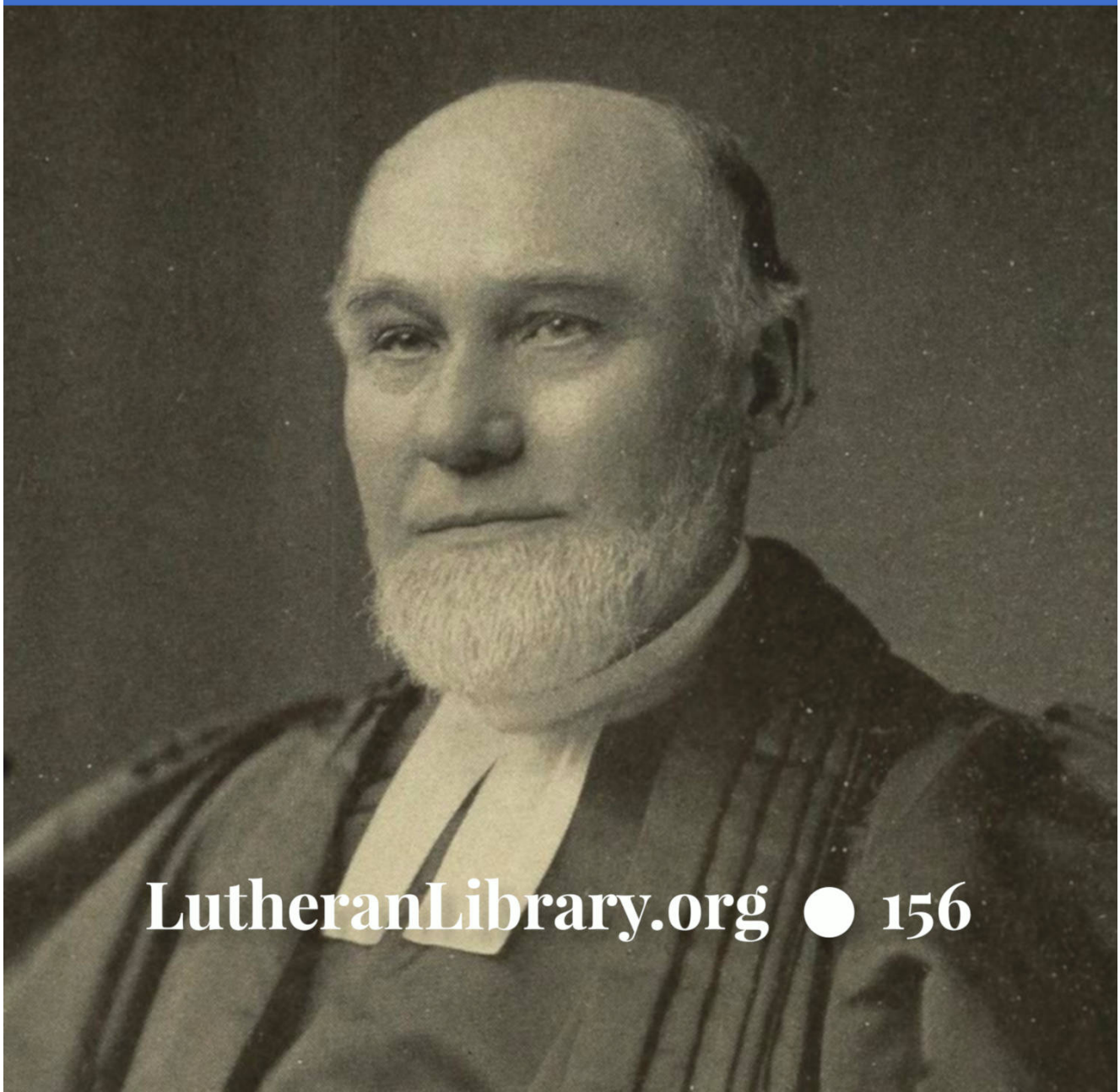


# Samuel Laird

## Selection of Sermons



# A Selection of Sermons by Samuel Laird

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# A Selection of Sermons by Samuel Laird

“He being dead yet speaketh”

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“There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.”

GENESIS 6:4

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# Preface by Lutheran Librarian

In republishing this book, we seek to introduce this author to a new generation of those seeking spiritual truth.

**Samuel Laird** (1835-1913) “...belonged to a group of stalwart preachers and leaders whose influence could not be confined to a congregation or a city or a synod. Among them were numbered such men as Krauth, Krotel, Mann, Spaeth, the Schaeffers, Schmucker, Seiss, Greenwald, Passavant.” (George Sandt) Dr. Laird was secretary of the General Council, president of the Pittsburgh Synod, President of the Pennsylvania Ministerium and was influential in the operations of the General Council’s English Home Mission Board. He was a member of the Board of Trustees of Muhlenberg College, and on the Board of Directors of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. For many years he served as Trustee of the German Hospital, and a Director of the Mary J. Drexel Home and Motherhouse of Deaconesses, in Philadelphia. Rev. Laird pastored faithfully for thirty-five years at St. Mark’s Church, Philadelphia,

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# Introduction

TO THOSE WHO KNEW DR. LAIRD as a preacher, a catechist, a pastor, a leader in the Church, and a man among men, the sermons that appear in this book have an added value. It is not only what is being preached, but also what the preacher himself is that enters into the estimate of a sermon; for what is a sermon other than the Gospel seeking utterance through a personality whom it has inspired and transformed? My acquaintance with the author of these sermons dates back to my seminary days in the early [eighteen-]eighties, when I frequently listened to his preaching and occasionally attended his catechetical lectures. He was then in the vigor of his manhood and one of the leading pulpit lights in the city of Philadelphia.

Dr. Laird belonged to a group of stalwart preachers and leaders whose influence could not be confined to a congregation or a city or a synod. Among them were numbered such men as Krauth, Krotel, Mann, Spaeth, the Schaeffers, Schmucker, Seiss, Greenwald, Passavant. They rose into prominence at a time when Lutheranism in its English form was passing through a crisis because it had in large measure forgotten the rock whence it was hewn and the pit whence it was digged. Though his modesty forbade him to assume the role of leader in the controversy which preceded and followed the organization of the General Council in 1867, he was a staunch defender of the principles for which it stood. He was wont to speak with much admiration of the men who bore the brunt of the battle, and more than once characterized them with the brief sentence, "There were giants in those days," not once thinking that he was one among them.

Dr. Laird's position and influence in the Church at large are best indicated by recounting the responsibilities that were entrusted to him. For seven successive years, beginning with 1870, he was secretary of the General Council. He, together with Dr. Seiss, shaped the policy of the

English Home Mission Board of the General Council from the very beginning. There never was a more powerful leadership in any General Council board. He was president of the Pittsburgh Synod, when serving the First Church in Pittsburgh as pastor, and president of the Pennsylvania Ministerium, when pastor of St. Mark's, Philadelphia. His fine legal mind (for he had studied law two years before he reached his decision to enter the ministry) made him a valuable member of the Board of Trustees of Muhlenberg College, and of the Board of Directors of the Philadelphia Seminary, whose treasurer he was for a number of years. He would have graced a judge's bench with signal dignity and strength had he entered the legal profession, according to the opinion of a Philadelphia judge. His exceptional keenness and masterly analysis of crucial situations were in evidence on many occasions, and he was capable of making a convincing argument such as compelled respect and admiration even among those who took the opposite side. He was abundantly able to write forcibly, and in clear, clean-cut English, but very little issued from his pen that found its way into Church papers or magazines because of his aversion to seeing his writings in public print. He was a man of reserve and polish and dignity, and well qualified to act as the Church's representative in any capacity. In 1901, he was sent as delegate of the General Council to the General Conference of Lutherans held at Lund, Sweden. Besides the positions of trust and honor held by him, as already mentioned, he was for years a Trustee of the German Hospital, and a Director of the Mary J. Drexel Home and Motherhouse of Deaconesses, in Philadelphia.

Dr. Laird's gifts as preacher and pastor, and as moulder of the congregational life were of a high order. He prepared his sermons with care and delivered them with force. In all the parishes he served, he won the respect and confidence of his people to an unusual degree. He was a man of large vision and broad sympathies, and these qualities were reflected in the people whom he served. His pastorate of thirty-five years in St. Mark's, Philadelphia, left an indelible impress on the congregation which has distinguished itself as one of the few whose range of interests is as wide as the Lutheran Church.

Dr. Laird was born in Newcastle County, Delaware, February 7, 1835; in early life his parents moved to Philadelphia, where he was educated; he graduated from the High School in 1852 and from the University of

Pennsylvania in 1855; he was prepared for the ministry by leading local pastors and was ordained in 1861, when he took charge of St. Luke's, Philadelphia, which he served three years; in 1864, he was called to Trinity Church, Lancaster, Pa., and three years later to the First Church, Pittsburgh, which he served twelve years; in 1879, he was called to St. Mark's, Philadelphia, where he closed his long and distinguished pastoral career, departing this life December 16, 1913. He was married on April 27, 1865, to Miss Mary A. Baston, who proved to be a helpmeet entirely worthy of the distinguished name she afterwards bore. This volume of sermons is her tribute of love to the memory of one whose labors and responsibilities she so cheerfully, devotedly and intelligently shared.

GEORGE W. SANDT.

# 1. The Love of God

“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” – John 3:16.

THERE ARE TEXTS in the Bible which include in themselves the very sum and marrow of the Gospel, which set forth in the space of a line or two the great fact and means of salvation, which concentrate, as it were, into a focus the leading truths which Christ came to make known.

Such a text we have before us today. Here if anywhere is given to us a concise view of what God has done for sinners. And may the Spirit of Him who uttered these words aid us in our consideration of them.

The theme of the text is the Love of God. And the exalted character of the theme you will perceive when you consider the Being who exercises this love. “God so loved the world.” It is not some angelic being that is here spoken of. It is not merely some exalted royal personage occupying a high throne among the principalities and powers. It is not one of the sons of light dwelling among cherubic natures. *But it is God himself.* The great – the adorable – the infinite God – the Creator of the worlds – the former of our bodies – the framer of our Spirits. It is the mysterious, incomprehensible Deity, who dwelleth in a light unto which no man can approach – who alone inhabiteth eternity, whom no man hath seen or can see, who is and who was and who ever shall be. It is God revealed to us as a Triune Being – three persons in one God: Father, Son and Holy Ghost – whom our highest conceptions cannot attain unto, whom our broadest thoughts cannot comprehend, whose fullness the profoundest minds cannot understand.

“It is the Father in the absoluteness of His unchanging nature and universal presence, the Spirit in all the completeness of His manifold energies and diversified operations,” and the Son in the plenitude of His

power and in the high administrations of His kingly dignity, each and all spoken of as One moving in love to the world. And when we contemplate this Deity as infinite and perfect, who can sound the depths or grasp the length and breadth, or comprehend the height of the love he feels. This adorable Being *loved* the world. Take in the force of that word loved. It was not a mere emotion. It was not a simple affection. It was not pity. It was not sympathy. It was not compassion. It was not tender regard. It was each one of these and more than these. It was all these combined and made intense. It was something superadded to them all. It was love. *Free, pure, unbounded, outgushing love*. It was one of God's infinite perfections directed in all its intensity towards us. It was not transitory. It was not a sudden outburst of feeling, subsiding after a moment's existence. But it was like God himself. Running back to eternity, a warm, glowing affection, ever abiding, ever cherished, ever the same. It throbbed with every pulsation of the great heart of God. It shone in every act. It accompanied every thought. And it is not only a past love; but also a present love, as true now as in days gone by; as active and efficient now as when Christ came into our world. Not only may we say that "God so loved the world," but also, God so loves the world. We are apt to judge God by ourselves, and to imagine that because we change, He must. We are apt to think because our love may be more intense at some times than at others, or may be transferred to other objects or withdrawn altogether from those on which it was fixed, that so it is with Him. But we wrong the Deity. We think of Him as encompassed with human frailty. We forget that there is no change in Him. His love is like the sun, which ever sheds forth its beams the same, the warmth or the cold which we feel being caused not by any irregularity in his shining, but by our being turned towards or away from him. So the different sense of God's love which we may have, results not from any change in Him, but in ourselves, according as our hearts are turned towards Him or away from Him. But from Him there proceeds the ceaseless, boundless, warm rays of love. Oh! the love of God! Who can measure it? Who can grasp it? It is like a shoreless, bottomless sea, encompassing us on every side.

Our conception of it is heightened, too, when we are reminded by the text that this love is exercised towards the world. "God so loved the world," Here we see its freeness, for there is nothing in the world to claim God's love, nothing to call it forth. Had it been some race of high intelligences that was employed in doing God's will, in showing forth His glory, in

chanting His praises, in moving in harmony with His plans and purposes, we would not wonder. If there were any beauty or attractiveness here, anything upon which the mind of the Deity could dwell with complacency and delight, the display of his love would not be so great. If He could behold here the creatures of His own hand, looking up to Him as their Father and upon themselves as His children and returning His love with the glowing affection of their own hearts, we would say that the bestowment of it were perfectly natural and a thing to be expected. If the inhabitants of the earth honored God, then it would not be so strange a thing that He should honor them. But is such the case? Have the earth and its inhabitants continued as they came from the hands of their Maker? What was it that God beheld in looking forth from His throne in the heavens? Tell me, was there anything attractive to God here? Anything which could claim His affectionate regard? Anything to merit His tender mercy? Anything to move one pulsation of his heart in compassion? Was there not rather everything to repel? Was there not such consummation of wickedness as to call down the judgments of heaven? Could not God by one exercise of His Almightyness have blotted out this foul spot from His universe, with as much ease as with His word He spake it into being? But behold! and wonder! “God loved the world,” Aye, even this world; corrupt, wicked as it was to Him who was perfect purity, yet not withstanding all, He loved it. Not that He loved its sinfulness. Not that wickedness had become in the least less abominable to Him. Not that the sentence of condemnation upon guilt was revoked, or the judgments of that condemnation at all abated. No! For then must God Himself have changed, in which case He would have ceased to be God. There was the same inflexible justice; the same settled purpose to punish all iniquity; the same determination to cast opposers of His government and laws and grace into the lake that ever burneth. His hatred of transgression had by no means either altered or ceased. But God loved the sinner while He condemned the sin.

And see the *manifestation* of that love.

“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” This was the act which resulted from the movings of His love – the gift of His Son – His only begotten Son. This was the exertion of His heart, the putting forth of the power of omnipotence urged and actuated by love. Here see the intensity and fullness of that divine passion which took possession of the

breast of the High and Holy One, and led Him to make that sacrifice at which all heaven wondered, the giving up of His only Son to save rebellious man. Jesus Christ was the gift of God. There was nothing in those who are redeemed which could merit or claim it. Nothing like compulsion could move the Deity.

“Herein,” says John, “is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

And to what did He give Him? To rule and reign in super royal dignity, and by His administrations of grace and truth to set right what had become so disjointed and wrong? To dwell among men and receive their loud acclamations, and rapturous songs of praise? To be honored and loved and adored by those over whom He ruled? To abide among mortals simply and raise them by His power to dignity and honor? This of itself would have been a wonderful condescension, and a wonderful manifestation of love. But no. Something more than this was required. The love of the Divine Being was put to a severer test. Jesus Christ must descend to a deeper humiliation than this to save our lost race. And even when God saw that the blood of His Son was required. He held Him not back. He gave Him to the humiliation of the manger cradle; to lowliness of life among men; to poverty and want; to persecutions and revilings; to weary days and sleepless nights; to chastisement and stripes; to anguish and cruel mockings; to sorrow and bloody sweat. He gave His back to pitiless scourgings. His brow to be pierced by the crown of thorns, and His hands and feet by the nails driven in by relentless hands, his side by the spear; and his body to be mangled and torn, and raised up upon the cross, there to give up His spirit amidst the apparent victory of His enemies and the desertion of His Father. Draw near, careless mortal, and survey that scene and see if thy heart cannot be moved by such an exhibition of thy Father’s love to thee. See the spotless Lamb of God laid upon the altar of Calvary. See how that benign countenance which looked with so much tenderness upon fallen humanity, is marked with the signs of anguish. Behold the meek and gentle Saviour bowed under the mighty sorrow which weighs upon His heart. See the death damp upon His brow; hear the despairing cry which issues from His lips. Look at the sharp strokes which pierce in even to His very soul. Mark how the Son of God yields up Himself to death. See Him consuming in the fierce fires of Divine wrath visited upon Him for thy sake. Is there not enough in

that scene to move thee to tears and to melt thy hard heart into ingenuous sorrow? And what is it that has led God to give up His only begotten Son to death! His love to thee! “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.”

But further still, the simple and single condition upon which salvation is vouchsafed is an additional evidence of the love of God. Simple belief is the only condition enjoined. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Nothing is required which is beyond the ability of man to do; nothing out of his reach. No great achievement above the power of mortals. For were this the case, all the acts of God and all the bestowments of His grace and all His promises, and all the hopes of redemption He arouses, would be nothing but solemn mockeries; they would tantalize, not satisfy. But His bestowments are so rich and free, His provisions of grace so ample, and His work so complete that it only remains for the poor lost soul to acquiesce in the arrangements God has made; to receive His offers of mercy, to accept the conditions He lays down, and to comply with His terms, to rest in His redeeming work, and to look out of himself to the mighty arm that is stretched forth to lift him up, and he is safe. All he has to do is simply believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing else is demanded than that he should look and live. Having his eyes turned towards the cross of Calvary, and viewing the great sacrifice offered there, let him but throw himself in the arms of his Saviour, and God will accept him and receive him for Christ’s sake. Only let him believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, believe that his sins were atoned for upon the cross, believe that Christ suffered in his stead, believe the record God has given concerning His Son, and he shall not perish but have everlasting life. Could any provision be more gracious? Could redemption be freer? Could less than this be required? Could any terms be easier? And how comes it that all is made to fit so well to our necessities? That so much is given where so little is demanded? And that the very act which brings with it all the fullness of complete redemption, is one of the commonest acts of life – faith – belief of a thing on the testimony of another. It is God’s love which led Him to arrange it so. It was because of the yearnings of His heart to us, that He made such a blessed provision of His mercy.



Notice also the boundless character of this love. "Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish." It takes in all our race. The great multitudes of earth have all been comprehended in the love of God. Each one for himself and all together have been the objects of this warm affection. There is no exclusion on account of tribe or kindred – condition or color – age or attainments. We are apt to think that we are lost amid the vast multitudes that have peopled our earth. We are apt to think that the Divine Being does not regard us especially, since there are so many upon whom His love is exercised. But no one can look upon this word whosoever and deem himself excluded. When the saints shall assemble in the great temple in the heavens, it shall be found that there are some there out of every nation upon earth, that all peoples, tongues and languages have contributed to swell that throng. The shepherd from Bethlehem's plains shall be there. The virtuous prisoner lifted from Pharaoh's dungeon shall be there. There shall be found the fishermen of Galilee and the officer of Ethiopia, the god-fearing captives of Babylon, and the jailer of Philippi, the loved disciple, and the noble army of martyrs, and whosoever has believed in the Son of God, and gone down to the grave faithfully maintaining his profession. God is no respecter of persons. He looketh not upon the outward man. He regards neither beauty, nor wealth, nor position, nor learning. The soul of each one is dear to Him whatever his circumstances, whatever his surroundings. None so lowly or obscure that His eye does not behold him and love him. None so base and depraved that God does not extend to him His offers of mercy.

"Whosoever will, let him come and take of the waters of life freely. \_

And our theme is not exhausted yet. The text speaks of one more act of God which fills out the measure of His love. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life," Life is bestowed upon the believer in Jesus and that everlasting life. It were a bright evidence of love to save rebels and sinners from eternal death; but in addition to that, behold the love of God extends to them eternal life. And how shall we speak of this life. "Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for those who love Him." Jesus said,

“In my Father’s house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also.” These shall be the dwelling place of the saints. And they shall be with Jesus and see Him as He is. This is enough to make heaven. They shall be safe in the everlasting keeping of Him who died for them. They shall put their hand in His and He shall lead them. They shall sit down with Him upon His throne. They shall share His glory and rejoice in His presence, and their hearts shall glow with His praise. All pain and sorrow and sighing shall be far beneath them, and they shall live on in the rapture and the glory of the redeemed in the heavenly city. Everlasting life is conferred upon them, and their whole time shall be taken up with the blissful employments of the glorified saints.

    "Those dwellers there are not like these of earth.    No mortal stain they bear;  
    And yet they seem of kindred blood and birth,—  
        Whence and how came they there?  
    Earth was their native soil; from sin and shame  
        Through tribulation they to glory came;  
    Bond-slaves, delivered from sin’s crushing load,  
        Brands plucked from burning by the hand of God,  
        Those robes of theirs are not for these below;  
        No angel’s half so bright!  
    Whence came that beauty, whence that living glow?  
        Whence came that radiant white?  
    Washed in the blood of the atoning Lamb,  
        Fair as the light those robes of theirs became;  
    And now all tears wiped off from every eye.  
        They wander where the freshest pastures lie  
    Through all the nightless day of that unfading sky."

Is there not comfort and consolation for thee, O son of man, in these words and in the thoughts here presented? Does it bring no joy to thy heart to know that thy Father loves thee? Will it not be thy solace in thy weary pilgrimage? Canst thou not feel it stirring up thy soul to renewed activities on the side of goodness and truth, arousing thee to a brighter life, and confirming thee in a fuller assurance of hope? Christian, is not this theme

the delight of thy life? Dost thou not rejoice in it? Does it not encompass thee on every side? Dark indeed would thy days be were it not for this love. Drink in the joy of the theme! Dwell upon the thought that God loves thee, and as thou dost cherish it; let thy warm affections go out towards Him who loved thee even unto death.

And thou, desponding brother laden with sin, there is joy for thee in these words.

Let thine eyes revert to the cross of Calvary, see there the evidence of that love. Canst thou not feel the holy influences going out from that cross, flowing down to thee? The words our Saviour spoke, He speaks to thee. The love the Father bore, He bears to thee. Lift up thy drooping head and see the smiling face of thy God beaming upon thee. Let not thy heart be sorrowing. Be not burdened with thy sins. Hope on though troubles now assail. And throughout life bind to thy heart the thought that God loves thee.

"O love of God, how deep and great!  
Far deeper than man's deepest hate;  
Self fed, self kindled like the light.  
Changeless, eternal, infinite.

O wide embracing, wondrous love,  
We read thee in the sky above,  
We read thee in the earth below,  
In seas that swell and streams that flow.

We read thee best in Him who came.  
To bear for us the cross of shame.  
Sent by the Father from on High,  
Our life to live, our death to die.

O love of God, our shield and stay,  
Through all the perils of our way:  
Eternal love in thee we rest,  
Forever safe, forever blest! "

## 2. The Attraction at Bethlehem

“Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing” which is come to pass. – Luke 2:15.

IT FREQUENTLY HAPPENS that places comparatively insignificant in themselves, are dignified by the events which transpire at them. “What cannot ennoble greatness, greatness can ennoble.” Towns and villages that would forever have remained in obscurity, or been known only to few, have had fame thrust upon them, and been honored by the historian and the poet, by some scene or transaction that happened there.

“The late emperor of France, while besieging Mantua in Italy, exempted a small neighboring village from all exactions, in honor of Virgil, whose birthplace it was supposed to be.” Who has not heard of Avon, rendered famous by one of England’s greatest poets? How many places have claimed the honor of being the birthplace of Homer? With what reverence is our own Mount Vernon regarded, because there repose the remains of the Father of his Country. What interest clusters around the places noted in Scripture history, and especially those ignored by the presence of our Lord. Nazareth was held in low esteem and even despised, but it is now highly regarded and even ennobled, since our Saviour passed his youth and earlier years there. “Capernaum was an insignificant fishing town, but because He frequently resided and preached in it, it was exalted unto heaven.” And so “Bethlehem was not remarkable for its buildings or commerce, or the number of its inhabitants, or fame of any kind. It was ‘little among the thousands of Judah.’ But it was immortalized by an event that fixed upon it the eye of inspiration, that drew towards it in due time a multitude of the heavenly host, and has rendered it dear and memorable to the church forever: it is the birthplace of the Messiah.” “Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah,” says the prophet,

“...though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me, that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting.”

In this city of David was born a Saviour which is Christ the Lord. And it was the announcement of these glad tidings by the angel to the shepherds watching their flocks by night upon the plains of Palestine, and the strange events that accompanied it, that led them to say:

“Let us now go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass.”

Come with me then and let us follow in the footsteps of the shepherds, and go even to Bethlehem and contemplate a scene which will induce us to exclaim, as Moses did on a very marvelous but very inferior occasion, “Ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing, or hath been heard like it?” And whither are we conducted? To some magnificent palace? To a scene of grandeur and dignity? The announcement of the angel, the shouting of the heavenly choirs, the appearance of that bright star have raised high our anticipations, and led us to expect something grand and noble. But what do we behold? A babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Its surroundings are lowly and mean. It finds shelter in a stable. Its parents are not numbered among the dignitaries of the land. There is no pomp or display in their circumstances or demeanor. To the outward eye, there is nothing of greatness in that scene. And yet upon that unconscious babe reposing in the manger, the whole universe looks with wonder and with awe. What is it that commands the absorbing attention of the heavenly hosts? What is there in this event which draws so much interest upon it from all God’s intelligent creatures! Why do the angelic orders bend over and gaze upon it with so much wonder and delight? Let us inquire and see what there is in this thing which is come to pass to cause so much commotion in heaven and on earth.

## **1. The Union of the Human And Divine**

First we see here a union of the divine and human natures. In that little babe we behold “God manifest in the flesh.” The Former of the worlds comes down to live for awhile upon this globe. The Ruler of the Universe abases Himself to move among His subjects. The Inhabitant of the Skies takes up His abode among men. He who occupied a throne of glory, now dwells upon His footstool. He who was with the Father from all eternity, and was in all respects equal with God, appears as a servant. Divinity clothes itself in the garb of humanity. God allies Himself with man, takes upon Himself the form of a man, and manifests Himself in the flesh. In Jesus Christ, God and man were so united as to form one person. Divine and human properties are alike ascribed to Him. He “being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” The names of God are ascribed to Him. Isaiah says, “His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” Jeremiah calls him, “The Lord our righteousness.” Thomas on beholding Him after His resurrection from the dead, exclaims, “My lord and my God.” Paul declares Him to be “God over all blessed forever.” John speaks of Him as the “King of kings and Lord of Lords.” And yet also the names and titles of a man are given to Him. He is spoken of as the Promised Seed. He is called the Son of Man – the Son of David – the son of a Virgin – the second Adam – and by two of His Evangelists His genealogy is traced out, and the names of His ancestors are given by one as far back as David, and by the other back even to Adam.

He wrought works which none but God could do, and at the same time performed actions and deeds that are only becoming a man. He created the world and all things visible and invisible. The apostle John says, “All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made.”

He also sustains and preserves all things, for Paul tells us, “By Him all things consist.”

He quickeneth the dead, for the Scriptures declare that He “quickeneth whom He will.”

He is the author of eternal life, as He Himself says of those who follow Him, “I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish.”

He is the Judge of the world, for we are expressly told that “the Father judge th no man; but hath committed all judgment unto the Son,”

He performs and possesses all things equally with God. And yet, though He is the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of His person, still as a man He came into the world in the form of a babe.

Though as God in Him was the infinite perfection of the Deity, yet as clothed with humanity we are informed that He grew and “increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.”

Though as God He was incapable of committing sin, and could not be tempted, yet as man He suffered those bitter temptations of the devil in the wilderness, still, however, without sin.

Though as God He stood in need of nothing, yet as man He endured hunger and thirst.

Though as God He ruled all things by a word and knew no want of energy, at the sound of whose voice even the winds and the waves were calmed to peace, yet as man He became wearied and fatigued.

Though as God He needed no rest, and His watchful eye was ever open to behold all the events transpiring in the universe, yet as man He slumbered and slept.

Though as God He was raised above all grief and affliction, yet as man He endured pains and sorrows and wept bitter tears.

Though as God He would laugh in derision at all the efforts of His foes against Him, yet when manifested in the flesh He was buffeted and scourged by His cruel enemies.

Though as God He could call even the putrid dead from their graves, yet upon the cross He gave up the ghost, and His lifeless body was buried in the tomb.

“Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

“In all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren,” according to the flesh. We find then many things ascribed to Him which

cannot pertain to Him as God; and many others ascribed to Him which cannot pertain to Him as man; the only mode of explaining the difficulty is that in His person the divine and human were united – God and man were conjoined. And in the circumstances of His birth at Bethlehem we have the same combination of the lowliness of humanity with the glory of the Deity. What circumstances of abasement and humility surround Him at the time of His birth. It is not attended with any earthly pageantry or glory. His mother is an obscure virgin, so little thought of and possessing so little of this world's goods, that no room can be found for her in the inn. The shelter afforded Him on coming into the world was no better than that given to the beasts of the stall. The cradle that held the sleeping babe was a manger. No goodly apparel wrapped His little form; no soft pillow supported His young head. All His surroundings were of the meanest order. By these evidences of His abasement was He surrounded. And yet where can we find such manifestations of Glory as in the birth of Jesus. Prophets foretold it. The time and place of it were specified long before. Heavenly visitants announced it and directed His parents what to call Him. At His birth the very heavens are lit up with glory, and the heavenly choirs are heard chanting their hymns of praise, singing, "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will to men." The constellations of the firmament have a new star added to their number, which shines with brilliant luster on account of the wondrous event which has happened. Magi from the east, guided by its light, come to pay their homage and make their offerings to the new born king. All these circumstances attest the wondrous nature of the great thing that came to pass. Heaven shows its interest in the babe, and angels come to sing at the birth of Him whom they adored in heaven. These honors are heaped upon the infant Jesus, the Lord from heaven, in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

That Christ was divine as well as human is shown also from the fact that He existed before He was born into this world. At His birth, as the apostle says, He was only manifested in the flesh. He did not then only begin to live. This was not the commencement of His existence. It was at this time that He took upon Himself our nature in addition to or in conjunction with the Divine nature, which He had before. When He was born into this world He did not then just come into being. Before that He had lived. From all eternity He had existed. The very expressions He Himself used show this. He said, "Before Abraham was I am," and in one of His prayers in



addressing the Father He said, “And now, O Father, glorify thou Me, with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” The apostle uses this language concerning Him, “He came unto His own and His own received Him not.” Before He could come He must have had a previous existence; there must have been a condition and a state from which He proceeded, that condition was the divine, and that state the heavenly. And not only did He exist before His incarnation, before His coming in the flesh; but he existed on an equality with the Father and from all eternity. “In the beginning was the word and the word was with God, and the word was God.” The shepherds then, as they gazed upon that babe in the manger at Bethlehem, beheld the God-man Christ Jesus, the Only-begotten of the Father, now come down to dwell among men.

## **2. Fulfillment of Prophecy**

In the second place we see in this thing which is come to pass, a fulfillment of prophecy – we behold a striking display of divine truth – a verification of the inspired word. The coming of the Messiah was called “the truth of God.” The advent of Christ into the world was the chief promise ever given to man. It was the hope of the world – the event which was looked for with joy, and hailed with gladness and rejoicing. It was the earliest assurance made to man. Scarcely had our first parents sinned, and become subject to all the woe that sin entails, before a deliverer was promised them. And what a length of time the promise seemed to hang in suspense. A year rolled by and yet He came not. A hundred years passed away and yet He had not appeared. A thousand slowly went by, and Adam died without seeing the fruition of his hopes. Another thousand glided away, and the patriarchs looked with anxious eyes for Him, but he came not. And still another thousand years came and went. And during all that time the fulfillment of that promise lingered. It was foretold that He should descend from a particular nation – the nation of the Jews. Hear the words of the prophet:

“Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said; he hath said which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance but having his eyes open; I shall see

Him but not now; I shall behold Him but not nigh; there shall come a star out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; out of Jacob shall come He that shall have dominion.”

The particular family also from which He should arise was named – the family of David – as saith the prophet Jeremiah, “Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise up unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth, in His days Judah shall be saved and Israel shall dwell safely,” Even the place of his birth was mentioned by Micah, “But thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting.” The very circumstances attending his advent were minutely foretold, the murder of the children in Bethlehem in these words, “A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children because they were not.” His forerunner, John the Baptist, is thus noticed by the prophet Isaiah:

“The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God,”

And all these were uttered hundreds of years before they came to pass, but were all exactly and accurately fulfilled. “On how many things does the veracity of God depend, the failure of anyone of which would prove Him false.” How completely are all the contingencies of life under His control, to bring about all His purposes and designs. Nothing escapes His notice. There is nothing but what He overrules and directs for the accomplishment of His own ends. All His power is pledged for the performances of His promises. Heaven and earth shall pass away sooner than one jot or tittle of His word shall fail. The most minute events all bear their part in the great economy of God, and all tend to the working out of His plans. Upon how many little, apparently accidental circumstances did the birth of Christ in Bethlehem depend. For Joseph and Mary were residing in Nazareth. And had not Judea been under the Roman dominion; and had not Caesar Augustus wished to know the number and wealth of his subjects, so that he ordered an enrollment of all the people in his dominions; and had not the

parents of our Lord been thus compelled to go up to the city of David," He would have been born elsewhere, and the word of God would have been of none effect. And all these occurrences appear casual; and they were so to the persons themselves; but not to God; He knows all His works from the beginning. All the prophecies of the God of truth have been verified to the very letter so far as they have yet come to pass. We have here the strongest assurance that those still to be fulfilled will just as surely meet their accomplishment. Everything that had been foretold concerning the birth of Christ was accurately fulfilled. Nothing was wanting. Even the little minutiae were all accomplished. Occurrences which seem to us trivial all contributed to verify the truth of God's word. Men waited long for the promised Messiah, but they waited not in vain. Though He tarried long, He came at last, came in the fullness of time, according to the previously announced purpose of God. As we take another view of the manger at Bethlehem, we have another witness to God's truth. Let our confidence in Him never be shaken.

### **3. Provision For Our Salvation**

Again in this great thing which is come to pass, we see provision made for our salvation. For the glad tidings of great joy which the heavenly messenger brought to the shepherds were "Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." The joyous proclamation he makes and sounds aloud that all may hear, is, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." The angel that foretold his birth directed that His name should be called Jesus, because He should save His people from their sins. He Himself declared that He came to seek and to save that which was lost. It was this that the prophet referred to when he said,

"Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

He is the bright sun of righteousness whose rays are the light and healing of the earth, and the joy of eternity. He is the “Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” “He is the fountain opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and uncleanness.” He is the “Branch of the Lord, beautiful and glorious,” whose name is “the Lord our righteousness.” He is the “Rock of Ages,” on which frail man finds his salvation, and in whose cool shade this world’s weary ones are blessed. He is that Root of David which has penetrated through the fissures of opposing rock and forced its way to the fountain and waters of life. He is the ‘Rose of Sharon’ and the ‘Lily of the Valley,’ which God has planted in this bleak world to gladden the eye and revive the heart of drooping man, and be a soothing balm to His many, many wounded. He is the meek dove that has left the pure air and blissful groves of heaven to be torn and immolated for the purifying and cleansing away of guilt. Behold here then the Saviour that has made His soul an offering for thy sins. For this He left His bright abodes on high. For this, though rich. He became poor. For this He laid aside His dignity and honor and glory and descended even to our lowly world, and appears in the form of flesh. He came to save sinners; to die that we might live; in His love and pity to redeem us. The incarnation of Christ was the first step made in the working out of the plan of salvation. That plan, it is true, had been formed long before. Various events had happened which looked to its development. But the first grand act of the Deity in actually making provision for our salvation was sending His Son to our earth to assume our nature. The manifestation of Christ in the flesh was an earnest of what God purposed to do for our redemption. As those shepherds gazed upon the Infant in His manger cradle, how their hearts must have thrilled within them when they called to mind all the grand and glowing promises of deliverance and blessings which were to be fulfilled in the Redeemer. As they looked upon Him they were assured that God really meant what He had said, and that here was the beginning of the great work which was yet to be wrought out. The Saviour of the world had come. The great Redeemer was now born, who had come to reconcile a rebellious world to their offended Sovereign. Through Him the sons of Adam could come back to their allegiance to their rightful Lord. Through Him heaven and earth could once more hold loving communion with each other. From henceforth peace from God towards men was assured. Through Him pardoning mercy was vouchsafed to guilty man. Now at length the great

sacrifice was being made ready, through whose offering myriads of souls should be redeemed from the power of sin and the thralldom of Satan, and made heirs of everlasting life. The victim to be offered up on God's great altar had now been provided. Through His blood-shedding salvation was freely and fully offered to all who would come and accept. It is in this, His great work – a work which God alone could undertake – that it is our privilege to contemplate Him. It is in this capacity that the apostles love to speak of Him; and to manifest Him to a weary and sin-stricken world as their only hope and salvation. Look then, thou frail child of clay, upon this great thing that has come to pass, and as you look, accept and live. Draw near to that rude manger at Bethlehem, thou desponding and guilty one, and behold thy Saviour and Redeemer, the Shepherd and Bishop of thy soul.

But “great as this thing is which has come to pass, there are many who will refuse to take a step to see it. Even at the very festival which is the commemoration of it, they will be found anywhere rather than at Bethlehem. They will be attracted to anything rather than to that sight which the shepherds left their flocks and made haste to see; which the Eastern Magi came such a distance to behold, and which drew all heaven down to earth. Some, while they observe the day by a freedom from labor, not only neglect, but insult the subject of it, and by intemperance and riot revive the works of the Devil, which the Son of God was manifested to destroy.” How many will spend this day in sensual and groveling pursuits, and instead of improving it as a time to feed their soul, will only use it in ministering to their appetites. How many will give themselves up to the joyous hilarity of the season and bestow not one thought upon the great event it is meant to commemorate. There should be joy and rejoicing, but with a reference to those glad tidings of great joy which have been proclaimed to men. It is well to put aside our sorrows and our cares, to deck our houses with garlands of green, and to spread happiness all around; but let our hearts recur to Him who alone can effectually remove all sorrow, and who is the only true source of happiness. It is well to give gifts, to renew friendships, and to bind tighter the cords which hold us together in our social life. But while all this is done, forget not the great gift which God has bestowed upon men.

Let us celebrate this glad day by joining our voices with those of the heavenly choirs above in giving “Glory to God in the Highest,” and

proclaiming “peace on earth, goodwill to men.” Let your thoughts dwell upon that wondrous event – the Son of God incarnate. Renew your solemn vows of devotion and consecration to Him. Let your love be firmly fixed upon that Saviour whose love moved Him to descend to earth for you.

Give a hearty welcome to this Glorious Prince of Peace. Welcome Him to the earth, and at the same time open your hearts for His reception. Treat Him not as did the ungodly race dwelling upon the earth at the time of His Advent. Let Him not be cast out from your homes as too mean and poor to be allowed to dwell there. Give Him the freest and heartiest welcome your natures are capable of. Remember that this lowly Babe upon which you gaze as it lies in its manger cradle, is at the same time the Mighty God. He will come again to take vengeance upon them that know not God, and that obey not His Gospel, and to bless His own people. He has come to restore you to your proper dignity; to reconcile you to your God. “No longer continue in arms, rejecting His authority, trampling upon His laws, and refusing the offers of His grace; otherwise war, eternal war, will continue between you, and the Lord God Omnipotent.” But only let the haughtiest sinner submit to His government this day, and all the blessings he came to purchase shall be bestowed upon him. Let all enmity be laid aside, all opposition fade away, and as you this day call to remembrance that strange scene upon which the shepherds gazed at Bethlehem, let your hearts rejoice, and your lips exclaim, “Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord: we have waited for Him: we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”

### 3. Jesus A Man Among Men

Behold the man! – John 19:5.

THE MOST REMARKABLE BIOGRAPHY in the world is that of Jesus Christ. There is nothing like it in all earth's records. The men who wrote it performed a work which can never be surpassed in dignity and honor. The princes of the angels would have been exulted, and felt themselves doubly glorified, had they been summoned to write that life. It is as much superior to the lives of even extraordinary men as the stars of heaven are to the diamonds of earth. The selection of human language as the medium through which to publish it was a signal honor. Literature was ennobled and crowned at the hour of its appearance. The eye of Intellect was opened then to fairer visions than any she had ever seen before. Mind for the first time came in contact with the ideal of perfection in human life. Imagination looked on in wonder and felt the prize taken from its hands by the actual. Fancy owned herself conquered by positive fact. Poetry had never sung, art had never pictured such a life as this. Men read and wondered, read again and believed, read a third time and adored the unearthly original. Yet though unearthly, it was felt that there was genuine humanity softening the splendors, without staining the purity of His divine character. Hence while philosophy was compelled to own its master in One whose extraordinary wisdom seemed to embrace everything, and to be equally intimate with the grass of the field and the glories of heaven, with a fisherman's hut and the mansions of the universe, with the heart of a widow weeping over the corpse of her only child and with the eternal decrees of God respecting the destiny of worlds, the humblest of the children of men were attracted by His unequalled gentleness, and found in Him a mysterious Friend in whose ear they could whisper the tale of their sorrows and their struggles, confident of sympathy and counsel. The decrepit sufferer touched His clothes, the penitent young woman shed tears at His feet, and the peasant's child sprang

into His arms. The common people heard Him gladly. It was confessed that His word was with power. Men unused to the finer emotions of our nature declared that never man spake like Him. Villages, towns, cities were moved by His presence. Who is this? passed from lip to lip as He approached. The learned wondered whence His knowledge came, for He had not been taught in their schools: the officials disliked His remarks, for He waited not for authority from them: the formalists shrank from His presence, for He stripped off the cloak of their hypocrisy; the selfish were enraged by His preaching, for He founded all moral action on the love of God and man; the wicked defamed His character, for He kindled a fire in their consciences; the malignant called Him Beelzebub, for they hated a holiness which they could not appreciate, and denied the power of God in the Messiah whom they would not accept. His deeds were as surprising as the perfection of His character and the novelty of His doctrines. He found mankind the subjects of disease and death in a thousand forms, and like a sun endowed with the power of chasing pestilence from the earth. He moved among men, pouring the healing rays of health, happiness and life wherever He came. The loathsome leper crawled across His path, and perfect health was the boon of a word. The blind cried to Him, and immediately the splendid scenery of Palestine greeted their astonished vision. The deaf heard His mighty voice, and strange melody thrilled their hearts with joy. The paralytic looked on the Nazarene and hastened home to his friends, with his couch upon his shoulder. The master pleaded for his sick servant, the father and the mother for their dying children, and, though the sufferers were at a distance, the Healer spoke the word and they were restored. The company of mourners were stopped by a stranger, and the widow's only son started to life. The sisters wept bitter tears over a brother three days dead, and a voice called Lazarus from the grave. The frantic demoniacs rushed, in all directions, and "Come out," was the instant signal for reason to return. Demons deprecated the anger of Jesus, cowered in His presence, and prayed that He would not torment them before the time. Earth acknowledged its Lord, and the water yielded to Him a firm footing. The fig tree withered at His glance, and the five loaves were multiplied so as to satisfy the wants of thousands. The boiling lake and the raging hurricane obeyed the command, "Peace, be still," and the alarmed sailors were assured of perfect safety. The angels of heaven came down to minister to their master, and Moses and Elias met Him on the mount of transfiguration.



Considering His character, doctrines and miracles, we are astonished at the position which He chose in society. Though Son of David and heir to the throne. His chosen companions were the humblest of men. Though Son of Abraham and heir of the land of promise, He had not where to lay His head. Though Son of Man, the Second Adam, and therefore heir of the world. He was poor and despised, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Though Son of God and appointed heir of all things. He was often hungry, wearied and faint. He could work miracles for the benefit of others, but would not for Himself. He could dry the tears of others, but His own fell often. He could summon legions of angels from heaven, but alone He met the tempter and suffered him to try all his wiles. He could speak of the glory He had with the Father before the world was, but He was familiar with the cold mountain and the midnight air. A load of mysterious grief lay upon His heart, a burden which no one else could have borne. Passing from His position in society, look at what He experienced from men. Surely, we would be ready to exclaim, such disinterested benevolence, such invaluable instructions, such an exhibition of the most perfect human virtues, such an unprecedentedly beautiful character, such a combination of wisdom and meekness, of power and gentleness, of sublimity and lowliness, of moral grandeur and humility, of dignity and condescension, of justice and mercy, will be hailed with rapture as an honor to the human race, as an unequalled glory to the land of Israel, and as a conclusive proof that God has not forgotten mankind. Surely, bad as men are, they will open their hearts and homes to this benign Stranger. They will love Him; they will embrace Him; they will esteem it an honor to have Him notice them; they will submit to His guidance; they will look up to Him and adore Him. His very presence will make them ashamed of iniquity. If example can save, they will be saved. The treacherous will become upright; the cruel, gentle; the unclean, pure; the licentious, temperate; the profane, godly; the vicious, virtuous; the formal, devout; and the selfish, benevolent. Society will be regenerated from its fountain head to its farthest streams; grace will flourish in the church; justice in the courts, peace in the cities, and joy in the fruitful field. Jerusalem will become the glory of cities, and Palestine of nations. With such a guest among them as Jesus, the descendants of Abraham will be the model people of the world, and all nations will hear of their sublime preeminence. Angels will not think it condescension to visit such an

honored community, and even God Himself might say, "They will reverence My Son."

But was it so? Alas! a dark page in the history of Jesus must now be turned over. He came unto His own. His own received Him not." Some strange infatuation seemed to seize on men, leading them to reject and maltreat and persecute the Prince of Peace. He was taunted as the Nazarene, the friend of publicans and sinners, the plotter against Caesar, the breaker of the Sabbath, the enemy of Moses, the blasphemer of God, and the accomplice of Satan. His movements were watched by a malignant priesthood, and His steps were pursued by spies, for the purpose of entangling Him in His talk. He was homeless, footsore, weary, thirsty and faint. Over His cheeks tears of grief often coursed, and from Him escaped the cry, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death." Herod with his men of war set Him at nought and mocked Him, and Judas betrayed Him into the hands of His enemies for thirty pieces of silver. Men perjured their souls to swear away His life. An infuriated mob rent the air with cries of "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" and demanded the release of a murderer that the Son of Man might be delivered to their will. Peter, His own disciple, denied Him, and the rest of the apostles fled from Him. A crown of thorns was made to pierce His temples, and the scourge descended upon His back. Between two thieves He was lifted up upon the cross, and the tomb of Joseph received His body.

Sin had enacted many a foul tragedy since the club of the assassin struck down earth's second born; it had rolled many a city in flames, and deluged many a field with gore; it had kindled many a fire of fury, and offered many a shrieking victim to the demon gods; it had imbrued<sup>1</sup> its hands in the blood of the innocent and murdered many a prophet of the Lord, but it had not yet borne its full fruit nor reached the limits of its atrocious daring. One act yet and these limits will be reached. One act yet and it must recoil upon itself exhausted by its labor, and stupefied by its own ferocity. Muttering along the ages you hear it, gathering strength in its course, and growing reckless in the presence of the Omniscient, until after four thousand years of practice, it braces itself up to the execution of one desperate resolution, and fixing its glaring eyes upon the Prince of Life, it shouts, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him." And accordingly, by wicked hands. He was seized and condemned and crucified and slain and buried and sealed in His tomb.

Such was the reception which Jesus met with from the sons of men. Instead of hailing Him with joy and gladness as their Deliverer and Saviour; instead of embracing Him as the anointed of God, come for their salvation and redemption, they gathered around the judgment hall of Pilate, and when the Roman governor brought out Jesus and placed Him before them, saying, "Behold the man!" they rent the air with cries of Crucify Him! Crucify Him! and chose a murderer in His stead.

Friends and brethren, I present this Jesus before you this morning, and would say to each one of you, "Behold the man!" and would ask you "What will you do with Him?" Will you accept Him and embrace Him, or will you join that throng that stood around the judgment hall in Jerusalem and cry "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

Let me show you what kind of a reception you may be reasonably expected to give Him. In general we should give Him a reception agreeable to the character He sustains, and to the designs with which He was sent into our world. Jesus appears in our world under the character of a Saviour, a Deliverer. It may be expected that His appearing in our world under this character would immediately flash universal conviction upon mankind that they need a Saviour, that they are helpless in themselves and can obtain relief from no other quarter. It may be expected that they would give up all their self-righteous conceit of themselves and abandon all trust in their own righteousness and good works; for until they do this they never can receive Him in His proper character; that is, as their Saviour. It may be expected that they would welcome Christ as the great, the only Deliverer, and give themselves up entirely to Him, to be saved by Him, who alone is mighty to save. And it may be expected that every heart would be transported with admiration, joy and gratitude at His appearance: a contrary temper towards Him can proceed from nothing but ignorance of our sin and danger, and an ungrateful disaffection to Him.

Does Jesus appear among men as a great High Priest, making atonement for sin? Then it may justly be expected that we should place all our trust upon the virtue of His atonement, and that all hands should be eagerly stretched out to receive those pardons which He offers, in consequence of His propitiatory sacrifice. Does He appear to destroy the works of the devil and to save men from sin by making them holy? Then who would not expect that we would all fall in with His designs, all form a noble league

against sin, seek for the sanctification of our hearts, and earnestly apply to Him for the influences of divine grace to make us holy? Does Christ appear in the character of a mediatorial King, invested with all power in heaven and earth and demanding universal homage? Then it may reasonably be expected that we should all bow the knee in humble submission, all make His will the rule of our conduct, and labor after universal obedience. Does He appear both as the publisher and as the brightest demonstration of the Father's love? and has He shown His own love by the many labors of His life, and by the agonies and tortures of His cross? then may it not be expected that we should return Him love for love; an obedient love for his bleeding, dying love? Ought not the sight of a crucified Saviour, dying in agony and pain, to melt every heart, and draw the whole world to His arms? He Himself has this reasonable expectation. He says, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth" (that is, suspended on the cross) "will draw all men unto me." If such love will not attract men, what will? May it not be expected that the strong assurance that their offended Sovereign is reconcilable, and so much in earnest to pardon obnoxious rebels, would at length make them sensible of their ingratitude, melt their heart into ingenuous sorrow for their unnatural rebellion against so good a God and determine them to cheerful obedience in the future? Does Christ exhibit Himself as able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God through Him, and as willing as able, as gracious as He is powerful? Then may it not be reasonably expected that all the unbelieving fears and tremblings of desponding penitents should vanish forever? That all would fly to His arms with cheerful hope and humble confidence, and do Him the honor and themselves the kindness to believe themselves safe upon their compliance with His invitation? Does Christ appear in the character of a Great Prophet sent to publish His Father's will, to reveal the deep things of God, and to show the way in which guilty sinners may be reconciled to God? – a way which all the philosophers and sages of antiquity, after all their perplexing searches, could never discover! May it not then be reasonably expected that we should be all attention to His instructions that we should resign our understandings to Him as our Teacher, and readily believe what He has revealed, and particularly that we should cheerfully comply with the only method of salvation contained in the Gospel?

Does Christ assume the august character of the Judge of the quick and the dead, and must we all appear before the judgment seat of Christ? Then it

may be expected that we should all humbly revere and adore Him, fear to offend Him and prepare for our appearance before Him. This is a brief view of the reception we ought to give to the Son of God upon His appearance in our world. Unless we receive Him thus we can receive no benefit from Him, but must incur the aggravated guilt of rejecting Him. “But to as many as thus receive Him, to them He gives power to become the sons of God, even to as many as believe in His name.”

Do not imagine that none are concerned to give Him a proper reception, but those with whom He conversed in the days of His flesh. We, at the distance of nineteen hundred years, and six or seven thousand miles from the time and place of His appearance in human form, are as much concerned with Him as they were. He is an ever-present Saviour, and He left His Gospel on earth in His stead, when He ascended up on high. It is with the motion of the mind and not of the body that sinners must come to Him; and in this sense we may come to Him as truly as those who conversed with Him. He demands the reverence, love and trust of mankind now as well as 1900 years ago; and we need His righteousness. His influence, and His salvation as well as the people of Judea among whom He appeared in person. Nay, as His glory has now pierced through the cloud that obscured it in the days of His flesh, and as He is exalted in honor and dignity, it may be expected with still more reason that we should reverence Him and submit to Him in His high character. He is not now the object of our bodily senses, we cannot see and handle Him; but He is now an object for the acts of the mind. Spiritual and intellectual things must be the proper objects for all rational creatures. Therefore, though Jesus be not now within reach of our senses, yet reason and faith may reach and perceive His glories: and it is expected that we should admire, love, trust and serve Him.

And is there not infinite reason that infinite beauty and excellence should be esteemed and loved; that supreme authority should be obeyed and the highest character revered? Is it not reasonable that the most amazing display of love and mercy should meet with the most affectionate returns of gratitude from the person obliged? Shall the Creator die for His creatures, the Sovereign for His rebellious subjects; the great Lawgiver transfer the penalty of His own law upon Himself, in order to remove it from obnoxious criminals? Shall He die in extremities of torture and write His love in characters of blood? Shall He do this, and is it not reasonable that His

creatures, that His rebellious subjects should be transported with wonder, joy and gratitude; and that such miracles of love should engross their thoughts, their affections and their conversation? If we form our expectations from what we find in fact among mankind in other cases, surely we may expect the Son of God would meet with such a reception in our world: the thousandth part of this kindness would excite gratitude between man and man, and he would be counted a monster who would not be moved by it. And shall kindness from creature to creature excite love and gratitude, and shall the infinite mercy of God towards rebellious creatures fail to excite like emotions? Is this the only species of kindness that must pass unnoticed? Is Jesus the only Benefactor that must be forgotten! Is it not reasonable and would not anyone expect that the perishing would willingly accept of a Saviour! that the guilty would stretch out an eager hand to receive a pardon that the diseased would apply to the physician? that inexcusable offenders should repent of their causeless offenses against the best of Beings? and that needy, dependent creatures should embrace the offer of happiness? Is it not natural to suppose this? No man can deny the reasonableness of this expectation without asserting that the highest excellency should be despised, the highest authority rejected, the richest goodness contemned; that rebellion and ingratitude are virtues, and self-destruction a duty. Your judgment and conscience declare that if it is reasonable for a child to reverence a tender and affectionate parent; if it is right that you should love your own life, or your own happiness, then certainly it is right that you should give such a reception as we have set forth, to the blessed Jesus. Happy for us, happy for the world, if we could as easily prove that the expectation is as much founded upon actual facts as upon reason. But here the evidence turns against us. In such a wicked, disordered world as this, it would be a very deceitful method of reasoning to infer that things are, because they should be.

How different in reality is the reception the Son of God generally meets with in the world, from what it ought to be.

Many have lived all their days under His Gospel, and have professed His religion, yet have never received Him as their Saviour nor realized that they must perish forever, unless Jesus Christ out of pure mercy shall undertake to save them.

If men heartily received the Saviour, would they not love Him? But where is the evidence of that love; where are its inseparable fruits and effects? Where are their eager desires and pantings after Him? Where is their delight to converse with Him in His ordinances! Where their anxiety, their zeal, their earnest endeavors to secure His favor? Where is their conscientious observance of His commandments? For He has made this the test of their love, "Then are ye my friends," says He, "If ye do whatsoever I command you"? Does not the evidence from this inquiry affect you, my hearers? Are you not convinced in your consciences, that if these are the inseparable fruits of love, many are nearly if not quite destitute of it?

Inquire farther. Have you learned to entrust your souls in His hands, to be saved by Him entirely, in His own way? Or do you depend, in part at least, upon your own imaginary goodness? Does it appear strange to you to be told that after all your good works, God will deal with you entirely as with guilty sinners, and have no regard at all to your supposed merit in the distribution of His mercy, but entirely to the righteousness of Jesus Christ? For this purpose the Son of God came into the world, and those who do not entrust themselves to Him, do not give Him a proper reception. In rejecting Him you reject the salvation which He so freely offers to you. You cast aside your own redemption, and turn madly away from the only method provided for your eternal safety.

Consider, too, that in turning away from Him you aggravate your guilt; for you not only sin against God by breaking His law, but you willfully despise the remedy He has provided for your deliverance. You cast contempt not only upon His commandments, but also upon His grace. You disregard His demands and His bestowments alike. You pay no attention to His requirements or to His favors.

Consider this subject well, I beseech you. Meditate upon the wondrous character and work of Jesus Christ; think why He came into the world and why it was that He was possessed of such remarkable endowments. Then ask yourselves the question whether you have an interest in Him? Shall He come and display His divine power; shall all His miracles be performed and his instructions given, His trials be endured, and all his agony and pain so willingly borne; shall the Son of God be nailed to the cross and through Him the gates of heaven itself be opened; shall all this be done – and yet shall it be done in vain for you? The salvation which is now offered will

either raise you aloft to heavenly glories, or sink you by your very rejection of it to deeper depths of woe. May the divine Spirit influence and move our hearts that we may all be led to give this Saviour a proper reception, to ascribe to Him the honor which is His due, so that we may share His glory in the world to come!

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1. imbrued: stained with blood (Websters Third)↔



## 4. Men Offended at Christ

Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me. – Matt. 11:6.

JOHN THE BAPTIST had been thrown into prison by Herod Antipas, because of his stern rebuke of that cruel tyrant's unholy union with his brother Philip's wife. He was held in bondage in the fortress of Machaerus. While thus imprisoned, the fame of Jesus reached him. He heard of His preaching and of His works of healing the sick, casting out devils and raising the dead. But he seems to have been offended. He was placed in peculiarly trying circumstances. He had faithfully performed his mission. He had lifted up his voice in condemnation of the corruption and hypocrisy of the times. He had sounded aloud the call to repentance. He had warned of the wrath to come, and urged his hearers to flee from it. He had pointed to the long promised Messiah then present and standing among the people. He had preached that the Kingdom of heaven was at hand – with its judgments upon the guilty – its rewards for the righteous – its administrations of justice – its rectification of all wrongs – its overthrow of Satan and ungodly men – its exaltation of the true King and His followers. But the only outcome of all to him as yet was imprisonment by the power of a licentious prince, at the request of a malicious adulteress. He was depressed and discouraged. He could not doubt that Jesus was the Messiah, for then he would have doubted his own mission as His forerunner; and he had divine testimony to the truth of what he proclaimed. But he was disappointed. The work of Christ was not such as to satisfy him. Godless rulers still retained their places of power; vice was still unblushingly practiced among princes and among the people; hypocrites and deceivers still claimed to be guides in religion; the poor saints were still under bondage, despised by the world and apparently neglected of heaven. The hopes and expectations of the weary prisoner were not met. He could not

understand the tardiness of Jesus' mode of procedure. Hence his perplexity. He was offended. To clear up these difficulties and satisfy himself, he sends an embassy to Jesus with the straightforward question, "Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" Jesus dealt very tenderly with His distressed and afflicted servant. He kindly received his messengers. "In the same hour," Luke tells us, "He cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight," Then Jesus answering said unto the messengers, "Go your way and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, to the poor the Gospel is preached."

