followed by mourning. Then there is the meekness as there is deepening acquaintance with God, and withal the hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

But now it is mercy; and the effect of mercy is not a compromising of the holiness of God, but a larger and deeper standard of it. The fuller your hold of grace is, the higher will be your maintenance of holiness. If you only regard grace, as a wretched selfish being, to find an excuse for sin, no doubt it will be perverted. And so He speaks at once of the simple normal effect of tasting of this spring of mercy. They are "pure in heart." This is the next class, and it is, I believe, the consequence of the first — of being merciful. "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God." It is exactly what is proper to God; for He alone is pure absolutely. Thus also He was perfectly reflected in His beloved Son. For not a single thought or feeling ever sullied divine perfectness in the heart of Jesus. In this case He is just telling out what He Himself was. How could He but put His own characteristics before those who belonged to Him? For indeed He is their life. It is Christ in us that produces what is according to God by the Holy Ghost — that blessed One whose very coming into the world was the witness of perfect grace and mercy on God's part; for we know God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son for it. And He was there, a man — the faithful witness of the mercy and of the purity of God. He, when He came with His heart full of mercy towards the vilest, was yet the very fulness and pattern of the purity of God in, its perfection. "He that sent me," He could say, "is with me; ... for I do always those things that please Him." The only way of doing anything to please God is by the cherished consciousness of being in the presence of God; and there is no possibility of this, except as I am drawn there in the liberty of grace and as knowing the love of God to me, as brought to Him in Christ. But this is not revealed here; for the Lord is rather unfolding the moral qualities of those that belong to Him.

The third and closing form of these beatitudes is, "Blessed are the peace-makers; for they shall be called the children of God" (ver. 9). Here we have the active side again, of which we saw an analogy in the closing one of the first four. These go out making peace, if there is any possibility of the peace of God being brought into the scene; and if it cannot be, they are content to wait on God, and look up to Him, that He may make this peace in His own time. And as this peace-making can belong only to God Himself, so these saints that are enriched with these blessed qualities of the grace of God as well as His righteousness, with His active mercy, and its effects are equally found now characterized as peace-makers. "They shall be called the children of God." Oh, this is a sweet title — sons of God! Is it not because it was the reflection of His own nature — of what God Himself is? The stamp of God is upon them. There is no one thing that more indicates God manifested in His children than peace-making. This was what God was doing, what His heart is set upon. Here are found men upon the earth who shall be called "the sons of God" — a new title from God Himself.

Then follow two blessings of exceeding interest. They add much to the beauty of the scene and complete the picture in a most striking way. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (ver. 10). This is evidently to begin over again. The first blessedness was, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;" and the next three were all marked by righteousness. It is the first thing that God produces in a new-born soul. He

who is awakened takes up God's cause against himself. He is, in measure at least, broken down, poor in spirit; and God looks for him to grow in poverty of spirit to the last. But here it is not so much what they are, as what their lot is from others. The last two beatitudes speak of their portion in the world from the hands of other people. The first four are characterized by intrinsic righteousness — the last three by intrinsic grace. These two, then, answer, one to the first four, and the other to the last three. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This does not go beyond the blessed state of things that the power of God will bring in upon the earth in connection with the Messiah. Being rejected, the kingdom of heaven is His with a stronger and deeper title, as it were — certainly with the means of blessing by grace for the lost. A suffering and despised Messiah is still dearer to the heart of God than if received all at once. And if *He* does not lose the kingdom because He was persecuted, neither do they. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Persecuted, not merely by the Gentiles or the Jews, but for righteousness' sake. Do not be looking at the people that persecute you, but at the reason why you are persecuted. If it is because you desire to be found in obedience to the will of God, blessed are you. You fear to sin? you suffer for it? Blessed are they which suffer for righteousness' sake: they will have their portion with the Messiah Himself.

But now we have, finally, another blessedness. And mark the change. "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you for My sake." This change to *ye* is exceedingly precious. It is not merely put in an abstract form — "Blessed are they;" but it is a personal thing. He looks at the disciples there, knows what they were to go through for His sake, and gives them the highest and nearest place in His love. "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you . . . for My sake." It is not now for righteousness' sake, but "for My sake." There is something still more precious than righteousness, and that is Christ. And when you have Christ, you can have nothing higher. Blessed indeed to be persecuted for His sake! The difference is just this: when a man suffers for righteousness' sake, it supposes that some evil has been put before him which he refuses. He would have perhaps to subscribe something against his conscience, and he cannot, nor would dare, to do it. He is offered a tempting bait, but it involves that which he knows is contrary to God. All is in vain: the tempter's object is seen. Righteousness prevails, and he suffers. He not only loses what is offered, but he is evil spoken of too. Blessed are they who suffer thus for righteousness' sake! But for Christ's sake is quite a different thing. There the enemy essays great execution. He tempts the soul with such questions as these: Is there any reason why you should stand up for Jesus and the gospel? There is no need for being so zealous for the truth. Why go out of your way so far for this person or that thing? Now in these cases it is not a question of a sin, open or covert. For, in the case of suffering for Christ's sake, it is the activity of grace that goes out to others. It answers to the last three of the seven beatitudes. A soul that is filled with a sense of mercy cannot refrain his lips. He who knows what God is, could not be silent merely because of what men think or do. Blessed are ye who thus suffer for Christ's name! The power of grace prevails there. Too often, alas, motives of prudence come in: people are afraid of giving offence to others, of losing influence for self, of spoiling the prospect of the children, etc. But the energy of grace, looking at all this, still says Christ is worth infinitely more; Christ commands my soul — I must follow Him. In suffering for righteousness' sake, a soul eschews evil earnestly and peremptorily, committing itself at all cost to what is right; but in the other it discerns the path of Christ — that which the gospel, the worship, or the will, of the Lord calls to, and at once throws itself with its whole heart on the Lord's side. Then comes in the comfort of that sweet word, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you.... for My sake." The Lord could not refrain the expression of His soul's delight in His saints: "Blessed are ye. . . . Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven." Observe it is

not now in the kingdom of heaven, but" in heaven." He identifies these with a higher place altogether. It is not only the power of God over the earth, and His giving them a portion here, but it is taking them out of the earthly scene to be with Himself above. "For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." What an honour to follow in earthly rejection and scorn those who preceded us in special communion with God — the heralds of Him for whom we suffer now! We may clearly then consider that these two final blessednesses, the persecutions for righteousness' sake and for Christ's sake, answer respectively to the first four blessings and to the last three.

In Luke, where we have these blessings brought before us, we have none for righteousness' sake — only for His name's sake. Hence in all the cases it is, "Blessed are ye." To some it may seem a delicate shade, but the difference is characteristic of the two Gospels. Matthew takes in the larger view, and specially that view of the principles of the kingdom of heaven which was suited to the understanding of a Jew, to bring him out of his mere Judaism, or to show him higher principles. Luke, whatever the principles are, gives them all under the form of grace, and treats them as our Lord's direct addresses to the disciples before Him — "Blessed are ye." Even if he takes up the subject of the poor, he drops the abstract form of Matthew, and makes it all personal. Everything is connected with the Lord Himself, and not merely with righteousness. This is exceedingly beautiful. And if we pursue further the next few verses, which give, not so much the characteristics of the people as their general attitude in the world — the place in which they are set in the earth by God — we have it in a very few words, and strongly confirming the distinction which has been drawn between righteousness' and Christ's name's sake. Also, if you examine the 1st epistle of Peter, you will find this remarkably corroborated there also.

"Ye are the salt of the earth." Salt is the only thing that cannot be salted, because it is the preservative principle itself; but if this is gone, it cannot be replaced. "If the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" The salt of the earth is the relation of the disciples here to that which already had the testimony of God, and therefore the expression "earth," or "the land," which was specially true of the Jewish land then. If you speak about the earth now, it is Christendom — the place that enjoys, either really or professedly, the light of God's truth. This is what may be called the earth. And this is the place which will finally be the scene of the greatest apostasy; for such evil is only possible where light has been enjoyed and departed from. In Revelation, where the closing results of the age are given, the earth appears in a most solemn manner; and then we have the peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues — what we should call heathen lands. But the earth means the once-favoured scene of professing Christianity, where the energies of the mind of men have been at work, the scene where the testimony of God had once shed its light; then, alas, abandoned to utter apostasy.

"Ye are the salt of the earth" — they were the real preservative principle there: all the rest, the Lord intimates, were good for nothing. But, let us note, He gives a solemn warning that there is a danger that the salt should lose its savour. He is not now speaking of the question whether a saint can fall away or not. People go with their own questions to Scripture, and pervert the word of God to suit their previous thoughts. The Lord is not raising the question whether life is ever lost; but He is speaking of certain persons who are in a given position; and among them there may be persons who take it heedlessly, or even falsely, and then comes the fading away of all that they had once possessed. He announces their judgment — a most contemptuous one — to be passed upon that which took so high a place without reality.

"Ye are the light of the world." This is another thing. Bearing in mind the distinction drawn in the series of the beatitudes and of the persecutions, we have the key to these two verses. The salt of

the earth represents the righteous principle. This evidently involves the clinging to the eternal rights of God and the maintenance before the world of what is due to His character; but it is gone when that which bears the name of God falls below what even men think proper, and they scoff against what is called religion. All respect vanishes, and men think that the condition of Christians is a fair subject for ridicule. But now, in verse 14, we have not only the principle of righteousness, but of grace — the outflowing and strength of grace. And here we find a new title given to the disciples, as descriptive of their public testimony — , 'the light of the world.' The *light* is clearly that which diffuses itself. The *salt* is what ought to be inward, but the light is that which scatters itself abroad. "A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid." There was to be a diffusion of its testimony around. Man does not light a candle to put it under a corn measure, but on a candlestick, "and it giveth light unto all that are in the house." After this manner let your light shine before men, "that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Mark it well.

We have looked at these two striking sketches of the testimony of believers here below as the salt of the earth, the preservative energy in the midst of profession; and as the light of the world going out in the activities of love toward the poor world; and the danger of the salt losing its savour. and of the light being put under a bushel. Now we find the great object of God in this twofold testimony. It is not merely a question of the blessing of souls, for there is not a word about evangelizing or saving sinners, but of the walk of saints. There is a grave question that God raises about His saints, and this is about their own ways apart from other people. Calls to the unconverted we find abundantly elsewhere, and none can exaggerate their importance for the world; but the sermon on the mount is God's call to the converted. It is their character, their position, their testimony distinctively; and if others are thought of throughout, it is not so much a question of winning them, as of the saints reflecting what comes from above. This light is what comes from Christ. It is not, Let your good works shine before men. When people talk about this verse thinking of their own works, they are generally not good works at all; but even if they were, works are not light. Light is that which comes from God, without admixture of man. Good works are the fruit of its action upon the soul; but it is *the light* which is to shine before men. It is the confession of *Christ* that is the point before God. It is not merely certain things to be done. The light shining is the great object here, though doing good ought to flow from it. If I make doing good everything, it is a lower thought than that which is before the mind of God. An infidel can feel that a shivering man needs a coat or a blanket. The natural man may be fully alive to the wants of others; but if I merely take these works and make them the prominent aim, I really do nothing more than an unbeliever might. The moment you make good works the object, and their shining before men, you find yourself on common ground with Jews and heathen. God's people are apt thus to destroy their testimony. What so bad, in the way of a thing done professedly for God, as a work that leaves out Christ, and that shows a man who loves Christ to be on comfortable terms with those that hate Him? This is what the Lord warns the saints against. They are not to be thinking about their works, but that the light of God should shine. Works will follow, and much better works than where a person is always occupied with them. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven " (ver. 16). Let your confession of what God is in His nature and of what Christ is in His own person and ways — let your acknowledgment of Him *be the thing* that is felt by and brought before men; and then, when they see your good works, they will glorify your Father which is in heaven. Instead of saying, What a good man such a one is, they will glorify God on his behalf — connecting what you do with your confession of Christ.

The Lord grant that this, as it is the word and the will of Christ, may be that to which we surrender ourselves, and which we desire above all things for our own souls and for those who are dear to us; and if we see the forgetfulness of it in any saints of God, may we remember them in prayer,

and seek to help them by the testimony of His truth, which, if it does not carry the heart with it, may at least reach the conscience and bear fruit later.

We have seen our Lord's statement of the character, and also of the position, proper to the heirs of the kingdom of heaven. We have found Him pronouncing those "blessed" whom man would not have counted so. But our Lord was the perfect pattern of all this. And what could have sounded more unreasonable, specially to a Jew, than to hear one deliberately and emphatically call those blessed and happy who were despised, scorned, hated, persecuted, yea, thought ill of, and treated as malefactors? No doubt it was expressly for righteousness' sake and Christ's sake. But to the Jew the coming of the Messiah was looked forward to as the crown of his joy — that most auspicious event on which all was to turn for Israel, both as to the accomplishment of God's promises made to the fathers and the fulfilment of the magnificent predictions which involve the overthrow of their enemies, the humiliation of the Gentiles, and the glory of Israel. Therefore, to suppose that the receiving of Him who was the Messiah would now entail inevitable shame and suffering in the world was indeed an enormous shock to their most cherished expectations. But our Lord insists upon it, declaring such only to be blessed — blessed with a new kind of blessedness, far beyond what a Jew could conceive. And this is part of the privileges into which we too are brought by faith of Christ. The instruction of our Lord in the sermon on the mount only comes out in stronger forms now that He has taken His place in heaven. The enmity of man has also come out to its full measure. The world has joined with the Jews in enmity to the children of God. And so the last book of the New Testament shows that those who take the name of Jews, without any reality, remain to the end the most hostile to all true testimony of Christ on the earth.

In the portion that follows we enter upon a most important subject. If there was this new kind of blessedness, so foreign to the thoughts of Israel after the flesh, what was the relation of the law to Christ's doctrine and the new state of things about to be introduced? Did not the law come from God through Moses? If Christ brought in that which was so unexpected, even by the disciples, what would be the bearing of this truth upon that which they had previously received through God's inspired servants, and for which they had His own authority? Weaken the authority of the law, and it is clear that you destroy the foundation on which the gospel rests; for the law was of God as certainly as the gospel. Hence came in a most weighty question, especially for an Israelite: what was the bearing of the doctrine of Christ, respecting the kingdom of heaven, upon the precepts of the law? The Lord opens this subject (vers. 17-48) with these words: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets." They might have thought so from the fact of His having introduced something not mentioned in either; but "Think not," He says, "that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." I take this word "fulfil" in its largest sense. In His own person the Lord fulfilled the law and the prophets, in His own ways, in righteous subjection and obedience. His life here below exhibited its beauty for the first time without flaw. His death was the most solemn sanction which the law ever could receive, because the curse that it pronounced upon the guilty, the Saviour took upon Himself. There was nothing the Saviour would not undergo, rather than God should have dishonour. But our Lord's words warrant, I think, a further application. There is an expansion of the law, or δικαίωμα (righteous requirement), giving to its moral element the largest scope, so that all which was honouring to God in it should be brought out in its fullest power and extent. The light of heaven was now let fall upon the law, and the law interpreted, not by weak, failing men, but by One who had no reason to evade one jot of its requirements; whose heart, full of love, thought only of the honour and the will of God; whose zeal for His Father's house consumed Him, and who restored that which He took not away. Who but He could expound the law thus — not as the scribes, but in the heavenly light? For the commandment of God is exceeding broad, whether we look at its making an

end of all perfection in man, or the sum of it in Christ.

Far from annulling the law, the Lord, on the contrary, illustrated it more brightly than ever, and gave it a spiritual application that man was entirely unprepared for before He came. And this is what the Lord proceeds to do in the wonderful discourse that follows. After having said, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled," He adds, "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (vers. 18-20). Our Lord is going to expand the great moral principles of the law into commandments that flow from Himself, and not merely from Moses, and shows that this would be the great thing whereby persons would be tested. It would no longer be a question of the ten words spoken on Sinai merely; but, while recognizing their full value, He was about to open out the mind of God in a way so much deeper than had ever been thought of before that this would henceforth be the great test.

Hence He says, when referring to the practical use of these commandments of His, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" — an expression that has not the smallest reference to justification, but to the practical appreciation of and walking in the right relations of the believer toward God and toward men. The righteousness spoken of here is entirely of a practical kind. This may strike many persons sharply, perhaps. They may be somewhat perplexed to understand how practical righteousness is made to be the means of entering into the kingdom of heaven. But, let me repeat, the sermon on the mount never shows us how a sinner is to be saved. If there were the smallest allusion to practical righteousness where a sinner's justification is concerned, there would be ground to be startled; but there can be none whatever for the saint who understands and is subject to God's will. God insists upon godliness in His people. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." There can be no question that the Lord shows in John 15 that the unfruitful branches must be cut off, and that, just as the withered branches of the natural vine are cast into the fire to be burned, so fruitless professors of the name of Christ can look for no better portion.

Bearing fruit is the test of life. These things are stated in the strongest terms all through Scripture. In John 5: 28, 29 it is said, "The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation," or "judgment." There is no disguising the solemn truth that God will and must have that which is good and holy and righteous in His own people. They are not God's people at all who are not characterized as the doers of that which is acceptable in His sight. If this were put before a sinner as a means of reconciliation with God, or of having sins blotted out before Him, it would be the denial of Christ and of His redemption. But only hold fast that all the means of being brought nigh to God are found in Christ — that the sole way by which a sinner is connected with the blessing of Christ is by faith, without the works of the law — only maintain this, and there is not the least inconsistency nor difficulty in understanding that the same God who gives a soul to believe in Christ, works in that soul by the Holy Ghost to produce what is practically according to Himself. For what purpose does God give him the life of Christ and the Holy Ghost, if only the remission of the sins were needed? But God is not satisfied with this. He imparts the life of Christ to a soul, and gives that soul the Holy Spirit to dwell in him; and as the Spirit is not the spring of weakness or of fear "but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind," God looks for suited ways and for the exercise of spiritual wisdom and judgment in passing through the present trying

scene.

While they looked up with ignorant eyes to the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, our Lord declares that this sort of righteousness will not do. The righteousness that goes up to the temple every day, that prides itself upon long prayers, large alms, and broad phylacteries, will not stand in the sight of God. There must be something far deeper and more according to the holy, loving nature of God. Because with all that appearance of outward religion, there might be always, as there generally was in fact, no sense of sin, nor of the grace of God. This proves the all-importance of being right, *first*, in our thoughts about God; and we can only be so by receiving the testimony of God about His Son. In the case of the Pharisees we have sinful man denying his sin, and utterly obscuring and denying God's true character as the God of grace. These teachings of our Lord were rejected by the outward religionists, and their righteousness was such as you might expect from people who were ignorant of themselves and of God. It gained reputation for them, but there it all ended; they looked for their reward now, and they had it. . But our Lord says to the disciples, Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the 'kingdom of heaven."

Allow me to ask the question here, How is it that God accomplishes this in regard to a soul that believes now? There is a great secret that does not come out in this sermon. First of all, there is a load of unrighteousness on the sinner. How is that to be dealt with, and the sinner to be made fit for and introduced into the kingdom of heaven? Through faith, he is born again; he acquires a new nature, a life which as much flows from the grace of God as the bearing of his sins by Christ upon the cross. There is the foundation of practical righteousness. The true beginning of all moral goodness in a sinner — as it has been said and as it deserves to be often repeated — is *the sense and confession of his lack of it*, nay, of his *badness*. Never is anything right with God in a man till he gives himself up as all wrong. When he is brought down to this, he is thrown upon God, and God reveals Christ as His gift to the poor sinner. He is morally broken down, feeling and owning that he is lost, unless God appears for him; he receives Christ, and what then? "He that believeth hath everlasting life." What is the nature of that life? In its character perfectly righteous and holy. The man is then at once fitted for God's kingdom. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." But when he is born again, he does enter there. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," The scribes and Pharisees were only working on and by the flesh; they did not believe that they were dead in the sight of God; neither do men now. But what the believer begins with is, that he is a dead man, that he requires a new life, and that the new life which he receives in Christ is suitable to the kingdom of heaven. It is upon this new nature that God acts, and works by the Spirit this practical righteousness; so that it remains in every sense true, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven."