This was a direct answer to the Baptist's question. By it he was referred to those very prophecies of Isaiah, which relate to Christ's Messianic work. In the 35th chapter of that evangelical prophet we read, "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not. Behold, your God will come... *Then the eyes of the blind shall he opened,* and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing." This must have been very convincing to John, inasmuch as it comes in immediate connection with the passage which sets forth that particular work of the Messiah, upon which his mind appears to have been dwelling, viz.: the work of judgment. "Say to them that are of a fearful heart. Be strong, fear not; behold, your God *will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense;* He will come and save you." Jesus hereby shows that the former of these passages applies to Him, as much as the latter. That He is the Healer as well as the Avenger – that He is the compassionate Saviour of the weary and heavy laden, as well as the terrible Judge taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not His Gospel. His desponding and imprisoned servant therefore need not fear. The Messiah to whom He had pointed the people, knew for what purpose He was commissioned, and how best to carry on His work. All was well. The prophecies were being fulfilled. Israel's King had come. Notwithstanding darkness and mystery surrounded His movements, and perplexity and wavering troubled His servants, still the divine plan was being consummated. The glowing words of the prophet who predicted these things would be the song of all faithful ones.

“The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

The Saviour also added these words of caution and admonition to be told to John, “Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me.” This answer which His disciples returned to the anxious prisoner had the desired effect. Jesus pronounced upon him greater praise than was ever given to mortal. We read no more of his difficulty and perplexity of mind. In the calm assurance of faith, he met a martyr’s death, and went from the dungeon of Herod and the buffetings of Satan to the repose of the saints, and the bliss of Paradise.

But not all who are offended at Christ, are as easily satisfied and set right as John the Baptist was. It was predicted that Jesus should be “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, to them which stumble at the word.” When the godly Simeon took Jesus up in his arms in the temple, he said, “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against.” Those words have come true. The Christ of God is spoken against. As it was with the Jews of old, so is it now, men will not have Him to reign over them. If we could get at the real opinions of men outside of the church, we would find that they are opposed to Him. He is a mystery they cannot explain, and that they would like to have out of the road. He stands in the way of their hopes and projects, their aspirations and endeavors. They would prefer to have a world without Christ. Their mode of living and acting is at variance with His revealed law, and He is a constant witness against them. They fear Him; they are restive under His rebukes; their hearts are hardened against Him. They try to prop up their opinions with fallacious arguments; and pick at and quarrel with everything about Him which does not tally with their own beclouded notions.

## **I. The World Is Offended At Christ.**

### **1. Some Are Offended At His Person.**

Isaiah tells us that it would be so.

“He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised and we esteemed Him not.”

Though He attested His divine mission by words of heavenly wisdom, and by wondrous miracles, the Jews exclaimed, “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joses, and of Juda, and of Simon? and are not His sisters here with us? And they were offended at Him.” He came in lowliness and humility, in meekness and poverty. Had He been born a prince, multitudes would have flocked to bow the knee and pay their homage to Him. But because He was brought up in an humble home, in an obscure place. He is stigmatized with the name of the Nazarene. Men prefer wealth to worth, and greatness before goodness. Because He appeared simply as a man, men are unwilling to regard Him as anything else than a man; and when He sets up the claim of being equal with God, with the Jews they retort, Thou art mad and hast a devil. When He associates with publicans and sinners to do them good and sits down at meat with them, He is styled their friend and a wine-bibber, as if He were their boon companion. Men of intellectual culture and high social position think that one who keeps company with such characters cannot be regarded as their Saviour. Even the thief reviles Him; and the multitudes choose a Barabbas to be delivered to them and permit Jesus to be led away to the cross.

## **2. Some Are Offended At His Work.**

He performed not such deeds as usually attract notice and by which men seek fame. He moved not in the walks of literature or science or statesmanship. He sought no earthly greatness, nor did He heed the applause of the multitude or strive to win His way to popular favor. All the kingdoms of the earth were offered to Him if He would only follow the usual way of men in seeking worldly honor and power by falling down and worshiping the false god of this world. But He rejected the temptation of Satan, saying, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.” Jesus appeared as a servant. He said, “I am among you as he that serveth.” All His works were ministrations for the relief of suffering

and distress among the poor, the sick, the bereaved and the outcast. All His invitations were intended for the weary, the heavy laden and the sin burdened, for the meek, the persecuted, the tempted and the poor. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. He held up such labors as these as worthiest of imitation and as being most honored and blest of heaven. The world is too intent on money-getting and ease taking and pleasure seeking to follow in the footsteps of Him who went about doing good.

But more than in these things, they are offended at Him in His work as the Redeemer. The cross is an offense to them. “Christ crucified” is still “to the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness.” He proclaimed Himself to be the anointed of God, the Saviour of the world that had been promised for many centuries, and yet He proposed to accomplish this work before the generation in which He lived by simply doing the will of God, and thus securing merit and righteousness. In conformity with this plan, in all humility He submitted to become man, to take man’s place, and in it to render implicit and unfailing obedience to the Divine Law in all its parts and requirements, and as a substitute for the sinner to undergo death, and that in a most humiliating form on the cross, suffering as a malefactor, and to be laid in the tomb, the common lot of mortals. And now the world refuses to receive a crucified criminal as the Divine Son of God, sent to be the Redeemer and is offended because what He has done and the manner of His doing it is not such as their judgment commends. Although He proved by His mighty works, His heavenly words and godlike life, and by the circumstances attending His death. His resurrection and ascension, that He is truly what he professed to be, namely, the Christ of God, yet, while allowed the poor compliment of being a good man. His words and work and claims are an offense to the self-complacent, but really blinded, sons of earth.

### **3. Others Are Offended At Christ’s Doctrine.**

His doctrine is so opposite to all human thinking; it is so humiliating to human pride; it is so comprehensive, relating to the innermost being as well as the whole outward life of the individual, that human nature rebels against it. There is not a thought of the mind, or a desire of the heart, or an impulse of the passions, or a word of the lips, or a movement of the will, or an

action performed, to which His doctrine does not apply, and which His commandments are not meant to govern. It requires the whole being to be put into subjection to it, and this does not please men. The ambitious and the haughty have no sympathy with that spirit, which can pronounce blessing after blessing upon “the poor in spirit,” and them “that mourn,” upon the “meek,” and them “which do hunger and thirst after righteousness,” upon “the merciful,” “the pure in heart,” the “peacemakers” and upon them “which are persecuted for righteousness sake,” and who are reviled and evilly spoken against. It is an offense to the unclean, the envious, the vengeful and the sensual to be told that it is their duty to cultivate “love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” The grasping and selfish cannot understand how it is possible to be “more blessed to give than to receive,” and cannot comprehend why they should be called on to bear crosses, and make sacrifices, and suffer tribulation, and endure affliction, yea, if it be necessary, to suffer the loss of all things to win Christ and be found in Him. Nor do the carnal minded see why it is so necessary to have and practice that “holiness without which,” the Lord of God declares, “no man shall see the Lord.”

The method by which salvation is secured is not satisfactory to a self-righteous race. “Being ignorant of God’s righteousness and going about to establish their own righteousness,” they submit not themselves “unto the righteousness of God.” Not realizing how sinful they are, nor the greatness of that condemnation under which they rest, they are unwilling to hear of repentance and faith. An imputed righteousness they are not satisfied with. They rely upon their own works and supposed goodness for acceptance with God, and believe themselves entitled to an acquittal in the day of judgment, and to be received into the heavenly world on the ground of personal merit and worthiness. Salvation purchased for them through the precious blood of the crucified Christ and bestowed upon them as a free gift by the grace of God, they are not willing to receive. It is so humbling to proud man to look upon himself as possessed of nothing which will recommend him to his Maker, as being capable of doing nothing that will secure the favor of God, nay, as being sinful and guilty and lost, that he is offended when told that he rests under condemnation, and the wrath of God abides upon him. Hence when the evangelists come and proclaim the Gospel with all its blessings – its gracious call, its Divine enlightenment, its

justification, its peace of mind, its encouragements of help here, its glad hopes of glory hereafter – straightway offense is taken because all is offered through the mediation of Jesus Christ instead of being secured by the sinner’s own work. The truth is that the carnal mind is enmity against God, and even when He manifests Himself in the flesh for the express purpose of saving the lost, an estranged and guilty world is offended at Him.

## **II. Not Only Worldlings, Hut Christians Are Often Offended At Christ.**

His administrations are not always pleasing to them. His mode of dealing does not always suit them. They fain would have things otherwise than they are; and desire matters to be regulated in a different manner from that which He orders. They sometimes grow restive under His yoke. They complain at their cares and crosses. They murmur at His way of leading them. Since all power is given unto Him, and He is exalted to the right hand of God, they do not comprehend or do not take the pains to inquire why His church should continue to be a little flock, a feeble folk, and through much tribulation should enter into the kingdom.

### **1. They Are Sometimes Offended At Christ’s Forbearance And Patience With His Enemies.**

They do not understand why Satan is allowed to roam at large, like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour; nor why persecutors and infidels and blasphemers are permitted to attack the church of the living God and oppose His truth and slay His prophets and imprison His ministers. They do not see the wisdom of that administration which will allow the Johns to be cast into the dungeon, while the Herods and Herodias are at liberty to engage in their voluptuous feasts and wanton dances, and to live their dissolute lives. A blessing was pronounced upon the meek, and it was promised that they should inherit the earth, and yet they see a Paul led out to execution while a Nero is permitted to live to persecute Christians and slay the saints of the Most High. They would deal with these enemies in a far different manner. When their Lord and Master, with His humble

followers, are set at nought and so illy treated, with John they feel like calling down fire from heaven to consume the foes of God and man. They question why it is that the great adversary of souls is suffered to sow broadcast his tares alongside of the good grain, and why hypocrites and deceivers are tolerated even within the church's fold. The church has now been for eighteen centuries in the world, and all along the ages the efforts of the godly have been hindered, the spread of the Gospel has been opposed, the truth itself has been attacked, error in multitudinous forms has been introduced in an insidious way to turn men from the belief of the Divine Word. Yea, even in the bosom of the church itself, just as the apostle Peter said would be the case, "false teachers" have arisen, "who privily have brought in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them," and yet the "swift destruction" prophesied, comes not. Shortsighted and impatient Christians should strengthen their faith, when such questionings arise, by calling to mind the "long suffering of God which waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing," and should not complain, if God, willing to shew His wrath, and to make His power known, endures with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction."

## **2. Others Are Offended At Christ Because Of His Seeming Neglect Of Them.**

Our Lord did not promise His followers exemption from suffering and trial. Often their lot is one of severe affliction, and they are called to pass through the fires. How many there are who know by a sad experience the bitterness of poverty and want, as they travel on in the pathway marked out by Him who said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." How many weary ones, suffering from sickness and pain, with "trembling of heart" and "sorrow of mind," through many anxious days and sleepless nights, in the morning have said, "Would God it were even," and at even have said, "Would God it were morning." How many have been left, apparently alone, to withstand the subtle wiles of that base tempter, who assaulted our Lord Himself in the wilderness, when His body was weakened with fasting. How many helpless ones, orphaned by the hand of death, have been compelled to make their way as best they could through a selfish, grasping world. How many there are who have never known the gentle caress and watchful tenderness of a



mother's love, or the blessing of a father's heart. How unspeakably hard to bear those burdens and sorrows and contend with those doubts and despondencies and weaknesses which frail mortals often meet with, as they struggle on in the strait and narrow way that leads to heaven, through the same heartless world that taunted and jeered at their Master, as sinking under the weight of His cross. He was led out to Calvary. The words of David's complaint are reiterated from their lips, "Have mercy upon me, Lord, for I am weak. My soul is also sore vexed... I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears." But when the believer, under the influence of such trying experiences in this friendless world, is tempted to murmur at the manner in which his Saviour is dealing with him, let him call to mind the words spoken by that same Saviour for his admonition and encouragement: "If ye were of the world the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord."

But amidst all the perplexity and wavering of His followers, and all the opposition and malice of His enemies, Christ's work goes on in the way of His own appointment He still continues to heal the sick, to raise the dead, and to cast out devils, to preach the Gospel and to work out salvation though John be thrown into prison. He may not now be understood, clouds and darkness may be around His throne, yet in due time He will vindicate Himself and give His wondering saints cause to admire and applaud the wisdom and love that have marked all His words and acts. Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Him. Let the troubled Christian lay hold by faith of the sure promises of His Word, and though he may not understand the methods and ways in which his Lord and Redeemer is working, yet he will learn to trust Him.

"God moves in a mysterious way,  
His wonders to perform:  
He plants his footsteps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds ye so much dread

Are big with mercy, and shall break  
In blessings on your head,

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning Providence  
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast.  
Unfolding every hour.  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower."

## 5. Palm Sunday

And when he had thus spoken, he went before, ascending up to Jerusalem. And it came to pass, when he was come nigh to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount called the mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, Saying, Go ye into the village over against you; in the which at your entering ye shall find a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat: loose him, and bring him hither. And if any man ask you, Why do ye loose him? thus shall ye say unto him, Because the Lord hath need of him. And they that were sent went their way, and found even as he had said unto them. And as they were loosing the colt, the owners thereof said unto them, Why loose ye the colt? And they said, The Lord hath need of him. And they brought him to Jesus: and they cast their garments upon the colt, and they set Jesus thereon. And as he went, they spread their clothes in the way. And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out. (Luke 19:28-40)

SUCH IS THE EVANGELICAL DESCRIPTION of the triumphant entrance of Christ into the city of Jerusalem. That entrance took place on the first day of the week preceding Easter Sunday. The Church has therefore very appropriately appointed this Gospel to be read before the congregations on this Lord's day, inasmuch as it corresponds with the time in which the event itself took place. This day is known in the church year as

Palm Sunday, or the Sunday on which palm branches were strewed in the way of Jesus as He advanced from the Mt. of Olives to Jerusalem, and shouts of rejoicing arose on the air when He manifested Himself as Israel's King. It is a glad day, coming near the close of that period of mortification of the flesh, and searching self-examination, and turning away from sin, known as the Lenten season, in which the church prepares herself to gaze upon the sufferings of her Saviour, and especially upon the closing acts of His passion on Calvary, at which the heavens clothed themselves in sackcloth, and the sympathizing earth trembled because of the death of its Lord. Palm Sunday, because it is a day of rejoicing coming in this season of humiliation, has been appropriately selected by many of the churches as Confirmation day. Now the church opens her doors for the reception of those who through penitence, prayer and humble faith have turned themselves from the world to their rightful Lord, confess their faith in Him before heaven and earth, and take the vows of allegiance to Him upon them. On consideration it will be found that there are several points of resemblance between the Palm Sunday on which our Lord Himself was the chief actor, and this Palm Sunday on which the converts to the Christian faith are confirmed. We propose to trace these points of resemblance.

## **I. His Ascension To Jerusalem**

In the first place, this triumphal march of Christ took place when He was on His way ascending up to Jerusalem. It was drawing near to the time of the Passover feast of the Jews, when the faithful sons of Israel assembled at their metropolis, in obedience to the Mosaic law. From all parts of Judea they came and thronged the highways leading to the city. Jesus was among them, drawing near to Jerusalem to attend the feast. So the confirmants, who are openly received into the church's fold today, are on their way to the heavenly Jerusalem. Their faces are turned and their feet are moving towards that city whose Builder and Maker is God. They have come out from their abodes of worldliness and are going up to Zion. They are joining that mighty pilgrim band, gathered out of all quarters of God's domain, who, in obedience to the divine law, are traveling to that great temple on high, to engage in the pure worship of Jehovah. Many have gone before them. The successive ages have beheld the faithful of successive

generations advancing in the same path on which they now enter. Prophets and kings, and apostles, martyrs, reformers and holy men have preceded them. Their friends and relatives are around them. The whole company of the church welcome them to their ranks. Singing the songs of Zion, they proceed on their way. They are resolved never to cease their spiritual journey until the massive walls of the heavenly city are reached, the pearly gates are opened, and their feet stand upon the golden streets, until their ears are greeted with the strains of celestial music and their eyes behold the mansions of the blessed flashing with the glory of God and illumined by the presence of the Lamb. They are on their way to keep the feast in honor of the Lamb who was slain. Their pulse is quickened and their eyes beam brighter, as new hopes are aroused in their hearts, new thoughts fill their minds, and holy aspirations animate their souls. They are not without their embarrassments. The dust of travel is upon them. The journey will be fatiguing and attended with discouragements But as their day their strength shall be. With subdued but joyous anticipation they set out. They are on their way “ascending up to Jerusalem.”

## **II. The Obedience of Faith of His Disciples**

In the second place, the triumphal entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem was attended by a manifestation of the obedience of faith on the part of His disciples. In order to prepare for this event, when Jesus “was come nigh to Bethphage and Bethany at the mount called the mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, saying. Go ye into the village over against you; in the which at your entering, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat: loose him and bring him hither. And if any man ask you. Why do ye loose him? thus shall ye say unto him. Because the Lord hath need of him. And they that were sent went their way and found even as He had said unto them. And as they were loosing the colt, the owners thereof said unto them. Why loose ye the colt? And they said, The Lord hath need of him. And they brought him to Jesus.” Here then are two instances of unquestioning obedience rendered to the command of the Lord. The two disciples whom Christ sent on this errand could not know what He knew, nor foresee what He foresaw. They had made no arrangements for securing the beast after which they were sent, nor of themselves knew where to find it, as is shown

by the very minute directions given them. The only thing they had to guide them was the word of the Master. That they believed, and on that they relied with implicit confidence; and on that they acted. The owners of the colt also promptly complied with the will of the Lord. The simple answer “The Lord hath need of him,” given to their question, was sufficient for them. Here were examples of trusting obedience. The word of Christ was supreme law to these men. They questioned not the propriety or the reasons for His directions, but immediately submitted to His will. Had they been like many modern objectors and quibblers they would have demanded explanations of this conduct, and visible proofs that all was right. But the Lord’s order was sufficient for them, and without further ado they trusted Him and obeyed.

So the persons who are confirmed in the church are surrendering themselves to their Lord. They recognize Him as the great Prophet of God – the Light of the world. They receive His words as divine truth. They submit themselves to His guidance as able to direct and lead them. They acknowledge His right as the Supreme Lawgiver to command them, and trust in His integrity and holiness to demand only what is just and true. They are assured of His wisdom and goodness and love, and are confident that what He reveals may be trustingly believed, and what He orders may be safely followed. They feel their own inability to know the truth of themselves, and to work out their own salvation, and so they yield themselves into their Saviour’s hands and set themselves to do as He tells them, not only because He has a right to their service, but because it is safest and best. Doubtless there is much about the scheme of salvation which they cannot understand. There are many mysteries in the Word of God which they cannot fathom, many revelations which are obscure and dark, much about the nature of God and of Christ and about the work of their Redeemer which is not given to them to know. There are many Providences that they cannot explain. They know not by what way they shall be led, nor what they shall be called upon to do and suffer before their pilgrimage is over. They have a great deal to learn, and there is a great deal which cannot be learned in this life. And yet they know enough to give themselves into the hands of the Lord Jesus and trust in Him for salvation. Though there may be conflicting emotions and fears and struggles in their souls, yet they are assured that following Christ is the only way of solving their difficulties and obtaining peace. The command of Christ they are resolved to make the law of their life, knowing that the path of obedience is

the path of safety. They have had their spiritual conflicts. Satan has intruded his evil suggestions upon them in the midst of their holiest meditations and most solemn devotions. They have been tempted again and again to postpone or give up this step. They have lamented their weakness of faith, their failures, their shortcomings, their ignorance of divine truth; they have mourned over the opposition their carnal minds have made to the Word of God; but they see in Jesus Christ a sufficiency that avails in the sight of God to cover all their sins and defects, and they take comfort in the thought that His strength is made perfect in their weakness. They have had their struggles and their fears; worldliness, the desires of a fleshy mind, and unbelief would keep them back; but they have determined to break through all opposition and flee to the arms of their Saviour, who they know is ready and willing to receive them, and who is able to keep them from falling. They do not intend to trust the promptings of their own minds, but they intend to trust Christ. His commands will they follow; His path will they walk in. To Him will they yield unhesitating and confiding obedience.

### **III. Christ Made Public Declaration of Himself**

In the third place, in His triumphal entrance into Jerusalem Christ made a public declaration of Himself. He never before so openly appeared before so large a multitude. Previous to this His usual custom seems to have been to shun too public a manifestation of Himself. He bade many of those upon whom He wrought miracles, see “that they told no man.” When Peter, in the presence of the other disciples, in answer to the question of the Lord – “Whom say ye that I am?” – said, “Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God,” He charged His disciples that they should “tell no man that He was Jesus the Christ.” Even in those larger assemblies when He preached to the people. He did not declare Himself the Christ, but let His works and His heavenly words attest who He was. But on this occasion Jesus did not retire from the presence of the vast multitude, nor refuse their homage, nor repress their ascriptions of praise, nor charge them to keep silence concerning Him. But He rode in the midst of the thronged way, while the whole city was moved by His presence, and from the crowded metropolis issued great numbers who had gathered there from all parts of the land to be in attendance at the approaching feast; all these lined the road or joined in

the procession, and “the multitudes that went before and that followed cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the Highest. And when He was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this! And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.” Here then was an acknowledgment of Jesus such as had never before been made; and Jesus permitted the people to honor Him in this public way, and to declare who He was, applying the language of prophecy to Him, and so pronouncing Him to be the Messiah. It was a confession of Christ made by men before men.

The confirmants make a confession of Christ today. By appearing here publicly they acknowledge Him who is Head over all things to the church. By assuming the name of Christian they declare themselves the followers of Him from whom that name is derived. In being baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost they enter into a covenant with the Triune God, through Christ, through whom alone that covenant is made. In answering the questions propounded to them in the service, they declare their purpose to renounce the kingdom of Satan and all worldliness, and to believe the record God has given of the Creator, the Redeemer and the Sanctifier, and to surrender themselves to a life of obedience and submission to the Gospel which Jesus proclaimed. In coming out before the congregation they profess their faith in Jesus as their Prophet, Priest and King, and that they rely upon Him alone for salvation and desire it to be known that henceforth they belong to Him. They give expression to their desire to participate in all the means of grace, the adequacy of which to sanctify them and prepare them for heaven they thus admit. They announce their willingness to let it be published that Christ is their Lord, and they are His servants, and that they are not ashamed of Him. They confess their faith in Him.

Such a confession of Christ is required of all His followers. “Whosoever 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.” “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” We cannot be full disciples of Christ in secret. We must let our discipleship be known or Christ will not recognize us. He is a poor servant



who is ashamed of His Lord, or who, from fear of the world, hesitates to avow Him. In all ages God has demanded that His people be separate. He requires us to honor the Saviour before men, by declaring that we acknowledge His claims and look to Him for salvation.

## **IV. Triumph Over His Enemies**

In the fourth place the public entrance of Christ into Jerusalem was a triumph over His enemies. The chief priests and Scribes and Pharisees had long ignored His claims, and were jealous of His growing popularity, and had followed Him with persecution. They had even cherished designs upon His life, in order to put Him out of the way. Gladly would they have silenced the shouting multitude or diverted their homage to themselves. They stood by gloomy and sullen, but powerless. They could not restrain the uprising of the people, nor could they bear to see so much worship rendered to the despised Nazarene. "Some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto Him, Master, rebuke Thy disciples. And He answered and said unto them, I tell you that if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." The tempter, too, with whom He contended upon His entrance into His ministry, was vexed to see the people turning to Him. All through His ministry Satan had used his utmost exertions to thwart Him and defeat His purposes. He inspired the hatred which was manifested towards Him; he aroused the rulers to plot His death; he used all his arts to render His work of none effect. But here was a sudden yielding of the populace to the claims of Jesus that he could neither check nor control. The enemies of Christ were impotent before Him, He triumphed over them all.

So now in the case of those confirmed, there is a triumph for Christ. They make a declaration for Christ against the world and its usurping, wicked prince. The Spirit of God has touched their hearts and enlightened their minds, has quickened their spiritual understandings and strengthened their wills in purposes of good. They are putting off the old man with his deeds and are putting on the new man, which is renewed in righteousness and true holiness. The power of Christ's cross has prevailed over the powers of darkness. The heavenly law of life has put in subjection the fleshly law. Satan is despoiled of his prey, and the world is, so far at least, overcome.

The Lord adds new trophies to those already gained and decks His crown with additional jewels. Grace has conquered the resistance it met with and so has gained a victory. Every soul gathered into the kingdom swells the forces of the Prince of Peace and weakens those of the Adversary. Every new member admitted into the fold of the church is a gain from the world.

Naturally there is opposition to Jesus and His Gospel. Conformity to them is disliked. The barriers which sin raises must be broken down; and the strong entrenchments which Satan builds up around his power must be demolished before there is a yielding to Christ. All this is accomplished through the Gospel of Christ. When He makes friends out of enemies; willing followers out of rebels; saints out of sinners; new creatures out of earthly natures. His work is a triumph. Worldlings and the powers of evil may stand by chagrined and defeated, but they are unable to stand before the Lord of Lords. He rescues from their grasp those whom otherwise they would lead to destruction.

## **V. A Time of Rejoicing**

Again the triumphal entrance of Christ into Jerusalem was a time of rejoicing. His disciples rejoiced. For three years they had attended Him in His poverty and trials. They had witnessed the resistance of the rulers, the indifference of the people, the accusations of His revilers, and the bitter hostility with which He had been met. They were with Him when He was charged with casting out devils through Beelzebub; with being mad and being possessed of a devil. They had seen His anxiety, His patience under suffering. They knew that He had had to flee for His life, and to hide Himself from the rage of the multitude. No such outburst of fervid enthusiasm as this had ever attended His steps before. It was a spontaneous acknowledgment of His claims. They no doubt regarded it as the dawning of a better day – the commencement of a new era in His history. They rejoiced in this tardy but general praise accorded to Him, and looked on with wonder as the multitude thronged around to do Him honor. The people rejoiced. They spread their garments in the way as a token of submission. They cut down palm branches and strewed them in the way. They praised God “with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen.” They filled the air with their Hosannas; and together they shouted " Blessed be

the King that cometh in the name of the Lord." They were glad because their Messiah, their King, had come. Their hearts were awakened and they gave vent to their feelings in the language which the prophet had employed in predicting this scene. It was a day of rejoicing.

This confirmation day is a day of rejoicing. Those who are received into the fold of the church as communicants rejoice. Now at length, after all their conflicts and tears and penitential prayers, and strivings of heart, they are permitted to be publicly identified with the Saviour to whom they have given themselves, and to acknowledge Him before men. They know that they are moving in the line of duty, and that brings intense satisfaction. They have conquered themselves and the world, and they are glad. Their relatives and friends rejoice. They have looked upon them with much anxiety and followed them with many prayers. They have noted each year as it rolled by and longed for the happy hour when they would take this important step and be numbered henceforth among the children of God. It gives them joy to see them coming out publicly to take the vows of allegiance to Christ and to set out in the path that leads to the skies. It arouses new hopes, and gives new anticipations of reunions of families in heaven, which one day must be separated on earth. The church rejoices. Additions are made to her membership. Her power for good is increased. She is hereby assured that her labors for the salvation of souls have not been in vain. She is encouraged to make new efforts in the same direction. It is a token that Christ is still present with her; that the Holy Spirit is operating upon the hearts of men; the Word and the sacraments have not been preached and administered in vain. The angels rejoice. They are sent forth to be ministering spirits, to minister to those who are heirs of salvation. Jesus said, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

Throughout those hosts of high and glorious beings the news is conveyed. Their hearts thrill with rapture. New songs burst forth from their lips. They contemplate the scene here presented with delight. They gaze with gladness upon those whom the Saviour has searched out and brought into His fold. It is a day of rejoicing.

## **VI. Followed By Great Vicissitudes**

Finally this triumphal procession of Christ was closely followed by great vicissitudes. During that same week Christ was betrayed by one of His disciples into the hands of the chief priests and rulers of the Jews. Previous to this He endured the bitter agony of the garden of Gethsemane. He was arrested and led before the Sanhedrin, then before Pilate, then before Herod, then to Pilate again, before all of whom He received cruel and inhuman treatment, and finally was condemned to death. On the sixth day of the same week He was led out to be crucified, bearing His cross, on which He suffered death as a malefactor. On the evening of the same day He was buried, and laid in the grave until the first day of the following week, when through the power of God He arose from the grave and appeared to His wondering disciples. Forty days after that He led His disciples out as far as the Mt. of Olives, and there, in the presence of the eleven, He ascended up until the clouds received Him out of their sight, and He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. All these were momentous events. They followed each other in rapid succession, and came quickly after the day on which He was hailed by the applauding multitude, and garments and palm branches were strewn in His way. They were rapid alternations of humiliation and exaltation, of sorrow and joy. They led to a final consummation of victory and glory in the heavens.

So those who are united with the church must not expect to walk upon a perfectly smooth and even path. The step which they take today will be followed by many changes, which may come upon each other quickly. They know not by what way Providence will lead them, nor can they tell what temptations will assail them. They must needs follow their Lord into the vale of sorrow and pray His prayer, "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless not My will, but Thine be done." The cross which He bore they must bear as they journey on, even until the hour of their departure from the world. They may meet false friends who would betray them into the hands of their spiritual enemies. The world will be no helper to them, but its giddy votaries will clamor against them and condemn them, will look on with satisfaction at their discomfiture and rejoice if they should fall. Temptations will be presented in various forms, and the sin which still lurks in their members will torment them and contest every inch of their progress in a holy life. Death awaits in secret to seize them as his prey; and the Great Arch Fiend unseen, but subtle and powerful, will take every opportunity to thwart their plans and entangle them in his toils. But as

to Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, so to them will God send His angels to guard and keep and protect them, to strengthen them in their conflicts and to ward off all temptations that would be too strong for them to bear. The almighty grace of God will ever be vouchsafed to them. There will be periods when they will especially feel the power of a new life pulsating through their frames, and there will be a shaking off of the earthy bands and surroundings, and a renewed resurrection to vigor and activity in spiritual life. Let them be faithful and diligent in the employment of the means of grace, and there will be constant communion and fellowship with God through Jesus Christ by the aid of the Holy Spirit. As time rolls on they will be able to look back and see how their minds have expanded, their views of holy things enlarged and strengthened and their hearts more steadfastly fixed on God. Excitement and sudden glow of feeling will give place to calmness and composure, steady continuity of affection and purpose. They must be diligent and faithful to their calling and all along the way look to the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour and the Shepherd of their souls who will preserve and defend them. And if they thus fight a good fight and finish their course and keep the faith, the day of ascension will come, when like their Lord, they will rise up to be received by Him in the heavens, and to sit down with Him on His throne in glory everlasting.

## 6. Christ Crucified

“They crucified him.”– Luke 23:33.

WE COMMEMORATE TODAY the greatest tragedy in this world’s history. Let us glance at the most important events of the memorable Friday on which Christ was crucified.

It is past midnight and we can discern a band of men coming forth from a green, tree-shadowed garden. Here and there a ray of moonlight, striking through the trees, flashes on bright armor, and we see that some of the band are Roman soldiers. The torches which are carried by many reveal the faces of men clad in Oriental dress. These are Jews, and their eyes are fixed fiercely upon One, who with bound hands and bowed head, is led forward across the brook Kedron and up the hill into Jerusalem and to the high priest’s palace. In the background, among the shadows of the trees, we see some figures keeping aloof from the crowd as if uncertain what to do. These are the eleven apostles. There is one also in the multitude of those who are bearing Christ along who seems troubled and appears to be in strange company. His eye dare not meet that of the silent Prisoner, and his heart is torn with doubts and fears as to the result of that terrible night’s work, and of the kiss of betrayal. After a rapid walk up the declivity and through the streets of the city the palace is reached and the sinless One is brought into the presence of Annas the Sadducee, an old man, full of craft and cruelty. The city of Jerusalem is crowded with visitors who have come from almost all parts of the world to keep the feast of the Passover, but yet all is still.

The weary night, the darkest in this world’s history, drags on. Jesus has been led away from Annas, who has in vain tried to find guilt in the innocent One. He has been taken from one side of the palace to the other, where dwells Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas. There a few of the fiercest and bitterest of His enemies are met together and seek, by the aid of false

witnesses, to impute wickedness to Him, in whom was no sin. To the questions, half sneering, half fearful, of Caiaphas, Jesus answers not a word. "As a sheep dumb before her shearers," so the Lamb of God opened not His mouth. But at last He speaks. In answer to the High Priest's adjuration. He has told them that He is the Son of God, and now the savage hatred of the crowd breaks forth. They sway to and fro and angry voices are lifted up. White-haired teachers, forgetting their sacred calling, are trying to inflame the passions of the people. There is one ominous murmur throughout the assembly, "He is guilty of death."

The dawn is breaking and the spring morning is cold and gray as they hurry Jesus across the court of the high priest's house. Those sad eyes, so wan with looking on the sins of men, gaze on the group of servants who stand around the fire of coals. Whose is that boisterous voice? Who is he whose broad Galilean dialect betrays his origin, as he cried with an oath, "I know not the man." Those warning eyes look on the face lighted up by the blazing coals and strike sorrow to the very heart of the denying Peter. And so, bearing this fresh wound, the denial of His friend, Jesus goes to the soldiers' guard room to await the day when He may be judged by the whole Jewish Council.

The brutal soldiers keep Him till the sun shines out; and in the sweet Eastern morning Jesus is dragged before the Jewish Council met in full assembly. Not one friendly face looks forth from among those judges. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea are absent, and scribe and elder, priest and Sadducee are alike eager for the death of Christ. And now, the mock trial is over, and since they have not the power to put Him to death, the Jews determine to deliver Him to the Roman authorities, and the procession starts for the gorgeous palace of Pilate, the governor. The whole city of Jerusalem is astir. The streets are crowded with people – villagers bringing their fruits and wares from Bethany and Bethphage; fishermen from Gennesareth who have come to keep the feast; women and children and white-haired patriarchs; and here and there stern Roman soldiers riding with their officer and watching warily for any disturbance among the people.

And now all eyes are turned towards a strange procession. Yonder are the chief priests with Caiaphas at their head, and others who are well known as the leading men of the great Council. Strangers ask who is the pale, worn man, bound as a prisoner, around whom a frantic mob surges with such

angry cries. "He is the prophet of Galilee," say some "a good man and wise." "He is a deceiver and stirrer up of sedition," say others; and as the crowd presses nearer, the Roman soldiers press them back with their spears.

And so they come to the beautiful palace of Pontius Pilate, towering high up above the city, with its floors flashing with jewels, its roofs glittering with gold, and its halls echoing with the splash of fountains and the cooing of doves.

Pilate sees in the excited crowd only a new sign of riot in the people whom he fears and despises. He stands before the Jewish rulers cold and dignified, without sympathy for accusers or accused. He sees that the priests are eager for blood, and with the keen eye of experience is convinced that the prisoner is innocent. He takes Jesus within the splendid hall, where his accusers will not come on the eve of the passover. The Roman governor stands there in his purple and fine linen, powerful, gorgeous, troubled. The King of heaven and earth stands before him, poor, despised, insulted, yet calm in His spotless majesty. The few words then spoken convince Pilate that Jesus has done nothing worthy of death, and he tells the Jews so plainly. But in vain: the shouts grow fiercer. Presently Jesus is sent to Herod, Pilate hoping to get rid of the responsibility. Once more through the streets of Jerusalem, more crowded, more dangerous than ever, is the sinless One dragged to the Palace of Herod Antipas, one of the worst princes of a bad line.

Herod's soldiers mock Him and set Him at naught, and He is sent back to Pilate wearing a white robe which they have put upon Him. Again the vacillating Roman Governor tries to deliver the innocent prisoner. But he fears an outbreak; the city is filled with Jews, far outnumbering his soldiers and already the cry is raised, "Thou art not Caesar's friend." He offers as a last choice to set the prisoner free, according to the Passover privilege of the Jews. But now a mighty roar goes up from the numberless voices, "Not this man, but Barabbas." "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

And so the sentence is given and Jesus is delivered to their will. Think of the savage fury of the mob as it sweeps upon Him. The soldiers proceed to scourge Him according to the horrible custom of the time. It was a punishment under which the victim often died, but for Jesus the end was not yet. The mockery of the soldiers follows the scourging. Herod's white robe,



all stained with blood drops now, is torn off, and a scarlet garment is thrown over the fettered prisoner. Jesus has acknowledged Himself a king and He shall be crowned, say the soldiers. They twist some sharp, thorny branches into a crown, and press it upon His aching brow. A reed is used as a scepter and is pressed between the bound and helpless hands; and the mocking words are uttered, "Hail, king of the Jews." If Pilate had hoped to save Jesus, the fury of the crowd banished the hope. He has yielded against his will and knowledge of right; he has washed his hands, as he thinks, of the blood of Jesus; and soldiers have been sent to prepare a cross – not a difficult matter, as it was a common instrument of execution among the Romans – and the great procession of sacrifice sets forth for Calvary. The crowd sweeps out through the city gate to look on this great sight – a motley crowd of open enemies and secret friends.

We know not for certain who all were there, but doubtless we can rightly name some of that vast multitude. There were many who had seen the works of mercy which Jesus had performed. Country people from Nazareth would remember the quiet home among the hills, and the blameless life of Him whom they called the carpenter's son. Were there none there from Cana of Galilee who were present when the water was made wine? Were there none to tell of the daughter of Jairus, or of the son of the widow of Nain? We hardly think that Lazarus and his sisters of Bethany, so near to Jerusalem, would have been absent at such a time. We know that there were women who followed Him in that procession, and doubtless the tearful eyes of Mary the Mother of Jesus saw where He fell under the weight of the cross and watched Him on the way to Calvary. The spot is reached at last.

The authorities are determined to make the scene a notable one, and two thieves are to die with the Lord of Righteousness. The Roman soldiers clear a space around the three crosses; the vast crowd stands impatiently outside the barrier of armed men. The horrible details of the torture are watched with brutal interest. It is done at last. "They crucified Him." How different the feelings of the two classes of spectators! To the one class this scene was only one of interest and excitement, in so far as their curiosity to witness the horrible was gratified. To the trembling believers in Jesus, to those who had learned to love Him, and yet were afraid now to avow their love, the scene must have been one of mingled astonishment, mystery and grief. Could it be that He the all powerful would really yield to His enemies? Could the

conqueror of death, the deliverer of Lazarus really die? And who shall tell the thoughts which passed through the mind of the mother of Jesus, and of Mary Magdalene, and of many another who loved Him? If the eyes of the Jewish rulers flashed with gratified rage, there must also have been many eyes wet with tears.

They crucified Him. The precious blood of the Lamb is shed for the sin of the world! For thee, Pilate, in thy pride, if thou wilt avail thyself of it; for thee, O Bartimeus, the beggar, once blind, in thy humility – for all alike it falls. They crucified Him, and all crucify Him who sin out of malicious wickedness.

Let the proud man remember his pride crucifies afresh the meek and lowly Jesus. The angry and cruel man, the selfish, the lustful; yea, even the frivolous, the thoughtless, the indifferent crucify the Saviour. The sins of all of us it was that brought Him to the cross and nailed Him there. May the thought of that cross and passion humble us all. May we die with Him unto sin, that we may rise with Him unto newness of life.

# 7. The Resurrection of Christ

“The Lord is risen.” – Luke 24:34.

THERE IS NO FACT in the Saviour’s history that is more important for us to know than His resurrection. Without this His work would have been incomplete. Without a resurrection from the grave, no benefits would have flowed from His death. If He had been held in the embrace of death His power would have ceased with Him. And if His enemies, when they nailed Him to the cross, had put Him out of existence, they would also have given the death blow to the religion He came to establish. But, thanks be to God, the great Sun of righteousness, after a “red and bloody setting,” has had a bright and “glorious rising,” thus vindicating Himself and His gospel and establishing His religion upon a foundation which cannot be overthrown. An event that has so important a bearing upon all that we believe, and all that we hope for, cannot be a matter of indifference to us. I therefore propose to consider, I. The proof of the resurrection of Christ, and II. Some of the reasons why it was necessary.

## I. Proof Of The Resurrection Of Christ

We rest the proof of the resurrection of Christ entirely upon human testimony; upon the assertions of those who saw Him after He had risen. The apostles and their companions are the witnesses to whom we must refer; and whose evidence we receive. The apostles above all men were in a position to know the truth of this event. For they were the intimate friends and companions of Christ before His death; they were better acquainted with Him than any other persons on the face of the earth, and therefore could not be deceived in regard to the reality of His presence among them. To these witnesses Christ showed Himself at different times and places after His resurrection. They saw Him and conversed with Him. And they all

concur and agree in the belief and proclamation of the fact that Christ had risen from the dead, and had appeared to them. No less than seven different credible authors, namely, the apostles Matthew, John, Paul, Peter and James, and the evangelists Mark and Luke record not fewer than eleven distinct appearances of Christ after His resurrection and previous to His ascension, and at least two appearances after His ascension.

“On these various appearances,” it has been remarked, “that Christ was seen at different hours of the day – early in the morning by Mary Magdalene and the other women, during the day by Peter, by the seven disciples at the sea of Tiberias, by the apostles at His ascension, and by Stephen – and in the evening by the ten apostles, and by Cleopas and his companion – so they could not possibly be mistaken as to the reality of His person. But we nowhere read that He appeared at midnight, when the senses and imagination might be imposed upon. Further, the several distances of time and place at which Jesus showed Himself, merit attention. His first two appearances were early in the morning on which He arose. One of them was close by the sepulchre, the other on the way from it to Jerusalem. The third on some part of the same day. The fourth in the evening of that day, on the road to Emmaus, and in a house in that village, which was between seven and eight miles from Jerusalem. The fifth at Jerusalem at a later hour of the same evening. The sixth a week after at the same city. The seventh about sixty miles from it at the sea of Tiberias. The time and place at which He was seen by James are not recorded. A ninth appearance was in some other part of Galilee. Forty days after His resurrection He again met the apostles at Jerusalem and led them out to Bethany, that they might see Him go up to the Father. A few years after this, Stephen saw Him; and in about a year from that time He appeared to Paul near Damascus.”

These proofs are complete and afford us ample evidence of the truth of the resurrection of Christ. The apostles could not be mistaken. What they saw and heard, that declare they unto us.

But unbelief, always shifting its ground, and making up excuses for itself, may assert that the apostles have deceived us in this matter – that they have related what is not true – and have palmed a falsehood upon the world. To which I reply that it is impossible for the apostles to deceive us.

## **1. Poor, Unlearned, Timid Men**

For in the first place they were poor, unlearned, simple minded, timid men. They had but recently been called from their honest and laborious occupation of fishermen. They were illiterate. They were totally unacquainted with the way of the world. Their knowledge consisted for the most part in knowing how to mend their boats and nets, and to entrap the habitants of the waters. And it is not to be supposed that such men could conceive such an imposture and succeed in palming it off upon so many; and in their ignorance and simplicity hoodwink the learning of the world, especially since there were so many of their enemies around them who were ready to detect and expose the least thing to which suspicion might attach itself. Besides, the apostles after the death of Christ were thrown into consternation and dismay. They were like sheep without a shepherd – frightened and fearful. They knew not what moment the executioners might come to put them to the same cruel death they had inflicted upon their Master. And it would be absurd to think that men, under such circumstances and at such a time, would attempt to plan and impose a deception upon the world. In addition to this, it was only upon the most certain and infallible evidence that they would believe the event themselves. They would trust nothing but the testimony of their own eyes, and ears, and hands, “and regarded the accounts of their companions, whom on all other occasions they esteemed persons of unstained veracity, as idle tales.” And it is not reasonable to suppose that men would be so bold in proclaiming a thing upon insufficient evidence of its truth, who were so wary in believing it themselves.

## **2. They Believed That Christ Had Risen From The Dead**

Again. The apostles have given us the most certain proof that men can give, that they believed what they proclaimed, that Christ had risen from the dead. They had nothing to gain by this assertion, but everything to lose. They evinced their sincerity by voluntarily exposing themselves to scorn, tortures, persecutions, and even death in making the declaration that they did. The scourge, the prison and the cross, were what they had to expect in preaching the resurrection of Christ, and the religion which it sealed. Everywhere they were hated; calumniated; despised; hunted from city to city; thrust into prison; scourged; stoned; put to death. All these excruciating sufferings were endured to attest the resurrection of Christ: for

the whole gospel system rested upon this fact. As one of their number declared, "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain." Now the apostles would not have incurred such losses and subjected themselves to such torments if they had not been sure that Christ had risen. Men are not so infatuated with the rack as to allow themselves to be stretched upon it for the sake of a falsehood. They are not so in love with the cross as to allow themselves to be nailed to it for propagating a story which they know to be a lie. But the apostles bore all that was heaped upon them for the sake of what they proclaimed; and sealed their belief in the truth of what they declared with their blood.

### **3. They Worked Miracles In His Name**

The apostles proved that Christ had really risen from the dead by working miracles in His name.

"He who affirms a thing, and to prove the truth of it does a miracle, brings God as a voucher of the truth of what he says."

The apostles did work miracles in proof of what they asserted, and of this declaration among the rest. On one occasion a certain lame man, who had been in that state more than forty years, and who had been carried and laid daily at the gate of the temple called Beautiful, to receive alms of them that entered into the temple, was cured of his lameness by Peter: who when he was questioned about it said, "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him, doth this man stand here before you whole." God would not lend His power to impostors, and confirm and ratify a lie that had been declared in His name, for the purpose of deceiving mankind. And yet we must either believe that He would do so, which would be blasphemous; or else receive and credit the testimony of the apostles and evangelists.

From all this it appears that the apostles had the best means of knowing that Christ arose from the dead. They had the same evidence that He was alive again which they had of the life of each other; the same evidence which we have that those around us, with whom we are daily brought in contact are alive; namely, personal and continued intercourse with them.

Being assured of this fact, and knowing that it was one of the cardinal doctrines of Christianity, they declared it, and sealed their firm persuasion of what they declared by their sufferings, their miracles and their deaths. Upon their testimony we receive and hold it as an event that really transpired, and as a fact that cannot be denied, that “The Lord is risen indeed.”

## **II. Why It Was Necessary**

Consider some of the reasons why it was necessary. The resurrection was necessary in the first place:

### **1. To Confirm His Mission and Gospel**

In order to confirm His mission and gospel. As Christ by His death paid down a satisfaction for sin, so His resurrection was necessary to show that that satisfaction had been received and accepted. He was “delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification.” Had He continued in the grave, and under the power of death, there would have been no evidence that His work had any value in it. The world could not believe that He had satisfied for sin, so long as He was under the dominion of death, which was the wages of sin. No one could place confidence or trust in a Saviour to deliver him from death who was not delivered from it Himself. If the resurrection had not followed the crucifixion, that scoff of the Jews had stood as an unanswerable argument against Him, “Himself He cannot save.” He came to break the power of sin, to triumph over “principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places,” and how could He accomplish this work if He fell a victim to wicked men and remained a captive Himself. But His resurrection from the dead proved that His blood was not shed in vain, and that the ransom He paid was pleasing and acceptable to God. By raising Him from the dead God put His seal to His mission and work. Had Christ not risen the whole gospel system would have fallen to the ground. The resurrection is the pillar upon which the temple of Christianity rests. It is the signature of God written in living characters, in which He writes His great Name in confirmation of the religion Christ came to establish. Can anyone pretend that God would

Himself lead men to believe in a pretender, and to trust in a deceiver? By raising Christ from the dead, He adds the authority of the Father to that of the Son: enjoining us to receive all the doctrines He taught, and to obey all the commands He gave. The resurrection of Christ is a confirmation of the fact that He was what He professed to be, and that His words were true, and that His work was accepted and owned of God.

## **2. To Triumph Over His Enemies**

It was necessary again that Christ should rise in order to triumph over His enemies. The darkness that enveloped the land at His death was not deeper than the gloom that overspread the hearts of His disciples and friends. They were dejected and sad. Their hopes were buried with the Master in the sepulchre. They had looked to Him as the Messiah whom their prophets had foretold, and whom they had so long expected. They had regarded Him as their Redeemer. And now He had been taken by the hands of wicked men and slain. Depression rested upon the spirit of the church. "It seemed as if the name of Jesus and His cause were forever entombed in the grave." And His friends and followers were not more dejected and oppressed than His enemies were exultant and rejoiced. They had been tracking His footsteps through the whole course of His ministry. They could not endure His unmasking of their corruptions and hypocrisy. They could not submit to have His claims acknowledged. They could not bear to have all their fond anticipations of earthly renown and glory so completely set aside by this poor, despised Nazarene. They could not permit themselves to be stripped of their power and influence with the people; as this Jesus bid fair to do for them. And now He was removed. They had seen Him led out and nailed to the cross. They had witnessed His death agony and heard His expiring cry. They had sealed His sepulchre and placed a guard around it, so that His body should not be removed. He was now safely put out of the way and would trouble them no more. During His abode in the grave they were exultant and joyous. "But how gloriously was the scene reversed by His resurrection!" The eclipse which the Sun of righteousness had suffered had passed away only to reveal Him shining more brilliantly than before. Now He was raised far above the reach of His enemies. The degradation to which they had subjected Him was only allowed that His exaltation might be the greater. His sepulchre was the stepping-stone to His throne. His descent into



the grave must needs go before His ascent into heaven. “The person of the Saviour was forever removed beyond the reach of further assault, and His cause was more than ever triumphant.” His foes were vanquished, and He was vindicated. He had spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them, openly triumphing over them. “God had highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.” And to His friends His resurrection was a thing of joy. They were “glad when they saw the Lord.” Now He was completely exempt from danger. He was restored to them once more, and none of His enemies could have power over Him again. “He had told them, ‘Ye shall have sorrow; but your sorrow shall be turned into joy, and your joy no man taketh from you.’”

The return of our Lord to His friends and His triumph over His enemies, was a pledge that He would always be with His church and protect her from the attacks of her foes; and that He would finally put down all enemies under His feet. His words to His disciples sent them to preach the gospel to every creature, were “Lo I am with you alway even unto the end of the world.” There would be no more painful separations, no more dark despondencies and gloomy fears on account of the absence of the Lord. Though removed from sight. He would still be among His followers. His power would shield and protect them. His Spirit would guide them. They were now assured that greater is He that is in the church, than He that is in the world. And His prevailing over His enemies then was a pledge and token that He would finally triumph over all His foes.

### **3. To Overcome Death**

The resurrection of Christ was necessary in order that He might overcome death. Death had reigned from Adam through all generations. It entered into the world with sin; and as long as sin prevailed it held dominion. He who came to break the power of sin must conquer it. Myriads had descended into the grave, none of whom had been able to burst the shackles that bound them, and set themselves free. The king of terrors held undisputed sway over the whole race. All mankind had been compelled to acknowledge His

authority and bow to His decree. The world had looked in gloomy sadness upon generation after generation walking to the grave.

No one hitherto had been able to stand up and enter into contest with the mighty conqueror. But at the resurrection, Death was foiled and conquered. He met with One who was fully equal to enter into combat with Him – One to whom all power was given, and who came off victorious. Henceforth His pains were loosed and mortality gave place to immortality. Though death still retains the semblance of his power, yet there is coming a day when he will be completely put under our feet, and graves and tombs will mar our world no more.

Upon that morn when the Saviour rose triumphant from the tomb, no doubt shouts and songs of praise from the celestial choirs broke the stillness of heaven. Multitudes of the angelic hosts assembled to greet their risen king. His work was done, the battle fought, the victory won. Joy and gladness were diffused through a wondering and adoring universe. Mortals have most reason to join in this gladness and rejoicing. It was their mortality the Saviour took that He might clothe it with immortality. It was their corruption that He assumed, that He might exchange it for incorruption. What everlasting gratitude is due to Him for His work on our behalf! What songs of praise should arise from our hearts and lips for the victory He has won. Let us rejoice on this glad day of our risen Lord, and ever hail it as commemorating the triumph He has won.

## 8. The Ascension of Christ

“And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.” – Acts 1:9.

THERE ARE FIVE GREAT TRANSACTIONS in the history of our Lord which stand out more prominently than the rest, and which form so many centers, around which other incidents may be grouped. These are His incarnation, His crucifixion, His resurrection, His ascension and His second coming. Each one of these events is a subject of absorbing interest to our race, for they are the chief acts through which He secures for us all the blessings we have hitherto enjoyed or shall enjoy, and by which He laid the foundation of our future well being and consummates it. In events that are of so much moment, and which involve so much of benefit to man, it is important that we should have good and sufficient proof that they actually occurred in the manner represented. And God in His tender and all-wise providence has so ordered it that the great central facts which have taken place are testified to by men who are our fellows, selected out of our own number, and who had no interest in deceiving, but every inducement to tell the truth.

On that memorable night when the Saviour of the world was born, a heavenly messenger conveyed the glad tidings to the shepherds who were watching their flocks, while all nature was bathed in slumber. And led by the joyous news imparted to them, and by the strange sight which they had beheld, they went to the place where the young child was, and saw Him lying in His manger cradle as the angel had told them. Wise men from the east also, guided by the bright star that had appeared in the heavens, came to present their offerings and pay their adoration to the new born king.

His crucifixion is also a fact well known. It was a large multitude which assembled around the judgment hall of Pilate, and called for the crucifixion of our Lord; that attended Him on His sad way to the hill of Calvary and

gazed upon Him while He was hanging upon the cross. The chief priests and scribes, the Jewish populace, the Roman soldiers and the friends of Jesus all witnessed that scene. The governor gives his testimony to His death by permitting His body to be taken down from the cross, and His enemies, the Jews, testify to the same by placing the seal on His sepulchre. The same clear testimony is given to His resurrection. No less than seven different credible authors record not fewer than eleven distinct appearances of our Lord after He arose from the dead and previous to His ascension, and at least two appearances after His ascension. And He was seen by at least five hundred persons upon this earth after He arose from the grave, at different times and places, for a period of forty days. Luke says of this that our Saviour “shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”

In regard to the ascension of Christ, there is also abundant evidence. Jesus, in the presence of His apostles, stood upon the mount of Olives. He there gave them His last directions in regard to their mission upon earth. And while He was thus standing in the midst of them, engaged in conversation, “while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight.” He ascended up into heaven from whence He had come, and to the celestial seat He had vacated.

It is this last great event which this season particularly invites us to consider. The incarnation of Christ we celebrated at the beginning of the church year, in the joyous events that attend Christmas day. The crucifixion was commemorated by the solemn services of Good Friday. His resurrection by the glad announcements of Easter. And now His ascension demands our attention. And in our considerations of it, we propose to speak of the objects gained by the ascension of Christ.

## **1. The Attainment of Supreme Power**

The first object gained by Christ in His ascension is the attainment of Supreme power. Peter, speaking of Him, says, “Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour.” Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians tells us that God raised Christ from the dead and “set Him at His

own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and hath put all things under His feet.” Again Peter informs us that Christ “is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him.” The meek and lowly Jesus who walked upon this earth in so much humility, has been exalted on high. Heaven is His throne and earth is His footstool. All power in heaven and on earth is committed unto Him. He wields the scepter of universal dominion. He has received an abundant reward for all His sorrows while upon earth. Jesus Christ now guides the helm of the Universe. The highest archangels pay their willing allegiance to Him; and throughout the realms of space His mandates are obeyed. John in apocalyptic vision saw a great multitude which no man could number stand before the throne and before the Lamb, who cried with a loud voice saying, “Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.” “And all the angels stood round about the throne and fell before the throne on their faces and worshiped God, saying Amen: Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be unto our God forever and ever.”

## **2. Triumph Over His Foes**

A second object gained by Christ in His ascension was a triumph over his foes. He was hated as well as feared by all the enemies of unrighteousness. Satan, the arch enemy of all that is good, well knew that in Jesus was centered all the hopes for the salvation of our race. He had waged war against God and upon man ever since his first fatal effort in Eden. He was well aware that if he failed in the great battle to be fought, nothing but eternal confusion and despair awaited him. He summoned all his power to enter into his terrible contest with the Christ of God. He began his efforts as soon as the infant Jesus appeared upon our earth, and in that cruel massacre which Herod ordered at his instigation, would have removed the heavenly babe from our world before He could benefit it, had not divine power interposed in His behalf. And when Jesus entered upon His ministry, how artfully and deceitfully did he endeavor by those sharp temptations in the wilderness to overcome the Redeemer. Baffled here, he still pursued his

object with unrelenting malice and fell hatred. The Saviour of the world was followed with persecution upon persecution throughout all the years of His ministry. And at last the powers of darkness met with apparent success. The Son of God was delivered into the hands of those who thirsted for His blood. Condemned to an ignominious death, He was led out unresistingly to the place of His crucifixion, and there nailed to the cross and raised up to die. Death's fetters were not strong enough to bind down the Prince of Life. Three short days only did He remain in the grave. And then, to the astonishment of all His foes, rising in His power from the tomb, He ascended up on high leading captivity captive. Now He is beyond their reach. " Having spoiled principalities and powers. He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them."

“Here lay the Holy One, the Christ of God,  
He who for death gave death, and life for life;  
Our heavenly Kinsman, our true flesh and blood.  
Victor for us on hell's dark field of strife.  
The Conqueror, not the conquered, He to whom  
The keys of death and of the grave belong.  
Crossed the cold threshold of the stranger's tomb,  
To spoil the spoiler, and to bind the strong.”