But the Lord does not here explain how this would be. He only declares. that what was suitable to God's nature was *not* to be found in human Jewish righteousness, and that it must be for the kingdom.

Now He takes up the law in its various parts, at least what has to do with men. Here He does not enter into what touches God directly, but first of all takes up that which flows from human violence, and after this the great flagrant example of human corruption; for violence and corruption are the two outstanding forms of human iniquity. Before the flood even, such was the condition of men: "The earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence." Here, in verse 21, we have the light of the kingdom cast on the command, "Thou shalt not kill: and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment." The law took cognizance of this extreme form of violence; but our Lord

gives length, breadth, height, and depth to it: "But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire" (ver. 22). That is, our Lord treats as now coming under the same category with murder, in the sight of God, every kind of violence, and feeling, and expression; anything of contempt and hatred, whatever expresses the ill-feeling of the heart; any putting down of another, the will to annihilate others as far as character or influence is concerned: all this is no better than murder in God's searching eye. He is expanding the law; He is showing now One who looks at and judges the feeling *of the heart*. Therefore it is not at all a question merely of the consequences of violence to a man, for there might be no very bad effect produced by these words of anger, but they proved the state of the heart; and this is what the Lord is dealing with here. "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way: first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (vers. 23, 24). He is not yet manifesting the Christian in his entire separation from the Jewish system. These words clearly show a connection with Israel — though the principle applies to a Christian; for the altar has no reference to the Lord's table.

"Agree with thine adversary quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily, I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing" (vers. 25, 26). I believe that Israel were guilty of that very folly — Israel as a people — that they did not agree with the adversary quickly. There was the Messiah, and they, being adversaries of Him, treated Him as their adversary and compelled God to be against them by their unbelief. The position of Israel morally, in the sight of God, was very much the one shown us here. There was a murderous feeling in their heart against Jesus. Herod was the expression of it at His birth, and it went through all the ministry of Christ, as the cross proved how utterly there was that unrelenting hatred in the heart of the Jews against their own Messiah. They did not agree with their adversary quickly, and the judge could only deliver them to the officer to be cast into prison; and there they remain until this day. The Jewish nation, from their rejection of the Messiah, have been shut out from all the promises of God; as a nation they have been committed to prison, and there they must remain till the uttermost farthing is paid. In Isaiah we have the Lord speaking comfortably to Jerusalem: "Cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." Thus, while we come into His favour now, while we through the grace of God receive the fulness of blessing through Christ Jesus now, yet there can be no doubt that rich blessing is in store for Jerusalem. For God in His mercy will one day say to her, Your iniquity I now pardon: I will make you no longer the witness of My vengeance on the earth. And why is Israel not permitted to this day to amalgamate with the nations? There they remain, kept apart from all other people by God. But God has in store for them His signal mercy. "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem . . . for she hath received at the Lord's hand double for all her sins." This figure we find elsewhere beautifully set forth in the case of the man guilty of blood, who fled to the city of refuge provided by God. And the book of Numbers teaches that there the man abode, out of the land of his possession, till the death, not of the manslayer, but of the high priest that is anointed with oil. The priesthood of our Lord is referred to there. When the Lord has completed His heavenly people and gathered them in where they do not need the activity of His intercession; when we are in the full results of all that Christ has wrought for us, the High Priest shall then take His place on His own throne. Then will be the termination of His present heavenly priesthood, and blood-guilty Israel will return to the land of their possession. I have no doubt that this is the just application of that beautiful

type. I cannot understand what proper interpretation there could be of the death of the high priest anointed with oil, if you appropriate it to a Christian now; but apply it to the Jew, and nothing is plainer. Christ will terminate that character of priesthood that He is engaged in for us now, and will enter on a new form of blessing for Israel.

But there is another thing besides violence: there is the corrupt element in the heart of man — the heart lusting for that which it has not. This is taken up in the next word of our Lord: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee . . . And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell" (vers. 27-30). That is, whatever in our walk, or in our ways, or in our service, whatever it might be that exposes a soul to the danger of yielding to these unholy feelings, should never be spared, but departed from at any cost. There must be the excision of everything that is hurtful to the soul; the members of the body, such as the eye desiring and the hand which would take, being used as showing the various ways in which the heart might be entangled. The cutting off of these members sets forth a heart thoroughly exercised in self-judgment; not prompted to excuse itself by saying that it had not actually committed the sin, but whatever exposed to it must be given up.

The Lord then denounces the easy dissolution of the tie of marriage: "It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement. But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery" (vers. 31, 32). Thus our Lord shows that though there might be serious difficulties, still this human relationship receives the strong sanction of God's ordinance. Though an earthly relationship, the light of heaven is thrown upon it, the sanctity of marriage held up, and the possibility of allowing anything to interfere with its holiness entirely put down by Christ, save only where there was that which interrupted it in the sight of God, in which case the act of separation would be only a declaration of its being already actually broken.

The next case (vers. 33-37) brings us into a different order of things: it is the use of the name of the Lord. Here the reference is not a judicial oath, i.e., an oath administered by a magistrate. In some countries this might savour of heathenism or popery, and no Christian ought to take such an oath. But if the declaration be simply God's authority, introduced by the magistrate to declare the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, I do not see that the Lord in any wise absolves the Christian's obligation to this. But the matter here relates to communication between man and man. "Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black." They were simply the asseverations of common life among the Jews. If our Lord had meant to forbid the Christian from taking judicial oaths, would He not have instanced the oath that was usual in the courts of those days? But the oaths that He brings before us were what the Jews were in the habit of using when their word was questioned by their fellow-men, not what was employed before the magistrate. So far from thinking that a Christian is doing right in refusing a judicial oath, I believe he is doing wrong not to take it when the magistrate requires his testimony, when there is nothing to offend conscience in the form of the oath. If the magistrate does not acknowledge God in the oath, still the Christian is bound to acknowledge God in the magistrate, who is, to the Christian, a servant of God in the outward things of this world. Even the Assyrian was

the rod of God, all the while that he thought only of carrying out his own purposes against Israel. Much more the magistrate, let him be who or what he may, represents the truth of God's external authority in the world, and the Christian ought to respect this, more by far than the men of the world; and therefore the oath, which simply demands the truth on ground of that authority, is a holy thing and not to be refused. The Christian, doubtless, has no business with prosecuting another himself. On the contrary, he owes it to Christ and His grace to let the world, if it will, abuse him — he may protest by word against it, and then leave it with the Lord. When our Lord Himself was dealt with unrighteously, He convicts the person of it, and there it ends, as man would think, for ever. There is no such thing as seeking to get present reparation of His wrongs. So should it be with Christians. There may be the moral conviction of those that do the wrong, but the taking it patiently is acceptable with God.

There is no way in which the Christian so shows how much he is above the world, as when he seeks not the world's vindication in anything. If we belong to the world, we ought all to be volunteers. If the world is our home, a man is called upon to do battle for it. But for the Christian this world is not the scene of his interests, and why fight for what does not belong to him? If a Christian fight in and with the world (save his own spiritual warfare), he is out of his place. It is the duty of *men*, as such, to repel wrong; and if the Lord uses the world in order to put down revolution and make peace, the Christian may well look up and give thanks. It is a great mercy. But the truth which the believer has to get firmly settled in his own soul, is that "they are not of the world." To what measure are they not of the world? "They are not of the world even as *I* am not of the world." In John 17, where our Lord repeats this wondrous word, He speaks in view of going to heaven, as if He were no longer on earth at all. Thus, in the spirit of one away from the world, He says, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." A little before He had said, "Now I am no more in the world." His going up to heaven is what gives its character to the Christian and to the Church. A Christian is not merely a believer, but a believer called to the enjoyment of Christ *while He is in heaven*. And, as Christ our Head is out of the world, so the Christian is in spirit lifted above the world, and is to show the strength of his faith as above his mere natural feeling. Nothing makes a man look so foolish as having no side in this world. Christians do not like to be nonentities; they are apt, one way or another, to wish their influence to be felt. But the Lord delivers from this.

It is below our calling, then, to indulge in affirmations beyond the simple statements of truth. "Let your communication be, Yea, yea; nay, nay, for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil" (ver. 37). It is worthy of note, as a practical proof of the distinction here drawn, how our Lord acted when He was before the high priest. He was silent till the high priest put the oath to Him; then at once he answers. Who can doubt that He shows us the right pattern there?

Our Lord comes next to the case of any practical injury that may be done us. It is not that it is wrong for a man to punish according to the injury that has been inflicted upon another. "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" is perfectly righteous; but our Lord intimates that we ought to be much more than righteous, we ought to be gracious; and He presses this as the climax of this part of the discourse. First, He had strengthened the righteousness of the law, extended its depths, and put aside its license; now He goes further. He shows that there is a principle in His own ways and life which teaches the Christian that he is not to seek retaliation. "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." It is clear the Lord has no reference here to what governments have to do. The New Testament is written for the Christian, for that which has a separate existence and a peculiar calling in the midst of earthly systems and peoples. It belongs to those who are heavenly while they are walking upon earth. We become such by the reception of Christ, and to such the Lord says, "Resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy

right cheek, turn to him the other also." Personal injury is meant here. The evil done may be ever so undeserved, but it has to be overcome with good. Show that you are willing to take even more for Christ's sake. I 'And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.' There the law is evoked: that is, a man lays a claim, perhaps falsely, to one part of your clothing, and if he will "sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." Here it seems not exactly a man appealing to the law, but the public officers themselves. "And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." The great principle our Lord marks in this — whether it is human violence, or the law ever so hardly or wrongly applied, — that while, according to the law, you might go one step, according to the gospel you would go two. Grace does twice as much as the law, whatever may be the point in hand. It was never intended in anywise to supplant obligations or to lower responsibilities, but, on the contrary, to give power and force to everything that is righteous in the sight of God. The law might say, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth;" here there is not only the endurance of that which is positively wrong, but grace that gives more than is asked. "The law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." And this is one way of practically showing how far we value grace. It is not a question of the mere letter of our Lord's words. If you were to limit it merely to a blow on the face it would be a very poor thing; but the word of Christ is that which conveys to me the spirit that pleases God, and gives me the reality of grace. And grace is not the vindication of self nor the punishment of a wrong, but the endurance of evil and the triumph of good over it. Christ is speaking of what a Christian has to put up with from the world through which he passes. He is to receive tribulation as the discipline which God sees to be good for his soul; the great spectacle before men and angels — that there are men on this earth who are allowed and rejoice to suffer for Christ, because they have learned to give up their own will, to sacrifice their own rights, and to suffer wrongfully, looking onward to the day when the Lord will own whatever has been their sorrow for His sake, and when all evil shall be judged most solemnly at His appearing and kingdom.

Our Lord says, in verse 42, "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." It is an example of a great general principle that the Lord is insisting upon; as He had laid bare the character of violence, so here of another thing — the solicitation that addresses itself to the kindness of heart of a Christian. "Give to him that asketh thee." Most certainly this is, a comely and a gracious thing; but it is perfectly plain the Lord is not pressing upon His people that the thing be done heedlessly, nor as a mere gratification of their feelings, but with a conscience towards God. Supposing a person came to ask you for something, and you have reason to think that he would spend it improperly, you must limit it. Why not? He might say to you, Did not the Lord enjoin, "Give to him that asketh thee?" Certainly; but the Lord has given certain other words by which I judge as to the propriety of giving in each particular case. The asker might be going to do what I am sure would be absurd or wrong; am I still to give? or is not another principle introduced, namely, due discrimination? Perhaps he that asks has plans of his own which I believe to be worldly: am I to gratify his worldliness? What the Lord has in view is real need; and as there was wont to be great indifference to this among the Jews, as indeed such is apt to be everywhere, the Lord not merely insists upon the Christian helping his brother, but takes the broadest ground in urging generous giving; not, of course, for anything we may get by it, but out of love according to God.

"Give to him that asketh thee." We all know there are those who would impose. This shuts up and often hinders pity; and it may oftener still be an excuse for not showing pity. The Lord is guarding against the snare, and shows the great moral value, for our own souls and for the glory of God, of habitual, considerate, ungrudging kindness towards the distressed in this world. Not that I am always to give *what* a person asks, for he may seek something foolish; but still "Give to him that asketh thee,

and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." Do you count up how often you have been deceived? Even then why be sore? You are entitled, at the word of Jesus, to do it as unto your Father. The receiver of your bounty may apply it to a bad use: that is *his* responsibility. *I* am bound to cultivate unsuspecting generosity, and this quite independent of mere friendship. Even the publicans and sinners are kind to those who are kind to them; but what ought a Christian to be? *Christ* determines the position, conduct and spirit of the Christian. As He was a sufferer, they are not to resist evil. If there was need, the Lord's heart went out to it. They might turn His love against Himself, and use the gifts of His grace for their own purposes, like the man who was healed, heedless of the Lord's warning and the sense of His benefits. But the Lord, perfectly knowing it all, goes on steadfastly in His path of doing good, not in the mere vague thought of benevolence to man, but in the holy service of His Father.

But now a word as to what follows. It is the very pith and essence of that which concerns our relation towards others here below; the great active principle from which all right conduct flows. This is the question of the true character and limits of love. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy" (ver. 43). This was the expression that the Jews drew from the general tenor of the law. There had been the sanction of God for the extermination of their enemies; and from that they drew the principle, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." Here was a thing that the law never could teach — it is grace. In a thousand practical instances, the question is not whether the thing is right. We often hear Christians asking, Is such a thing wrong? But this is not the sole question for the Christian. Suppose wrong is done him; what is to be his feeling then? If there is enmity to him in another, what is he to cherish in his own heart? "Love your enemies . . . do good to them that hate you . . . that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven;" thus they show in practical ways that they belong to such a parentage, "For He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.... Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (vers. 44-48).

This has no reference to the question of whether there is sin in our nature or not. There is always the evil principle in a man as long as he lives here below. But what the Lord insists on is this: Our Father is the perfect pattern in His ways with His enemies now, and He calls upon us to be thorough in that same grace and love in which our Father deals. It is in pointed contrast with the Jew, or with anything that had been enjoined before. Abraham was not called to walk in this way. He was, I believe, justified in arming his servants for the recovery of Lot; 'as were the Israelites in taking up the sword against the Canaanites. But we are called on (as a rule of Christian life, as that which governs our thoughts and feelings and ways) to walk on the principle of gracious long-suffering. We are in the midst of the enemies of Christ, of our enemies too because of Him. It may not come out at once, nor always. Persecution may pass out of fashion, but the enmity is always there; and if God were only to remove certain restraints, the old hatred would burst out as ever. Nevertheless, only one course is open to the Christian who desires to walk as Christ walked; "Love your enemies;" and this really not by a mere show of smooth ways or words. We know that, in certain cases, to go and speak to an angry person would only draw out bitterness of wrath, and there the right course would be to keep away; but under all circumstances there should be all readiness to seek the blessing of our adversary. To do real kindness to one who has injured me, even if it should never be known by a creature upon earth, is the only thing worthy of a Christian. The Lord thus gives us opportunities of showing love to those that hate us. When the provocation occurs, we should have it settled in our souls that the Christian is here for the purpose of expressing Christ; for indeed we are His epistle, known and read of all men. We

ought to desire to reflect what Christ would have done under the same circumstances.

May the Lord grant that this may be true of our own souls, first in secret feeling with Him, and then as manifested lowly and unselfishly toward others. Let us remember there is no Victory for us but what is an outward reflection of secret victory over self with the Lord. Begin there, and it is surely won in the presence of men, though we may have to wait for it.

Matthew 6

Matthew 6 begins with what is higher even than what we have had. The various exhortations of chapter 5 brought out Christian principle in contradistinction to what was required or allowed under the law. Now the law is dropped: there is no longer any express allusion to it in our Lord's discourse. The first principle of all godliness comes out now in its sweetest shape, namely, the having to do with our Father in secret; who understands us, sees all that is passing within and around us, hears and counsels us, as, indeed, He takes the deepest interest in us. It is the inner, divine relationship of the saint that comes out in this chapter — our spiritual bonds with God our Father, and the conduct that ought to flow from them. Hence, says our Lord, "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them." I take the liberty of altering the word "alms" into "righteousness" (ver. 1), which last a few of the very best authorities support. There are those that differ here as elsewhere, but, at the same time, internal and spiritual reasons confirm the external grounds. Thus, if you use the word "alms" in the first verse, is there not a mere repetition in the next verse? On the other hand, take the word as "righteousness" (so the margin), and all is plain. The context supports it. For it will be observed in the following verses our Lord divides righteousness into three distinct portions: first, almsgiving; next, prayer; thirdly, fasting. That these are the three parts of the righteous ways of the saint, as viewed by our Lord in this discourse, is evident.

(1) With regard to alms, which was a very practical thing, the principle of mercy comes in, as it might not in all cases of giving. It is a thing done seriously and solemnly, and the heart is drawn out. It is done in the sight of God. The general admonition is this: "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore" (founded upon this exhortation) "when thou doest thine alms," which was one branch of this righteousness, "do not sound a trumpet before thee "; alluding to certain ways of notoriety and self-commendation then adopted by the Jews — the spirit of which belongs to men at all times. There are few things in which human vanity betrays itself more glaringly than the desire to be known by almsgiving. And what is it that brings true deliverance from this snare of nature? "When thou doest alms (observe, He now makes it entirely individual), do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly. That is, it is not merely that one is not to blazon abroad what is done, but not to oneself even. Not only another's left hand is not to know what your right hand does, but your own left hand ought not. Cutting are the Lord's words to everything like self-gratulation. The grand point is this: that all be done to our Father. It is not a question of duty simply; but our Father's love has been brought out, and this is His will concerning us. He knows what is best, — and we are ignorant of it. We might think to supply the greatest happiness by surrounding ourselves with what we most like; but the letting slip the means of personal enjoyment will open to us fresh sources of blessing. Besides, what we ought to desire is that the alms may be "in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly." We shall find this repeated at every point of what is here called our

"righteousness." Room is ever made for the flesh where there is not the cultivated habit of what is done being between our Father and ourselves. Nay, more, our Lord would have us dismiss the very thought into the bosom of the Father, who will not forget it.

(2) We have the same thing as to prayer. The allusion is, it would seem, to the practice that every day, when a particular hour came round, people were found praying in public rather than miss the moment. It is clear that all this was, at best, most legal, and opened the door for display and hypocrisy, It utterly overlooks the grand truth which Christianity brings out so fully, that, to do things for testimony, or as a law, or in any way for others to see, or for ourselves to think of, is totally wrong. We have to do with our Father, and our Father in secret. Therefore our Lord says, "Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (ver. 6). This is in no way denying the propriety of public prayer; but united supplication is not at all referred to here.

As to "the Lord's Prayer," it was for those disciples individually who required to be instructed in the very first principles of Christianity. For this is part of what the apostle calls "the word of the beginning of Christ" when he says, "Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection: not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do if God permit." The apostle allows that all these were very important truths; they are truths that godly Jews ought to have known before redemption was accomplished, but these did not bring in the full power of Christianity. They were quite true, and will ever remain true. There never can be anything to weaken the importance of repentance from dead works and faith toward God. But it is not even said, faith in Christ. No doubt faith Godward always abides; but still, till Christ died and rose, there was a great deal of truth that even the disciples were not able to bear. Our Lord Himself says so. Therefore the apostle tells them, "Leaving the word of the beginning of Christ" (that which Christ here below brought out, and which was perfectly suited to the then state of the disciples), "let us go on unto perfection." There is no such thought as giving that up; but assuming that as a settled truth, let us go on to the understanding of Christ as He now is, which is the meaning here of the word "perfection." It is not a better state of our own flesh; neither does it refer to anything that we are to be in a future life; but to the full doctrine of Christ as He now is, and glorified in heaven — as brought out in this epistle. Christ is in heaven; there is His priesthood; He entered in the power of His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. It is Christ as He is now above; there you have this perfection. In the same epistle he speaks of Christ as "made perfect" through sufferings. He was always perfect as a person — never could be anything else. Had there been any flaw in Christ on earth, He must have been, like the offering that had a blemish in it, incapable of being offered for us. In the Jewish sacrifices, if the animal died of itself it could not even be eaten. So, as to our Lord, had there been the principle of death in Him at all, if He were not the living one in every sense, without the smallest tendency to death, never could He be God's foundation, nor ours. He did truly suffer death, the willing victim on the cross; but this was just because death had no hold on Him. Every son of Adam has mortality at work in him. The Second Man could say even here below, "I am the resurrection and the life." Such is the truth as to Christ Himself. While it is perfectly true that Christ was always morally perfect — perfect, too, not only in His divine nature, but in His humanity — absolutely stainless and acceptable unto God; yet for all that there was a mountain of sin that needed to be removed from us, and a new condition to be entered, in which He could associate us with Himself. Though absolutely sinless in Himself, He was made perfect through sufferings; He passed through this course of sufferings into the blessedness in which He stands now as our High Priest before God.