### **3. To Bestow Blessings Upon His Church**

In the third place Christ ascended in order to bestow blessings upon His church. Wherefore He saith,

“When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. And He gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

And among these blessings bestowed after His ascension was the great gift of the Holy Ghost. Before His death He said to His disciples, “It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send Him unto you.” And upon that

memorable day of Pentecost, when this promise was fulfilled to the apostles, when they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, Peter standing up in the midst of the apostles said to the assembled multitude that Jesus, “being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear.” Under the influence of the Spirit, the apostles went forth preaching the gospel and working wonderful miracles in confirmation of the same. Soon their fame spread abroad. Multitudes were converted; and churches were established in all parts of the then known world. The Spirit continues to be given and has been with the church in all ages. He still acts in enlightening, converting and sanctifying every believer. This great gift is yet bestowed, for our Lord has given us the promise that we shall receive it if we seek it.

“If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.”

#### **4. Still another object for which Christ ascended was to intercede for us.**

He has ascended up into the immediate presence of God to carry on the work of an High Priest, on behalf of His people. Paul tells us that “We have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God” – “not into the holy places made with hands, which are figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” “Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood. He entered” once into the holy place,” and is “even at the right hand of God making intercession for us.” “And by these holy services which are now going on in heaven He obtains eternal redemption for us.” “There He maintains our cause;” there, as our Intercessor, He offers the incense of His own petitions, and pleads the merits of His own blood, and obtains for us the blessings we seek both as to body and soul. “Wherefore He is able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.” How eloquent are His wounds! How powerful

is the merit of His sacrifice! How effective is the voice that arises from that blood, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

## **5. Again Christ ascended as the forerunner of His people.**

Just before He left this world He told His disciples that He would come again to receive them unto Himself, that where He is, they might be also.

“Two persons had ascended before Christ – Enoch and Elias. But they ascended as private individuals, and it did not follow that because they ascended others would also: they were not so connected with others as to move them by their influence. But Christ attracts and draws millions. His glory is a pledge of our own. Because He lives, we shall live also.”

So certain is it that the followers of Jesus shall be exalted as He is that the apostle contemplates the work as already consummated, and says we are “raised up and made to sit together with Him in heavenly places.” Paul, speaking of the Christian’s hope says, “Which hope we have as an anchor to the soul both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus made an High Priest forever after the order of Melchisedek.” He has entered there as the first among many brethren. When the everlasting gates were lifted up to let the King of Glory come in, they remained open to afford a free ingress for all who are marshalled under His banners, and who are following Him on to victory. He has gone before; soon there shall be gathered around Him a “multitude which no man can number, out of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues.” The presence of Jesus in those celestial abodes insures the arrival of His saints there in due time. Where He is they must be also. No power can defeat the Christian if he rightly struggle for his heavenly home. “Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able” to rob us of our reward if we only labor for it in the proper way. Jesus has already gone to His reward. The heavens have received Him, and He will see to it that no one of His humble followers



shall be dragged away from the skies. Our struggles and prayers and tears shall not be thrown away. They will eventuate in triumph. The heavens may sometimes be dark above us; trouble may encompass our path, yet let not our energies flag, let not our feet grow weary or our hands hang idly down, the time will come when sorrow and sighing shall flee away, the cross give place to the crown, and the shout of triumph arise from lips that once trembled with fear. Heaven is ours. Jesus has taken possession of it. He offers a place in it for every believing, faithful soul. He cannot, will not disappoint. Take to yourselves then the whole armor of God, and press onward for the prize.

“Be brave, my brother!  
The recompense is great,  
The kingdom bright and fair;  
Beyond the glory of all earthly state,  
Shall be the glory there.  
Grudge not the heavy cost.  
Faint not at labor here,  
'Tis but a life time at the most,  
The day of rest is near.”

## **6. To Prepare A Place For His People**

The last object which I shall mention, for which Christ ascended, was that He might prepare a place for His people. Just before the time when He was to be offered up, when His disciples were gathered around Him, sad on account of His departure from them. He comforted them with these words, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God; believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. \_I go to prepare a place for you." On that work He is engaged, fitting and arranging a place for the everlasting and blissful abode of His saints – that heavenly Jerusalem, that firmly founded city for which Abraham looked, whose builder and maker is God. John in the Revelation saw " that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal." "And the building of the wall of it was

of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. Its twelve gates were twelve pearls." And he "saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty, and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." And "they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" shall enter therein. These are the mansions Jesus our ascended Lord has gone to prepare. Tongue cannot describe the glorious creation of the great Architect. And when all things are ready and the appointed time has come, our blessed Saviour shall return again to this earth, to receive His faithful ones to Himself in these abodes prepared by His own hands. On that memorable day when He was caught up out of sight of the apostles from the mount of Olives, while they steadfastly gazed toward heaven as He went up, "two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said. Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven," And some of these days when the world is all unprepared for it, and men are going on in their courses of sin and worldliness, the heavens shall open and Christ attended with ten thousand of His saints shall descend again to earth, "to be admired of all that believe," and to take "vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,"

"The church has waited long  
Her absent Lord to see;  
And still in loneliness she waits,  
A friendless stranger she.  
Age after age has gone,  
Sun after sun has set,  
And still in weeds of widowhood.  
She weeps a mourner yet.  
Come, then, Lord Jesus, come!

The whole creation groans,  
And waits to hear that voice,  
That shall restore her comeliness,  
And make her wastes rejoice.

Come, Lord, and wipe away  
The curse, the sin, the stain.  
And make this blighted world of ours  
Thine own fair world again.  
Come, then, Lord Jesus, come!"

# 9. The Glorious Church

“A glorious Church.”– Eph. 5:27.

THE CHURCH IS THE COMMUNITY – or, as it is expressed in the Apostles’ Creed – “the communion of saints.” It has the Lord Jesus Christ for its Head, and all who believe in Him and are identified with Him, for its members. It is partly on earth, partly in Paradise. Those of its members who are yet on earth struggling, are in the state militant; those who have passed away from earth are in the state triumphant; but all alike belong to the one church. It has its representatives from all nations, languages and zones; it has existed in all the ages, and will exist through all eternity. It is bound together by its allegiance to One Head, by its profession of one faith, and by its reception of the same Baptism. There has been no institution like it on the earth, nor shall it give way to any successor. *However* it may be contemplated, it may well be styled in the language of the text: “A glorious church.”

## I. It Is Glorious On Account Of Its Origin.

Its origin is divine. It springs not from the earth, nor is it the work of man. Human wisdom could not have devised it; human energy could not have established it; human effort could not have preserved it. It is an institution come from heaven, planned in heaven, and established and kept by heavenly power. It is a thing altogether above the reach of worldly aspiration or worldly achievement. God in His Word claims it as His. Jesus Christ the God-Man is declared to be its chief cornerstone. “Now, therefore,” says Paul, “ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God! and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone: In whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth

unto an holy temple unto the Lord. In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” Of Christ it is said that “God hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.” The church is called “God’s building,” the “flock of God,” the “house of God,” the “church of the living God.” No other institution among men is spoken of in such terms as these, and no others can claim a divine origin except that of the family and state government. The Great Architect of the Universe therefore is the founder and builder of the church. God has stooped from the skies and planted His holy habitation among the children of men and made it the place of His abode. It is here He reveals Himself. It is here His laws are given. It is here His purposes with regard to men are made known. It is here His grace is found. It is here that heaven communicates with earth, and a way is opened by which earth may communicate with heaven. It is through the church that God lays hold upon an apostate world, and prevents it from being wrested from His rightful sway. The church, therefore, comes from God. The great, the majestic, the adorable Being who alone is to be worshiped and feared and obeyed is its founder. The seal of the Triune God is upon it. Its origin is glorious because it is divine.

Of all the institutions and associations of men none can claim such an origin as this. All others, however good and benevolent their objects are essentially of the earth – earthy. They are characterized by the weakness, the errors and the sinfulness of their founders and members. Man cannot by his own effort rise higher than himself. Because of his impotence he cannot even attain unto his own standard of perfection, and that will necessarily be low inasmuch as he is a sinful mortal. All his labors, therefore, will be marked by his imperfections, and will be more or less marred and disjointed and defective. If he is enabled to accomplish anything at all essentially good, it is only by the aid of divine grace, and this is obtained only through the church. And if he attempt to unite principles of his own devising, which will necessarily partake of his own nature, with divine principles, he mingles things at variance with each other and builds a house divided against itself, which Christ Himself declares cannot stand. Imperfection attaches to all his works, and nothing that is not perfect will endure forever. We must build on eternal truth, if we would build for eternity. The world and the fashion thereof passeth away. And however glorious to our eyes may be the fabrics which we rear, and whatever wisdom, pains and wealth

may be spent in their construction, if they are the result of human effort, even the greatest, and if our, frailty and mortality are connected with them, we must look to see them all swept away, so that not a vestige shall remain. And if our attachments and hopes are clustered around them, we must expect nothing but disappointment. It is God's hand that has formed the church. He laid its foundations broad and deep, and established them on the Rock of Ages. As coming from Him it is perfect. He established no other institution as supplementary to it; and in His gracious workings among men, He knows of no other. All mere human institutions are built upon the sand, and must be swept away when the wave of trial comes. They are transitory. Feebleness mars them, because they are human. The Church was formed by Almighty God. It bears the impress of Divinity.

## **II. It Is Glorious In The Work Of Its Establishment.**

It was established with many mighty wonders and at much cost and labor. God founded it and employed the greatest and mightiest and best of our race as coworkers with Himself in its construction. His omniscient and all wise mind devised its plan, and His omnipotent hand wrought upon it through various heavenly and earthly agencies, over centuries of time. Prophets commissioned from on high and inspired by the Holy Ghost, spoke of it and made known its blessedness to sinful men, and prepared the way for its full development. The great Jehovah spoke from the heavens and revealed His intentions and purposes concerning it. For its laws from the skies, containing the great moral law that rules throughout the companies of God's hosts in the wide universe, were given and engraved on earth's tablets by the hand of the great Artificer Himself. Angels left their posts of glory and high dignity in the celestial courts and at the Father's bidding descended to this His footstool, to carry out His commands in regard to it. A peculiar people was called to be the keeper of the Oracles of the Most High, and by most wonderful acts and miraculous interpositions of Divine Providence were they delivered and preserved and defended from their enemies, that they might be the guardians of its truth, and that through them God's counsels concerning it might be brought to pass. Patriarchs and prophets, kings and princes, and spiritual and earthly principalities labored

and toiled for its completion. Millions of treasure were spent upon it. God Himself, that His church might rise, humbled Himself and took upon Him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men. He vacated His seat of loftiest eminence; united Himself to dust and ashes and was subjected to all the pains and sorrows of poor death-stricken mortality that He might labor and suffer for it. As thus manifest in the flesh the Son of God devoted His life on earth to its firm establishment. He submitted Himself to subtle temptations of the malicious devil; endured the hard and bitter lot of poverty; preached the eternal truth of heaven from place to place, and from house to house to a blinded and unheeding world; he wrought miracles of wonder upon the living, upon the dead, upon the winds, upon the waves, and controlled good and evil spirits alike by a word; He was pursued by implacable foes with unvarying hate; He was condemned at a heathen tribunal amid the clamors of a maddened populace, who would only be satisfied with His blood; and though innocent of transgression. He was crucified in ignominy and shame between two criminals suffering for their wicked deeds. All this He endured that His church might be established forever as a refuge for sin stricken humanity. The grave and the powers of hell were conquered by His resurrection, and all power has been committed into His hands, in that He ascended up on high and is seated down at the right hand of God, “far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come,” all things are put under His feet, and He is “head over all to the church.” And since that day the Holy Ghost has been sent, the apostles have labored, miracles have been performed in the name of Jesus, martyrs have suffered and died, and myriads of holy men have toiled, un pitying persecutions have been endured, battles have been fought, and divine grace has been freely bestowed upon men, that the Church of Christ might be strengthened and preserved. History does not record the mighty acts which have been performed; nor can the world form any idea of the cost of blood and treasure and labor which under the hand of God have been expended in founding and establishing His church.

### **III. The Church Is Glorious In The Object For Which It Was Established.**

The great work of the church is to save souls, and this includes all other work for the good of the world. There are many institutions and associations in the world established for various and diverse objects. Some are intended to elevate the social standing of men. Others to educate their mind. Others to provide for bodily wants in time of need. Others to establish a kind of brotherhood for mutual benefit and good. Others for governmental purposes. Others for the promotion of science and art. But there is none except the Church which proposes to deal with those interests which relate to the spiritual welfare of man, and the salvation of his immortal soul. In its operations it has reference not only to this world, but to that which is to come. It is designed to fit men not only for time, but for eternity. It takes in besides the little age of this fleeting life, the untold ages of the future. It regards not the welfare of men simply for the few days in which they are allowed to remain here, but deems these important only as being preparatory to that endless duration in which a thousand years shall be as one day. It contemplates man's good not only during that little span of existence bounded by birth and death, but also his chief good in that state in which he will endure as long as God Himself.

Nor does the church aim merely at the welfare of the bodies of men or of their intellect. It does not seek only the culture of the mind, or refinement of thought and feeling and manners, or advancement in the social state; nor does it aim at securing wealth and the ease and freedom from want which it brings, or the acquisition of power and influence. Nor does it strive simply to make men moral, so as to promote honesty and fairness in business dealings, and an avoidance of those crimes which are a disgrace to civilization, and those rebellions to proper authority which undermine the stabilities of government. All true good in this world it does seek after, and does attain in the most perfect manner possible in the sinful state to which man has brought himself, and the unnatural condition of affairs which sin entails. But the church has an object higher than all these, which when attained will secure all the good that men usually labor for and much more than their highest hopes can entertain. It is the everlasting salvation of men that the church seeks. It was founded that souls might be saved from destruction, that heaven might be peopled with happy saints, and the powers of darkness defeated in their malignant designs. If this object is secured, then all other objects worth striving for are secured. If this highest good is reached, then the man will be possessed of all good. If the soul is saved,



then will it be freed from all sin, which is the source of all evil, and the cause of all misery; then will the mind of man be released from all its fetters and embarrassments, and he will see and know even as he is known; then will the body be delivered from the evils and pains and sicknesses and death to which it is now subjected; and endowed with capacities and powers to receive and impart happiness beyond our present conception, and which eternity will not impair; then will be developed in perfection those graces and adornments of character, which render their possessors so attractive and lovely; then will blessedness and glory crown the brightest and noblest hopes of those who once toiled in this sinful world in weariness and woe, but who have been renewed after the image of Him who created them. The church's gaze is centered on heaven, and its hopes are fixed there alone where sure and perfect peace may be found. Through it the great Redeemer speaks, and promises rest to the weary and the heavy laden, and salvation to the lost. Were it not for the church, the mansions of heaven prepared for the saints would be deserted, and the cells of the prison house of the lost overcrowded with inmates. The princes and powers of the empire of evil, with their malignant and subtle chief, direct all their efforts and assaults against the Church of Jesus Christ, knowing that if this can be overcome, the victory will be theirs and that Satan will then truly be the Prince of this world. To defeat this foe of happiness and heaven, the Lord is ever at work in His church, and gathering trophies from the grasp of Satan and introducing them into the company of His flock, and preparing them for a celestial residence with Himself. No nobler work than this could enlist the sympathies of heaven, or employ the energies of man. The world to come will alone reveal the magnitude of those interests with which the church is concerned, and the untold rewards which are held in reserve for its members. In view then of the great object of its establishment, it is well styled "a glorious church."

## **IV. The Church Is Glorious On Account Of Her Ultimate Triumph**

Her situation in this world has always been lowly. Her members compared with earth's myriads have been a little flock. Her founder as to His earthly connections was the son of a carpenter, and His days were spent in poverty

and toil. Her first apostles were humble fishermen. Her members for the most part have been of the poor, without titles and without power. Her foes have been great and strong, and have battled against her with many persecutions and through many centuries. The blood of her martyrs has stained the fields of almost all lands, and nearly every generation has witnessed the flames kindled for the burning of her children. Divisions have often enfeebled her ranks, and defections caused sorrow throughout all her borders. Hypocrites and deceivers have crept into her fold and brought dishonor upon her and turned many from the faith. Many of those whose names have been enrolled upon her records have given her at best but a divided love, and finally have forsaken her overcome by the deceitfulness of riches, or the cares of this world, or the fear of persecution. Many a merciless wave has dashed its force against her, and many a raging tempest has spent its fury upon her. Strained and weather-beaten, she has plowed the waters of affliction, often with the sky entirely overcast, without a gleam of sunshine or the sight of a single star, guided only by the compass of faith which points to Him who controls the winds, and holds the waters in His hand. But amidst all her adversities and struggles she has still maintained her place and kept on in her appointed work. Though ridiculed by the giddy, sneered at by the proud and self-righteous, downtrodden by the mighty, she has ever been the refuge of the weary, the reliever of distress, the consoler of the desponding, the dispenser of pardon and peace to the penitent, and the home of the God-fearing and the true-hearted. With all her discouragements and hindrances she has been strengthening and maturing for immortality. Depressed and derided, nevertheless she has gathered to her fold the greatest and noblest of the race, and decked her crown with the brightest of earth's jewels. Like her Lord and Master she has meekly suffered, but fulfilled her mission; and though maltreated and scourged she has blessed even her enemies, though they knew it not. She has triumphed in the good she has done, and the souls she has plucked as brands from the burning.

But still greater triumphs await her. The day is coming when she shall receive double for all her troubles, when she shall prevail over all the earth, when the heathen shall be given to her for her inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for her possession. The Word of God speaks of a time when nations shall bring their glory unto her, and kings and princes lay down their scepters at her feet. Already the myriad hosts, gathered from

every land and clime, are waiting with longing and glad anticipation, the arrival of the hour, known in the counsels of God, when decked in her bridal robes, she shall be presented before the face of Him who has saved and washed her in His blood. On that glad coronation day shall she stand vindicated before an admiring universe, while all her treacherous and open foes, as well as her spiritual enemies, shall hide themselves from her presence in the blackness of darkness forever. Then from that great throng, clad in white robes and with palms of victory in their hands, shall burst forth the long pent up song of praise, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." "Amen. Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God forever and ever." And throughout the endless day of heaven's eternity, shall the church abide in the presence of Him who has redeemed her, safe and blessed evermore. Exalted to seats of dignity and honor, her portion henceforth shall be in that kingdom which knows no end. Her humble, lowly state shall give place to one of heavenly glory. Her members cleansed and purified from all stains and imperfections, adorned with all the gifts and graces of a loving Lord, shall shine as the stars for ever and ever. After all her weary toils and trials on earth, she shall enter into her reward and rest, seated on thrones of light, among the princes and exalted powers on high, crowned with glory everlasting.

If these things are true, the church becomes the greatest and most important institution on earth. If God is its Founder and Architect, if it was established in His Province through so many multiplied agencies, if its object contemplates so much of good, if its ultimate triumph will be so glorious, it rises in importance to a value which no arithmetic can calculate. It demands our respect, our reverence, our love, and our labors. True there are many imperfections attaching to it, in its earthly state. There are weaknesses and shortcomings and failures which we cannot help seeing. Folly and sin are often mingled with its holiest rites, and selfishness and ambition mark many of its leaders and office bearers. Broken vows and worldly conformity too often mar its beauty and disgrace its profession. Bickerings and contentions are frequently found, instead of unity and peace. Position and power are sought by too many who love the preeminence. But these are not the faults of the church itself, nor owing to any defect in its working, or any failure on the part of its means of grace. They result from the sin and the folly of poor, frail humanity. It is this very evil and sin and

guilt which it is the work of the church to restrain and eradicate. We must not blame her for the mishaps and failings and hypocrisies of those she is endeavoring to sanctify and save. The church as instituted by God and equipped for her work, is perfect. She needs no earthly associations to supplement her works, no inventions of man to fill out any lack in the wisdom of God. The church then is to be upheld, supported, defended. Whatever else may prove false she will be true; whatever else may disappoint, she will satisfy; whatever else may be given up, we must cling to her.

And if these things are true, how necessary is it that we be connected with the church. If God bestows His grace only through the means which He has committed to her ministration, then there is no salvation out of her. If God dwells in the midst of her, and through her dispenses His blessings, how essential is it that we be enrolled among her members, identified with her interests, take part in her struggles, drink in her life, feed upon her spiritual food, partake of her grace and strength, and so come into communion and fellowship with God Himself. If God has been at so much expense of treasure and blood, if Jesus Christ has yielded up Himself to crucifixion, in order that the church might be firmly founded, how can we think lightly of her, or despise her claims, or turn away from her calls or neglect her interests. Can we treat the Son of God with so much contempt and consider the shedding of His blood of so little moment that we can be saved quite as well without His aid as with it! Can we think we can slight His appointments and neglect His ordinances, and refuse to participate in His sacraments, and to comply with His demands, and yet have a good title to heaven? Awake to a true and wise consideration of these things. Let no prejudices prevent an honest searching for the truth. Let your convictions of duty lead to its performance. The church waits for you. Those many witnesses on high stand and gaze anxious for a correct decision. Think of the claims of your God; think of the purposes of your creation, and lose no time in laying hold upon the salvation of Jesus offered in His church.

# 10. The Coming of Christ

“As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” – Heb. 9:27, 28.

AS THERE WAS A FALL, so there is a redemption. As there is one death, and one judgment after death in consequence of the fall, so there is one offering to atone for transgression and to deliver from the condemnation of the judgment. And though there are many sins there is but one justification. But there are different stages in the great work of redemption. Christ does it all, not all at once, nor at one visit to the world. The text speaks of a twofold coming – a coming a second time, which necessarily implies a first time. One has been accomplished, the other remains to be accomplished. We propose in the present discourse to consider the likenesses and diversities of these two comings.

## I. How They Are Alike

### 1. Predictions And Expectations

They are alike in the predictions of inspiration, and in the expectation of the saints living before their occurrence. It cannot be doubted that the character and nature of His first coming were clearly foretold by the Old Testament prophets. The following, among other facts, were mentioned concerning Him, all having reference to His first coming, and all being fulfilled at that time, viz.: His being born of a virgin and of the house of David and of the seed of Abraham: the time of His coming: the place of His birth: the adoration of the wise men: His being anointed by the Spirit: His public

ministry: His teaching by similitudes: His miracles: His public entry into Jerusalem: His humble condition: His meekness and humility: His compassion and tenderness: His being hated by the Jews: His being betrayed by a disciple: His being sold for thirty pieces of silver: His being accused by false witnesses: His patience and silence before His accusers: His hands and feet being pierced: His suffering and agony: His being railed at and reproached: gall and vinegar being given Him to drink: His intercession for His murderers: His death and burial: His resurrection and ascension. All these were foretold of Him at His first coming. Equally clear and explicit are the predictions given both in the Old and New Testaments of His second coming. It is called the “Glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour:” “the time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord:” “the last time.” It is prophesied that Christ shall come in the clouds: with power and glory; accompanied by His angels and saints: with flames of fire; with the voice of the archangel; with a shout: suddenly and unexpectedly: as the lightning. It is predicted that He shall come to complete the salvation of His saints: to judge the world: to be glorified in His saints: to reign: to destroy death: that every eye shall see Him: that the wicked shall scoff at it: that they shall be surprised by it: and that they shall be punished with everlasting destruction. All these things are predicted concerning His second coming. And as these two advents are alike in that they equally form themes of prophecy, so they are alike in the expectations of the saints before their occurrence. The Old Testament records show with what longing the pious and holy men of yore looked for the Saviour. They speak of His appearing in the most ardent and glowing terms. And seem to be impatient of the delay of His incarnation. All history attests that as the time of His revealing drew near, the expectations grew stronger, and the yearning, more intense, so that even the Gentile nations caught the spirit of the pious Jews, and turned their eager eyes, weary with waiting and watching, to the land where the promised Deliverer should arise. Their anticipations were intensified by hopes of deliverance from the miseries under which they groaned. The true spirit is that manifested by old Simeon, “Lord, now lettest Thou thy servant depart in peace for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

It is just as much a part of piety now to be in constant expectation of the second coming of Christ. Paul gave thanks to God for the Corinthians, because they came behind in no gift: “waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He commends the Thessalonians also because they turned

“from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven.” Peter, after speaking of the events to happen at the revelation of Jesus Christ, said, “What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God.” And in the apostolic times and the ages succeeding down to the present, there have been those who have anxiously looked for the coming of the Son of Man, to correct the evils of this sinful world, just as the saints of old expected and watched for His first coming. In the predictions of the prophets then and in the expectations of the saints these two comings are alike.

## **2. The Personal Reality Of Their Nature**

They are alike in the personal reality of their nature. Nothing is truer than that the Son of God became incarnate in the flesh. Jesus Christ was really and actually born into the world just as really as we are. He grew from infancy to boyhood, and from boyhood to manhood. He ate and slept, and wept and suffered. He actually lived and moved and passed the time of his sojourning here in His holy and divine vocation. He was tempted of Satan, though without sin. He walked through the cities and villages and byways of Palestine. He taught the people. He was nailed to the cross, and personally suffered excruciating torment. He died and was buried, His body being taken down from the cross and laid in the sepulchre by His friends. Literally and truly did He arise from the tomb. His disciples saw Him and recognized Him. They talked with Him and ate with Him after He arose from the grave. Frequently was He seen after His resurrection; at one time by five hundred at once. There is no doubt about His identity. In the presence of His apostles He ascended up on high: they saw Him go up, till the clouds received Him out of their sight. Jesus Christ was not an ideal, spiritual, airy fancy, but a personal reality, moving among men, speaking to them, approached by them, healing their diseases, doing them good, and in all respects manifesting Himself as a potent being.

Of the same nature will be His second coming: it will be personal; every whit as literal and real as His first coming was. When He ascended the disciples stood gazing after Him; when two bright messengers appeared saying, “Ye men of Galilee why stand ye here gazing up into heaven? This

same Jesus that is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.” We are told also that every eye shall see Him. The very place where His feet shall stand when He returns, is mentioned. Before He went away He spoke of His coming again, which necessarily implies that it will be in the same personal way that He came before. He will again then descend to our earth, and tread upon it as He trod before; and be manifested to its inhabitants, so that they shall see Him and know Him, as He was seen and known by His apostles after His triumph over the grave. As the heavenly hosts sang songs of praise over His first advent, so there will be shouts and songs when He returns to reign. And as literally and truly as He ascended up on high and in person took a seat on the right hand of His Father, so literally and truly will He in person come back to seat himself on His own throne. These two comings are alike then in the personal reality of their nature.

### **3. Both Are Parts of the Great Redemptive Scheme**

They are alike in being parts of the same great redemptive scheme. The great work of Christ is the redemption of man from the dominion and thralldom of Satan. In this work there are many steps, and many acts. The first great act in the securing of redemption was Christ’s incarnation, which included His birth, death and resurrection. But still the work of redemption is not complete. This poor earth yet groans under the curse, brings forth its thorns and thistles, and rolls on its orbit blighted by the foul breath of sin. Pain and sickness and every evil still hold sway over the creatures who were made for glory, honor and immortality. Death yet claims his victims; nor Will he yield his authority and power. The great enemy of our race continues to carry on his malicious and fatal work, in effecting the ruin of the sons of men. Something more then remains to be accomplished. These foes must be finally and completely destroyed; these evils must be eradicated from the earth. This final work Christ performs when He comes again. But it is the necessary continuance of what He has already begun, and is a part of the same grand work which He engaged to do, and which He entered upon when as a babe He humbled Himself, and took upon Him the form of a servant. The first great stage in His work He has passed through, what remains will follow in due time, and consummate what has been begun. At His second advent then He unfolds no new purpose, makes



known no new scheme, and ventures upon no new labor. He completes what He has commenced, and builds the superstructure on the foundation He has laid. As He has declared Himself to be the Alpha and Omega, so His first and second advents form the beginning and ending of the same redemptive scheme.

#### **4. They Produce Great Changes In The Thinking and Affairs of Men**

These two comings are alike, because they produce great changes in the thinking and affairs of men. No character has produced so much change in the world as Jesus Christ. Though a despised Nazarene His influence has been felt to be more potent than that of the mightiest conqueror or the greatest philosopher the earth has ever seen. Though He was nailed to the cross His principles and teachings could not be. Though men could crucify Him, they could not bind or bury His influence. The Christianity He taught and founded in His own blood, has outlived all its foes, and triumphed over all the forces arrayed against it, and so molded the minds of men, that even His bitterest opponents have been more or less influenced by it, and are compelled to respect what they find they cannot change. In every department of life, civil, social, religious, Christianity has made itself felt, and introduced great changes. The world is by no means what it was before the advent of Jesus Christ. His cross, erected in Palestine, has largely influenced the earth, and shaped its mightiest movements. What an advance is the Christian dispensation upon the Jewish Theocracy which preceded it. How different are the philosophy, the literature, the opinions of men now from what they were before. So, also His second advent will introduce great changes. Changes greater even than those introduced by His first coming, as then will be seen in their fullness the results of His divine work. Not only a few will then submit to Him, but all nations; and His Gospel, with its heavenly principles, will prevail among all the sons of men, so that all will live and move and act in accordance with them. Old theories which even in this enlightened age have been cherished, will be abandoned. New light will burst upon the world. Judaism was like the starlight, affording but faint glimmerings amid the darkness. Christianity is like the moonlight, shining somewhat brighter, but still leaving much in obscurity, and hiding much from view. But the approaching dispensation, called in the Scriptures the

times of restitution, will be like the clear sunlight, dissipating all darkness, and shining with such an effulgence as to reveal all things. Then shall many of the pursuits men now delight in, be deemed empty vanities; the knowledge they now possess be insignificant; their present wisdom be looked upon as folly, and all ways of acting and modes of thought of worldly-minded people be considered childish. Radical and vast will be the changes introduced in all parts of our globe by the revelations of that great day of the Lord. An entirely new order of affairs will be established. The world will be as it were remolded; and men reanimated with a new life. Just as Christ's first coming started a new order of things, so will His second coming inaugurate still more wonderful transformations. These two comings of Christ then have several particulars in which they resemble one another. The same Christ appears upon the earth, at different periods. He comes for the same great purpose; and each time effects His object. It is the same being, the God-man that both times visits the earth, both times engaged in the same great work, beginning it at the first visitation and completing it at the second.