Upon the subject of the Lord's Prayer I will only make a few remarks now. But again I would notice that it is entirely individual. Many might unite in saying, "Our Father;" but a soul in his own closet still would say "Our Father," because he thinks of others, disciples, elsewhere. , Yet it is plain that the Lord does not anticipate the use of this prayer, save in the closet and for the condition in which the disciples were. We have no hint that it was employed formally after the day of Pentecost. There were other wants and desires, other expressions of affection toward God, brought out then, into which the Holy Ghost would lead those who were passed out of the condition of nonage by having received Him into their hearts, whereby they could cry, "Abba, Father." Such is the key to the change, and the New Testament is perfectly clear upon it. (Compare Gal. 3: 23-26; Gal. 4: 1-7.)

However, let us look at the prayer itself; for nothing can be more blessed, and all the truth of it abides for us. "When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do, for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking" (ver. 7). Now it is plain that our Lord does not forbid repetition, but vain repetition. We find our Lord Himself, when He was in an agony in the garden, repeating three times the same words. But vain, formal repetition, whether words read out of a book, or framed sentences of the mind, He does positively forbid. Again, let me press the plain fact, that our Lord here is not providing for the public wants of the Church; nor do we hear that it was so understood. There is not the smallest thought of such a thing after the gift of the Holy Ghost, when the Church was formed and at work in this world. So that while the Lord's Prayer was given as the most perfect model of prayer, and may have been used as it stands by the disciples previously to the death of our Lord and the gift of the Holy Ghost, yet it seems plain that afterwards it was not so. The New Testament is, of course, the only test of this. When we come to tradition, we shall find all sorts of difficulty on this as on other subjects, but the word of God is not obscure. In no way does it leave us uncertain as to what God's mind is: else indeed the very purpose of a revelation would be defeated. What then is the permanent use of the prayer? Why is it given in Scripture? The principle always abides true. There is not a clause of that prayer, I believe, but what one might proffer now, even to "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." For it is a mistake to suppose that it puts the sinner upon the ground of prayer in order to acquire forgiveness of his sins. Our Lord speaks of the believer — the child of God, Our daily faults and short-comings we need to spread before our God and Father, as He encourages us to do day by day. It is a question of His government who, without respect of persons, judges according to the work of each; and hence He will not own the petition of one who cherishes an unforgetting disposition toward others, even if they have done us ever so grievous wrong.

The habit of self-searching and confessing to our Father is a very important one in Christian experience; so that this clause I believe to be as true and applicable at the present time as it was to the disciples then. When the poor publican said, "God be merciful to me a sinner," we have another thing as appropriate in his case as this was to the child of God saying "Our Father." Again, when the Holy Ghost was given, and the child was able to draw near to the Father in the name of Christ, you have something different still. The Lord's Prayer does not clothe the believer with the name of Christ. What is meant by asking the Father in that name? Can it be merely saying, "In His name" at the end of a prayer? When Christ died and rose again, He gave the believer His own standing before God; and then to ask the Father in the name of Christ is to ask in the consciousness that my Father loves me as He loves Christ; that my Father has given me the acceptance of Christ Himself before Him, having completely blotted out all my evil, so as to be made the righteousness of God in Christ. To pray in the value of this is asking in His name * (Compare John 16.) When the soul draws near, consciously brought nigh to God, it may be said to ask in His name. There is not a soul using the Lord's Prayer as a form that has a real understanding of what it is to ask the Father in the name of Christ. They have never entered into that great truth. Hence, perhaps in their very next petition, they take the place of

miserable sinners, deprecating the wrath of God, and still under law. Is it possible for a soul that knows what it is to stand before God as Christ is, to be thus systematically in doubt and uncertainty? It was the case with the Jew; but as a Christian, my place is in Christ, and there is no condemnation: otherwise there cannot be the spirit of adoption, or the exercised function of priests to God. We are made priests to God by virtue of this blessed standing — here upon earth, and we need to exercise it. The conscience is brought to this — you cannot walk with Christ and with the world. And the Christian is properly a man who enters into heavenly thoughts and relationships while he is walking through the world. This is the vocation wherewith we are called. Whether Christians know and do it or not, nothing less does Christ look for from them. "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." This is true from the time that we receive Christ. From that moment we owe it to Christ, if we would be true soldiers of His, to take our place as those who are not of the world, even as He is not.

This will suffice to show that while the Lord's Prayer always remains inestimably precious, yet it was given to meet the individual wants of the disciples, and that the further revelation of divine truth modified their condition, and would thus lead into another strain of desires, which, in fact, were not then given expression to. It seems to me a happy reflection that it is our Lord Himself who tells us this. "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name." What do I gather from this? That one may use the Lord's Prayer every day, and never have asked anything in the name of Christ. "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy maybe full. *"At that day ye shall ask in My name."* What day does this mean? A still future time? No, but the present; the day that the Holy Ghost brought in when He came down from heaven. It is this which is connected with that full revelation of truth which is so essential to Christian joy and blessedness, and to the unworldly and heavenly walk of the children of God; and where the one is not entered into, the other cannot be. There may be vigour of faith and personal love to Christ, but for all that a soul will still savour. of the world in spirit and religious position till he has entered into this blessed place which the Holy Ghost now gives us of drawing near to God in the name of Christ.

I must now pass on to one of the most important practical exhortations which our Saviour gives us in connection with prayer — the spirit of forgiveness. He has known little of prayer who does not know the hindrances which austerity of spirit brings with it. This was one of the things that our Lord had specially in view. "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (vers. 14, 15). He does not mean that the disciples would not have their sins forgiven in the day of judgment, but speaks of forgiving trespasses as a matter of the daily care and training of God. I may have a child guilty of something that is wrong, but does it therefore lose its relationship? It is my child still, but I do not speak to it in the same way that I would had it been walking in obedience. The father waits till the child feels its sin. In the case of earthly parents, we sometimes do not take sufficient notice of what is wrong, at other times we may deal with things only as they touch ourselves. We may correct, as it is said in Hebrews, "after our own pleasure," but God for our profit. Our Father always keeps His eye upon what is most blessed for us, but for this very reason He does betimes chasten us. "What son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" If we were not sons, we might perhaps get off; but as surely as we are, the Father's rod comes upon us for our wrongs, though we may think them little; but though painful for the present, if it be His will, we may be assured that He will make the things that may seem most against us to be unquestionably for us. To maintain the spirit of love, and specially of love toward those that wrong us, costs somewhat; but blessing will be ours in the end, and indeed also by the way.

(3) We now come to the subject of fasting. I believe there is a real value in fasting that few of us

know much about. If, on particular occasions which call for special individual prayer, one were to unite fasting with it, I have no doubt the blessing of it would be felt. There is humbling of spirit expressed in it. There are prayers which are most suitably accompanied by standing, others by kneeling. Fasting is one of those things in which the body shows its sympathy with what the spirit is passing through; it is a means of expressing our desire to be low before God, and in the attitude of humiliation. But lest the flesh should take advantage of even what is for the mortifying of the body, the Lord enjoins that means be taken rather not to appear unto men to fast than to permit any display. For although a true Christian would shrink from putting on false appearances, the devil would cheat him into doing it unless he is very jealous in self-watchfulness before God. "Thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (vers. 17, 18).

Then follow the exhortations with regard to the things of this life. And, first, as to the laying up of treasures upon earth. The Lord brings in a principle, not of natural interest, but of spiritual wisdom and freedom from care, which the soul enjoys that does not want anything here below. Supposing there is something that one very much values upon earth, there is proportionate fear lest the thief or some corroding thing should spoil our treasure. Very different is that which the Lord enjoins that we should seek: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal," a most solemn test for examining ourselves by. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (vers. 19-21). We may detect where we are by that which our thoughts chiefly rest upon. If they are heavenward, blessed are we; but if earthward, we shall find that those very things upon which our hearts are set will prove a sorrow one day or another. The Lord traces all this to one grand root — you cannot serve two masters. You have not two hearts, but one; and your heart will be with that which you value most. Everything is thus followed up to its source: God on the one hand and mammon on the other. Mammon is what sums up the raises of the heart of man as to all things here. It may manifest itself in different forms, but this is the root — covetousness. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought [be not anxious] for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on." The great point is indifference to present things, or rather, a peaceful trust about them; not because we do not value the mercies of God, but because we have confidence in our Father's love and care about us. The apostle Paul shows us the most beautiful expression of this when he says, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." He had known changes of circumstances — what it was to have nothing, and what it was to have abundance; but the great point was his thorough content with God's portion for him. This was not a thing that he passed through lightly, but he had learned it. It was a matter of attainment — of judging of things in the light of God's presence and love. The blessing is to be looking onward with this thought: our Father deals with us now with a view to glory; as the apostle adds, "My God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." How sweet that is! "My God" — the God that I have proved, whose affection I have tasted. I can count upon Him for you as well as for me; and He "shall supply all your need," not merely according to the riches of His grace, but according to His riches *in glory* by Christ Jesus. He has taken you from this world as His children: He is going to have you the companions of His Son above; and he deals with you now according to your place and position then. Whatever is suitable to this great plan of His glory and love, I he Lord will give us to prove the consequence of that.

May the Lord strengthen us, that we may accept this with thankful hearts, knowing that we are not our own masters! The Lord will preserve us from the dangers, the snares, the pains, which our

haste or wilfulness in leaving Him out of these outward things brings with it. He shows us in this chapter the exceeding folly of it, even as to the body. He takes instances from the outward world to show how God may be confided in to accomplish His own purposes best. And more than that, He reminds us that these outward things, on which we are tempted to lay such great stress, are only the objects that the Gentiles seek after. A Gentile was a term used in speaking of a man without God, in contrast with a Jew who had God in an outward manner in this world. A Christian is a man who has God in heaven as his Father. "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." Therefore, as our Father knows this, why should we doubt Him? We do not distrust our earthly father; much less then should we doubt our heavenly Father.

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." It is not that we are to seek first the kingdom of God *and then* these things; but seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all the rest will come.

"Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." That is, our Lord prepares us for this, that the anxiety which dreads an evil thing on the morrow is nothing but unbelief. When the morrow comes, the evil may not be there; if it comes, God will be there. He may allow us to taste what it is to indulge in our own wills; but if our souls are subject to Him, how often the evil that is dreaded never appears. When the heart bows to the will of God about some sorrow that we dread, how often the sorrow is taken away, and the Lord meets us with unexpected kindness and goodness. He is able to make even the sorrow to be all blessing. Whatever be His will it is good. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'

Matthew 7

We now come to a very distinct portion of our Lord's discourse. It is not so much the establishing of the right relations of a soul with God our Father — the hidden inner life of the Christian — but now we have the mutual relations of the disciples with one another, their conduct toward men, the different dangers which they have to dread, and, above all things, the sure ruin for every soul that names the name of Christ if hearing and not doing His sayings. The wise man hears and does. And so the chapter closes. I would desire to dwell a little upon these various points of instruction which our Lord brings before us. Of course it will not be possible to enter thoroughly into all; for, I need not say, the sayings of our Lord are peculiarly pregnant with profoundness of thought. There is no portion of God's word where you find a more characteristic depth than here.

The point with which the Lord Jesus opens is this. He had before this shown fully that we are to act in grace as children of our Father; but that was more particularly with the world, with our enemies, with persons that wrong us. But then a serious and practical difficulty might elsewhere arise. Supposing that among the wrongdoers were some that bore the name of Christ, what then? How are we to feel about and to deal with them? No doubt there is a difference, and a very weighty one. Still there is a thing that we have to take care of before we touch the question of another's conduct; and that is, to watch against the spirit of censoriousness in ourselves, the habit or tendency to impute evil motives in that which we do not know and which does not meet the eye. We all know what a snare this is to the heart of man, and that it is more particularly the danger of some, through natural character and unwatchfulness as to the allowed habit. There is more discernment in some than in others, and such ought peculiarly to watch against it. It is not that they are to have their eyes shut to what is evil; but they are not to suspect what is not uncovered, nor to go beyond the evidence God gives. This is a most important practical safeguard, without which it is impossible to walk together

according to God. People may be together as so many separate units, without any real sympathy or power to enter into the sorrows, difficulties, trials, and it may be the evil, of others. Yet all that has a claim upon the heart of a disciple. Even that which is wrong calls upon love to find out God's way of dealing with what is contrary to God. For the essence of love is, that it seeks the good of the object that is beloved, and this without reference to self. It may have the bitterness of knowing that it is not loved in return, as the apostle Paul knew, even in early days, and with real Christians — yea, with persons singularly endowed by the Spirit of God. God has been pleased thus to give us these solemn lessons of what the heart is, even in saints of God.

Under all circumstances, this great truth is obligatory on the conscience: "judge not, that ye be not judged" (ver. 1). On the other hand, this principle can be easily abused by the selfishness of man. Were a person going on in an evil course and using this passage to deny the title of brethren to judge his conduct, it is clear that he betrays a want of conscience and of spiritual understanding. His eye is blinded by self, and he is merely turning the Lord's words into an excuse for sin. The Lord did not, in anywise, mean to weaken the holy judgment of evil; on the contrary, He, in due time, binds this solemnly upon His people: "Do not ye judge them that are within?" It was the fault of the Corinthians that they did not judge those that were in their midst. It is plain, therefore, that there is a sense in which I am to judge, and another in which I am not. There are cases where I should disregard the Lord's holiness if I did not judge, and there are cases where the Lord forbids it, and warns me that to do so is to bring judgment upon myself. This is a very practical question for the Christian — where to judge and where not to judge. Whatever comes out plainly — what God presents to the eye of His people, so that they know it for themselves, or on testimony which they cannot doubt — they are surely bound to judge. In a word, we are always responsible to abhor that which is offensive to God, whether known directly or indirectly; for "God is not mocked," and the children of God ought not to be governed by mere technicalities, of which the cunning craft of the enemy can easily take advantage.

But what does our Lord mean here: "judge not, that ye be not judged?" He refers not to that which is plain, but to what is concealed; to that which, if it does exist, God has not yet laid the evidence before the eyes of His people. We are not responsible to judge what we do not know; on the contrary, we are bound to watch against the spirit of *surmising* evil or imputing motives. It may be that there is evil, and of the gravest character, as in the case of Judas. Our Lord said of him: "One of you is a devil;" and purposely kept the disciples in the dark about the particulars. just remark, by the way, that it is only in the Gospel of John, which shows us that our Lord's knowledge of Judas Iscariot was that of a divine person. He says it long before anything came out. In the other Gospels all is reserved till the eve of His betrayal: but John was led by the Holy Ghost to remember how the Lord had told them it was so from the beginning; and yet, though He knew it, they were only to confide in His knowledge of it; for if the Lord bore with him, were not they to do the same? If He did not give them directions how to deal with the evil, they were to wait. That is always the resource of faith, which never hurries, especially in so solemn a case. 1' He that believeth shall not make haste."

All is open to God, all is in His hands, and patience is the word, until His time comes for dealing with what is contrary to Him. The Lord lets Judas manifest himself thoroughly, and then it was no question of bearing with the traitor. While there are certain cases of evil that we are to judge, there are questions that He does not ask the Church to solve.

We have to take care that we go not before God, lest we might find ourselves in detail, if not in the main, against God. We must not break that which is bruised by yielding to personal or party feelings. What a danger this is. The inevitable effect of a judging spirit is that we get judged ourselves. The soul, whose habit is censorious, is universally ill spoken of. "With what judgment ye judge, ye

shall be judged." Then the Lord puts a particular case: "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" (ver. 3). That is, where this proneness to judge is, there is another still more serious evil — an habitually unjudged evil in the spirit, which makes the person restless, and desirous of proving others to be wrong too. "Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?" (ver. 4). The mote, of course, was but little, but it was made a great deal of, and the beam, an enormous thing, was passed by. The Lord is bringing out, in the most emphatic way, the danger of a suspicious judicial spirit. And He shows that the way to deal rightly, if we desire the good of His people and their deliverance from evil, is to begin with self-judgment. If we really wish to have the mote out of our brother's eye, how is it to be done? Let us begin with the grave faults we know so little, corrected and confessed, in ourselves: this is worthy of Christ. What is His way of dealing with it? Does He say of the mote in our brother's eye, Bring it to the judges? Not at all; you must probe yourself. The soul is to begin there. When I judge the evil that my conscience knows, or that, if my conscience does not know now, it may learn in God's presence — if I begin with this, I shall then see clearly what concerns others; I shall have a heart fitted to enter into their circumstances, an eye purged from what unfits the heart to feel with God about others. "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (ver. 5). This may be found in a believer, in principle; though when the Lord says, "Thou hypocrite," He alludes to the evil in its full form; but even in ourselves, we know it in measure, and what can be more opposed to simplicity and godly sincerity? Hypocrisy is the most hateful evil that can be found under the name of Christ — a thing that even the natural conscience writhes under and rejects. "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

Often and often we find that when the beam is gone, the mote is not to be seen, having already disappeared. And where the heart is set upon the Lord, would we be sorry to find ourselves mistaken about our brother? Should I not rejoice to find the grace of the Lord in my brother, if I discover in self-judgment myself only to be wrong? This, may be painful to one, but the love of Christ in the believer's heart is gratified to know that Christ is spared this further dishonour.

This, then, is the first great principle our Lord here enjoins. The habit of judging others is to be watched against earnestly; and this, too, because it brings bitterness upon the spirit that indulges it, and unfits the soul for being able to deal rightly with another: for we are set in the body, as the apostle Paul shows, for the purpose of helping one another; and we are all members one of another.

But there is another thing. In watching against hasty and harsh judgment, there might be the abuse of grace. And the Lord immediately couples this with the former: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." We must carefully remember that the Lord is not here speaking about the gospel going out to sinners. God forbid that we should not carry out the grace of God to every quarter under heaven, because nothing less than this ought to be the desire and effort of every saint of God. All ought to have the spirit of active love going out after others, energetic desires for the salvation and the blessing of souls; for it were a sad shortcoming if it went not beyond souls being brought to Christ. Seeking to grow up into Christ and glorify Him in all things, to know and do the will of God is our calling. In this verse the Lord is not taking up the question of the gospel going out indiscriminately; for, if there be a difference, the gospel best suits those called "dogs", which, to the Jews, was a figure of all that is abominable. Speaking of thieves, drunkards, extortioners, etc., the apostle says: "Such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord

Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

It might be asked, Is not the wickedness of one man greater than that of another? On an earthly platform, one might say, Much every way; but God does not, in saving souls, make these distinctions. So, speaking of believers from among the Jews, the apostle says they had been "children of wrath, even as others." There may have been highly moral characters among them. Did this dispose them better towards God's grace? Alas, where the soul finds a justification of itself in what it is, nothing can be more dangerous. The apostle himself had been an example of this very thing. It is a hard thing for a man who had been building on his righteousness to bow to the truth that he can only enter heaven upon the ground of a publican and a sinner. But so it must be, if the soul is to receive salvation from God through the faith of Jesus.

The Lord, then, is not in anywise restraining the gospel from going out to every quarter; but He speaks of the relations of His own people with the unholy. The believer is not to bring out for these the special treasures that are the Christian portion. The gospel is the riches of God's grace to the world. But, besides the gospel, we have the special affections of Christ to the Church, His loving care for His servants, the hope! of His coming again, the glorious prospects of the Church as His bride, etc. If you were to talk about these things, which we may call the pearls of the saints, with those out of Christ, you are on wrong ground. If you were to insist upon the duties of the faithful in worldly company, then it is giving that which is holy unto the dogs. There is blessed provision for "the dogs" — the crumbs that fall from the Master's table. And such is the great grace of God toward us, that the crumbs which fall to our portion, Gentiles as we were, are the best.