But these two comings have their diversities as well as their likenesses. Though in many particulars they resemble each other, yet in many respects they differ. It is Jesus Christ who appears, and Christ the Redeemer, but to carry out different parts of His redemptive work.

## **II. How They Are Diverse**

### **1. They Are Diverse In The Circumstances Of His Manifestation.**

At His first advent His humiliation and lowliness were most manifest. Under mean and lowly circumstances He was born, and laid in a manger. He grew up sharing the hard lot of His humble parents, and was subject unto them. When he entered upon His ministry He led a life of poverty. His own plaintive words show how destitute He was.

“The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.”

Persecuted by the great and forsaken by many who professed to be His friends. He endured all without complaining or murmuring, or using any of the Divine power which dwelt within Him to deliver Himself from the persecutions of His enemies. The words of the prophet in relation to Him were literally fulfilled. "He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him."

Far different, however, shall it be at his second advent. He will come in great splendor and majesty. He Himself said, "The Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels." His revelation will be accompanied with marvelous heraldic demonstrations. "The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God." He will be clothed in irresistible power. "Hereafter," said He, "shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." When the apostle John was transported in spirit, in his apocalyptic visions, and saw Christ, the sight was unendurable, and he fell at His feet as one dead. In the mount of transfiguration His three favored disciples caught a glimpse of that glory in which He shall hereafter be revealed. His face did shine as the sun, His raiment was white as the light, and a bright cloud overshadowed them. "At the sight and at the sound of the voice which was heard, the disciples 'fell on their faces.' He will appear then, not alone, nor in lowliness, but attended with angel bands, and in splendor and great glory, manifesting His majesty and power."

## **2. In The Nature Of His Work.**

At first He came as the victim to be offered for sin, He shall come again without sin unto salvation. John the Baptist, His forerunner, pointed to Him as he appeared among the people and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" He was spoken of as the Lamb slain. He bore the sin of the whole world in His body on the cross. But Isaiah tells us, that when He shall appear again it shall be said in that day, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him; He will save us; this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

He came the first time as the meek Teacher. Everywhere He taught the people with the greatest forbearance, tenderness and love. The reproach uttered against Him by the Scribes and Pharisees was, "This man receiveth sinners." How gently He dealt with all who came to Him, How wisely He instructed them, accommodating Himself to their dullness, bearing with their prejudices and submitting to their want of appreciation. But when He comes again it will be as the righteous Judge. The day of forbearance will then be past; the time for sifting will then have come. "His 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." The axe which has lain so long as a warning at the root of the trees will be lifted in judgment. No longer will the gardener pray that the barren fruit tree may be allowed to stand this year also, but the command will be put in execution, "Cut it down, why encumbereth it the ground?"

In the days when He moved here upon earth, it was as the submissive sufferer. He submitted to the temptations of Satan, to the persecutions of the chief men of the Jewish nation, of Herod, and of Pontius Pilate. But when he comes again it will be as the triumphant Lord.

### **3. In The Manner In Which Men Shall Regard Him.**

At His first coming the words of Isaiah were fulfilled when in prophetic vision he said in regard to Him: "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised and we esteemed Him not," But never more shall He move among men as the despised Nazarene. Never more will He be called a winebibber, nor will it be said that He hath a devil and that He casteth out devils by Beelzebub. The crown of thorns which rude soldiers put upon His brow will give place to the crown of glory; and the mock robes of the king to be crucified, to the garments of light. Then will the second Psalm be fulfilled, wherein God says, "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me. Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Of His own true believing people it is said, "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy

upon their heads, they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

## **Conclusion**

From all this we may see:

### **1. What Is The True Scope Of Proper Christian Faith And Hope.**

It looks back to a Saviour come in the flesh and suffering as a sacrifice for sin, and it looks forward to a Saviour come in the glory of God to overthrow His enemies and complete the redemption of His saints.

### **2. That Both These Aspects Of Faith And Hope Are Essential – The One To Justification, The Other To Salvation.**

### **3. We Have Reason To Be Admonished To Be Earnestly “Looking” For The Coming Again Of Our Lord And Saviour Jesus Christ.**

Christ and His apostles again and again urge us to be looking and watching for the coming of our Lord. They represent that event as the great hope of the church, and warn every Christian against any neglect of it. In these days of apostasy and unbelief we need to be reminded of these Scripture admonitions. The world is more and more taking hold of the idea that it can get along very well without Christ. The world’s progress, and the world’s greatness are the two grand absorbing thoughts of the age. God is, to a great and alarming extent, forgotten, and Christ is neglected, and Christians have quite too much caught the spirit of the day, and are quite too much swayed by the excitements of the hour. We need to have our eyes turned to the world’s true Saviour. We need to have our gaze directed to that cross on which He was crucified as the foundation of our salvation, and our hopes directed to Him as He shall come again without sin unto salvation. I would

have the words of the apostle Peter set prominently before you, “What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God,” and would remind you of those loving, but significant utterances of Christ, “Watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. . . . Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing. . . . But if that evil servant shall say in his heart, my Lord delayeth His coming. . . . The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for Him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Let the abiding impression of the whole Gospel upon your hearts be – Christ in the fullness of His work – Christ already come and offering Himself as the sacrifice for sin – Christ yet to come to receive us to glory. With our lamps trimmed and burning let us be ready for Him, and though we may be sundered on earth we shall meet in the glorious kingdom of our common Lord. It is but a little while we have to wait. Our pilgrimage on earth will soon be over, and in the future we shall be with Him and be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Beyond the smiling and the weeping,  
Beyond the waking and the sleeping  
Beyond the sowing and the reaping,  
I shall be soon.

Love, rest and home! Sweet hope!  
Lord, tarry not, but come.  
Beyond the rising and the setting  
Beyond the calming and the fretting.  
Beyond remembering and forgetting,  
I shall be soon.

Beyond the gathering and the strowing  
Beyond the ebbing and the flowing,  
Beyond the coming and the going,  
We shall be soon.

Beyond the parting and the meeting,  
Beyond the farewell and the greeting  
Beyond this pulse's fever beating  
We shall be soon.

Love, rest and home! Sweet hope!  
Lord, tarry not, but come.

# 11. Christ's Coming and Preparation For It

Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." – Matt. 24:44.

IN THIS TEXT an important event is spoken of and a solemn exhortation is founded upon it. The event spoken of is in these words: "In such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh;" and the injunction founded upon it is: "Therefore be ye also ready;" and to the text as thus divided I invite your attentive and prayerful consideration. And may Almighty God, by His Holy Spirit, aid and direct us both in hearing and speaking to the praise of His glorious grace.

The event here spoken of is the *coming of the Son of Man*. This has been interpreted by many persons to mean death. And in all those passages in which we are urged to watch and be ready for the coming of the Son of Man, it has become usual to refer us to death as the thing to watch and be ready for, making it to be synonymous with Christ's coming. Death is often held up in this and similar passages as the end or object to which we are hastening and for which we ought to be looking and preparing. I cannot, however, agree with such an interpretation. If our Saviour meant that death should be the object of the believer's continual watchfulness and expectation, He would have said so in language which could not be misunderstood. He would not say one thing and mean another. The Scriptures represent the coming of the Son of Man and death as two entirely distinct events; our creeds also so represent them. When, therefore, our Saviour uses the phrase "the coming of the Son of Man," plain common sense would understand Him as meaning the coming of the Son of Man and not death. He has never once specified death as the object of watchfulness or preparation. Had He done so in a single instance, we might then have



some warrant for supposing that in many passages in which He speaks of His second coming, it was in reality the death of each person to which He referred. But such is not the case. And whatever our desires and prejudices may be, we are forced to the conclusion that Christ's coming and not death is the thing we are exhorted to be ready for. Some have tried to evade the force of this reasoning by saying that for all practical purposes death may be considered the same thing as the coming of Christ. But this is not the manner in which the Gospel presents the matter. Death is spoken of there. We are assured that "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment." It is where death leaves a man that the coming of the Saviour will find him. But no one could have studied the New Testament in reference to this subject without discerning how seldom death is mentioned and how often the coming of Christ is alluded to.

"It is a mistake and one fraught with much practical mischief, as if it were the thing to be anticipated, and of which to interpret the many solemn injunctions of Scripture, with reference to the Saviour's second coming. It is this latter event and not the former which we are again and again urged to prepare for."

The Dean of Canterbury, speaking upon this subject, recently said:

"In Holy Scripture, we do not hear of preparation for death. I doubt whether one text can be found in which we are exhorted to make such preparation as such. But the constant note, the continual recurring exhortation, is, to be prepared for the Lord's coming. The reason is that he who is prepared for the Lord's coming is necessarily also prepared for his own death. The greater includes the less. He who so lives and thinks, so speaks, so works in his daily life as to be ready for the sign of the Son of Man from heaven, and the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, will not be found unready when the summons is heard in a softer tone, and comes with more previous warning. But he who has forgotten his Lord's coming, and has simply been careful about readiness for his own dismissal, will ever be too liable in the lesser thing to have neglected care for the greater: and he will also be well nigh certain to have lowered his standard of attainment, and narrowed his sympathies unworthily; in taking

thought for himself to have forgotten the great body of which he is a member; in minding his own safety to have forgotten the glory of his Lord – nay his very Lord Himself. For there is nothing that so much takes a man out of himself, nothing that so much raises and widens his thoughts and sympathies, nothing that so much purifies and elevates his hopes, as this preparation for the coming of the Lord.”

Our Lord knew well that death is to the believer even, a cold repulsive object; and that chilling and gloomy and repellent would be the influence which its perpetual expectation would exercise upon the sons of men. There is no attractiveness about the shroud, the grave, and the coldness of death. These are surely not held up to men for them to look forward to and live for and be prepared to meet. We instinctively turn away from these: we have an aversion for them which the most pious even cannot wholly overcome. No! our Saviour has placed before His followers a glowing prospect full of warmth and energy; lively and attractive to all who love Him in sincerity and regard Him as the chief among ten thousand. He places life before them, not death. He holds up to our gaze a subject which we can contemplate with delight, not one which will repel us. He clothes the future with joy and peace and glory for all His followers; He would not fill them with dread and dismay. He holds out to them a hope connected with His second coming which is intended to act as an incentive to us to overcome all the trials and troubles of this life and to make us triumph over even death itself. So far from identifying death – even the death of the believer – with the second coming of Christ, there are no two things which the word of God puts more widely apart, or which are presented to us in stronger contrast the one with the other; and to suppose our Lord thus to have identified them, or thus to identify them ourselves, is manifestly to accuse Him and be guilty ourselves, of confounding things that differ. Death is the coming of the King of Terrors: and therefore His advent is not to be confounded with that of the Lord of Life and Glory. At death the believer departs to go and be with Christ. Christ does not come to him. Death is a scene of pain and sickness and sorrow and sighing; of bitter partings and heart rending farewells. At the coming of Christ pain and sickness shall be forever dissipated: the death divided shall be eternally reunited; sorrow and sighing shall flee away. There can be no two things more dissimilar than these two.

Besides this:

“...death does not at all fall in with the spirit or nature of the Gospel, so as to entitle it to prominence as a theme of evangelical incentive. It belongs to sin and the curse, but to the Gospel and salvation. It presents a circle of ideas altogether narrower, darker, more legal, less evangelical, less fitted to impress with Christ-ward impulses, than we would expect in the system of God’s gracious appliances. We would not deny it a place among the considerations to be addressed to men, or exclude it in things to be looked to in our contemplations of the future, but to make it a substitute for the doctrine of the speedy coming of Christ in the glory of His kingdom is to put a gloss upon the Scriptures which they were never intended to wear, and to dislocate the inspired adjustments of truth by foisting man’s judgment in the place of divine wisdom.”

Christ is the great theme of the Gospel. His incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and second coming are the subjects placed prominently before us. These are put in the forefront of the picture, and compared with them, death is thrown quite into the background.

It is to Christ’s personal return to this earth then that the text refers when it speaks of the coming of the Son of man. And this is a doctrine made remarkably prominent in the sacred Scriptures. As a subject of hopeful expectation to the pious, and of terror to the ungodly, it is the most formally repeated and constantly affirmed. There is hardly a chapter in the evangelical writings which does not in some way refer to it. The Saviour Himself during His lifetime spoke largely of a period when the tribes of earth “shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory,” and when He shall send His angels, with a great sound of a trumpet, to gather His elect from the four winds.”

And passage might be multiplied upon passage all explicitly declaring the same thing. The writers of the Gospel seem to love to dwell upon it; and display the greatest anxiety to impress it on their readers. There is no doctrine of the Gospel announced with more clearness or solemnity. Nor are we to understand by this any spiritual coming: but a real advent to this earth again as really and truly and personally as He came to it before. It was not a spiritual coming which the apostle calls, “the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the Great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. It was not a

spiritual advent which the Corinthians were expecting when they were”waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ." It was not a spiritual view which the Thessalonians had when they “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven,” Paul had an actual presence of Christ in his mind when he said the Thessalonians were his hope and joy and crown of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at His coming." It was no spiritualizing our Lord meant should be put upon His words when He said, “As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.” “There are I believe,” says a writer of a treatise upon the book of Daniel, “some twelve or thirteen words in the original in the New Testament in reference to this coming. And these occur in plain and undoubted reference to it – no less than about one hundred and twenty-five times. They are thus often used to assert that truth. And they do it so clearly and pointedly, that it would seem their application cannot be mistaken.” The doctrine then that Jesus Christ who once walked upon this earth, was offered up upon the cross, ascended up into heaven, is verily and truly to come back to earth again, to be seen with our eyes and heard with our ears, as literally as He was by the listening thousands who crowded around Him in the desert and by the seashore, or by the most favored of His apostles, is the truth of God; revealed as clear as a sun beam in the Gospel, and made one of the most prominent of its themes.

That this has been the belief of the church, too, is seen by the fact that it is confessed in the writings of the great and good of all ages. The authors of the apostles’ creed, whoever they were, lived near the times of the apostles themselves. They certainly were acquainted with the interpretation of the Gospel as held in their day. They drank in the very spirit of the apostles. And in making that grand summary of Christian doctrine, which has been received by the Orthodox churches all over the world, and in every century and in which we make confession of our faith every Lord’s Day morning, they use the following language, “Ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.” The authors of the Augsburg Confession, the great symbol of our church, reiterate the same doctrine. They say in that confession, that, “Christ shall openly come again to judge them that are alive, and restore to life those that be dead, according to the creed of the apostles.”

If anything then should be received as an article of faith, this certainly should. If we believe that Jesus Christ ever lived upon our earth, if we believe that He was slain upon the cross, we must accept and hold the doctrine of His second coming; for the revelations which make known the first make known the last, and the same authority sanctions and enforces them all.

There is an important admonition given us in the text in this connection. "Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh." The coming of the Son of Man will be a sudden and unexpected event. The Holy Spirit gives us this caution in regard to it: "In such an hour as ye think not." No one can fix the exact time or date of the Saviour's appearance; it is folly to attempt it. The Scriptures purposely leave that indefinite and uncertain; and many well-meaning men have brought discredit upon themselves and their cause by attempting to speak with too much assurance in regard to the time of the second advent. That is not given us to know. Notwithstanding this, however, the time of the Saviour's coming is not so uncertain and indeterminate as to leave us entirely in the dark with regard to it. Paul says expressly, "Ye brethren are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." And the Saviour exhorts in this wise, "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares." There can be a looking for an object and an expectancy of it and a readiness for it and also a knowledge of its near approach, without a knowledge of the exact time in which it will happen. And this is just the posture in which the Gospel leaves this matter. It urges Christians to watch for the coming of the Son of Man; to be prepared for it; to be expecting it and looking for it; without informing them of the year or day in which it will take place. It presents it as an event which is likely to happen at any moment: which they are not to place far off in the future: which they are not to put out of mind and away from their thoughts; but which they must make a matter of ever present concern; as any moment it may be a present reality. It is too much the habit of Christians though they believe that Christ will come, yet to put that coming far off in the dim future, and give themselves no concern about it. They have fallen in too much with the general opinion of the world; and have come to think that there must be a millennium of righteousness and peace first in which the world will be converted to Christ, and then way down at

the end of that blissful period they locate the Saviour's return. These are false and pernicious views. They are full of danger to those who entertain them. The Scriptures nowhere so present this subject. They, on the contrary, solemnly enjoin upon us to watch for the Saviour's advent and be ready for it. Now we cannot watch for a thing and expect it, when we know that it will not come to pass for a thousand years or more. It is perfect folly for any one to declare that Christ will not come for 1000 years, and a distorting of the truth, when Jesus Himself declares, "In such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man Cometh." The impression which the Gospel would make upon a candid reader, is that Christ may come at any moment. If the particular moment were specified there would be no expectancy and no preparation, until near the time of the arrival of that moment. To have one watch for a thing and be on the lookout for it, and be in a state of constant readiness for it, he must be left under the belief that it is likely to happen at any time. The injunction, therefore, to be ready for the coming of the Son of Man, coupled with the caution that it will be in such an hour as we think not, of necessity implies that we are to be in constant expectation of His coming as possibly near at hand. Be careful then how you entertain this matter.

Heed not those who would lead you to treat it with indifference. Turn away from all those scorers against whom we are particularly warned, who cry "Where is the promise of His coming?" He will surely come at some time. It will be at an unexpected time; in such an hour as we think not." As the lightning shineth out of the east even unto the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be," are the words of Holy Writ. And who will have the presumption to say that that event will be postponed when the Saviour Himself as his very last utterance and caution in closing His revelation to man says, "Surely I come quickly."

That it is highly essential to be ready no one will deny. If we are to hail our Master with joy and not with sorrow, if we are to go in with Him to those high rewards bestowed upon the righteous, we must be prepared for Him. What then is implied in being ready for Christ's coming?

I reply first it is being found at our sundry posts of duty diligently employed in our various callings. The instruction of the Saviour in this regard is "Occupy till I come." No man is called to leave his honest labor, or neglect any of the duties of life. You are to fill the station in which God has placed you, in a godly and Christian way. You are not to neglect any

social duty or relation of life. You are not to turn aside from what Providence has appointed you to do. You are to be content with your lot. You are to be faithful in all that you engage in. You are to be true and honest in the performance of your duty to your country, your family, to the community in which you are placed and to your Lord. You are to be like faithful servants, who know not what hour their master may come, but keep all things in readiness and are always prepared. You are to be ready to obey whatever summons the Lord may send. You are to live always as men who are looking for the Lord's return. You must engage in no pursuit or occupation, in which you would not have Him find you employed. You are to rise and go forth in the morning prepared, if need be, to meet Christ at noon. You are to keep your spiritual account constantly settled like one who knows not how soon it may be called for.

A second thing implied in being ready is having our sins and guilt washed away in the blood of the great atoning Sacrifice and in being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.

It is to have repented and turned from all manner of sin and evil, and to have exercised true faith in the Son of God. We must have set ourselves also to obey all the injunctions and commands of the Lord. We must be connected with His church on earth, and be found diligently engaging in all the ordinances appointed by Him. And besides all this there must be a whole-hearted concentration of the entire man to Him. Everything must be yielded up to be laid on the altar of sacrifice, should He demand it. You must not only be a hearer of the word but a doer also; so that you may be founded upon a rock, that the storm and tempests may not be able to destroy. Having given ourselves unreservedly to Christ, we must be His followers indeed; breathing in more and more of His spirit; engaging in His employments, and taking delight in His ways. Whole-souled obedience must be rendered to the requirements of the Gospel. We are not to be discontented or dissatisfied with our lot; but to stand steady at our posts, serving our God in the spirit of our Master, and doing good in our day and generation. We must be growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and being made meet for the inheritance of the saints.

The third requisite in being ready for the coming of the Son of Man is to be in a posture of waiting for Him.

There must be a real love for the Lord Jesus Christ – a love which leads us not only to acquiesce in all His appointments here, but which takes delight in all His appointments for the future. There must be such an entwining of the affections around the heart of Jesus, as that He will be our all in all. There must be a looking for His return. His saints must watch for His coming, and love it, or there will be no readiness for it. If we regard it as something we would rather not have happen, if we look upon it with aversion; and feel annoyed, and afraid lest it should come to pass; there is cause to be suspicious of ourselves: and we should immediately Set to remedy any defects in our Christian character, that we may not be covered with shame and confusion at the advent of our Saviour. Let there be a perfect identification of yourselves with Christ. Have no will but His. Study to know His will, and to conform yourselves to it: and so abide in Him that when He shall appear, ye may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

“’Tis but a little while  
And He shall come again,  
Who died that we might live, who lives  
That we with Him may reign.  
Then, O my Lord, prepare  
My soul for that glad day;  
O wash me in thy precious blood,  
And take my sins away.”



## 12. Turning From Idols and Waiting For Christ

“For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God: And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”– 1 Thess. 1:9-10.

THE IMPRESSION MADE upon the converts of Thessalonica by the preaching of the great apostle to the Gentiles was a deep and lasting one. Though eighteen hundred years have rolled by since, in company with Silas, he entered that ancient city, yet the Christian religion still lives and flourishes there, and Christian churches have arisen in place of the synagogue in which he preached. So eagerly and intelligently did the Thessalonians receive and lay hold of the truth presented to them, that they soon became sincere and devout Christians. The word preached to them was not in vain, but was accompanied with the power of the Holy Ghost. “For,” says Paul, “our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.” “And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.” Such a church could not long remain unknown. Their work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope could not be hidden. Their religion was like a light set on a candlestick, not hid under a bushel; like a city set on a hill, seen afar. From them “sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia,” their immediate neighborhood, “but also in every place their faith to Godward was spread abroad. It was not necessary for Paul to declare anything concerning them to others to whom he preached, for they themselves told of their own accord

how Paul was received by the Thessalonians, and what effect his preaching had.

We learn from the text that there were two prominent facts asserted of the Thessalonians by others, as a proof that they had become Christians. One was that they had turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and the other was that they “waited for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus our Deliverer from the wrath to come.”

The first great evidence of the conversion of the Thessalonians, and which was noted as such by the surrounding countries, was that they turned from idols to serve the living and true God. Before the visit of Paul they had been idolaters. They were sundered from God, and the light which was in them had become darkness, and they had changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image, made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts and creeping things," and “worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.” Having lost the knowledge of the true God, they had formed for themselves a vast system of imaginary gods and goddesses, creations of their own fancy, whom they worshiped and served, to whom they prayed and vowed and paid their oblations. They were heathen bowing down to senseless stocks and stones, which could neither see nor hear them, nor do them good. But upon the preaching of Paul they were at once convinced of their former folly and sin, and throwing their idols to the moles and bats, turned to the living and true God. They accepted the truths proclaimed by the apostolic missionary, as the word of God, and acknowledged Him as the Lord of heaven and earth, who only had a right to claim their homage and their service. They separated themselves from their idolatrous neighbors and companions, forsook the temples and the shrines of their false gods, trusted no longer in dead deities, but were known henceforth as God worshipers.

Such is the characteristic of all true Christians, they are worshipers and servers of the living and true God. They are known and recognized as His. They are a peculiar people, holy and consecrated to Him, and devote to Him every power of their soul, body, and estate. They give up their idolatry, and their idols, whether the work of their imagination or of their hands, and show to the world that they acknowledge Him only, as Lord over all blessed forever.

Nor is it enough that the images made by cunning workmen, and the airy system of imaginary deities should be renounced. There may be worship just as false, and idolatry just as gross, in lands where Christian churches are built, and Bibles are printed and the Gospel preached, as where the ignorant and debased multitude pay their homage to idols of their own creation. For whenever anything comes between the soul and God, that thing is an idol. Worshiping and serving any creature more than the Creator is idolatry. There are many who would not adore a golden image, or bow down at a silver shrine, who yet render to those precious metals in other forms, a homage quite as debasing, and a service quite as enslaving. When men bring themselves under bondage to lust, ambition, pleasure and gain, they are no better than those whom they are wont to pity and commiserate because of their blindness and folly. And if they train their children to such lives of pleasure and worldliness as we see all around us, they are bringing them up to tortures greater than those inflicted on the devotees of Baal, and preparing them for fires severer than those of Molock. The men and the women that we meet with every hour, that we jostle on the street, that we deal with in the marts of trade, that come into the church and sit in its pews, who give not themselves to God, are in a worse state than the poor heathen, that they pity. Better, far better is the lot of the infant thrown into the Ganges, and of the wretch that casts himself before the crushing car of Juggernaut, than of those who hear the Gospel, and believe it not, who are taught of Christ and neglect Him, who know of the true and living God, but repent not of their sins and turn to Him. There are those who erect their golden calf right in the midst of the hosts of God, even while He is giving a revelation of His will, and making appointments for their good. But they shall find that it shall be broken in pieces by His righteous anger, and they and it together shall be burned up in the fires of offended justice. Ah! these idols! these idols! What multitudes in Christian lands they are destroying! How are they exalted by the willful and the proud into the place that God should occupy. How degrading is their worship, how debasing is their service. They are impotent to save. In the day when God shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know Him not, how quickly shall they be destroyed, together with all the hopes and expectations they have inspired. There is no hope, there is no safety but in the true and living God, and in the Son of God, the Christ, the Redeemer. Wise men did those idolatrous Thessalonians prove themselves to be in

turning from their idols to serve Him; and truly wise are all those who follow their example.

The second great fact asserted of the Thessalonians by the surrounding colonies and communities, by which they were known to have become Christians indeed, was that they waited for the Son of God from the heavens. "For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God: And to wait for His Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus which delivered us from the wrath to come."

The fact that Christ will come again is believed by all Christians, and confessed in all orthodox creeds. It is a doctrine prominently set forth in the Scripture. Jesus said to His disciples just before His departure from them, "I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am there ye may be also." At His ascension, two men in white apparel appeared to the apostles after He was taken up in the heavens, and said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven! This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." Paul tells us that "to them that look for Him, shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." Peter says, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." John refers to it when he says, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." And Jude makes the proclamation, "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints, to execute judgment upon all and to convince all that are ungodly among them, of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed." In the face of such passages as these, and many others of a similar character might be cited, no one can deny that the Scriptures teach that the Lord Jesus Christ shall return to our earth again. But although there is no question among Christians as to the bare fact here presented, there is great variety of opinion as to the attitude we should occupy in regard to that event, and the sway and influence it should have upon our lives. There are some who, while they believe that Christ will come, look upon His advent as a thing so far off in the future, that it has no practical effect upon them. There are others who deem it sufficient to believe simply that Christ will come,

without troubling themselves about the time of His advent or its attendant circumstances. Others again, while reading of it in their Bibles and confessing it in their creeds, consider all the subjects relating to it as mere speculation and not to be attended to. Over against all these classes we place the Christians of Thessalonica; and believe that the attitude presented by them, with reference to the coming of the Son of Man, is the true attitude which all Christians should occupy. They waited for the Son of God from the heavens, and they were known among their brethren in the surrounding nations by this feature of their Christian life; and the apostle Paul makes mention of it to their praise, and as a cause why he was bound to give thanks for them to Almighty God. If they were wrong why was this fact sounded out as a peculiar mark of their devotion to Christ; and why did not Paul correct the mistake and set them right? We are forced to the conclusion that the Thessalonians in looking for Christ's coming and in waiting for it, occupied the true posture of a Christian, and in this as well as in turning to God from idols, they were ensamples to the whole Christian church.

Nor is this the only place in the Scripture where this waiting for Christ is spoken of. Our Lord Himself exhorted His disciples as follows: "Let your loins be girded about and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord when He will return from the wedding, that when He Cometh and knocketh, they may open unto Him immediately." Isaiah says, "Since the beginning of the world, men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, God, beside Thee, what He hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him." James says, "Be patient therefore brethren unto the coming of the Lord. Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient: establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." To the Corinthians the apostle writes, "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ. That in everything ye are enriched by Him, in all utterance and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." And in his second epistle to the Thessalonians he prays, "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."

It appears from these passages that waiting for Christ's coming was a prominent feature of apostolic Christianity. The Thessalonians were right when they not only turned from idols to serve the living and true God, but to wait for His Son from the heavens. How greatly then do those persons depart from the faith and simplicity of the Gospel times, who ignore this subject as uninteresting, speculative, or a thing only for the future. The Bible warns us again and again against losing sight of the advent of our Lord. He who passes it by unheeded loses much precious consolation, as well as runs great risk and danger to his soul. A theme which is made the basis of so many Scripture exhortations, and the spring of so much hope to the church and the earth, and which we are specially warned not to neglect, should be a favorite theme for our thoughts, as well as a powerful incentive to our actions. When the Bible presents it so frequently, we cannot slight it without great injury to ourselves.