Whatever may be the benefits promised to the Jew, the grace of God has brought out in the gospel fuller blessings than ever was promised to Israel. What can Israel have to compare with the mighty deliverance of God that we know now? The consciousness of being completely cleansed from all sin; of having the righteousness of God for ours at once and for ever in Christ; of present access to Him as Father through a rent veil; and made His temple through the Holy Ghost dwelling in us. As the Lord Himself said to the woman of Samaria, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water." Where Christ is received now, by whomsoever it may be, there is this fulness of blessing, and the well is within the believer. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life." Thus we may see how wide and perfect is His grace, while it forbids certain things being thrown indiscriminately among the ungodly. Any act that implies fellowship between a believer and an unbeliever is false. Take, for instance, the question of worship, and the habit of calling the whole round of devotions worship. Worship supposes communion with the Father and the Son, and with each other in it. But the system which, founded on an easy rite which pretends to regenerate all, unites believers and unbelievers in one common form and calls it worship, is casting what is holy unto dogs. Is it not a thinly-disguised attempt to put the sheep and dogs upon the same ground? In vain. You cannot unite before God the enemies of Christ and those that belong to Him. You cannot mingle as one people those that have got life and those that have not. The attempt to do so is sin, and constant dishonour of the Lord. All effort to have a worship of this mixed character is going in the very teeth of the sixth verse.

On the other hand, preaching the gospel, where it is kept distinct from worship, is right and blessed. When the day of judgment comes upon this world, where does the worst stroke fall? Not upon the openly profane world, but upon Babylon, because Babylon is the confusion of what is of Christ with evil — the attempt to make communion between light and darkness. "Come out of her, My people," says the Lord, "that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."

Partaker of her sins is the grave affair with God. It is the acceptance of a common ground upon which the Church and the world can join; when the very object of God, and that for which Christ died, was that He might have a separate people unto Himself, so as to be, by their very consecration unto God, a light in this world — not a witness of pride, saying, "Stand by, I am holier than thou," but Christ's epistle, that tells the world where the living water is to be found, and bids them come: "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

Where we do not confound the religion of the world with the worship that goes up to God from His people, there you will also have the true line of demarcation — where we ought to judge and where we ought not. There will be active service towards the world with the gospel, but a careful separation of the Church from the world. This is also true individually. Yet persons take advantage of the word of God that says, "If an unbeliever bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go," etc.; but take care how you go, and for what. If you go self-confident, you will but dishonour Christ; if to please yourself, this is poor ground; if to please other people, it is little better.

There may be occasions when the love of Christ would constrain a soul to go and bear a testimony to His love in a worldly company, yet if we knew how easily words may be said, and things done, that imply communion with that which is contrary to Christ, there would be fear and trembling; but where there is self-confidence, there never can be the power of God.

But now the Lord, having finished the subject of the abuse of judgment and the abuse of grace, indicates the necessity of intercourse with God, and this very particularly in connection with what we have been seeing. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (ver. 7). Here we have different degrees, increasing measures of earnestness in pleading with God: "For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (ver. 8). And then He gives them an argument to encourage them in this: "What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" (vers. 9-11). There is a very interesting difference in the passage that answers to this in Luke 11, where, instead of saying, "give good things to them that ask Him," it is said, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" The Holy Spirit was not yet given. It was not that He did not act in the world, but He was not yet personally imparted, because that Jesus was not yet glorified. Scripture says this expressly. Thus, until the time when He was poured out from heaven, it was quite right to pray for the Spirit to be given; and the Gentiles in particular being persons that were ignorant about it, this is expressly mentioned in the Gospel of Luke, which especially contemplates the Gentiles. For who can read that Gospel without having the conviction that there is a careful eye upon those that have a Gentile origin? It was written by a Gentile, and to a Gentile; and all through it traces the Lord as Son of Man, a title which links itself, not with the Jewish nation properly and peculiarly, but with all men. This is the great want of man — the Holy Spirit, which was about to be given, and He is the great power of prayer, as it is said, "Praying in the Holy Ghost." Luke was led to specify that special gift which those that pray would need in order to give them energy in prayer.

But, returning to Matthew, we have the whole passage wound up by this word, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (ver. 12). This is in no way dealing with men according to their ways, but the contrary. It is saying, as it were, "You who know the heavenly Father, who know what His grace to the evil is, you know what is comely in His sight; always act upon that. Never act merely according to what another does toward you, but according to what you would that another should do to you. If you have

the slightest love in your heart, you would desire that they should act as children of your Father." Whatever another person may do, my business is to do to them what I would that they should do to me; namely, to act in a way becoming the child of a heavenly Father. "This is the law and the prophets." He is giving them exceeding breadth, extracting the essence of all that was blessed there. This was clearly the gracious wish of a soul that knew God, even under the law; and nothing less than this could be the ground of action before God.

But now we come to dangers. There are not only brethren to try us, but now He says, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (vers. 13-15). There is a moral connection between the two things. One main feature of that which is false is the attempt to make the gate large and the road broad; to deny the special manner in which God calls souls to the knowledge of Himself. How the arrangements in the religious world interfere with this! Take, for instance, the parcelling out of those that belonged to God into companies, as if they were the sheep of man, which people do not scruple to call "our church," or "such a one's flock." God's rights, His claims, His calling a soul to walk in responsibility to Himself, are all interfered with by such things. We never find even an apostle saying, "My flock." It is always, "The flock of God," because this brings in responsibility to God. If they are His flock, I must take care that I do not lead them astray. It must be the object of my soul, in having to do with a Christian, to bring his soul into direct connection with God Himself, to say, "This is one of God's sheep." What a change this would make in the tone and ways of pastors, if it were viewed as the flock of God! It is the business of the true servant to keep them in the narrow path on which they have entered.

But there is also the broad-road-going world, who think that they can belong to God by profession of Christ and trying to keep the commandments. There has been the widening of the gate, the broadening of the road, in connection with which the Lord says, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." The true teachers sent from God suffer with the false ones if they are mixed up with the world. Being all bound together for common objects, whether they belong to God or not, those that are really true are often drawn of the rest into what they know to be wrong. And remember another solemn thing. The devil never would be able to accomplish any plan in Christendom if he could not get good people to join the bad in it. Unbelief constantly uses as an excuse, "Such a good man is here "; "The excellent Mr. — does that." But is the opinion and conduct of a Christian to be the criterion by which I judge? If so, there is nothing I may not fall into; for what evil thing is there that a man, and even a believer, has not done? You know what David had to confess before the Lord. And this is the way the devil takes to keep other persons quiet in evil. The sole standard for the believer is the written word of God; and this is the special security in these last days. When Paul was leaving the Ephesian saints, it was "to God and to the word of His grace" that he commended them. Grievous wolves might enter in among them, not sparing the flock; and of their own selves men might arise, speaking perverse things; but the sole safeguard, as a rule of faith and conduct for the saints, is God's holy writ.

Mass is the most wicked act of the most corrupt thing under the sun; but if the grace of God could enter there, and work by His Spirit, spite of the elevated host, who shall put limits? But is this a reason why I should go to a Roman Catholic chapel, worship the wafer, or pray to the Virgin? God in His sovereign grace can go anywhere; but if I desire to walk as a Christian, how am I to do it? There is but one standard — the will of God; and the will of God can be learned only through the Scriptures. I

cannot reason from any amount of blessing there, nor from any apparent weakness here. Persons might be allowed to seem very weak for the express purpose of showing that the power is not in them, but in God. Although the apostles were such mighty men, they were often allowed to appear feeble indeed in the eyes of others. It was that which exposed Paul to be thought not an apostle by the Corinthians, though they, of all men, ought to have known better. All this shows that I cannot reason either from blessing that God's grace may work, or from the weakness of God's children. What we want is that which has no fault at all, and this is the word of God. I need it for my rule as a Christian man, and as walking together with all saints. If we act upon that Word, and nothing else, we shall find God with us. It will be called bigotry; but this is part of the reproach of Christ. Faith will always appear proud to those who have none; but it will be proved in the day of the Lord to be the only humility, and that everything which is not faith is pride, or no better. Faith admits that he who has it is nothing — that he has no power nor wisdom of his own, and he looks to God. May we be strong in faith, giving glory to Him!

But, again, "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit." The Lord does not here speak simply of men being known by their fruits, but of false prophets (vers. 15-20). "Ye shall know them by their fruits." Where grace is denied, the holiness is hollow, or, at best, legal. Wherever grace is really held and preached, you will find two things — much greater care in what concerns God than where it is not equally known, and also greater tenderness, forbearance, and patience in what merely touches man. Winking at sin is one thing, but unscriptural severity is very far from divine righteousness, and may co-exist with the allowance of self in many a form. There are certain sins that call for rebuke, but it is only in the gravest cases that there ought to be extreme measures. We are not left to make laws about evil for ourselves: we are under responsibility to another, even to our Lord. We ought not in this to trust ourselves, but to learn the wisdom of God and confide in the perfectness of His word; and our business is to carry out what we find there. Let the help come from where it may, if we can thus but follow the word of God more fully, we ought to be exceedingly grateful.

Solemn, most solemn, are the words that follow, as the Lord's eye scans the field of profession. "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven, Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (vers. 21-23). The Lord shows the stability of His word for the obedient heart, from the figure of a man building upon a rock; He shows also, as none but He could, the end of every one who hears and does not His sayings. But I must not enter upon this now.

The Lord grant that our hearts may be towards Himself! We shall be able to help one another, and we shall be helped of His own grace. Weak as we are, we shall be made to stand. And if through unwatchfulness we have slipped, the Lord will graciously set us upon our feet again.

May He grant us singleness of eye!

Matthew 8

I can well understand a man who received and revered the Bible as the word of the living God, finding himself at fault when he closely examines the Gospels, which recount the Lord's ministry. A casual reader might find no difficulty; but at first, nothing would be more probable than that he who

carefully compared the different accounts might be perplexed — I will not say stumbled, because he has too much confidence in the word of God. In comparing the Gospels, he finds that they differ very considerably in the way in which the same facts are recorded in different Gospels. He finds one arrangement in Matthew, another in Mark, and a third in Luke; and yet all these he is sure are right. But he cannot make out how, if the Spirit of God really inspired the different Evangelists to give a perfect history of Christ, there should at the same time be these apparent discrepancies. He is obliged to cast himself upon God, and to enquire whether there be not some principle which can account for these changes of position, and for the different mode in which the same circumstances are displayed. The moment that he thus approaches these Gospels, light will dawn upon his soul. He begins to see that the Holy Ghost was not merely giving the testimony of so many witnesses, but that while they thoroughly agree at bottom, the Holy Ghost had assigned a special office to each of them, so that their writings present the Lord in various and distinct attitudes. It remains to enquire what are these several points of view, and how they may both give occasion to and explain the variety of statement that is undoubtedly to be found therein.

I have already shown that in the Gospel of Matthew the Holy Ghost has been depicting Jesus in His relationship to Israel, and that this accounts for the genealogy given us in chapter 1, which quite differs from what we have in the Gospel of Luke. It is specially His genealogy as Messiah, which is, of course, important and interesting to Israel, who looked for a ruler of the seed of David. At the same time the Holy Ghost took particular care to correct the narrow worldly thoughts of the Jews, and shows that while He was, according to the flesh, of the seed of Israel, He was also the Lord God; and if Emmanuel and Jehovah, His special work as a divine person was to save His people from their sins. He may go out far beyond that people and bless Gentiles no less than Jews; but saving from sins was clearly an expectation of Christ that ought to have been gathered from the Prophets. The Jews expected that when Messiah came, He would be the exalted Head over them as a nation; that they consequently would become the head, and the Gentiles the tail. All this they had rightly inferred from the prophetic word; but there was a great deal more that they had not discerned. Messiah is bent upon their spiritual as well as their natural blessing; and all present hopes must fade away before the question of sin; yea, their sins. Jesus accepts His rejection from them, and effects on the cross for them that very redemption which they thought so little about.

How thoroughly, too, it falls in with the Gospel of Matthew that we should have a long discourse like that of the sermon on the mount without interruption; the whole being given us as a continuous word from our Lord. All interruptions, if there were any, are carefully excluded, so as to bring Him out on the mount in pointed antithesis to Moses, by whom God was bringing in an earthly kingdom; but now it is because He manifests the heavenly King, contrary to everything the Jews were expecting.

The Holy Ghost proceeds in this Gospel to give us the facts of our Lord's life still in connection with this great thought. The Gospel of Matthew is the presentation to Israel of Jesus as their divine Messiah, their rejection of Him in that character, and what God would do in consequence. We shall see whether the facts that are given us even in this chapter do not bear upon this special aspect of our Lord. From the Gospel of Mark it would be impossible to collect it in the same way. In Matthew the mere order of history is here neglected, and facts are brought together that took place months apart. It is not at all the object of the Holy Ghost by Matthew, or even Luke, to give the facts in the order in which they happened, which Mark does. Those that examine the Gospel of Mark with care will find notes of time, expressions such as "immediately," etc., where things are left vague in the other Gospels. The phrases of rapid transition, or of instant sequence, of course bind together the different

occurrences thus brought into juxtaposition. In Matthew this is entirely disregarded; and of all the chapters in this Gospel, there is not one, perhaps, that so entirely sets aside the mere succession of dates as the very one before us. But if this be so, to what are we to attribute it? Why, we may reverently ask, does the Holy Ghost in Matthew disregard the order in which things followed one another? Was it that Matthew did not know the time in which they occurred? Had it been only a man writing a history for his own pleasure, could he not have ascertained with tolerable certainty when it was that each fact occurred? And when he first had published his statement, would anything have been easier than for the other Evangelists to follow, and give their accounts in accordance with his?

But the contrary is the case. Mark takes up a different line of things, and Luke another, while John has a character to himself. On the very face of it we are driven to one of two suppositions. Either the Evangelists were as careless men as ever wrote accounts of their Master, giving different accounts as if to perplex the reader, or it was the Holy Ghost who presented the facts in various ways, so as to illustrate the glory of Christ far more than what mere repetition would have accomplished. The latter is surely the truth. Any other supposition is as irrational as irreverent. For, even supposing that the apostles had written different accounts and had made mistakes, they could very easily have corrected each other's mistakes; but the reason why no such correction appears was not human error or defect, but divine perfection. It was the Holy Ghost who was pleased to shape these Gospels in the particular form most calculated to bring out the person, mission, or various relations of Christ. The Gospel of Mark proves that the healing of the leper took place at a different time from what you might have gathered from this chapter — in fact, long before the sermon on the mount. In chapter 1 we have the Lord described as preaching in their synagogues through all Galilee, and casting out devils: "And there came a leper to Him, beseeching . . . If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean" (Mark 1: 40-45). Now, we cannot doubt this is the same story as in Matthew 8. But if we read the next chapter of Mark, what is the first thing mentioned after this? "Again He entered into Capernaum after some days, and it was noised that He was in the house . . . and they come unto Him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four." Clearly here we have a fact, the cure of the paralytic man, which Matthew does not give us till Matthew 9, after a storm which Mark describes in Mark 4, and after the case of the demoniac, which only appears in Mark 5; so that it is perfectly plain that one of the two Evangelists must have departed from the order of history; and as Mark, by his strict notes of time, evidences that he does not, Matthew must be concluded to have so done. In Mark 3 we have our Lord going up the mountain, and calling the disciples to Him; and there is the place accordingly in this Gospel, where the sermon on the mount would, if inserted at all, come in. Thus, it was considerably after what took place in Matthew 8: 2-4 that the sermon on the mount was uttered: but Mark does not give us that sermon, because his great object was the gospel ministry and characteristic works of Christ; and therefore the doctrinal expositions of our Lord are left out. Where brief words of our Lord accompany what He did, they are given; but nothing more.

It may make what I have been saying still plainer, if in Mark 1 we observe further the actual order. Simon and Andrew are called, in verse 16; James and John, verse 19; and straightway, having gone to Capernaum, He entered on the sabbath day into the synagogue, and taught. There we have the man with the unclean spirit: the fact took place a little after the final call of Andrew and Simon, of James and John, The unclean spirit was cast out; "and immediately His fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee. And *forthwith*, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell Him of her," etc. Hence we have positive certainty, from God's own word, that the healing of Peter's wife's mother took place a short time after the call of Peter and Andrew, and considerably before the healing of the leper. Carrying this back to our chapter in

Matthew, we see the importance of it; for here the healing of Peter's mother-in-law only appears in the middle of the chapter. The cleansing of the leper is given first, then the healing of the centurion's servant, and after that, of Peter's wife's mother; whereas, from Mark, we know for a certainty that Peter's wife's mother was healed long before the leper.

Looking at Mark again, we find that, on the evening of the same sabbath, after He had healed Peter's wife's mother, "they brought unto Him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door. And He healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils. . . . And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed, "which is clearly the same scene alluded to in Matthew 8, and would come in after verse 17. The fact of His going to the desert and praying is not mentioned here; but it took place at the same time. Then, in Mark, we have His going into Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out devils; and after that, He heals the leper. What I draw from this is that, as Mark tells us the very day on which these things happened, we must take him for a witness of their order as to time. When I go back to Matthew, do I find any intimation of the time in which all these events took place? Not a word. It is simply said, "When He was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him" (ver. 1), and then we have the healing of the leper. There is nothing to prove that the leper came at that particular time. All that is said is, "And *behold*, there came a leper," etc. — an Old Testament form of expression. Whether the healing of the leper took place before He came down, or after, we are not told here. From Mark we infer that the sermon on the mount was given long after, and that the healing of Peter's wife's mother took place before the healing of the leper.

Why, let us ask, would it not have suited this Gospel of Matthew to put the healing of Peter's wife's mother first, then the leper, and lastly the centurion? — for you will find that in the order of time, this was really the succession. The centurion came up after the sermon was over, and Christ was in Capernaum; the leper had been healed a considerable time before, and Simon's mother-in-law earlier yet.