Let us inquire a little more particularly into what is meant by waiting for Christ from the heavens.

## **1. Waiting For Christ Implies An Expectancy Of His Coming**

A man who waits for a thing expects it and looks for it. He has his thoughts fixed upon it and regards it as an event that may transpire at any moment. He is assured that it may occur at any time, and he is not taken unawares when it does occur.

There are some who tell us that Christ's coming is an event yet far off in the future. That we are not to concern ourselves about it. That the great thing for us to do is to labor to convert the world. That all nations must be converted, and universal righteousness prevail and a golden age be brought in, which will last for a thousand years, and then somewhere down at the end of that period Christ will come. Now this is a very beautiful theory, but the only difficulty in the way of its acceptance is that it is not true. I heartily agree that it is the work of a Christian, to labor to bring as many of all nations to the knowledge of salvation as he can, but I deny that the word of God teaches us not to look for the advent of the Son of Man until after the millennium. It invariably and always represents Christ's second coming as

likely to take place at any moment, and so enjoins us to keep ourselves in readiness for it and to wait for it. Listen to some of the passages bearing upon this point. James writes to the church general, "Be ye also patient; establish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." "Behold the judge standeth at the door." To the Philippians Paul says, "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand," And to the Hebrews, "Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come." Peter says, "The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober and watch unto prayer." Jesus calls that man an evil servant who shall say in his heart, "My Lord delayeth His coming." And in closing the volume of inspiration He gives the significant warning, "Surely, I come quickly." You may tell me that 1800 years have passed away since these utterances were given, and that Christ has not yet come. Very true. But the impression intended to be conveyed by these Gospel passages is that Christ may come at any moment, so that each age of the church would look for it, and wait for it, and cherish it as the grand hope of the church, and the greatest event of all time, next to the incarnation and the crucifixion. If we believe we are clear as to the intention of the Holy Spirit in any of His revelations, we believe this is clear. That such was the impression made upon the minds of the apostles themselves, and that they acted according to it, is proved by a passage in these same epistles to the Thessalonians. In the last part of the fourth chapter of the first epistle, Paul says, "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." Here the apostle speaks as if it were a probable thing that Christ would come even in his day. For he uses the expression "We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord," mentioning himself as among those who might be alive on the earth when the Son of God shall come. And in perfect harmony with this are the ever repeated injunctions of our Lord Himself, "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man Cometh." "Take heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is." "Watch, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." And if we know not the time, and are constantly enjoined to be on the watch, how dare any man postpone the

time one hour, much less a thousand years or indefinitely. It is a great mistake, and one that may prove fatal to us, to treat this subject lightly. The Scriptures everywhere speak of Christ's advent as imminent. Christians should be watching and waiting for it, lest it come upon them as a snare. They cannot rise from their slumbers and go forth to their daily labors sure that their Lord will not come before noon; they cannot lie down at night, certain that there will not go forth the midnight cry, "Behold, He cometh."

## **2. Longing For His Appearing**

Another Thing Implied In Waiting For The Son Of God From The Heavens, Is A Longing For His Appearing. Christ's advent is not a sad and gloomy subject for the Christian. It is indeed full of dark forebodings to those who heed not His Gospel; it will be a time of vengeance for them. But all who are His disciples indeed can look forward to it and contemplate it with the most joyous anticipation. In the epistle to Titus it is called "that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ." It need inspire the meek and lowly disciple of the Master with no dread or alarm; but may be regarded with complacency and delight. Nay it should be waited for with longing; and as Peter says we should be "looking for and hasting" to it.

There are several reasons why Christ's advent should be waited for with desire and longing. The world cannot be converted before He comes. I know it is common in missionary sermons and addresses to urge Christians to engage in the cause of missions in order to convert the world. It is constantly urged as an incentive to this work, that the Gospel must be preached to every creature, so that all may believe and the millennium introduced. God forbid that I should lay the slightest obstacle in the way of missionary efforts. Would to God that every son and daughter of our race, were a child of God. But while holding it to be the bounden duty of every Christian to do what in him lies to extend the Gospel and to bring souls to Jesus, yet I can nowhere find the Scriptures declaring that the world shall be converted before Christ's coming, but only after that event, and by His own personal administrations in His own kingdom. A favorite text is often quoted by those who hold a different view from this, which may be dwelling in the minds of some of you now. The Gospel shall be preached in



all the world, and then shall the end come. But if men would open their Bibles and read for themselves, they would find it runs thus, "His Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." There is not a word about the conversion of the world. It simply says the Gospel shall be preached for a witness unto all nations; and no man can say how much Gospel preaching constitutes a witnessing Gospel. And when I find the Bible declaring that the tares grow along side of the wheat, and that both continue until the harvest, the harvest being the end of the world; when I see a warning given that in the last days perilous times shall come, and a catalogue of crimes specified as then to be enacted, the very recital of which makes the blood tingle; when we are informed that "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse;" when it is expressly stated that the mystery of iniquity shall work until it culminates in gigantic evil and in a lawless power which shall be consumed and destroyed only by the Lord Himself, by "the spirit of His mouth, and by the brightness of His coming; so that the world grows worse instead of better, men might as well attempt to persuade me that Christ has already come, as that the world will be converted before His second coming. It is only after His throne is established here that the heathen shall be given to Him for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. Just in proportion then as we long for and desire the conversion and salvation of all the world, we should longingly wait for His advent. Again it is only when Christ comes that sorrow and sighing shall be banished from our world, and all tears shall be wiped away. The world is full of woe. Pain and anguish have struck their pulsations deep into the soul of man." "The heart knoweth its own bitterness. " There is not a household on earth that is free from the inroads of grief and sadness. The cry of the orphan; the wail of the widow left desolate; the sigh of the aged for strength and health departed; the groan of the sick and dying, are heard on every side. Wretchedness and misery reign over many quarters of the globe. Squalid poverty thrusts itself before you at every step. Wild insanity, and vacant chattering idiocy claim their victims. Everywhere are found the garments of mourning. Disease and death stalk abroad unhindered to do their fatal work. Suffering and sorrow are the lot of mourning mortals. Even the earth itself partakes of the common blight. A curse rests upon it, and it groans under its heavy burden, waiting to be delivered. Deliverance for it and its inhabitants shall come only when the Son of God shall come. He

who spake to the winds and the waves and they obeyed him; He who fed the hungering multitudes with bread; He who restored sight to the blind, and cast out the devils from the deaf and dumb, and dried the tears of the widow of stain, and raised the sick from their beds, and called Lazarus from the grave; He alone can do away with the groaning and the sighing of earth and its millions. This glad work He will accomplish only after His return to earth again. Then, and not before, will sorrow be turned into joy. Should not His coming be waited for with intense desire and longing? It is only at His advent, too, that Satan shall be bound, and evil shall be banished, and the confederates in iniquity and opposers and blasphemers of Christ be destroyed, and sin be done away and universal righteousness and peace be ushered in. Then the saints shall receive their crowns, and the pious their rewards. It shall be a day of glory and of bliss. It is full of hope and joyous expectation to the Christian. Distress and gloom brood over the earth because of Christ's absence; His presence only shall bring joy and gladness. The earth is waiting; the angels are waiting, the saints that have passed away are waiting; why should not we be waiting for Him? Can we not catch the spirit of the Thessalonian church and while we turn from idols to serve the living and true God, wait for His Son from heaven?

### **3. Readiness For Him**

Finally waiting for Christ implies readiness for Him. We should be prepared for His coming, and then we will wait for it with desire. To be ready for Christ's advent, is to be a genuine and true Christian. We must turn from idols to serve the living and the true God. That is lay aside everything that comes between God and the soul. We must have truly repented of our sins, and been washed in the blood of the atoning Lamb, that our guilt may be cleansed away. We must have true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, true love for Him, and a true hope in Him and for Him. We must be found connected with the company of His followers upon earth; gathered into His fold; serving Him in the way of His own appointment; and so separated from the world, and consecrated to Him. And besides all this there must be the work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope. Upon us is laid the solemn injunction, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." And while every Christian is to rest all things in the hands of his Saviour, he

must labor and work as if everything depended upon himself. The labors of love must be exercised in active charities, benevolent bestowments, and personal ministrations, for Christ and His cause and people. There must be that patience which endures suffering, affliction and toil, sustained by a heaven-kindled hope in the divine Redeemer. The lamp of true grace must ever be kept burning, else when He cometh He shall find all darkness within.

Nor is all this of itself sufficient to constitute readiness for the Lord's appearing. There must be a loving and diligent looking for Him. The crown of life which Paul expected, he tells us would be bestowed on all them that loved Christ's appearing. And in Hebrews we are told "To them that look for Him, shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." We are warned and commanded again and again by Christ and the apostles to watch for His coming. To watch implies being on the alert, and on the look out for His approach. The moment we give way to the delusion that Christ delayeth His coming, that moment our moral sensibilities lose their activity; our efforts flag; a dull stupor creeps over our souls; and we fall asleep, to be awakened only to shame and confusion. Watchfulness, wakefulness, longing, as to the second advent are requisites to joy and reward when the Lord comes. Identifying ourselves with Christ, by a true and living faith, working for Him in the way He points out, occupying our stations in life and performing our duties with diligence and integrity, and waiting for the Son of God from the heavens, constitute readiness for that event.

And now, my brethren, what shall I say to persuade you to attend to this solemn matter?

I have not made these opinions and views. I have endeavored faithfully to develop the words of the text in the light of the Scriptures. And I believe the views here presented are the verities of God. Let us ask ourselves are we Thessalonian Christians? Is ours the kind of Christianity which Paul commends and for which he said he was bound to thank God and for which he laid his head on the martyr's block? If not, then we come short of some of the requisites of true religion and are endangering our souls. Turn not away from this momentous subject. Prayerfully and diligently give it the study and attention it deserves, that you may at last attain the crown of life, and be admitted into the glories of the kingdom of our coming Lord. And may "the very God of peace sanctify you wholly," that "your whole spirit

and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

# 13. Life a Gleaning

“Where hast thou gleaned today?” – Ruth 2:19.

AMONG THE TOWNS AND VILLAGES OF JUDEA, Bethlehem has always been a place of peculiar interest. It is a place to which the mind reverts with pleasure. Its name is associated with important personages. It was here that David, Israel’s great king, was born. And it was over the hillsides and among the valleys that surround it, that, when quite a youth, he led his father’s flocks. It was here that the Saviour of the world was born. And among these same hillsides and valleys shepherds were keeping watch at night, when “the glory of the Lord shone round about them,” and the angels appeared and announced to them the advent of Christ the Lord in the city of David, and celestial choirs sang songs of glory and praise to the Highest over the birth of the heavenly babe. It is the place also where Naomi and Ruth and Boaz lived, and where those touching scenes transpired an account of which we have in the book of Ruth. A modern traveler says that round about the town even now “there are many fig orchards and vineyards, marks of industry and thrift; and the adjacent fields, though stony and rough, produce nevertheless good crops of grain.” “It was here that the scene of the beautiful narrative of Ruth gleaning in the fields of Boaz after his reapers, was laid; and it requires no great stretch of imagination, to call up those transactions before our eyes.”

It is the time of the summer harvest. The fields of Bethlehem stretching away in gentle undulations as far as the eye can reach, or rudely broken by the abrupt ascent of some precipitous hill, stand thick with the yellow ripened grain. The sun, as he climbs up the side of the heavens, sends down his hot beams, bathing all nature in his lurid light, until the eye is oppressed with the glare, and the air quivers and trembles over the heated earth. The dew has all been exhaled. The cattle have sought refuge from the oppressive heat, in the cool shade of some friendly tree. The birds have retired to their

leafy coverts in the forest. The breeze of the morning has died away. All is silent and still except an occasional rustle as the dry and brittle stalks strike against each other. The bearded heads of grain hang down heavy with the abundant yield of a plentiful harvest. The reapers have entered upon their work. Their sharp sickles flash in the sunlight, as each stroke adds another armful of the golden grain to that already cut. Boaz, the master of the field, comes out from Bethlehem to view his workmen. As he approaches he greets them with the simple salutation, "The Lord be with you." They answer in the reverent response, "The Lord bless thee." In the same field, following in the path of the reapers, is a damsel, gathering, one by one, the stalks that have accidentally fallen from the hands of the men, as, by the custom of the country, she is allowed to do. It is Ruth the Moabitish woman that lately came to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law Naomi, out of the land of Moab. Boaz approaches her and speaks kindly to her, saying, "Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens. Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them." Encouraged by these friendly words she continues her work, venturing to glean even among the sheaves. And at mealtime she draws near and sits beside the reapers, and eats of the bread and dips her morsel in the vinegar and takes of the parched corn that's reached out to her; and rises up refreshed and strengthened for the labor of the afternoon. Through the long hours of the sun's decline she continues her weary work: and as the shadows lengthen over the plain, and the evening comes on, she sits down and beats out the full ripe heads, and gathering the grain together, lifts up her heavy load, and moves slowly along over the dusty road towards her home in Bethlehem. Her day's labor is over. From early morning she has been toiling in the field, collecting the scattered stalks as they dropped from the sheaves. And now with the results of her labor she seeks the home of Naomi: and on entering the house and depositing her burden, her mother-in-law asks her, "Where hast thou gleaned today?"

Such is the account of that day's work in the harvest field of Bethlehem. And if you but vary the scene a little and alter the circumstances somewhat, you have a picture of human life. The world is a great harvest field. Its ripened fruits of knowledge and of holiness stand ready to be gathered. Men and women are its reapers and its gleaners. And the great Master stands overlooking all, watching the progress of His laborers and dispensing to

each his necessary encouragement and support. The work of each continues throughout life. Nor does any one amass at one grasp, all the fruits that he obtains from this great harvest field; but they are gleaned a little at a time through the whole length of his stay here.

## **1. Life A-Gleaning**

Life a-gleaning, then, is the great lesson suggested by that scene that transpired in the field of Boaz. It is a law of nature that nothing obtains its full development at once. It is by the regular addition of one thing after another, that perfection is attained. God even did not make this world by only one exertion of His power. There was a succession in the formation of its parts. It was only after the lapse of time, and the creation of one portion after another that it was completed. And throughout the whole natural world the same thing holds good. A tree does not become a tree in a moment. There must first be the planting of the germ; that sends forth a sprout, which appears above the ground, and by drawing up the juices of the earth, and receiving the influences of the sun and air it gradually develops into a stalk, with its little sprigs springing out at intervals; and it is only when some time has rolled by, and after one little particle after another has been deposited in its appropriate place, that the big round trunk is formed, with its thick boughs extending out on every side, supporting their branches, with all their ramifications of twigs covered with foliage.

And as with the works of nature so with those of man. The pyramids, those massive monuments of the toil and patience of bygone days, were built by the simple placing of one stone on the top of another, until by the gradual accumulation of these separate insignificant parts, their wedge-like forms tower aloft piercing the very clouds, reflecting the rays of the setting sun long after he has ceased to shine on the plains below, and withstanding the storms and tempests of the ages.

Man's own body is a growth. It grows and is nourished by gleanings gathered from time to time. One little atom after another is placed in its proper position, until the fibers and nerves and muscles and all the various parts of the structure, are completely formed and developed.

His mind, too, is trained and educated and filled with knowledge by this same process of gleaning. He commences by learning the simplest rudiments; then by picking up the various facts and incidents, and illustrations and processes of reasoning that are met with, further attainments are made; and by searching out new fields of inquiry, and collecting here and there the scattered grains of truth, sifting them from their enfoldings of chaff, and storing them away in the mind, those vast advances in all the departments of learning and science are made which dignify and grace mankind.

It is by gleaning also in the same great harvest field, that he is spiritually trained and strengthened. When a man becomes a Christian he does not thereby become a perfect saint. The germs and implantations of grace are in his soul, but these need to grow and to be brought out before they will obtain perfection. Though the dominion of sin is broken, it is not yet completely subdued. There still remain in him those unholy desires and lusts of the flesh which have to be crucified; and those sinful motions and tendencies of his depraved nature which must be overcome. And the graces and virtues of Christianity have to be cultivated. This is a gradual process. It takes time and costs labor. He must give all diligence, to “add to his faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.”

And the Christian must cultivate these in the great harvest field of the world. He comes in contact with its rude reapers and workmen, and moves over its rough stubble field; often lacerating his feet and tripping over the briars that run close to the earth. But it is here that he gathers those heavenly fruits which he scattered over the surface. He gleans out the good grain from among the briars and dead roots which cover the ground. For how is it that his faith is strengthened? Is it not by seeing from time to time some promise fulfilled? or experiencing some deliverance from evil; or by making some little advance in holiness; or beholding God’s cause triumph over wickedness, or by seeing in some of the various scenes of life the truth of His Word verified? How is it that gentleness is cultivated? Is it not by resisting the outbursts of anger, and keeping down the uprisings of passion, which from time to time occur; by bearing patiently with the little provocations, that are met with, and still preserving a calm and unruffled



frame of mind amid the rude jostlings and cankering cares of daily life? Is it not by repressing the tart reply, the reproachful word, the uncalled for sneer, that is so ready to issue from our lips? Is it not by returning good for the evil which is received, and bearing meekly with the unkind words and deeds of friends and foes? How is it that charity is cultivated? Is it not by performing one little act of love after another; by speaking here and there a friendly word, and making where needed a kindly bestowment? Is it not by repressing those ill feelings which would lead us to judge severely or harshly, or to think ill of our neighbors; and by cherishing such a fraternal spirit as will lead us to put the best construction on their actions, and to render them the assistance they need, when the opportunity offers? And so with the other spiritual graces and virtues. They are acquired and developed as we move along in our field of Christian labor. They are strengthened and increased by successive acts. We add to what has been already gained by continued gleanings, gathered from the harsh, sharp stubble field of the world, even though the hand is wounded in the effort. It is by picking up one golden stalk of grain after another that the armful is obtained. Nor do we know at first how much precious grain is secured in this way. It is only after it has been beaten out and sifted from the chaff, that the fruit of our labors appears. Then at the close of the day it will be seen how much has been gathered, and what great stores have been collected by these little gleanings. Great spiritual attainments are not made by one act, but by a continued succession of little acts during the whole labor of life.

## **2. Each Has A Particular Field For Gleaning**

A second suggestion of the text is that to each one there is assigned a particular field for this gleaning. "Where hast thou gleaned today?" was the question of Naomi. Ruth gleaned in the field of Boaz, nor did she leave it for any other, but continued there until the end of the harvest. And so to every one there is a special sphere of action appointed, in which he is required to labor. "We are not a race of independent creatures abandoned to live without control." We were not created, to be cast off to take care of ourselves, and to roam at large without guidance and oversight. Though possessing freedom of will we are under the direction of our Maker.

The object of the existence of every one is the same – to do the will of God – and to live to His glory. And yet the way in which this is done may vary in an endless manner. Almost as great as is the diversity in the individual members of the human race is the diversity in their spheres of action and lines of duty." The body is not one member but many." And each member occupies its own appropriate place, and performs its appropriate work. No one part usurps the place of another, nor can one part perform the functions of another. And the health and good of the whole body is best secured when each member fulfills the special duty assigned to it in the most perfect manner. God has appointed "some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers." The position of an apostle is greatly different from that of a teacher, and the position of a teacher again from that of a learner. Each one moves in the particular place assigned him, finding in that place different duties and requirements from all the others. So, also, there is an endless variety in the spheres of individuals. But the work of each one consists in acting well his part wherever he may find himself placed; in advancing in holiness in the course which is prescribed to him; in gleaning in his own field of labor, and in gathering from it all the good he can obtain.

Nor should any one suppose that he could better perform the work assigned in some other position than that in which he is really placed. There are some who are always complaining of their hard state; and of the difficulties that they have to meet. They are never satisfied; imagining that their lot is harder to bear than that of any one else. Because they cannot see into the hidden and private life of others, and only view what is more public and exposed, which is always the fairest; they think that others are not subjected to the same or similar trials with themselves. They are ever envying those around them, and wishing that they were as fortunate. They suppose that they could more easily carry out their Christian profession, that they would not have such difficult temptations to overcome, that they could more readily cultivate the graces of the Christian, that they would not have so much to perplex and vex them, and that they could in all respects approve themselves better Christians, if they were only in some other condition in life.

The humble and obscure long for a position among the more honored and exalted, and think that then they would have much greater opportunities

for growing in grace. The poor sigh for a position among the rich, and contemplate the liberal bestowments they would thus be enabled to make for the good of their fellow men. “The young ascribe their errors to the impetuosity so natural to their age. Those who are more advanced in years are ready to imagine that if they enjoyed more leisure, and were not so entangled with the cares and perplexities of their active station, they should be better able to attend to the duties incumbent on them as Christians. The aged are wishing for the energy and capacity of attention which belong to youth.” But all these are vain imaginings, airy suppositions. Joseph was just as much approved of God, advancing just as much in holiness, and cultivating virtue, while as a slave he was serving his master, as when seated upon a throne next to that of Pharaoh he directed the affairs of Egypt. David was doing the will of God and securing his own good as well when, as a shepherd lad, he advanced with his sling and smooth pebbles to fight the Philistine giant, as when clad in royal purple he swayed the scepter of a king. John the Baptist abiding in the wilderness, living on locusts and wild honey, and preaching the coming of the kingdom of God to those who flock to hear him, is doing more good to his fellow men, and receiving more good to his own soul, than Herod surrounded with all his pomp and magnificence, and receiving the homage and tribute of his subjects.

We promote our best interests, and secure our greatest happiness by conforming ourselves to the position in which we are placed; by improving the opportunities that are actually afforded us; and by gathering from the various circumstances by which we are surrounded all the good we can. “If we do not now love and fear God – if we cannot now resist temptation, mortify corruption, and devote ourselves to the service of God – if we do not now form any resolution to live as Christians – we may be assured that a change of circumstances will not avail.” We have not come into our various fields of action through chance, nor have we placed ourselves in them. The Supreme Ruler of the Universe directs our ways. He knows our fitness for the stations we occupy; and he has wisely ordered all things for our greatest good. The great objects of our being will be best secured by filling out the line of our duty which has been marked out for us. By gleaning in our own appointed harvest field, and not longing or searching for another.

### 3. There Is A Certain Time Fixed For The Work

A third point suggested by the text is that there is a certain time fixed in which this work is to be done. The harvest time is a set period of the year. It has its commencement and its ending. And between these two points the labor must all be performed. It does not last all the year. And when the proper season has passed it is too late to attempt to reap the grain and gather the gleanings. A beginning of the work must be made also as soon as the harvest sets in. It does not last long. A few weeks will cover the whole period. Every moment, therefore, is precious; and every moment must be busily employed.

So a man's life is his harvest time: and it is divinely limited. "There is an appointed time to man upon earth." He has his set boundaries beyond which he cannot go. As he cannot add one cubit to his stature, so he cannot add one day to his age.

And as his life is fixed and limited so it is brief. His days glide quickly by. What flies faster than time? The moments are gone as soon as counted. "Are not my days few?" says Job. "Behold thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before Thee," said David. Like a fragile flower man springs up, and blooms for a little while, and then fades away. Like the morning dew that sparkles but for an hour, and is then exhaled by the rising sun, so he endures for a short time and then disappears. His harvest is soon over. The hours of his active labor pass rapidly away. There must be no dallying with the work that is to be done. There are no moments to spare; none too many for the duty in hand. His work of gleaning must commence as early as possible and be continued industriously, for

Beyond the waking and the sleeping,  
Beyond the gathering and the strewing  
Beyond the reaping and the gleaning  
He shall be soon.

The consideration of this subject now, my hearers, should lead us:

First. To be content with our various positions and stations in life.

We are not the arbiters of our own destiny. We have not the control of our own ways. We are under the direction of an overruling Providence. God is wise and good. The appointments He has made concerning us are the best. Our welfare and happiness will be most secured when we most completely fill out the duties of our Christian calling in the several positions in which we find ourselves placed. Sighing and longing for other conditions and circumstances will not do us any good. It will only make us dissatisfied, fretful and unhappy. And, besides, if we should by any means be placed in the positions we seek, we would find there obstacles to be overcome, and duties to be performed, and temptations to be resisted, just as great as those we experience now. Other conditions will not increase our final happiness. For when we come up to stand before the Judge we will not be asked whether we could have performed the work assigned to another more faithfully than our own, but whether we have fully performed our own. Not whether we could have gleaned more in another field, but whether we have gathered all the stalks of grain that lay scattered over our own.

“Be content with such things as ye have”: so will you best please God, and promote your own comfort and peace.

Second. The consideration of this subject should also lead us to be faithful and earnest in our work.

This life is the only harvest season we have. The gleaning that is to be done, must be done now. The good that is to be gathered, must be gathered now. Time flies and if we are not earnest and faithful, it may pass away before we have gone over half the field. It becomes each one to attach himself with more seriousness, alacrity and fervor to the proper duties of his station than ever. If any have strayed away from their proper duty let them return to it as speedily as possible. If any have become wearied and inattentive, let them bestir themselves and labor with energy, for the sun is fast setting, darkness will soon overtake them. If any have not yet turned in from the dusty highroad of pleasure and of sin, let them at once alter their course, enter upon the harvest field of Christian labor, and set themselves to gather the gleanings of good.

“’Tis not for man to trifle! Life is brief,  
And sin is here.  
Our age is but the falling of a leaf,  
A dropping tear.  
We have no time to sport away the hours.  
All must be earnest in a world like ours.”

“Not many lives, but only one have we  
One, only one; –  
How sacred should that one life be –  
That narrow span!  
Day after day filled up with blessed toil.  
Hour after hour still bringing in new spoil.”

And so, when, after a life of holy activity, and energetic labor, we come to stand before the great Master, and lay down the precious sheaves that we have gleaned, we will hear His gracious words of approbation and reward, “Well done, good and faithful servants, enter into the joy of your Lord!”

# 14. Advent

“And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.” – Luke 19:11-13.

THESE WORDS reveal to us the secret thoughts of our Lord’s disciples at this period of His ministry. They were drawing nigh to Jerusalem. They gathered from their Master’s sayings that something remarkable was about to happen. They had a strong impression that one great end of His coming into the world was about to be accomplished. So far they were quite right, but as to the precise nature of the event about to happen they were quite wrong.

## 1. The Mistake Of The Disciples

Let us attend to the mistake into which the disciples had fallen. What was this mistake? Let us try to understand it.

Our Lord’s disciples seem to have thought that the Old Testament promises of Messiah’s visible kingdom and glory were about to be immediately fulfilled. They believed rightly that He was indeed the Messiah – the Christ of God. But they blindly supposed that He was at once to take to Himself His great power and reign gloriously over the earth. This was the sum and substance of their error. They appeared to have concluded that now was the day and now the hour, when the Redeemer would build up Zion and appear in His glory – when He would smite the earth with the rod of His

mouth, and with the breath of His lips slay the wicked, – when He would assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah, – when He would take the heathen for His inheritance and the uttermost part of the earth for His possession, – when He would reign in Mt. Zion and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients gloriously, – when the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, would be given to the saints of the Most High. Such appears to have been the mistake into which our Lord’s disciples had fallen, at the time when He spoke the Parable of the Pounds.

It was a great mistake unquestionably. They did not realize that before all these prophecies could be fulfilled, it behooved Christ to suffer. Their sanguine expectations over-leaped the crucifixion and the long period to follow, and bounded forward to the final glory. They did not see that there was to be a first advent of the Messiah “to be cut off,” before the second advent of Messiah to reign. They did not perceive that the sacrifices and ceremonies of the law of Moses were first to receive their fulfillment in a better sacrifice and a better high priest, and in the shedding of blood more precious than that of bulls and of goats. They did not comprehend that before the glory Christ must be crucified, and a people gathered for His name from among the Gentiles by the preaching of the Gospel. They grasped part of the prophetic word but not all. They saw that Christ was to have a kingdom, but they did not see that He was to be wounded and bruised, and be an offering for sin. They understood the dispensation of the crown and the glory, but not the dispensation of the cross and the shame. Such was their mistake.

It was a mistake, however, which we Gentiles are bound to regard with much tenderness and consideration. The modern Gentile Christians have fallen into an error, parallel with that of our Jewish brethren, and an error far more inexcusable because we have more light. If the Jew thought too exclusively of Christ reigning, has not the Gentile thought too exclusively of Christ suffering? If the Jew could see nothing in Old Testament prophecy but Christ’s exaltation and final power, has not the Gentile often seen nothing but Christ’s humiliation and the preaching of the Gospel? If the Jew has dwelt too much on Christ’s second advent, has not the Gentile dwelt too exclusively on Christ’s first? If the Jew ignored the cross, has not the Gentile ignored the crown? It seems to me that we have not rightly



understood “all that the prophets have spoken” about the second personal advent of Christ, any more than the Jews did about the first. And because we have done this we should speak of such mistakes as that referred to in our text with much tenderness.

This subject affects the whole question at issue between ourselves and the unconverted Jew. Unless we interpret the prophetic portion of the Old Testament in the simple literal meaning of its words, we will find it no easy matter to carry on an argument with an unconverted Jew.