But what is the great truth taught by these facts as they are arranged in the Gospel of Matthew? The Lord is met by a leper. You know what a loathsome thing leprosy was. Notoriously, it was not only most offensive, but hopeless, as far as man was concerned. It is true that in Leviticus we have ceremonies for the cleansing of a leper, but who could give a ceremony for the *cure* of a leper? Who take away that disease after it had once infected a man? Luke, the beloved physician, gives us the notice that he was "full of leprosy;" the other Evangelists do not state anything but the simple fact that he was a leper. This was enough. Because, to the Jews, the question was whether there was any leprosy at all: if such it was, they could have nothing to say to him till he was cured and cleansed. The Spirit of God uses leprosy as a type of sin, in all the loathsomeness that it produces. Palsy brings out the thought of powerlessness. Both are true of the sinner. He is without strength, and he is unclean in the presence of God. Jesus heals the leper. This at once illustrates the power of Jehovah-Jesus upon earth, and more than that; for it was not merely a question of His power, but of His grace, His love, His willingness to put forth all His might on behalf of His people. For the whole people of Israel were like that leper. The prophet Isaiah had said so long before; and they were not better now. The Lord repeats the sentence of Isaiah: "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy," etc., and this leper was a type of the moral condition of Israel in the presence of the Messiah. But, whether few or many, let them only present themselves in all their vileness before the Messiah, and how would the Messiah deal with them? The Messiah is there. He has got the power, but the leper is not sure of His will. "Lord," He says, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." We may remember the distress of the

king of Israel in the days of Elisha, when the king of Syria sent Naaman to him that he might be recovered of his leprosy: how, when he had read the letter, "he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?" Only God could do it: every Jew knew this; and this is what the Holy Ghost is desirous of showing. We have had the testimony that Jesus was a man, and yet Jehovah — able to save His people from their sins. But here comes out His presentation to Israel in particular cases, where the Holy Ghost, instead of giving a mere general and historical outline, as in chapter 4, singles out special instances, for the purpose of illustrating the Lord's relation to Israel, and the manifested effects of it. The leper is the first case, where we have, as it were, the microscope applied by the Spirit of God, that we may see clearly how the Lord carried Himself toward Israel; what ought to have been the place of Israel; and what was their real conduct. At once, when the leper acknowledges His power and confesses His person, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean;" when it was merely the question of His will and of His affections, immediately there comes the answer of divine love as well as power: "I will, be thou clean; and immediately his leprosy was cleansed." He put forth His hand and touched him. It was not only God, but God manifest in the flesh — One who entered fully into the poor leper's anxiety, yet proved Himself paramount to the law. His touch — it was that of Jehovah. God's touch! The law could only put the leper at a distance; but if God gives a law, He is superior in grace to the law that He gives. The heart of this leper trembled, afraid lest the blessed Lord should be unwilling to bless him; but He puts forth His hand, He touches him: none else would. The Lord's touch, instead of contracting defilement to Himself, banishes defilement from the leper. Immediately he is cleansed. Jesus then says to him, "See thou tell no man; but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded for a testimony unto them." There was no desire that He should publish what Jesus was: God might tell His works. He says, "See thou tell no man; but go, show thyself to the priest," etc. Nothing could be more blessed. It was not yet the time for the law to be set aside. Jesus waits. The cross must come in before the law could be set aside in any way. We are delivered from the law by the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is the great doctrine of the epistle to the Romans — that we are dead to the law, of course in His death, that we might "be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." Up to the resurrection of Christ from the dead, there is the most careful guarding of the law. After resurrection, saints passed into another relationship with Him who was risen from the dead. Here we find there was a sedulous maintenance of the claims of God's law; and it always was so until the cross. Therefore He says, "Go, show thyself to the priest." Also, had the man gone telling it to every one instead of to the priest, the great enemy might have found means to misrepresent the work, to deny the miracle, to try and make out that he was not the man who had been a leper. Alas! was it the wish of man's heart to show that Jesus had not wrought such a miracle? But Jesus says, "Go, show thyself to the priest. "Why? Because the priest himself would be the authentic witness that Jesus was Jehovah. The priest that knew the man was a leper before, that had pronounced him unclean, that had put him outside, would now see that the man was cured. Who had done it? None but God could heal the leper. Jesus, then, was God; Jesus was Jehovah; the God of Israel was in the land. The priest's mouth would be obliged to confess the glory of Christ's person. "Offer the gift that Moses commanded for a testimony unto them." When had there been the offering of that gift? They had no power to heal the leper, and thus could not offer the gift. So that Jesus had bowed to the obligations of the law, and yet had done what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh. But here was One who was God — God having sent His own Son "in the likeness of sinful flesh." God Himself, and God's own Son withal, He was here working this mighty work that proved His dignity, and He made the priest himself to be the witness of it.

But now we are to hear a different tale; Jesus enters into Capernaum. When, we are not told. It

had no connection with the story of the leper; but the Holy Ghost puts them together, because it brings in the Gentiles. We have had the Jew set forth in the history of the leper and the gift Moses commanded for a testimony to Israel. But now there is a centurion that comes and tells about his servant; and this brings in a new kind of confession of the Lord altogether. Here there is no touching — no connection with Christ after the flesh. Hence it is rather the way in which the Gentile knows Christ. The Jew looked for a Christ that would put forth His hand — a Saviour personally present among them — bringing in this divine power and healing them: as the Scripture had said, "I am the Lord God that healeth thee." And here He was come; but they did not know Him so. And the next witness, that we have brought together in Matthew, but nowhere else, is the centurion; because God would show that the natural children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were going to be cut off. They would not worship Him as the poor leper did. The testimony to the priest would be disregarded. They become more and more opposed to His claims. God says, as it were, If you Jews will not have my Son, I will send a testimony to the Gentiles, and the Gentiles will hear. Upon the rejection of Jesus by the Jew, upon Israel's refusal of Him who had proved Himself to be Jehovah-God in forgiving all their iniquities and healing all their diseases, what then follows? The door of faith is opened to the Gentiles.

Thus, we have the story of the centurion, which is taken out of its place and put here purposely. And even in the details of the history there are very noticeable differences. You have not the embassy of the Jews in connection with the centurion. This is left out in Matthew, but inserted in Luke. Thus, while Matthew's Gospel gives everything that might be calculated to meet the conscience of Israel, it abstains from giving that which *they* might have prided themselves on. It was wholesome for the *Gentiles* that they should hear of the embassy of this good man. He was like the Gentile laying his hand upon the skirt of him that was a Jew, taking his place behind Israel. But his faith goes beyond this; for we find that he comes and beseeches the Lord, and brings out his own personal faith in the most blessed manner. When Jesus says to him, "I will come and heal him," at once his heart is manifest. He answers, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof." For just as he, the centurion, could say to one, "Go, and he goeth; to another, Come, and he cometh; and to his servant, Do this, and he doeth it," how much more could the Lord "speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed?" Jesus had indeed authority over all diseases; but was it merely a question of His putting His hand upon the leper? Not at all. He had only to utter the word, and it was done. The centurion assumes the grand truth that Jesus was God (not merely Messiah), and therefore full of ability to heal. In short, he looks at Him in a still higher way, not as one whose presence must be connected with the putting forth of power, but as one who had only to speak the word, and it was done. This brings in the character of the word of God, and the absence of Jesus from those who now profit by His grace.

Such is *our* position. Jesus is away and unseen. We hear His word, lay hold of it, and are saved. This is the beautiful way in which we are here given the different bearing of the Lord on the Jew and on the Gentile; but we learn, moreover, that the blessing would be refused by Israel, and the Gentiles would become the objects of mercy, as it is said here, "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (vers. 10, 11), that is, many Gentiles shall come. Neither is this all: "But the children of the kingdom" — the natural children that were the seed, but not the true children according to Abraham's faith, these should be "cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Rejecting their Messiah, the Jews as a nation were going to be rejected. There would only be a line of believing ones; but the mass of Israel should be rejected until the fulness of the Gentiles have come in.

Thus we have here a wonderful view of our Lord in accordance with the general strain of the Gospel of Matthew. We have Jesus proving Himself to be Jehovah-Jesus, ready to heal wherever there was faith — but where was it? The leper might represent the godly remnant; 'but as to the mass of Israel, we have their doom pronounced here, and in the very same incident which proves that the grace of God which Israel refused would make a larger channel for itself among the Gentiles, who would partake of the mercies which the Jews rejected. This is just what is here put together in these two stories. Jesus gives proof to Israel that He was a divine Messiah. If they scorned it, the Gentiles would hear. But then there is another thing of great importance, and which shows why the healing of Peter's wife's mother is kept in this Gospel till after these events, although Mark gives it before. Mark furnishes the history of the ministry of Christ as it happened. Why does not Matthew the same? Divine wisdom is stamped upon this, as upon everything in the word of God. I believe it is reserved by Matthew for this place because Israel might have the idea that, when the mercy of God flowed out to the Gentiles, His heart might be turned away from them. The maid was not dead, but sleeping: this is the state of Israel now, And as surely as the Lord did raise her up, so surely will He in a future day awaken the sleeping daughter of Zion. We have got better blessing and higher glory now. But it is necessary for the truth of God's word that Israel should be blessed too; for if God could break His word to Israel, could we trust it for ourselves? Now God positively promised the eventual final glory of Israel on the earth. The only thing needed is that we should not confound these things; that we should not be ignorant either of the Scripture or of the power of God.

In this case we have an incident brought before us which proves that (though the Lord knew the unbelief of Israel and predicted it; and though He knew also that the Gentiles were now to come in by faith) His heart could not but linger over Israel. Therefore, as I think, the Holy Ghost, to illustrate this, brings in here the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. This third incident, then, the healing of Peter's wife's mother, I think we may infer was for Peter's sake, whatever may have been the other reasons. It is a natural relationship, and you will find that the great scene for this is Israel. Peter was the apostle of the circumcision; so that I have not a question that one of the reasons why this event is brought in here is to show that the unbelief of Israel would not finally alienate the Lord's heart. There He was, still healing all their diseases, as was witnessed even to the crowd around the door, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses." The Lord, when He wrought a miracle, entered in spirit into the circumstances of him whom He was relieving. If the miracle brought out His divine power, there was also the divine sympathy that entered into the depth of the need that He relieved.

After this, we have the Lord preparing to go to the other side. But this gives occasion for certain persons to be brought out in their true character and ways, and for the Lord to manifest His own. Now when did this happen? This brings out a most peculiar feature of the Gospel of Matthew, and shows how entirely the Holy Ghost was above the mere routine of dates. Look at the Gospel of Luke, and you will find that the conversation with these men, which is recorded here, took place after the transfiguration. In Luke 9 we are told that after the transfiguration had taken place, the Lord stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem; and then, in verse 57, it is said, "It came to pass, that as they went in the way, a certain man said unto Him, Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head. And He said unto another, Follow Me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father" (Luke 9: 57-62). Now, am I too bold in thinking that this was the same incident that we have recorded in Matthew? It is not probable that our Lord should have the same things repeated at different times; nor could we fairly conceive of two distinct persons copying one another so exactly. But mark its importance, if this be so. It took place a very long time after, and yet it is put in here by

Matthew. Why? Because it illustrates this — that while the Lord had all this love in His heart toward Israel, spite of their unbelief, there was no heart in Israel toward Him. What was His condition now? He had not even where to lay His head. What a thing for the Messiah of Israel to be obliged to say, when a man offered to follow Him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head."

This is the first time where He uses the expression "Son of Man." It is no longer "Son of David." "Son of Man" is the title of Christ as rejected or glorified. There is no question which of the two it was here. Even His own people will not have Him. And He is going away to the other side — He must leave them. He has done, it now, as we know. But this man proposes to follow Him. The Lord knew all that was in his heart — a mere carnal Jew, who thought by following Jesus to get a good place with the Messiah. The Lord tells him He had no place to give him. There was not even a nest for the Messiah. What was there for the flesh, offering to follow Christ, to find? The Lord unveils his heart, shows its own deception in seeking something for itself, while Himself had not even a spot which the meanest and most mischievous creature He had made might possess. Had not the foxes their holes, and the birds of the air their nests? But the Son of Man had not even where to lay His head. How could the flesh pretend to follow our Lord? To a *disciple* who said, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father," the Lord could say, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their dead" (vers. 21, 22). Mark the difference. Where the call of Christ is, there may be great reluctance, trial felt, and struggling on the part of nature; still the word is, "Follow Me." When you get a thoroughly carnal man in the presence of the gospel, there is not this backwardness — none of this trial. He thinks it is all beautiful, but it does not lay hold of his soul; and very soon circumstances occur to draw his heart away to other things, and at last the man sinks down again to his own level. But where the Lord does say, "Follow Me," how often the soul, before or at the time, says, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." Natural relationship had a very serious claim. His father was lying dead: he must go and bury him. People might say, A man must make the burying of his father so urgent that everything must give way to it. Not at all, says the Lord, Christ's claim ought to be stronger still. If the call of Christ is heard, even as the father lies dead, waiting for burial, we must forego even this. The world may say, There is a man that talks about Christ, and yet does not love his father. But we must be prepared for this: and if we are not, it is because we do not yet understand the supreme value of our Christ. You will find that natural ties and duties in this world are always apt to come in as a hindrance between Christ and the soul. The claims of nature are continually pressed upon one. But no matter whether it be father or mother, or brother or sister, or son or daughter, where the call of Christ is clear, take care that you do not say, Suffer me to do such and such a thing *first*. The word of Jesus is, Follow Me, and let the dead bury their dead."

Then the Lord goes. We find Him entering into a ship and His disciples following Him. And thereon follows the history of the tempest, and of the miracle that Jesus wrought in calming the winds and the sea. Now when did this really take place? On the evening of the day when the seven parables of Matthew 13 were uttered, before the transfiguration, but long after the other events mentioned in this chapter. Mark lets us know this positively in the chapter that records the parables (Mark 4) — the very same that are given us in Matthew 13, with this addition, "With many such parables spake He the word unto them, as they were able to hear it; but without a parable spake He not unto them. And when they were alone (when they had entered into the house, as it is given us in Matthew 13), He expounded all things to His disciples. And *the same day*, when the even was come, He saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side." Then follows the same history that we have here in Matthew 8; and after they come to the other side, there is the man with the legion of devils. There need not be a question that this is the same scene, but brought out in an entirely different connection,

and only occurred a considerable time after its mention here in Matthew.

What follows from this? That the Holy Ghost in Matthew only gives us historical order where it falls in with the special object of the Gospel. All this marks the perfect wisdom of God: and none but God would have thought of such a thing. But how few think of it, or even understand it now. Does it not show the slowness of our hearts to take in the full meaning of the word of God? What is the Lord teaching in these two scenes? We see Him here alone with His disciples. The godly part of Israel are now separated with Himself and exposed to all that the enemies of God could do against them. But it only serves to enlist the power of the Lord for them. Everything is subdued at His bidding. So is it in our own experience. There is never a difficulty, trial, or painful circumstance in which we appear to be utterly overwhelmed by the power of Satan in this world, but that, if our eye is towards Christ, and we appeal to Him, we shall know His power most truly put forth on our behalf. When they realize whom they had in the same boat with them and cry, saying, "Lord save us, we perish," He rises and rebukes the wind and the sea. "And there was a great calm." So that the very shipmen marvelled, saying, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him!" The disciples knew it in a still deeper way, but the others were astonished.

But this is not all. It might evince what Christ is for the *godly* who were with Him. But there were two men, far indeed from the Messiah for they were among the tombs, possessed with devils, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way — just the picture of the most desperate power of Satan in the world. One of them, as we are told elsewhere, went by the name of Legion, because many devils were entered into him. You could not have worse than this. The power of Satan was stronger than all the fetters of men.

But the Lord is there. The devils believe and tremble. They felt His presence. But the day was not come for Satan to be dispossessed of his title over the world. As yet, it was only the proof of the power to do it: but the full exercise of that power was reserved for another day. I doubt not that our Evangelist gives the casting out of the demons as a witness of Christ's power to deliver the Jewish remnant; and therefore the Holy Ghost, here only, names the two men; as, on the other hand, the possessed herd of swine seems to represent the destruction of the unclean mass of Israel in the latter day.

The history brings out this also — that Satan has power in a twofold way, not. only in the dreadful excesses of those who are completely under his influence, but in the quiet enmity of the heart that could lead others to go to Jesus in order to beseech Him to depart out of their coasts. What a solemn thing it is to know that the secret influence of Satan over the heart, that creates the wish to get rid of Jesus, is even more fatal, personally, than when Satan makes a man to be the witness of his awful power. But so it was then, and so it is that men perish now.

That is the history of the men that wish Jesus to depart from them. The Lord grant us that happy knowledge of Himself, that entering into what He is to us now, which gives the soul calmness and rest in His love, and the certainty of His presence with those that belong to Him: "I am with you always, even unto the consummation of the age." May we know what it is to have Jesus to take care of us, and produce a great calm, whatever may be the effect of the stirring up of Satan's power against us. The Lord give us to look at Jesus. If it be from our first knowledge of sin to our last trial in this world, it is all a question of whether I trust in myself or in the Lord,

Matthew 9

Whoever attentively examines this chapter with the following one, can hardly fail to see that the

proper break is at the end of verse 35, the last three verses forming properly the introduction to chapter 10. What we have in chapter 9, as far as I have understood, is the effect of the presence of Jesus upon the religious leaders of Israel: I believe this is the great subject. Chapter 8 gave us the outline of the Lord's presence in Israel, and its results. That is, it was a general picture; and therefore we saw that the Holy Spirit entirely neglects the mere historical order, putting together passages in the life of Christ that were separated, in point of fact, by months or even a year. There is not here the slightest attempt on the part of the Spirit of God to present them as they happened; but on the contrary, the Holy Ghost goes out of His way for the purpose of culling from different times and places certain grand facts that illustrated the Messiah's presence amidst His people, His rejection by Israel, and what the results of this rejection would be. What we saw was that, first of all, He was proved to be God, the God of Israel — Jehovah; to whom the cleansing of leprosy was merely the question of His will; for even the leper did not doubt His power. "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." None but God could do this. Now none had so strong a feeling about this loathsome evil as a Jew, because God Himself had laid down so carefully the nature and proof of leprosy in His law. For it was a question of hopeless uncleanness — the solemn emphatic lesson of how horrible sin is, in its effects and in itself. God can cure and God can cleanse: nobody else can. It was not exactly a case of forgiving, but of cleansing and putting away defilement. The Spirit of God reserved the question of forgiveness (which is connected with the rights of God and with His judicial character, as the cleansing of leprosy is more particularly connected with His holiness) till the chapter we are about to look at now. In the first of these chapters (Matt. 8) there was the broad feature that Messiah was there — God Himself in grace, and not acting according to the law, which would have banished the leper outside of dwelling-place and people and His own presence. A most wonderful fact to realize on earth and in Israel that a person was there, as plainly God in His power as He was God in His love! The law merely laid down that which was right, but could give no power, and only condemn the unrighteous. It must make the case of a sinner hopeless, just because it is God's law, for the law can never mix with sin. But here was One who had given the law and yet was above the law. It is evident, indeed, that unless there be some principle in God paramount to the law, there can be no rescue for the guilty. But grace is that principle. And here was One who showed in His acts and words that He was in nothing more manifestly God than in the fulness of His grace. He touched the leper and said, "I will; be thou clean." The state of this man was just the picture of the true condition of Israel; and what the Lord did for the solitary leper, He was equally willing to do for the whole nation; but "He came to His own, and His own received Him not." Would God then be baffled in His love? If the Jew refused Him, what of the Gentile? They should hear; and therefore we have immediately following the centurion and his servant. But I will not repeat the facts of chapter 8. In the chapter before us now we have, not the general picture of God's presence and its results in Israel, but its special bearings upon the religious leaders of the people.

We begin again with the Lord's giving a remarkable case of healing; not the obvious case of leprosy, which ought to have struck any Jew, but another equally illustrative. "He entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into His own city" (ver. 1) — that is, Capernaum. Thus we are upon narrower ground now. Capernaum was the place where the Lord lived and wrought His mightiest miracles, and which for that very reason afterwards comes in for the most fearful woe that He could pronounce. This is a most solemn principle. When the day of the Lord comes, the heaviest blow of judgment will fall, not upon the dark parts of the earth, but upon the favoured ones where there has been most light, but alas, most unfaithfulness. For my own part, I do not doubt our own land must suffer in a special measure; but, above all, Jerusalem, and Rome too, to which latter place the most remarkable of all the epistles was written, as laying down the foundations of Christianity, but where there has been the greatest departure. They will come under the judgment of God in a most emphatic

manner, not only religiously but civilly. No matter who reigns, or who may be put down, this must be the case wherever, in spite of the special favours of God and the light of His word spread abroad, persons have remained unfaithful, and have even become more lax and superstitious or sceptical. The Lord will remove those that are His before the judgment, and the rest will remain to suffer His just retribution. "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man."

In this scene the Lord shows the moral necessity for such a judgment. Nor was it merely in the land of the Gergesenes, or of Nazareth. But take the people who ought to have known the Scriptures more than others, whose very profession it was to know and teach them — what was their estimate of Jesus? It is this which comes out in our chapter. "Behold, they brought to Him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer" — a most blessed word, meeting the whole case of the man; a word to touch his affections and meet his conscience. Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. There was comfort for both his heart and conscience. His sins ought to have laid more heavily upon his heart than his palsy did upon his body; but this word met all his need. "And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth" (ver. 3). In this chapter, it is not the scribe in his vain fleshly confidence professing to show honour to Jesus; but the scribes are judging and condemning Him. To their view Jesus was blaspheming when He said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." Awful delusion of man's evil heart. "This man blasphemeth!" And these were not ignorant people, who said within themselves, "This man blasphemeth." "But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise and walk?" And now He brings out a word which ought at once to have told upon the scribes, who were familiar with the Scriptures, where it was said of Israel's God, "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases," and of which they now had an exemplification before their eyes.

This is not the experience of a saint now, though we can take it up in a most blessed sense. But can we say that, "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases," is the way the Lord deals now with Christians? Where He forgives a person's iniquities, does He necessarily heal all their diseases? Whereas, here it is evident that the Lord contemplated the union of the cure of bodily diseases with the forgiveness of sins in the same people and at the same time. When will this be? When God takes the government of the world into His own hands. When the One who was crucified will be glorified — not only in heaven, but here below; when that day comes, the outward world, the body of man, and particularly of God's own people Israel, will feel the immediate effect. While we can take the spirit of the Psalms, so far as they apply to our condition now, let us not forget there is much in the Psalms that is not applicable to ourselves.

The forgiveness of iniquities and the healing of bodily distempers, were both promised to Israel, and so the Lord accomplishes both here. He shows that, in His person and by His ministry now in the midst of Israel, there was the witness of the power to do both. That they might know that the Son of Man had "power on earth to forgive sins (then saith He to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house. And he arose and departed to his house." There was a proof of the reality of the forgiveness in the fact that the disease was healed before their eyes. The union of these two things ought forcibly to have struck a scribe. In this miracle we have the strongest testimony of what the glory of His person was.

This then was the Lord's answer to the blasphemy of the scribes who charged Him with blasphemy. "But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men" (ver. 8). Alas, they did not know that it was the power of God exercised by one who Himself was God. They saw that He was the vessel of the power of God, and this was all. A man

might be this, and not be God. He might be pleased to work miracles even by a bad man. So that, while they gave glory to God who had given such power to a man, there was no real faith in the person of Christ. But the great object of the miracle is the bringing out of the true state of heart in the ecclesiastical chiefs of the people. A solemn judgment, to apply any time, begins to dawn with this chapter; and before we have done with it, we shall find that the case is closed, as far as they are concerned. Jehovah-Jesus was intolerable to Israel.; but, most of all, to those who had the highest reputation for learning and sanctity.

The Lord passes from this scene, and sees "a man named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and He saith unto him, Follow Me; and he arose and followed Him." If we compare the Gospels of Mark and Luke, we find that both the palsied man's case and the call of Levi took place long before many of the circumstances that we have already had; but they are reserved for two special purposes in Matthew's account. They are given at the beginning of Mark 2 as they happened in order of time; but the Spirit of God, in Matthew, puts them out of that order for the purpose of giving large pictures, after a dispensational sort, of our Lord's presence upon earth and its consequences for Israel; and all the facts that would bear upon their blindness for a time and future restoration are grouped together.

Here we see the effect of His presence upon the religious guides. Matthew's call was a most significant one. The Spirit of God led him to give his name here — the name by which he was afterwards known both on earth and in heaven. Matthew accordingly shows the grace of the Lord, spite of the animosities of those scribes against Him, and the form that His grace took in consequence of their unbelief. He goes out and calls Matthew as he was sitting at the receipt of custom. Other people had brought the palsied man, but Matthew does not seem to have manifested faith before the summons of Jesus. It was not Matthew who sought Jesus, but Jesus who called Matthew, busied about the tax, of which he was the licensed gatherer. The publicans were always classed with the sinners, and the Lord goes and calls the publican Matthew as he was in the performance of his office, sitting at the receipt of custom. Obedient to the Messiah's call, Matthew not only follows Him at once, but invites Jesus to sit at meat in the house. "And, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto His disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" It was a positive clear subversion of all propriety and order in the eyes of a Jew. To sit down at meat without the least feeling of contempt for these publicans and sinners was, indeed, strange in the eyes of the Pharisees. What was the Lord doing? He was displaying God's grace increasingly — all the more unbelief broke out from the merely outwardly-religious people: for persons can have thoughts of God, but not founded upon His word, and may be ever so earnest out of their own minds and hearts, but without either faith or light from God. On the one hand, these men proved their total unbelief in Jesus and His glory; but, on the other hand, God, in the person of Jesus, was going farther in His grace and more counter to the thoughts of these religious people in Israel. He calls Matthew, and He eats with these publicans and sinners; and when fault is found with it by the Pharisees to the disciples, the Lord at once produces that blessed word from the Old Testament, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice" — for "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." He vindicates this call and maintains it, not as an exceptional case, but as a principle.

It was what God was come down to make good upon earth. It was not the law, but grace now. This gives rise to something further, and a very instructive word from the Lord is brought before us here. The disciples were found fault with because they did not fast like the disciples of John and the Pharisees. And the Lord gives this reason for it: "Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?" That is, He shows the absurdity of fasting when the source of all

their joy was there. How utterly contrary would it have been to their faith in Him, the Messiah, to submit to this mark of sorrow and humiliation, in the presence of the spring of all their joy and gladness! But there was something deeper than that to be learned. There was not only the presence of One that the disciples understood, and that the others did not, but the Lord shows that you cannot mingle the prescriptions that flow from the law with the principles and power of divine grace (a most important principle, and the very one that Christendom has practically destroyed). For what has brought about the present state of Christendom? Christianity is the system of grace in Christ maintained in holiness by the Holy Ghost among those that believe. Christendom is the great house of profession, where there are unclean vessels mingled with those that are to honour where principles abound and reign that never came from Christ, and that are adopted, some of them from Judaism, others out of people's own wit, without respect to the Bible. But what the Lord shows is, that even if you take what God once sanctioned under the law, it will not do now. The same God who tried Israel by the law has sent the gospel; and it is the gospel that He is sending now, and not the law. It is grace that we have to do with. It is Christ risen and in heaven that I am in relationship with, and not with the law. I am dead to the law if I am a Christian. Christendom has forgotten and departed from that; and, arguing from the premises that the law is good, and the gospel also, they say, Will it not be much surer to put them together? The result is, that what our Lord said should not be done, men have been aiming at with the utmost diligence. They have tried to put the new wine into old bottles: that is to say, put the joy-producing grace into the receptacles of legal principles. The Lord has brought in new wine, and He wants new bottles.

The inner virtue and power of Christianity must clothe itself with its own proper forms. The new garments are the due manifestation of the gospel, which totally differs from ways framed according to the law. Legalism is the old garb, and it is despising the goodness of God to merely patch up the old one. And after all, it will never succeed. The attempt will only make the old worse. This is what Christendom has done. It has tried to mend the old garment with the new piece — to bring a certain measure of Christian morals into the old garment as a sort of improvement upon Judaism. And what has been the result? Besides, there is the pouring of the new wine into old bottles. There is a certain measure of the preaching of Christ, but it is so much in connection with the old bottles! These verses embrace both the outward development and the inward power, and show that Christianity is entirely a new thing, and one that cannot be mingled with the law. If you find a man who thinks he has got some righteousness of his own, you can cut him down by the law. This is the legitimate use of the law. He is really ungodly, and you use the law to prove that he is so. But in the Christian we have one who is godly; and the law, as Paul expressly insists, is not for him. I am not to put the new wine into old bottles, nor the old into new. This leads the Lord to bring out the entire newness of the conduct and principles that flow from Himself and from His grace. And all this was strongly opposed to the thoughts and prejudices of the scribes and Pharisees, who came in afterwards with their questions about fasts. Not that fasting is not a Christian duty (we already looked at this in chapter 6); but then, it must be on Christian principles, and not on Jewish ones.

Now we come to an incident of the deepest interest. A ruler of the synagogue sends for our Lord to heal his daughter, then comes and worships Him, saying, "My daughter is even now dead; but come and lay Thy hand upon her, and she shall live. And Jesus arose and followed him, and so did His disciples" (vers. 18, 19). That was exactly an illustration of the Lord's attitude towards Israel. He was there with life in Himself? Israel was like the maid that needed Him; she had no life in her: such was Israel's condition. But the Lord is at once roused, and goes at the call of the ruler. He owns the claim of faith, let it be ever so feeble. The centurion knew that a word would be enough; but this Jewish ruler, with the natural thought of a Jew, wants the Lord to come to his house and lay His hand upon

his daughter that she might live. He connected the Lord's personal presence with the blessing that was to be conferred upon his sick child; whereas, we Gentiles walk by faith, and not by sight. We believe in and love one that we do not see. The Jews look for one whom they shall see; and they will have Him in this way. As Thomas, after eight days, was allowed to see the Lord, and bidden to thrust his hand into His side, and see in His hands the print of the nails, so will it be with Israel. "They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced." Whereas, we believe in Him on whom we have not looked. So that our position is a totally different one from that of Israel.

Now in this case the Lord hears the summons, and goes at once to raise up the dead daughter of the Jewish ruler. But while He is going, a woman touches Him. While the Lord's errand is to Israel — and so it was, and it only remains suspended — while He is on the way, whoever comes, whoever touches, gets the blessing. No unbelief of scribes, no self-righteousness of Pharisees, ever would or could hinder the Lord in His mission of love. He was about to bring in new principles which would not mix with the law — grace that would go out to all, and would meet the worst; which is plainly set forth by this woman who comes and touches Him. But first of all you have the pledge of the resurrection of Israel; for we have the warrant of the word of God for looking at the condition of Israel as one of death. Look, for instance, at Ezek. 37, where Israel is compared to dry bones. "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost. . . . Behold, O My people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves. . . . And ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land." So, I believe, in this miracle. It represents, not merely the conversion of dead sinners, but the raising of Israel as a nation. The Lord was refused by the people who had the deepest responsibility to receive Him; but most surely, as He raised up that young woman from the bed of death, so surely will He restore Israel in a day that is coming. But meanwhile, whoever comes gets the healing and the blessing. So it was with this poor woman. The Lord not only gives her the consciousness that she is healed, but lets her know that His affections were thoroughly with her. "Daughter" He says to her, "be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole." There was at once the word of assurance. The Lord puts His seal upon what her faith had done, though she had done it tremblingly.* Then, in due time, we have the raising up of the one who was dead, in whom it was not a question of faith, but of the power of God and of His faithfulness to His own promise.

*Let us note this open confession of Christ unto salvation. In Mark 5: 30-34 and Luke 8: 45-48 we see how the Lord draws out and urges the timid soul to an open confession of grace received through the touch of faith. Then follow the Lord's blessed words of assurance and of relationship: "*Daughter, . . . go in peace,*" which her confession brings out, to her lasting joy and comfort. Ed.

After this (ver. 27) we find that two blind men follow Him: elsewhere only one of them is mentioned; but I believe that both are mentioned here for the same reason as we had the two demoniacs. They cry and say to Him, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on us." It is the confession of Christ as connected with Israel. They address Him as Son of David. The Lord asked them, "Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto Him, Yea, Lord. Then touched He their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened" (vers. 28-30). Then came the dumb man possessed with a devil: "And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake; and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel" (ver. 33). I believe that all this is brought together for the same purpose. The Lord was giving type after type, and pledge upon pledge, that Israel would not be forgotten, that Israel would be raised out of death: let them be ever so blind, they would see; ever so dumb, they would speak. Let the Pharisees and scribes be utterly unbelieving and blasphemous, and ready to turn away all from Christ — let it be so now; but death would give way,

blindness would be removed, speech would be given to Israel, in a day that was coming. The very confession of the multitude was, that it had never been so seen in Israel.

Let me repeat that in thus applying these miracles of our Lord I am not at all denying the blessing of any part of these for a soul now. But this is no reason to prove that the Lord has not an ulterior view which we ought not to forget. "But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils" (ver. 34). What could be worse than this? Was it not in principle blasphemy against the Holy Ghost? Such is the form which that sin took then. There was the power of the Holy Ghost which wrought in Christ and through Him; and they attributed this power to Satan. There could not be anything more determined than such hostility. They were not able to deny the righteousness of the man, nor the facts of superhuman energy; but they might attribute the power that was entirely above man, not to God, but to the adversary; and they did so. Their ruin was complete and final. What more terrible! Nothing could convince a man where all these evidences and appeals had been lavished upon him; and the end of it all was that, not the ignorant only, but the wise, the religious, the Pharisee priding himself in the law, the choicest part to man's eye of the chosen nation — even they said, "He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils."

Nothing more is needed. The Lord might send out a testimony through others; but as far as His own ministry was concerned, it was virtually at an end. He sends out the twelve immediately after; but it all comes to the same thing. The Lord is utterly rejected, as we see in Matthew 11. And then Matthew 12 gives the final pronouncing of the judgment on that generation. That sin of which they had been guilty would ripen into blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and could not be forgiven them, either in this age or in that to come. The consequence is that the Lord turns from the unbelieving race, and introduces the kingdom of heaven, in connection with which He gives us all the parables in Matthew 13. He takes the place of a sower, no longer looking to gather fruit from Israel, and addresses Himself to the new work in this world that He was about to undertake — which He still carries on to the present moment, though now through the instrumentality of others. So that the beauty of all this arrangement of the Gospel of Matthew cannot be surpassed, though the other Gospels are, for their own objects, equally perfect. Each presents the facts of our Lord's history so as to give a distinct view of Christ's person or service, with the effects of its display; and we ought to understand them all.

May the Lord grant that the effect of looking at these things may be, not only that we may know the Scriptures, but Jesus better! This is what we have most of all to cultivate — that we may understand the ways of God, the wonderful ways of His love, all expressed in Jesus.

Matthew 10

At the close of the previous chapter our Lord, in looking upon the lost sheep of the house of Israel, speaks of them in deep pity as sheep without a shepherd. What the Pharisees really were had fully come out: not but what He knew it before; but the circumstances of their entire rejection of Himself, and their hatred, coming out more and more decidedly, brought up before His spirit the exposure of God's sheep. If their spirit was implacable against Him in whom there was no sin, who was God's own Son, the Shepherd of Israel, what must not be the sorrowful lot of those who had infirmities and failures which laid them open to the malice of those who cared not for them for God's sake, who would have the keenest and most suspicious eye for everything weak and foolish about them! Let us always remember the grace of the Lord, that even that which is humiliating in us draws out nothing but His compassion. I am not now speaking of sin, but of that which is infirm; for

infirmities and sins are two different things. We do not want the Lord's sympathy with evil. The Lord has suffered and died for our sin. But we do want sympathy with us in our ignorance, weakness, trembling, liability to anxieties, cares, troubles: in all these things which make us suffer here we do want sympathy; and the Lord has it fully with us. This was also the case with Israel. Unconscious of their miserable condition, Jesus calls upon the disciples, in the love of His own heart, to pray the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth labourers into His harvest. It was His harvest, and His labourers alone could gather. But immediately after — and this is remarkable — He shows that *He* is the Lord of the harvest Himself; and He sends forth labourers. The next chapter illustrates this, and beautifully evinces the scope of Matthew, who portrays Him as the One who should save His people from their sins — Emmanuel, God with us. Mark the circumstances. This takes place upon His rejection by Israel. His own ministry, full of grace as well as power, we have seen fully exhibited, and terminating in the utter indifference of Israel and the hatred of the religious leaders. Matthew 8 gives us the people, and Matthew 9 their guides, thus severally manifesting themselves.

Now chapter 10 shows that Jesus, as Lord of the harvest, sends forth labourers and this too with full authority and power given to them. But observe, it is still in special connection with Israel; and the Lord is conscious from the beginning of rejection by Israel. Meanwhile it is a Jewish mission of the twelve Jewish apostles to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. I take this quite literally, and not as if it were said of the Church, which is never spoken of as lost sheep; but the sheep of Israel in their desolate condition are most aptly so described. Before the Church is gathered, what we want is a Saviour. We Gentiles were not sheep at all, but dogs, in our Evangelist's point of view. (See Matt. 15) And after we have been brought into the Church, we are not, and cannot be, lost sheep. Whereas these poor of the flock are spoken of as lost sheep of the house of Israel. For up to this time the work was not done by which they could be put in the known position of salvation.

Again, when our Lord is sending them forth, it is said, "He called unto Him His twelve disciples, and gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease" (ver. 1). This was peculiarly their mission. Not a word is said about preaching what we call the gospel, or teaching the whole counsel of God; but they were to go with messianic power against Satan and bodily diseases, as a testimony to Israel. They were to declare the kingdom of heaven. "As ye go," said our Lord, "preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (ver. 7). But the great characteristic feature of the mission was the conferring upon them power against demons and diseases. The appropriateness of this, in connection with Israel, is manifest. It was a bright evidence that the true King, Jehovah, was there, who was able Himself not only to cast out devils, but to confer that power upon His servants. Who but the King, the Lord of hosts, could do this? It was a testimony much greater than if the power had been confined to His own person. The ability to impart power to others (which was what Simon Magus, hoping to profit by it, so earnestly coveted) God here shows to be in His own Son. Now the servants were to be sent out, and in due order — twelve of them, in relation to the twelve tribes of the house of Israel. We find afterward the promise that they should "sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." There need be no question, therefore, that this was a Jewish mission. When the Church was called, God broke in upon the mere Jewish order by calling an extraordinary apostle, with a special view to the Gentiles — one who was called after Christ had died, and risen, and had taken His place at the right hand of God. Then came in this new work in the calling of the Church, and the apostle Paul became the characteristic minister of the Church, though the twelve had their place too. But at this time the twelve apostles were to be (what Paul was not) the ministers to Israel in testimony of the kingdom of heaven. For, observe, the strictest injunction was given them that they were not to go outside the limits of Israel; not even to visit the Samaritans, nor to enter into the cities of the Gentiles. Their business was solely with the lost sheep of the house of

Israel: a positive proof that it means those of the Jews who had a sense of sin, and who were willing to receive the testimony of the true Messiah. With them, their business was exclusively. It is the more remarkable, because in this Gospel we are told that after He had died and was risen, the Lord sent them out to the Gentiles; but then it was on the evident ground that His death had come in. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." Christ upon the cross becomes the attractive centre for man, as well as the foundation of all the counsels of God. Now in this case we have nothing of the sort. The Lord's death is not even referred to. His rejection is brought out, but nothing is said as to the building of a new structure — the Church. There was the waiting for still further rejection before this could be disclosed, as in Matthew 16.

But here the Lord Jesus sends forth the twelve, and commands them, saying, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass, in your purses; nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat" (vers. 5-10). That is, they were to go just as they were, with the coat they had upon them, with the shoes they had then on their feet. They were not to provide anything, or to lay up any store as a means of support during their mission. This is not a universal rule for the servants of God at all times. It was a peculiar mission, for a special time, and with reference to Israel only. It was not the gospel of God's grace, but of the kingdom. The two go together now; but then it was not so. Israel did not receive the testimony of the kingdom; an entire change comes in, and the kingdom of heaven, in outward establishment, remains in suspension. The calling of God now to the Gentiles comes in as a vast parenthesis between this message to the lost sheep in Israel and its full accomplishment in the last days. Whatever the Lord commands must be accomplished, but nothing is perfectly fulfilled till the Lord takes all in hand Himself.

Everything that is to be taken up by Christ in power and glory by and by is first committed to man. But man fails everywhere, Israel as a nation breaks down, the Church has become worldly and scattered. All will yet be to the praise of Christ Himself. Thus, no matter what you look at in the ways of God, there is, as a rule, first presenting it to man; it is made to rest upon him to see if he can bear the responsibility and the glory; and he cannot. But whatever man has failed in is destined to rest upon the shoulders of Christ in the day of glory, and all will then come to perfection, and will shine out in more than pristine brightness, and redound to His glory.

The twelve were sent out on this mission, and instructed to depend upon Christ alone. He would provide for them. They were to announce the kingdom of heaven; and He, the King, would undertake all charges. They were to go with the fullest confidence in Him. Now, although His servants are not to look to the world, or to use human means of acting upon saints, and although they may confidently look to God to provide for them, still they are not put in the same circumstances as these disciples. The difference is strongly marked. Take, for instance, such a command as this: "Into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence" (ver. 11). Is a man going out with the gospel now to ask who is worthy? He seeks the unworthy. But this was a mission to Israel; and Jehovah wanted the excellent in the earth, those whose hearts really desired the Messiah. "And when ye come into a house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you." This is not at all the way of the gospel now. On the contrary, it is peace with God that the servant of Christ is entitled to proclaim to His enemies. The direct bearing of the gospel is toward those who are in misery — the vile and forlorn; because the gospel is the fulness of God's grace to man who has nothing whatever to give to God. If they are but

broken down, feel that they are utterly unfit for God, and that God has provided such a Saviour as His word declares, then we cannot trust Him too fully or too simply. The essence of the gospel is this: That God does not ask me to give, but to *receive*. This is the gospel of God — the gospel of His Son; but here, in Matthew, it is the gospel of the kingdom. You will constantly find this phrase in Matthew. This gospel goes out to those that are worthy. If the house were worthy, the messenger's peace comes upon it; and if not, it returns. „And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet" — judgment would be upon them. "Verily, I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city" — just because they had the messengers of the kingdom coming to them with a gracious message, and they would not receive them.

From verse 16 the Lord warns them of the circumstances in which the gospel of the kingdom was to be preached. "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." That is, He calls for prudence, heavenly prudence. There was to be entire holiness in the object and character of the prudence, and free from any just charge of being injurious to men. "But beware of men" — do not suppose that, although you go forth with love in your hearts, you will not meet with wolves. The Jews are plainly intimated. "Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings." While hating the Gentile yoke, they would be quite willing to invoke Gentile authority where it became a question of Christ's followers. The Jews would drag them before the Gentile kings and governors, abhorred as they were. But our Lord adds this gracious word 'for My sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.'

Thus God turns the weapons of the adversary against himself. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath Thou wilt restrain." One cannot but feel that such a truth as this, though it has special application to apostles setting out on this mission, most surely remains for us. "But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." At the same time He prepares them for most heartless conduct toward them, even from relatives. The brother would know the habits of his brother, the father would know all about the child, and the child about the father: all this would be turned against the servants of Christ. "Ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake; but he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (vers. 19-22). "But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel," or, as the margin has it, "finished the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come" — a remarkable statement. It recalls the expression that I made use of before, the Church is a great parenthesis. The mission of the apostles was abruptly terminated by the death of Christ. They still carried it out afterwards for a while, but it was terminated completely by the destruction of Jerusalem: the whole thing was ended for the time being, but not for ever. The calling of the Church was then taken up; and when the Lord has taken the Church out of the world to heaven, God will again raise up witnesses to the Messiah upon earth, when the Jew shall be converted. God has declared that He would give His land to His people, and He will do so, for His gifts and calling are without repentance. God's faithfulness is involved in it, that the Jewish people must be restored to their own land when the fulness of the Gentiles is come in. The calling of the fulness of the Gentiles is the parenthesis that is going on now. When this is over the Lord resumes His links with Israel. They will go back to the land in unbelief. The testimony of the kingdom, which was begun in the time of our Lord by the apostles, will again be taken up until the Son of Man will come. Then "He will send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire. . . . Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun

in the kingdom of their Father." The Lord will accomplish fully in that day what was committed to man, and which broke down through man's weak or wicked hand. Then everything under the Branch of Israel shall be glorious. This, I conceive, is what goes along with the remarkable expression that they should not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man came. The whole period of the Lord's turning aside to call in the Gentiles is passed over in silence. He speaks of what was going out then, and of what will be resumed in Israel — passing over what is being done meanwhile.

In the latter part of the chapter the Lord gives sweet motives to encourage them. "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord: if they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of His household?" (vers. 24, 25).

He was proving this now, and they would have to feel it in their turn. "Fear them not therefore." The first motive for not fearing is: I have traversed the same path; do not be afraid. "Fear them not . . . for there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, and hid that shall not be known." As much as to say: You will understand the reasons and motives of people's unbelief another day, if not now. Every one that knows the truth and does not follow it, must have a dislike to those who do. As it was with Me, so will it be with you: but do not be alarmed. Be full of good courage, and persevere in the testimony. "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light; and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops" (ver. 27). He encourages them to the greatest openness and boldness. A second admonition not to fear is on another ground: And what harm can they do? They cannot touch the soul; nor can they even touch the body unless your heavenly Father allows it. "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." They cannot injure you, There is nothing which a believer has to dread, except grieving and sinning against God. Therefore He immediately adds, "Rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." A fearful thing is before God's enemies — the destruction of soul and body in hell!

"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows" (vers. 29-31). The special, the minute care of our Father for His own children is drawn from this, that the very sparrow, though so despised and trivial a bird among men, yet cannot fall to the ground "without your Father." He might have said, Without God; but He said, Your *Father* — a father's love is concerned for his children.

From verse 32 to the end of the chapter, we have the importance of the confession of Christ, and the effects of it in this world. The first great principle is this: "Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven." We have had the Father's care; we have now the Son's confession by and by. The Father's care we know upon earth, whatever may be the trial. The Son's confession of us will be in heaven, when all the scene of trial is over.

Then He warns them that the result of their testimony may be very painful — households getting into confusion, members of a family at variance one with another. Be not surprised. "Think not," He says, "that I am come to send peace on earth." We know that the Lord can give us peace always by all means: but He is speaking here of the entrance of His testimony, through His disciples, into a world that hates Him. Inevitably, then, the two principles come into collision. It is not that *He* desires confusion, but it is the natural effect of the knowledge of Christ entering a house where some of its members reject Him.

As it is in the world, so in the house. There are those that believe and those that believe not.

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword." Dream not that everything is going to be triumphant. The day is coming when the Lord will cause peace to flow as a river; but such is not the effect of His first coming. It is the badge of war now, because of the opposition which unbelief always creates against the truth. "For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household." The Lord boldly meets the case. I am come to bring in My principle, and it sets child against parent. Now this becomes one of our severest trials — the effect that the testimony of God has upon families. People speak of households being broken up and kindred disunited. The Lord already uses the same words and strengthens us for it. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it" (vers. 37-39). He shows that His coming would bring the opposite to a path of ease in this world. Yea, we must make up our minds to suffer trial, rejection and scorn. But then He adds the other side: "He that receiveth you receiveth Me; and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me." There would be those that would receive, as well as those that would reject. "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet" (that is, as a prophet), if he knew he was a servant of God, and received him as such, in the face of shame and scorn, he should have the same reward as a prophet himself. "And he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man" — other people might call him unrighteous, but he receives him, not as a mere man or friend, but as righteous, and he "shall receive a righteous man's reward." He proves that his own heart is right with God. We show our real state of soul by the opinion we pronounce. Supposing I speak or act unwarrantably against a good man doing his duty, I show that I am not with God in that particular thing. On the other hand, if I have faith to discern what is of God, and to take my part with him in the face of general desertion, happy am I indeed. God alone enables a man to do so. We show where our hearts are by our judgments of and conduct toward others.

"And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward" (ver. 42). It would be the evidence that the Spirit was at work in his soul — his heart drawn out in mercy to, and sympathy with, those who are of God in this world. He should in nowise lose his reward. It is the outward conduct springing from the inward principle. In all these cases it is clearly the Jewish mission of these disciples. I believe we thus get the true character of the chapter and the place it occupies in this Gospel.

The point of view in this whole chapter is, the Lord, as Lord of the harvest, not only bidding them to pray that labourers be sent into the harvest (Matt. 9: 38), but Himself anticipating the prayer. "Before they call, I will answer;" and the Lord is acting in the very spirit of that which will be *fully* true in the last days. He is Himself sending forth the labourers.

In Luke 22: 35, referring to this very mission, the Lord asks, "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing." Then the Lord tells them now to provide themselves with purse, and scrip, and sword: the very things which they were not to do before, they were to do from that time. The Lord abrogates what He had before enjoined, as far as the special circumstances were concerned. His goodness and love to them, and their walking in wisdom and harmlessness, would abide; but the peculiar character of this mission terminated at the death of Christ. It will, I conceive, be taken up again by others at a future day: but the disciples actually sent out were soon to be called to a new work, founded upon redemption and the resurrection of our Lord.

Matthew 11

The chapter at which we are arrived is full of interest and importance, especially as it is a kind of transition. What gives occasion for the Spirit of God to bring out this transition from the testimony to Israel to the new order of things which the Lord was about to introduce, is that John the Baptist, in prison because of his own rejection, is found in exercise as to personal faith and patience. While fulfilling his prophetic office, none could be more unwavering than John in his testimony to Christ. But there may be moments when faith is put thoroughly to the proof, and when the strongest may know what it is to be "cast down, though not destroyed."

Certainly this was the case with John the Baptist. It was not merely his disciples that were stumbled by his being in prison. Infidels ask now, If Scripture be truth, how is it that people do not receive it? Why is it not more widely spread? etc.

We know that at first tens of thousands confessed and followed the name of Jesus in one city alone; and the moral weight was great, for they walked in superiority to the world. We know, too, how far and wide the power of Christianity has spread: still, the great difficulty comes up again, and we find that what works in the mind of a sceptic may be found more or less disquieting the believer, because fallen nature is in the believer still; and what Scripture calls "the flesh" is always an unbelieving thing. Hence it came to pass that, blessed as John the Baptist was, yet he sent his disciples with the query, "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" Questions seem to have passed through his mind, and a confirmation of faith was wanted. Even a prophet is not beyond Satan's assault. And here we have this favoured and otherwise faithful man putting such a question, the very last that we might have expected. Instead of answering with the confidence of faith the question of his disciples, if it was such, John sends some of them to Jesus, saying, "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" The Lord replies, "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see . . . and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me" (vers. 4, 6).

Our Lord's answer evinces that it was not John's disciples merely, but himself also that was shaken. These are the two parts of Christ's ministry — His words and His works, "Those things which ye do hear and see;" the word always having the higher place; the works being what would appeal rather to the senses; whereas the word of Christ is that which deals with the heart and conscience by the Spirit. They were to go and tell John what they heard and saw; and therein we have what the Old Testament had predicted as signs and effects of the Messiah's power. We have not, I believe, one case of curing the blind before Christ came. It was a miracle which, according to Jewish tradition, was reserved for the Son of David. He it was who, according to Isaiah 35, was to open the eyes of the blind. The Lord puts the blind receiving their sight as the first outward miracle to indicate that He was really the Christ that was to come; and last, but not least weighty, is "the poor have the gospel preached to them." What is it but a testimony of the exceeding tender mercy of God that, while the gospel is intended for all, it is especially adapted to those that know misery, trial, contempt in a selfish world? The Lord adds, "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me." What a word of warning. A man sent from God for a witness, that all might believe in Christ; and when this very man is put thoroughly to the test, the Lord has to bear witness to him, instead of his bearing witness to the Lord. How constantly do we see man breaking down when tested; but what a blessed thing that we have such a God to go to, if He be only counted on.

But when these messengers departed, the Lord shows His tender compassion and regard for him, and begins to vindicate the same John who had shown his feebleness under suffering and protracted hope. He asks them, "What went ye out into the wilderness to see?" A superficial judgment might

have concluded it was but "a reed shaken with the wind" when John sent disciples with his question. But no, the Lord will not allow it. He maintains the honour and integrity of John. He has sent a little rebuke to John privately by his disciples; but before the multitudes He clothes him with honour "But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment?" It is in courts that you look for the grandeur of the world. "Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet," because John had a peculiar place and honour that no prophet had assigned to him — to be the immediate forerunner of the Lord, the herald of the Messiah Himself. John not only was a prophet, but the prophets prophesied of John; and the Lord says of him, "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist. "

But mark this word, a striking one, in this transitional chapter, "Notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (ver. 11). What is the meaning? In saying, "Among those born of women there had not risen a greater than John the Baptist," the Lord is excepted. He is speaking of John, not as compared with Himself, but with others. He was the greatest born of women; "Notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." It means clearly that there was a new order of things commencing, in which the privileges that God's sovereign grace would confer would be so great, that the least in the dispensation about to open would be greater than the greatest in all the past. Of course this is not as to anything in themselves; the faith of a weak believer now is not greater than a man's mighty faith in times past; nor is some poor soul, anxious and troubled about his acceptance, in a healthier state than those who could rejoice like Simeon in God their Saviour. Yet the Lord does say that the greatest of those gone by is less than the least now.

"The kingdom of heaven" never means heaven: they are different ideas as well as expressions. "The kingdom of heaven" always means that which, while it has its source in heaven, has its sphere upon earth. It may be applied, as it often is, to what is going on now; or, as sometimes, to what will go on when the Lord comes in glory, and brings His rule in a manifested form to bear upon the earth. But the kingdom of heaven always supposes the earth as the scene upon which the privileges of heaven are made known.

The Lord Jesus sees Himself rejected; but God, in His sovereign way and grace turns the rejection of Jesus to the introduction of far greater blessing than if Jesus had been received. Supposing the Lord had been accepted by man when He came, He would have blessed man and kept him alive upon the earth: He would have bound the devil, and brought in countless mercies for the creature in general. Still, what would have been all that without the vindication of God in the matter of sin? Neither moral glory nor supreme love would have been shown as they now are. For what could it be more than divine energy barring out the power of Satan?

But the death of Christ is, at once, the depth of man's wickedness and the height of God's goodness; for in the Cross the one proved his utter hatred and iniquity, the other His perfect holy love. It was man's unrighteousness that put Him there — it was God's grace that brought Him there; and Christ risen from the dead takes His place as the beginning, the Head of a new creation, and displays it in His own person now to faith in them that believe; puts them in this place of blessing while they are still in this world struggling with the devil; sheds the joy of redemption into their hearts, and fills them with the certainty that they are born of God — their sins being all forgiven — and they are only waiting for Him to come and crown the work of His love, when they shall be raised from the dead and changed into His glory. It is true to faith now, and will be true to sight by and by; but it is true always from the time it was introduced. It began with Christ's ascension into heaven, and it will terminate by Christ's descent from heaven, when He will bring in this power of the kingdom over the earth. What,

then, has the least believer got now? Look at saints of old. John the Baptist was resting upon promises. Even he, blessed as he was, could not say, My sins are blotted out, mine iniquities are all gone. Before the death and resurrection of Christ, saints could with joy look forward and say, It will be blessed indeed! They might be sure that it was God's intention; but it was not an accomplished thing. And, after all, if you were in prison, you would know the difference between a promise to bring you out and the fact of your liberty when fairly out. This is just the difference. The atoning work is done, and the consequence is, that all who believe are now entitled to say, Sin is no longer upon me in the presence of God. And this is not true of some Christians in particular, but every Christian should take the place that God gives him in Christ. And what would be the effect of this? Christians would not walk with the world in the way they do.

What I find, then, in the word of God is this: there was a new dispensation about to open, in which the very least is invested with privileges that the greatest could not possess before. And this, because God sets infinite value upon the death of His Son. God puts the greatest possible honour upon the death of Christ.

As an earthly sovereign puts particular honour upon an epoch of special joy to himself, still more faith may expect that God should attach peculiar glory to that work of Christ by which redemption has been accomplished, through the death and resurrection of His Son.

Now, everything is done, and God can invite souls — not to forget their sins, or turn away their eyes from them; but looking at them fairly and fully before the cross of Christ — He calls upon them to say, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." Knowing this, we must see how entirely evil is the place of a priest now — one man put in a position to draw near to God for others. Every Christian is a priest now. All Christians are not ministers. This is another thing. Ministry and priesthood, though so often confounded, are entirely distinct and different. It is a God-given privilege now, that every believer is a priest of God: that is, he is entitled to draw near into the holiest of all, sin judged, all his iniquities purged away, so that he may be thoroughly happy in the presence of God while he is upon earth. All this is only a part of the privileges of the least in the kingdom of heaven now. And remember this, all the grand prerogatives of Christianity are common privileges. One man may preach, and another may not; but this says nothing about the privileges of the kingdom. Paul, as a servant of God, had something which others had not: a gifted person might preach even without divine life in the soul. Caiaphas might testify, and Balaam too, and both utter true things; and Paul is willing to take such a place, to show that one might preach to others, and yet, if regardless of holiness, be himself a castaway. But this has nothing to do with the blessings I have been speaking of as the portion of believers now.

The privileges of the kingdom are now the universal heritage of the family of faith; the least of them is greater even than John the Baptist. Great misunderstanding has been shown as to the meaning of this verse. It has been taught that the least in the kingdom of heaven is Jesus Himself! — Jesus, of course, in His humiliation, in His going to the cross. But what misapprehension of the mind of God is there manifested by such a remark. For the kingdom of heaven was not yet come. It was preached, but not yet actually set up. And Jesus, far from being "the least" in that kingdom, was Himself the King; so that it would be derogatory to His person to call Him even the greatest, not to speak of "the least" in the kingdom. It would be want of reverence, as well as of intelligence, to say that He was in the kingdom at all. It would be more true to say that the kingdom was in Him, both morally, and in divine power.

"If I," says He to the Jews, "cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is

come unto you." It was arrived in His person: He being the King, and having the power thereof. But if you look at "the kingdom of heaven" as a state of things introduced into this world, Christ had to go up to heaven first — a rejected King, no doubt, but still as such to sit on the right hand of God — and thereon the kingdom of heaven commenced. The kingdom was not actually established till Jesus went up on high. Then it began, first spiritually, as by and by it will shine in power and glory. Hence it is clear that in this chapter we stand upon the confines of the past dispensation, and of the one that was about to open. John the Baptist is on the scene as the last and greatest witness of that which was closing. Elijah was to come; this might have been fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist. John was doing the moral work that was associated with Elijah's mission — preparing the way for the Lord. I do not say that Elijah may not come another day, but John was the then witness of Elijah's service. He was come "in the spirit and power of Elias:" and, as our Lord says a little after, "*If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.*" Such he was to faith. Like the kingdom of heaven now, it is a testimony to the future kingdom when displayed in power and glory. John was to faith then what Elias will be by and by. The kingdom of heaven is to faith now what the kingdom of heaven will be to sight hereafter. The Lord intimates that a dispensation of faith is coming in, when the promises were not to be accomplished in the letter.

But just as John the Baptist was cast into prison (a tremendous trial for a Jew who looked at him as a great prophet to usher in the Messiah in visible majesty), so He says here, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." It has to be received by the attentive ear of faith. How extraordinary it must have appeared to the disciples that the forerunner of the Messiah should be in prison, and the Messiah Himself afterwards nailed upon the cross! But before the outward glory comes, redemption through suffering must be effected. Hence, the least now who has this blessing of faith, who enjoys these astonishing privileges which the Holy Ghost is bringing out as the gift of God's sovereign grace, is greater than John the Baptist. For it is God's doing and giving and ordering. It is His joy by Christ to bless the man that has not the smallest claim upon Him. And such is His work now. But what would be the effect of this among the Jews? Our Lord compares them to capricious people who would neither do one thing nor another. If gladness is going on, they have no sympathy with it; neither have they with sorrow. John the Baptist called them to mourn: they had no heart for it. Then came Jesus, bidding them, as it were, to rejoice at the glad tidings of great joy: but they heeded Him not. They liked neither: John was too strict, and the Lord too gracious. They could not bear either. The truth is, man dislikes God; and there is no greater proof of his ignorance of himself than that he does not believe it. Whatever they might plead in the way of abuse of John the Baptist, or of Himself, "Wisdom is justified of her children."

Accordingly the Lord shows how wisdom was justified, positively and negatively. "He began to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! . . . And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works," etc. (vers. 20-24). What more solemn! They refuse the voice of heavenly wisdom; and the result must be in judgment more unsparing than that which had of old made Sodom the monument of God's vengeance. Was there one place or city in the land more favoured than another? It was Capernaum, where most of His miracles were wrought: and yet this very city should be brought down to hell. Even the notoriously depraved Sodom had not come under so fearful a sentence. The Lord only visits in judgment when means and calls for repentance are exhausted; but when He does judge, who shall be able to stand? Thus should wisdom be justified, may I say, by those that are *not* her children.

But then we have the positive part. "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank Thee, O

Father, Lord of heaven and earth." From the pronounced "woe," Jesus could turn round and say, "I thank Thee, O Father." Not that the events recorded here took place together. The whole scene about John the Baptist occurred long before the Lord alluded to the wise and prudent rejecting Him, and the babes receiving Him. The Gospel of Luke occasionally gives precise marks of time, and shows that the Lord's reception of John's messengers was at an early period of His ministry, very shortly after the healing of the centurion's servant; whereas His thanking the Father was after the return of the seventy disciples who were sent out on the final testimony, which is not mentioned in Matthew at all. The Holy Ghost in our Gospel puts aside, in general, mere successions of time, and welds together separated events to illustrate the great truth that it was His object here to bring out, viz., the true Messiah, presented with adequate proofs to Israel, but rejected; and this turned, of God's grace, to be the occasion of better blessings than if the Lord had been received.

And while the solemn sight of man's growing rejection is before us, Jesus says, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth" (hopes not limited to the earth now, but God looked to as Lord of heaven and earth — sovereign over all things), "because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight. All things are delivered unto Me of My Father." The throne of Israel may be refused Him; the Jews may reject, the leaders despise Him: all this may be, but what is the result? Not merely what was promised to David or Solomon, but "All things are delivered unto Me of My Father." Where were such thoughts as these divulged before? In the Psalms, in the Prophets, or where do you get anything like them? The rejected Messiah is refused by man: He submits to it. They strip Him of His robes of Messianic glory, and what comes out? He is the Son of the Father, the Son of God from all eternity, the blessed divine Person who could look up and say, "Father." Refuse Him in His earthly dignity, and He only shines in His heavenly one; despise Him as a man, and He is manifestly God.

"And no man knoweth the Son but the Father: neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him" (ver. 27). He is revealing the Father now. It is not merely that He is come to accomplish the promises of God, but He is revealing the Father — bringing souls into a deeper knowledge of God than was possible before. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." It is perfect grace: no restriction; no setting the Jew in the foremost seat of honour. But "Come unto Me, all ye that labour" — Jew or Gentile, it matters not. Are you miserable? Can you find no comfort? "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and I will give you rest." It is without condition or qualification if the needy but go to Him. In John we have,, All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." This is the proof of the Father's drawing — that I go to Jesus. It is the Son of the Father, in John; for grace is always found most full and free where the Son is brought out in all His glory.

"Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (vers. 29, 30). Grace does not leave men to do as they list, but enables the heart that receives it to desire the will of God. So, after saying, "I will give you rest," our Lord adds, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall *find* rest unto your souls." Mark the difference. In verse 28 it is, "Come unto Me. . . and I will give you rest" — it is pure grace to the soul in need, with nothing but its sins to bring; but in saying, "Take My yoke upon you. . . and ye shall *find* rest to your souls," He speaks of subjection to Him, and the effect is finding rest to our souls. When the sinner goes in his wretchedness to Jesus, the Saviour gives him rest — "without money and without price." But if that soul does not follow on in the ways of Christ, he becomes miserable, and loses the comfort he had at first. Why? He has not taken Christ's yoke upon him. The terms on which the Lord gives rest to *the*

sinner are, "Come unto Me," just as you are. The terms on which *the believer* finds rest are, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." The Lord keeps His moral government over His people, and they are more disturbed than any, if not subject to Christ; they can neither enjoy Him nor the world. If I have found such a Saviour, and yet am not bearing His yoke, God does not intend that I should be happy. All else is a false happiness.

Matthew 12

Matthew 12 completes the picture of the transition begun in chapter 11, and shows that, before God, the crisis was come. The Lord might continue to become the object of still deeper rejection, but the spirit that crucified Him had already manifested itself clearly. In the centre of this chapter we have the warning of the unpardonable sin, not merely against the Messiah, but against the Holy Ghost bearing His testimony to the Messiah; and, further, the fact that Israel as a nation would be guilty of that sin, and hence be given up to the power of Satan beyond example in all their sad history. So that the evil for which God had allowed them to be carried captive to Babylon was little in comparison with the iniquity of which they were now, in spirit, guilty, and into which they were about to sink. This brings the crisis closing the announcement of the kingdom to Israel; and chapter 13 introduces a new thing — the kingdom of heaven about to begin in its present mysterious form, because of the rejection of the Messiah.

I must now proceed to show how far all the incidents in this chapter are in harmony with the leading thought — the break between Christ and Israel. Therefore the Holy Ghost does not here confine Himself to the mere order of time in which the events took place. "At that time Jesus went on the sabbath-day through the corn, and His disciples were hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat" (ver. 1). We are not to suppose that "at that time" means "at that exact moment." It is a general term, embracing connected events, though there might be months between them. It is not like "immediately," or "forthwith," or "the week after," etc. What did intervene we must gather from the other Gospels. In Mark we find that the scene of the corn-fields took place early in our Lord's ministry. Thus, in chapter 2, on the sabbath-day following the call of Levi and the discourse about fasting, we are told that "He went through the corn-fields," Here we have this incident taken completely out of its historical connection. Mark adheres to the order of events: Matthew departs from it in order to give the great change consequent on the Messiah's rejection by Israel. Our Lord's word of woe upon Chorazin and Bethsaida, and the blessedness of those who received Him, was spoken by no means early. Here they are put together, because the object of the Holy Ghost in Matthew is to show this change.. Hence, what would prove the change is selected and reserved for this place.

In short, the Holy Ghost is giving us an historical picture apart from the mere date in which the events took place; and the events and discourses that illustrate the great transition are all grouped together. The disciples passed through the corn, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat, according to the liberty allowed them in the law. „When the Pharisees saw it, they said unto Him, Behold, Thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath-day." Our Lord then cites two incidents: one of them a constantly-recurring fact among the priests; the other recorded of their most conspicuous king, David; both proving the sin and the utter ruin of Israel. What was the state of things when David was obliged to use the showbread? Was it not because the true king was a despised, persecuted man — because the king of their own hearts' choice was there? It was the same thing now. The sin . of Israel profaned the holy bread. God would not accept aught as holy from people that were living in sin. No ceremonial is worth a straw if the heart does not honour Christ. Why were the disciples reduced to pluck and eat the ears of corn? Why were the followers ,of the true King reduced

to hunger?

Besides, "Have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath-days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?" (ver. 5). The priests did a very important work upon that day. They offered sacrifices then, because there was sin; and the people's sin demands what, according to the letter of the law, would seem to a Pharisee to be a breach of it. It does not matter what the law may ordinarily claim, if there is sin on the part of God's people, sacrifice cannot be deferred. Thus, whether you take the particular instance of the Lord's anointed in Saul's day, or the constant priestly service on the sabbath-day, one thing accounted for all disorder, whether real or apparent — *Israel were sinners*. They had allowed the chosen of the Lord to be hunted upon the mountains when he was there; and a greater than David was here. And so as to the priests and their work. One infinitely greater than the temple was there — Messiah Himself: and what was not their indifference, nay, their enmity, towards Him?

Another sabbath-day was necessary to complete the sketch. And now Jesus does work Himself; and these two things are brought together here. "When He was departed thence, He went into their synagogue; and behold, there was a man which had his hand withered; and they asked Him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath-days? that they might accuse Him." The Lord accepted the challenge. "He said unto them, What man shall there be among you that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath-day, will he not lay hold on it and lift it out?" Of course they would deliver the poor sheep out of the pit, because it was their own sheep. They had no conscience about doing what was to their own advantage because it was the sabbath-day. And the Lord does not blame them; but He presses this most pungent conclusion upon them — "How much, then, is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath-days." In a word, He shows by this second case, that not only was Israel a guilty people respecting the true Beloved, but that, if they knew their own condition, would own themselves to be like the man with the withered hand, in need of His mighty power. He was there in grace to accomplish all necessary healing. The Lord pressed upon them their dismal condition. The whole nation before God was morally as withered as that man's hand physically; but not willing, alas, to be healed like him. "Then saith He to the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it forth, and it was restored whole as the other" (ver. 13). Why is this recorded here as having occurred on the sabbath-day — especially in connection with the incident of the corn-field? In the first, the Lord proves Israel's guilt in contrast with the sanctity of the sabbath; and in the second, He declares Himself thereto work restoration even on the sabbath. It is an account of all importance, because the Lord is, as it were, tearing in pieces the outward letter of the bond between Him and Israel, of which the sabbath-day was a special sign.

I may here observe, the Lord's day differs essentially from the sabbath; and in the early Church there was scrupulous care taken not to confound the two things. The sabbath and the Lord's day are signs of wholly distinct truths. The first owed its origin to God hallowing His rest when creation was done; and it was the token that, when God would finish His works, there would be a holy rest for man. Then sin came in, and all was ruined. We do not hear a word about it (at least, directly), till a people is called out from among all others to serve the true God, as His chosen nation. We have seen, in the Old Testament as well as the New, how utterly they failed; and now the only hope of having a true sabbath is when Christ Himself shall bring it in. When Adam sinned, death passed upon all, and the creation-rest was broken. Then (after the type of Christ in the manna, with the sabbath following), came in the law, which took up the sabbath, incorporated it in the ten words and the statutes of Israel, and made it not only a hallowed day, but a day of command, which was enjoined upon them like the other nine words; a day in which every Israelite was bound, not only to abstain from work himself, but to give

rest to everything that was his. It was not a question of a spiritual people. All Israel were bound by it, and they shared its rest along with their cattle. The Lord's day, on the other hand, never was heard of till Christ rose from the dead. Thence issued an entirely new order of things. Christ, the beginning, the Head of a new creation, rose from the dead on the first day of the week. Thus, while the old world goes on, sin still at work, and Satan not yet bound, God has wrought salvation, which He is giving to every soul that believes. These recognize that Christ risen is their Saviour, and that they consequently have new life in Him. This, and much more than this, they come together to acknowledge on the Lord's day. They "show the Lord's death till He come." Nothing can be plainer in Scripture, if our desire is to know and follow the word of God. It was no longer a question of whether people were Jews or Gentiles. Were they Christians? Had they Christ as their life and Lord? If they thankfully confessed Him, the Lord's day was the day for them. Such of the Christians as had been Jews continued to frequent the synagogue on the sabbath. But this only shows the more plainly that it was not a mere change of day. To the Roman saints the apostle insists that the man who regarded the day, to the Lord he regarded it; and that the man who regarded it not, to the Lord he did not regard it. Was this the Lord's day? No, but Jewish days and fasts. The apostle would never treat the Lord's day as optionally to be regarded or not. Some of these believers saw that they were delivered from the law, and did not observe the Jewish feasts or fasts. The Gentiles, of course, were not under the law at all. But some, at any rate, of the Jewish believers, still had a conscience about the ancient holydays, and of them the apostle speaks. The Lord's day never was and never will be a Jewish day. It has its own proper character stamped upon it; and Christians, though not under the law as Jews with the sabbath, are yet by grace called on far more solemnly to use it for the Lord, as that which summons them to meet together in the name of Jesus, in separation from this world, conscious of redemption and justification through His death and resurrection. It is the type of the blessing that the Christian has got, yet to be manifested in glory. The world always confounds it, as do many Christians, with the sabbath. One hears sometimes real believers, but uninstructed, talk of the "Christian sabbath." This is, of course, because they do not see their deliverance from the law, and the consequences which flow from their belonging to Him who is risen from the dead. The apostle develops these blessed truths.

Our Lord merely deals with the Jews here. His disciples were not hindered from plucking the ears of corn on the sabbath, as on another He openly wrought a miracle in the presence of all (thus giving occasion for the Pharisees who sought one against Him). It is true that the works were works of mercy and goodness; but there was no necessity for either, had there not been a purpose. He could have spoken without doing a single thing. So with the blind man in the Gospel of John. All the clay in the world could not have cured him, but for the power of our Lord. His word would have been enough; but He does something Himself, and makes the man do something else upon the sabbath. We are told expressly, "It was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes." The Lord was breaking the seal of the covenant between Jehovah and Israel. The sabbath scaled that bond, and was in Israel now worse than useless in God's sight, because the people who pretended to keep the sabbath so carefully, were the bitterest enemies of His Son. It was utterly false to subject Him to the Sabbath. The Son of Man was "Lord even of the sabbath day." He takes that ground boldly, as we are here told (ver. 8), and the following sabbath performs this miracle. The Pharisees felt that it was a death-blow to their whole system, and they, gathering together, "held a council against Him how they might destroy Him." This was the first conclave for the purpose of putting Him to death. Jesus, knowing it, withdraws Himself from thence, "and great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all" — a picture of what He would do when Israel put Him to death. Thenceforth, the great work was to be among the Gentiles. The prophet Isaiah is quoted in connection with this occurrence, to show what our Lord's character was: "Behold My Servant, whom I have chosen; My Beloved, in whom My

soul is well pleased. I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He shall show judgment to the Gentiles: He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets; a bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory. And in His name shall the Gentiles trust."

The Lord was departing from Israel; but this is not all. There is a final testimony before He pronounces sentence upon Israel: "Then was brought unto Him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb, and He healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw." This was the condition in which Israel was about to be, without an eye or a voice for Jesus; the apt figure of the nation's condition, the Messiah unseen and His praise unuttered in their midst. And here is the solemn thing. The poor, the ignorant, all the people might cry, "Is not this the Son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his kingdom stand?" — He condescends to reason with them. "And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (vers. 27, 28). But they were dumb and blind. The man that submitted to Jesus was healed; but the Pharisees were consulting to slay the Son of David. The Lord answers them yet more. He tells them that now it was come to a point. "He that is not *with Me* is against Me; and he that gathereth not *with Me* scattereth abroad." All depended upon being and acting with Him; wherefore our Lord adds, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men" (ver. 31). The reason of it was this: not only the Son of Man was working these miracles, but the power of the Holy Ghost was there too. Although Jesus might submit to humiliation, He could not but assert the glory of God. The Holy Spirit was putting forth these mighty deeds, and the unbelief that refused the testimony of the Spirit when Jesus was there, would be even stronger against it on His departure. They would prove themselves to be like their fathers: "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye." And what the consequence? They would be guilty of the unpardonable sin, of rejecting (not only Jesus Himself, as a man presented here, but) the power of the Holy Ghost, whether working in Him then, or now by Him and for Him.

It is the final rejection of the Spirit's testimony to Christ. It was true when the Lord was here, but is still more complete now that He is in heaven. They refused Christ on earth, and after He went up to heaven, when, through the power of the Holy Ghost, His name alone caused the dead to rise, and thus proved even more His glory than what He had done personally when here below. Those who resisted such testimony as this were evidently hopelessly lost in unbelief and scorn of God in the person of His Son. Therefore our Lord pronounces this blasphemy to be such as nothing can meet. It is not ignorance which thus rejects Christ. A man may be without light; and when it comes, he may, through grace, be enabled to receive Him. But he who refuses all divine testimony, and makes the displayed power of the Holy Ghost the occasion of showing his spite against Jesus, is evidently lost for ever: he bears the unmistakable stamp of perdition upon his brow. This was exactly the sin into which Israel were fast falling. The Holy Ghost might be sent down, and work even greater acts of power than the Lord Himself had done; it made no change in their heart. The blaspheming unbelieving race of Israel should be forgiven neither in this "age," nor in that which is to come. I am not particular about the word "dispensation" — which means a certain course of time, ruled by particular principles; but the point is, that neither in this age (αἰῶν) nor in that which is to come, could this sin be forgiven. The age to come is that wherein the children of Israel are to be under the Messiah's rule; as now, and since

the Babylonish captivity, they have been under the rule of the Gentiles. This sin should be forgiven neither now nor then. As to all other iniquity, there was still a hope that what was not forgiven now might be when the Messiah came. Granted that there is unlimited forgiveness for every soul that receives Him; but they refused Him: they attributed the Spirit's power working in His person to Beelzebub; and that blasphemy would never be forgiven. Such was the growing danger of Israel. Rejecting the Messiah thus, they are doomed. It was rejecting the Holy Ghost's testimony; and a new work of God must then be brought in.

Hence the Lord pronounces them a generation of vipers. "The tree is known by his fruit." It was a bad tree, and no good fruit would He expect from it. "O generation of vipers," He adds, "how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word (that is, I suppose, everything betraying contempt for God) that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (vers. 34-37). What God insists upon is testimony to Jesus. These idle words betray the heart's rejection of Jesus, and slight the Holy Ghost's testimony to Him. "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." It is with the mouth that confession is made unto salvation; and the words that leave out Jesus prove that the heart prefers its sin to Him. The words of the mouth evidence the state of the heart. They are the outward expression of the feelings, and they show a man in one way as much as his conduct does in another. If the heart is evil, the words are evil, the conduct is evil: all therefore comes into judgment.

After this the Pharisees ask a sign, and the Lord gives them a most significant one: but, before that, He pronounces His moral sentence on the nation: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonas" (ver. 39). What was the special feature of Jonah as a prophet? To whom did he prophesy? He was sent away from Israel to the Gentiles; and, more than that, before Jonah performed his message aright, he must pass through the figure of death and resurrection. So obstinate was he in not going where he was bidden, that the Lord took care Jonah should be pitched out of the ship; and then He dealt with him as a dead man, and wrought a great work in his soul. Jonah having passed through this most remarkable type of death and resurrection was now ready for the message that the Lord gives him. This is the sign which the Lord puts before the Pharisees. Such was the state of the Jewish nation that He must leave them and go to the Gentiles; and that too after death and resurrection in reality, when Israel's hopes had perished. The Lord has blessing in store for Israel by and by; but for the present all is lost for them. They had rejected their Lord. God was going now to occupy Himself with the Gentiles. Hence it is that the instances used to confirm this are, first, the case of the men of Nineveh, who repented at the preaching of Jonah; "and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here." Then the queen of Sheba, also a Gentile, who did not merely repent because of sin, but showed an energy of faith, I may say, worthy of all note, without even a message sent to her. Such was the ardour of her heart, and her desire after wisdom, that, hearing of Solomon, she hastened in order to hear it from his own lips. What a rebuke for Israel! "A greater than Solomon is here"; and wisdom as much beyond Solomon's as the person of Jesus was above that of Solomon. But they were an evil and adulterous generation. They knew not that their Maker was their husband; they despised Him; and, adds our Lord, "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it." But now He proclaims what will be their final condition. The link of Israel to Himself was broken; and for this blasphemous contempt of the Spirit's testimony to Jesus as the Son of Man they should be judged.

This is what the Lord now shows. "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none" (ver. 43). Every student of Scripture will acknowledge that the *unclean* spirit means idolatry, and its worship connects with demons, instead of God. Are we to suppose that our Lord suddenly breaks off from what He had been saying of the nation to treat of mere individuals? Clearly it is about Israel. As a nation Israel never fell into idolatry after the return from Babylon, as before. Not that they were better men; but the unclean spirit of idolatry was no longer their special temptation. There were new ways in which the devil tempted them to sin, if not after the old sort. The house had been swept and garnished. Such it was when our Lord was here below. Israel had laid aside their idolatrous habits; they went to the synagogue every sabbath day; and they were zealous enough to compass sea and land to make a proselyte. The house was apparently clean, and nothing outwardly to shock the eye if you looked at it. But the unclean spirit is to go back. "Then goeth he and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto *this wicked generation.*" The unclean spirit is to return, with the full power of Satan — "seven spirits more wicked than himself." More wicked than idolatry! The figure of a man is used to illustrate the state of Israel, as the words that follow plainly show: "Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation." And when is that to be? It is their last state, yet to be. The empty, swept and garnished state existing then may be still going on. Humanly speaking, they may be moral. They may not abandon the books of Moses, but take their stand as worshipping none but the true God. This will go on for a certain time, but not forever; for we know from Scripture that God has kept that nation for special purposes, first in judgment, and then in mercy. He will convert them, and make them a holy, as they are the lineal, seed of Abraham. Israel is yet to show the last results of Satan's power over their souls before God converts a remnant, and makes it a strong, a saved nation.

But meanwhile, what was He going to do? Was He merely pronouncing judgment on Israel? Far from it. While He yet was speaking to the people one came and told Him, "Behold, Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with Thee" (ver. 47). The Lord immediately takes this opportunity to show that He no longer acknowledged mere relationships according to the flesh. He had special relationship with Israel, "of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came." He owns it no longer. They would not have Him, and will become the tenement for the devil in all his power — their last state to be worse than their first. But, says the Lord, I am going to have a new thing now — a people according to My own heart. And so He stretches forth His hand toward His disciples, and says, "Behold My mother and My brethren." His only true relations were those who received the word of God, and did it. "Whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother" — He renounced all earthly connection) for the present time. The only tie *He acknowledges* now is relationship to a heavenly Father, formed through the word of God received into the soul.

Thus we have in this chapter the Lord closing with Israel, as far as testimony is concerned. In the next chapter we shall find what comes dispensationally of those new relations that the Lord was about to unfold.