You would probably tell him that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament Scriptures. To those Scriptures you would refer him for proof. You would show him how it was prophesied that the Messiah should suffer and die and rise again. You would tell him that the 22nd Psalm, the 53rd of Isaiah; Daniel 9:26; Micah, 5:2, etc., were literally fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. You would urge upon him that he ought to believe these Scriptures, and receive Christ as the Messiah. All very good. So far you do well. But suppose the Jew asks you if you take all the prophecies of the Old Testament in their simple, literal meaning. Suppose he asks you if you believe in a literal personal advent of the Messiah to reign over the earth in glory, – a literal restoration of Judah and Israel to Palestine – a literal rebuilding and restoration of Zion and Jerusalem. Suppose he puts these questions to you, what answer are you prepared to make? Will you tell him that the Old Testament prophecies of this kind are not to be taken in their plain, literal sense? Will you tell him that the glorious kingdom and future blessedness of Zion, so often dwelt upon in prophecy mean nothing more than the gradual Christianizing of the world by missionaries? Will you tell him that you think it “carnal” to take such Scriptures literally, – “carnal” to expect a literal rebuilding of Jerusalem, – “carnal” to expect a literal coming of the Messiah to reign, – “carnal” to look for a literal gathering and restoration of Israel? If so, do you not see that you are putting a weapon in the hand of the unconverted Jew, which he will probably use with irresistible power? Do you not see that you are cutting the ground from under your own feet, and supplying the Jew with a strong argument for not believing your own interpretation of Scripture? Do you not see that the Jew will reply that it is “carnal” to tell him that Messiah has come literally to suffer, if you tell him it is carnal to expect Messiah to come literally to reign? Will not the Jew tell you it is far more carnal in you

to believe that the Messiah could come into the world as a despised, crucified man of sorrows, than it is in him to believe that He will come into the world as a glorious King? What answer could you give him?

Read the Scriptures in the light of these two great pole stars, the first and second advents of Jesus Christ. Bind up with the first advent the rejection of the Jews, the calling of the Gentiles, the preaching of the Gospel as a witness to the world, and the gathering out of the world a people for Christ's name. Bind up with the second advent the restoration of the Jews, the pouring out of judgments on unbelieving Christendom, the conversion of the world and the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth. Do this and you will see a meaning and fullness in prophecy which perhaps you never discovered before.

We should interpret unfulfilled prophecy in the light of prophecies already fulfilled. The curses on the Jews were brought to pass literally; – so also will be the blessings. The scattering was literal; so also will be the gathering.

The rejection of Israel was literal, so also will be the restoration.

We should interpret the events that shall accompany Christ's second advent by the light of those accompanying His first advent. The first advent was visible, literal, personal; – so also will be His second. His first advent was with a literal body; – so also will be His second. The least predictions concerning His first advent were fulfilled to the very letter; so also will they be at His second. The shame was literal and visible, so also will be His glory.

We ought to regard the mistake of our Lord's disciples with tenderness and consideration. We ought not to condemn them, for great as was their mistake, that of modern Christians has been almost as bad. We have been very quick in discovering the mote in our Jewish brother's eye and have not discerned the beam in our own. The Jew looked too much to the final glory of Christ, and turned away from the cross; we have fixed our gaze on the cross and have been neglectful of the kingly reign and glory of Christ to be revealed at His second coming.

## 2. What Is The Lord Jesus Christ Doing Now?

The second point to which I direct your attention is the present position of our Lord Jesus Christ. What is He doing now? The parable answers that question. "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. This nobleman represents the Lord Jesus, and that in two respects. Like the nobleman He has gone into a far country to receive for Himself a kingdom. He has not received it yet in full possession though He has received it in promise. He has a spiritual kingdom unquestionably. He is king over the hearts of His believing people, and they are all His faithful subjects. Without controversy He has a controlling power over the world. He is King of kings and Lord of lords.

"By Him all things consist," and without His permission nothing can happen. But His visible complete kingdom He has not yet entered into. "We see not yet all things put under Him." To use the words of the 110th Psalm: "He sits on the right hand of the Father till His enemies are made His footstool." The devil reigns over the hearts and lives of the mass of the people of this world. They choose the things that please the devil far more than the things that please God. Little as they may think it, they are doing the devil's will, behaving as the devil's subjects, and serving the devil far more than they are serving Christ. This is the actual condition of Christendom as well as of heathen countries. After 1800 years of Bibles and Gospel preaching, there is not a nation or a country, a city or a town, where the devil has not more subjects than Christ. So fearfully true is it that the world is not yet the kingdom of Christ. Christ is followed by a few and they often neither great nor wise, but they are a faithful people. But He has none of the visible signs of the kingdom at present on earth, no earthly glory, majesty or greatness. The vast majority of mankind see no beauty in Him. They will not have this Man to reign over them. His people are not honored for their Master's sake. They walk the earth like princes in disguise. His kingdom of glory is not yet come. His will is not yet done on earth as it is in heaven. He is gathering out a people who are carrying the cross and walking in His steps, but the time of His coronation has not yet arrived.

But just as the Lord Jesus, like the nobleman, went to receive a kingdom, so like the nobleman He intends one day to return, and then and not till then will Christ take to Himself His power and reign over all the earth. He left His servants as a nobleman. He will return to His subjects as a King. Then He intends to cast out the old usurper, the devil, and strip him of his power. Then He will make a restitution of the face of creation. It will be the world's jubilee day. The King will at last have His will done. At last men shall say, "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice." Then will He execute judgment on all the ungodly despisers of His word, and in flaming fire take vengeance on them that know not God and obey not His Gospel. Then He will raise His dead saints and gather His living ones, and gather together the scattered tribes of Israel, and set up an empire in which every knee shall bow to Him, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

When, how all these things shall be we can not say. Enough for us to know they shall be. The Lord Jesus waits for the time appointed by the Father and then shall they be brought to pass. Now He is sitting at the right hand of the Father – interceding as a high priest in the holy of holies for His people – adding to their number such as shall be saved by the preaching of the Gospel, – and waiting until the appointed day of His power, when He shall come forth to bless His people and to sit on His throne.

Have these things clearly in your mind, and then you will not cherish extravagant expectations of any church, minister or religious machinery in the present dispensation. You will not marvel to see ministers and missionaries not meeting with greater success. You will not wonder to find that while some believe the Gospel, many do not believe. You will not be depressed in seeing the children of the world in every place many, and the children of God few. You will remember that the days are evil, and that the time of general conversion has not yet arrived. Alas! for the man who expects a millennium before the Lord Jesus returns. How can this be if the world in the day of His coming is to be found as it was in the days of Noah and Lot.

Be assured of these truths and you will not be surprised by the continuance of immense evils in the world. Wars, tumults, oppression, dishonesty, selfishness, covetousness, superstition, bad government and abounding heresies will not appear to you unaccountable. You will not sink down into a morbid, misanthropic condition when you see laws and reforms

and education failing to make mankind perfect. You will not relapse into a state of apathy and disgust when you see churches full of imperfections and godly people making mistakes. You will say to yourself, “The time of Christ’s kingdom has not yet arrived – the devil is still working among his children and sowing tares among the good seed – the true King is yet to come.”

This will also explain why God delays the final glory, and allows things to go on as they do in this world. It is not that He is not able to prevent evil – it is not that He is slack in fulfilling His promises – but He is taking out for Himself a people by the preaching of His Gospel. He is long suffering – not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Think on these things and you will be often looking for the coming of the day of God. You will regard the second advent as a glorious and comfortable truth, around which your best hopes will all be clustered. You will not merely think of Christ crucified, but you will think also of Christ coming again to reign. You will long for the day of refreshing and manifestation of the sons of God. You will find peace in looking back to the cross, and you will find joyful hope in looking forward to the kingdom. For as surely as Christ has gone into a far country to receive a kingdom, so surely will He come as a King.

### **3. What Is The Present Duty Of All Christ’s Professing Disciples?**

We find an answer in the act and words of the nobleman in the Parable to his servants, “He delivered them ten pounds and said unto them. Occupy until I come.” These words are spoken to all who call themselves Christians. They address the conscience of every one who has not renounced his baptism and formally turned his back on Christianity.

The Lord Jesus bids you occupy. By that He means that you are to be a doer in your Christianity, and not merely a hearer and professor. He wants His servants not only to receive His wages and eat His bread, and to dwell in His house, and belong to His family – but also to do His work. You are to “let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works.”

Have you faith? It must not be a dead faith, but a faith that works by love. Are you redeemed! You are redeemed that you may be a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Do you love Christ? Prove the reality of your love by keeping His commandments. Beware of an idle, gossiping, sentimental, do-nothing religion. Think not because your works cannot justify you, nor cleanse you from a single sin, that therefore it matters not whether you do anything at all. Away with such a delusion. Cast it behind you as an invention of the devil. Think of the house built upon the sand and of its miserable end. If you would “make your calling and election sure” be an active working Christian.

But the Lord Jesus bids you occupy your pound. By this He means that He has given each one of His believing people the ability and the opportunity to glorify Him. He would have you understand that every one has His own sphere of action – the poorest as well as the richest; – that every one has an open door before him, and may, if he will, show forth his Master’s praise. Your bodily health and strength, – your mental gifts and capacities – your money and earthly possessions – your example and influence with others – your liberty to read the Bible and hear the Gospel – your plentiful supply of the means of grace – all these are your pounds. All these are to be used and employed with a continual reference to the glory of Christ. Of Him come riches and honor. His is the silver and His is the gold. His is your body and His your spirit. He appoints your habitation. He gives you life and health. You are not your own. You are bought with a price. Surely it is no great matter if He bid you honor and serve Him with all that you have. Breathes there a man or woman before me, who has received nothing from the Lord? Not one I am sure. See to it that you lay out your Lord’s pounds well and honestly. Take heed that you do not bury them.

But your Lord bids you occupy till He comes. By this He means that you are to do His work on earth, like one who continually looks for His return. You are to be like the faithful servant who knows not what hour his Master may come home, but keeps all things in readiness and is always prepared. You are not to suppose that you have any freehold in this world, nor even a lease. The greatest and richest of mankind is only God’s tenant-at-will. You are not to neglect any social duty or relation in life because of your Lord’s return. You are to fill the station to which God has called you in a godly and Christian way; and you are to be ready to go from your place of business to

meet Christ in the air, if the Lord shall think fit. You are to rise and go forth in the morning, ready, if need be, to meet Christ at noon. You are to lie down in bed at night ready, if need be, to be awakened by the midnight cry, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh." You are to keep your spiritual accounts in a state of constant preparation for inspection, for the day of Christ's coming is the great reckoning day. You are to measure all your ways by the measure of Christ's appearing, and to do nothing in which you would not like Jesus to find you engaged. How condemning are these words to thousands of professing Christians. What an utter absence of preparation appears in their daily walk and conversation. They give no sign of readiness for the second advent. They live as if they would never have to give an account of the use they have made of their pounds. They live as if there was no reckoning day before the bar of Christ. They live as if Christ had never said "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Think again how instructive these words are to all who are troubled with doubts about mingling with the world and taking part in its amusements. Here is a true test by which to try all your daily occupations and employments and recreations. Would we do this thing if we thought Jesus was coming to-night? Would we go to such and such a place if we thought Jesus would come and find us there! If not, then we ought not to do that thing or go to that place. Oh! that men would live as in the sight of Christ.

How encouraging these words are to all who seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and love the Lord Jesus in sincerity. What though the children of the world regard them as righteous overmuch, and call them rigid and bigoted and say they require too much. They may well reply, "I am doing a great work and cannot come down; I am striving so to live as to be ready when Christ comes."

# 15. The Kingdom Among Men

“The field is the world.”– Matt. 13:38.

THE LORD JESUS, though not the only, is the best speaker of Parables. If we may judge from the question of the disciples, “Why speakest Thou unto them in parables?” this was a mode of teaching that He used more frequently than was customary. A parable is founded on resemblance between the world of sense and the world of mind, between nature and grace, various spheres of human life and Divine operation, earth and heaven. “See” said God to Moses, “that thou make all things after the pattern shewed thee in the mount.” And as the tabernacle when thus obediently constructed and finished, was a parable of things in heaven, so this world is full of parables of the other. God appointed earthly things to be imperfect and shadowy representations, and to give distant suggestions of things which are above. The same consummate intelligence, the same perfect love presides and acts, though in different modes, in both spheres. Not to chance, but to a Divine design, is due the likeness between the growth of seed and the progress of truth in the human mind and in human society. Not to chance but to design is due the correspondence between the prevailing request of a son to his father for bread, and our efficacious petition to our heavenly Father for His Holy Spirit. Not to chance, but to design is it due, that the undeserved welcome, the complete forgiveness, the gushing, tender love wherewith the father receives back his lost son, should encourage the sinner to return with sorrow and trust to infinite mercy. Not to chance, but to design is it due, that the tenderest of all human relationships shadows forth the union of Christ and His church. And so of the rest.

The parables then are not arbitrary, nor are they felicitous guesses, but are founded on actual correspondences of natural and spiritual things. Now as Christ is the Word and Wisdom of God, by whom all things are created,



no other being is acquainted with them so well as He. No other can so readily speak in parables; that is, read off the mystic meaning of the sacred characters which are written on all things around us – on the farm and the garden, the house and the family, the processes of labor, and the relations of human life.

When the disciples asked our Lord, “Why speakest Thou unto them in parables!” He answered, “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.” The parable has a twofold operation. It works variously according to the discernment of the hearer. From the dull and gross it veils the fullness of the truth, whose brightness would prevent their reception of it. To the more advanced and spiritually minded it illustrates the truth, and makes it more affecting.

*The field is the world.* Apart from Revelation, this world is a strangely disordered scene. It certainly does not correspond to our preconception of a province of the Divine dominion. The more closely we observe it, the more apparent the disorder. It seems sometimes as if the constitution of things were irrespective of human characters, and as if men prospered or suffered, not in the way of reward or punishment, but by chance. It seems sometimes as if history were without a plan; as if nations were left to themselves; as if progress were a dream, and human affairs instead of moving in order towards some happy and beautiful goal, were only revolving in a dismal circle, only going round but not going on. On the one hand we are often deceived by a show of disinterestedness and public spirit, and then sickened at discovering unworthy motives, selfishness and corruption: or on the other we are wearied by the perpetual recurrence of disappointment, the constant seeming issue of vanity. In gloomy moments men are sometimes tempted to despair, and yield to the dreadful and impious doctrine, that men are slaves of nature or of chance, without a Personal Owner, without the watchful care of a Fatherly Providence.

Even in the church we also see worldliness and selfishness and hypocrisy. For nineteen centuries has the church existed and her limits are still narrow compared with that world, which she was commissioned to evangelize. The majority of the race are still “sitting in darkness and the shadow of death.” Even our own favored country is far from being in conformity with God’s will, and but few among her children show the

character of Christ – His supreme and affectionate piety, His purity. His rectitude, His wide humanity, His tender, self-sacrificing love.

Shall we then yield to the power of this gloomy reflection? Shall we say that the world and the church, if cared for once, are now forsaken and left to themselves, or given up to Satan? No, brethren, let us beware of this tendency as deadly to the soul. Without hope and cheerfulness we are undone, and certainly we can have neither without faith in God. Hear how the prophet pours out his grief: “None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth; they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. . . . Therefore judgment is far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men. We roar all like bears and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgment, but there is none: for salvation but it is far from us. . . . And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street and equity cannot enter.” A piteous complaint indeed. Yet he refers all, not to any carelessness on God’s side, but to men’s own fault as the root and spring of the evil: “Behold the Lord’s hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear.”

The text uttered by the Son of God Himself, plainly teaches, both His rightful ownership of us, and His concern for us: “The field is the world.”

*The world is God’s field.* He has reclaimed it from the wilderness of chaos for the purpose of cultivation.

As it is His own He feels an interest in it. A man generally cares for his property, and feels that his credit is in some measure dependent on his management of it. God having created the world for Himself never loses sight of it. He declared it at first to be very good. He began to cultivate it. The Son of man “sowed good seed.” And as a man is interested about his field, takes delight therein and is anxious about it, so Christ is anxious about the possession which He purchased with His own blood. He carefully superintends it, watches over it, and awaits His reward in the time of harvest.

As individuals as well as a community, every one of us is the property of God, made, redeemed, cared for, watched over; – a cultivated field, fenced and broken up, sown with the good seeds of truth – truth taught by parents, proclaimed by ministers, read in the Bible. Not one of us is without an owner. The meanest and most worthless and despised belongs to the same Master as the best, and is cared for and guarded by Heaven. Think of this, thou child of want and sorrow, and it will cheer thy darkest hour. Remember this, sinner, and it will enliven thee with hope of forgiveness and restoration. All blessedness, all love, all dignity awaits thee yet, if only thou wilt return to thy Father.

As the text asserts God to be the Proprietor and Superintendent of the world, so also the parable, with the interpretation unfolds the cause of the evil which we see prevalent around us, which we feel within us and under which we groan. It is not the growth of nature: it is not the work of God. An enemy hath done this. And this enemy our Lord says is the devil. He is the enemy of order and of the God of order. He is the genius of disorder. He introduces confusion and strives to reduce the field to a wilderness. As God brought the world out of chaos, the devil would turn the world back to chaos. All the disorder and confusion, the ungodliness, the selfishness, the sensuality in the world is his work. His work is the rebellion in our hearts the lawlessness in our lives. He separates men from God, and then estranges them from one another. Under his influence they forget whose children they are, forget that they are brethren. It is he that retards human progress, that is ever clogging the wheels of morality and intelligence, and placing obstacles in the way of the chariot of salvation. It is his policy to spoil the work of God, because he is the enemy of God and goodness. He has effected the degeneracy of human nature, has sown tares among the wheat. Where Christ has sown His Abels, His Noahs, His Abrahams, His Jobs, His Samuels, His Davids, His Hezekiahs, His Johns, the devil has sown his Cains, his Hams, his Nimrods, his Balaams, his Sauls, his Ahabs and his Judases among them. When Christ's Spirit suggests a good thought Satan suggests an evil one: when the One kindles the pure flame of Divine love, the other lights up the reeking fire of lust. An enemy hath done this, Christ's enemy and ours. Shall we yield to him? Or shall we not rather avail ourselves of the strength of Christ, the mighty Conqueror, our Friend and Saviour, and through Him vanquish the foe? It is Satan that secularizes the

church, and he is the father of heresy and division, of false and one-sided doctrine, and of sectarianism. An enemy hath done this.

The parable assures us of the final success of God's plan and operation in the world. The husbandman trustfully looks for the harvest, speaks of it as certain; and at the harvest the tares shall be separated from the wheat. The enemy's success is limited. He has injured the uniformity of the field, he has obstructed the progress of the wheat, but he cannot prevent the harvest. At the end of the world there shall be a rich result in the salvation of redeemed humanity, of all counsels of the Father, of the toils and sorrows of the Son; "He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied." Rich indeed must that harvest be which will satisfy this Husbandman. Then shall confusion and disorder cease, Satan be finally and signally defeated, and his work perish: while the church, thoroughly purified from degeneracy and decay, shall appear "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."

God's harvest of the world! The grandeur of the idea overpowers our feeble faculties. The harvest of creation and providence which shall vindicate eternal righteousness, love and wisdom; the harvest of redemption – of the patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations, of the passion of Calvary, the effusion of Pentecost, of apostolic labors, of the struggles of the church; the rich result of sunshine and storm, of great crises and of periods of quietude, shall be reaped by angels, and stowed in the "barn." For this great harvest all things are now preparing. Towards it all are tending. Nothing is done or permitted by Providence without reference to this. The harvest will be vast as the love of God, stupendous as the incarnation and the atoning sacrifice, glorious beyond all hope, intimation and conception.

The time is unknown, but the event is certain. May every one of us, by God's grace, be at that harvest gathered among *the wheat into the heavenly garner*.

Let us learn from this subject to feel a strong and cheerful interest in the great world of humanity as belonging to Christ, as cared for by Him. The world is Christ's field. The nations and their doings, society and government, agriculture, commerce, science and art all belong to Him. All that in them is good, is His operation, and all is subordinated by His overruling Providence to the best final issues. Let us learn the value and dignity of human beings as such, irrespective of rank, as the objects of Christ's

love, and particularly let us admire and delight in good men as the noblest workmanship of God. Above all let us sympathize with and help forward by prayer and effort, the great work of the church in spreading the purifying influence of Christianity. It is on that, the world's welfare is mainly dependent: it is by that, that God's glory may be most efficiently and directly promoted. If in one aspect good men are the seed, in another they are the servants of the Husbandman. "Ye are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry," says St. Paul. What an honorable calling – to advance the purposes of Divine love, to labor that God's harvest may be more plentiful! Yet this is the honor of every Christian. Unhappy, then, the servant who has no heart for his Lord's work, who wastes the time which belongs to his Master and allows his entrusted faculties to rust unused! But blessed are those servants whom their Lord shall find faithful and active! For them, no honor shall be too great, and from them no rewards shall be withheld. Verily I say unto you that even their Lord shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and shall come forth and serve them.

Let us learn also the incompetency of our understanding to deal with the great problems of the Divine government. Far be it from us to disparage the reason of man or to discourage the fullest and freest exercise of it! "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord. The inspiration of the Almighty hath given them understanding." Our reason is the grand instrument which God uses in working out our salvation, that within us of which He chiefly avails Himself in the gracious work of restoration. To this He always appeals: this He strengthens and illuminates; no impiety can be greater than to try to extinguish the faculty of thought. There is too little reason to complain of over activity of mind. On the contrary our Lord laments, and His servants have too often occasion to lament that the "people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

All this is true, but it is true also, that "he who trusteth in his own heart is a fool." Whoso in haste sets forth his own plans for the better administering of the world, whosoever attempts to mend it, transcends his duty and steps out of his place; much more whosoever thus violates express

commands, is guilty of impiety. In reformation we often prove sad bunglers and in gathering out the tares are apt to root out the wheat with them.

If, for instance, because we have evil thoughts and are tried with temptation, we do violence to our nature, and narrow the sphere of human life by voluntary asceticism, we destroy wheat as well as tares: for we curtail the appointed means of our discipline, and our opportunities of doing good. Let us indeed be watchful against temptation; repress every rising towards evil, and beware of indulging unclean imagination: but let us not endeavor to unmake ourselves, or throw a slur on the good gifts of God, lest we be found dealing in the dark spirit of paganism, or the proud spirit of Pharisaism, rather than in His spirit, who was accused as “a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.”

Or if, because of unrighteous and sensual men, we are provoked to use rough, sharp and forceful measures, instead of such as agree with human nature and the spirit of Christ, and are the only possible means of success; then our clumsiness does more harm than good, and we contract the guilt of lessening the harvest by rooting up wheat, together with tares: that is, by hardening these men’s hearts, and thus putting off their repentance to an unknown day, making it unspeakably harder, if not impossible.

*In the time of harvest* these wrongs shall all be righted, these evils redressed. Then shall the redeemed spirit re-enter the new and perfect body, and the complete man in the likeness of the glorified Second Adam, begin his full happiness. Then shall the church, set free from scandal and offence, from unshapeliness, uncleanness, and darkness, shine with the brightest beams of heaven. The work for which human skill is unfit, and for which the time is now not yet come, shall be done easily and thoroughly by the right agency, in the time of harvest, which is the end of this dispensation.

# 16. Quieting Thoughts About Life

“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold the judge standeth before the door. Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is full of pity and of tender mercy.” – James 5:7-11.

HUMAN LIFE ON EARTH is full of agitating elements. Scarcely a day passes in the history of any individual in which some circumstance does not occur to disturb the tranquility of the soul; and frequently do events transpire which lash the spirit into the wildest tumult. It will be our aim to suggest a few thoughts adapted to calm and compose our troubled hearts.

One quieting thought suggested by the text is:

## 1. The Trials Of The Good Will Be Ended Forever

That there is a period hastening on that will terminate forever the trials of the good. “The coming of the Lord draweth nigh.” “The Judge standeth at the door.” The period referred to is Christ’s advent to the earth as the great Judge. There is a sense in which He is with the good man every day now, as

Teacher, Priest, Redeemer; but there is a period when He will come in visible form as Judge. Then He will terminate for ever the connection of the pious man with this probationary life, where good and evil, truth and error, happiness and misery mingle in confusion, and introduce him to a scene of perfect purity, truth and blessedness.

This period is not far off. It emphatically draweth nigh, and emphatically may it be said to us all, “The Judge standeth at the door.” It is not a thing which must be put off until distant ages. “The Lord is at hand.”

Is not this a quieting thought to the Christian? Not forever will he experience this inner conflict of soul, the warring of flesh and spirit; not forever will he be subject to pains and infirmities of body; not forever will he be harassed with worldly thoughts and cares; not forever will he be grieved at the wicked conduct of society, and distressed at the turbid tide of depravity that rises and surges around him. No! the Judge is even now “at the door,” and soon will He deliver him from all this. Let us “comfort one another with these words.”

We shall soon have struck the last blow in life’s battle and won the crown. We shall soon have passed over the last billows of life’s ocean and reached the desired haven.

Another quieting thought about life suggested by the text is:

## **2. The Trials of the Good Are In Harmony With Present History**

That the trials of the good are in harmony with the present state of our history. Our present moral position is analogous to that of the husbandman in spring. “Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.” What kind of life is that of the husbandman in spring?

1 It is a life of trying labor. He has by certain processes of culture, to prepare the soil for the precious grain. In his work there is a great expenditure of capital, strength and time, without any immediate return. He has to pursue his operations, too, amidst many variations, and sometimes



severe inclemencies of weather that interrupt and threaten to utilize his labors, and blast his hopes.

2 It is a life of conscious dependence. How proverbially anxious is the farmer about the weather? He observes the clouds, he marks the shifting of the winds, he notices all the changes in the temperature. He knows that unless genial nature co-operate with him, his work will go for nothing.

3 It is a life of practical faith. The husbandman in springtime literally “walks by faith.” Were he to follow sight and be ruled by appearances he would never cultivate his fields. But faith spreads over him the summer’s ripening sky, and around him waving fields of golden grain. And he hopes. Faith and hope inspire him with patience under the trying labors of spring.

All this mirrors the present stage of the good man’s history. It is fitful spring with us. Our present season is a moral April: it is the struggle of sunshine and shower – the genial glow and the nipping frost. It is a season of fluctuation not settledness, of outlay not income, labor not wages, of seeds not of results. It is the season for burying the grain, not for plucking the golden ear. It is wise and well for the husbandman to labor patiently in the spring, for he has the assurance from testimony and experience that the glorious summer will reward him for his toil.

Brethren labor on and be calm in these April days of your existence. From the seed you are sowing in tears there shall spring a harvest of joy. “Be patient,” the summer is coming. Soon with the calm blue ether above, and genial airs around, we shall have more than the fruit and beauty of Eden at our feet.

Another quieting thought about life suggested by the text is:

### **3. Moral Endurance Of Trials Is Essential To Build Character**

That a moral endurance of trials is essential to amiability of character. “Grudge not one against another brethren,” or grumble not one against another. The trials of life have a tendency to superinduce this miserable state of mind. Hence in all circles and departments we meet with grumblers, ill-humored, irritable, discontented souls; souls who grumble at everybody

and everything. Not a few of such gloomy grumblers are to be found even in the churches. With them nothing is right. They grumble now at this person now at that, now at this arrangement now at that. They are always snapping and snarling.

The grace of patience, the spirit of moral endurance, is the only security against this unamiable and miserable state of mind. The man who has not that patience which results from a loving confidence in the character, and a loving acquiescence in the will of a Supreme Ruler will feel an annoyance in every trial. He will pass through the trials of life as a silly cur passes through a hailstorm, barking at every step. But the man who cultivates this magnanimous quality of soul will be, in trial, like the imperial bird in the storm; when beaten down from its heavenly flight, it still keeps its wings expanded, looks calmly up, and with the first gleams of sunshine soars away into the radiant and the lofty again.

Another quieting thought about life suggested by the text is:

## **4. The Most Illustrious Men Have Borne The Greatest Trials**

That the greatest trials have been endured by the most illustrious men in history. Take, my brethren, the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and of patience. “The Roman warriors,” says an old writer, “can talk of their Camillii, Fabricii, and Scipios: the philosophers of their Aristotle, Plato and Pythagoras; but religion propoundeth the example of the prophets.” The prophets were men of genius and of God: great in talent and in virtue, the loyal servants and moral organs of heaven – the most majestic trees in the forest, the brightest stars in the firmament of their race. Yet they suffered. Some of them were expatriated, others were incarcerated, all were persecuted – many were martyred. The morally great have always been sufferers.

Another quieting thought about life, suggested by the text is:

## **5. Trials Have Ever Been The Condition of Heroic Lives**

That trials have ever been the condition of truly heroic and honored lives. “We count them happy which endure.” We count them happy, not only because affliction tendeth to spiritual good, but because they are enabled by their sufferings, when rightly endured, to display the highest attributes of greatness. The finest attributes of character, like the stars are only seen at night. In the history of true men when the sun of prosperity goes down, the brightest orbs of virtue come out to light up the moral firmament of the world. It is when the aromatic plants are pressed, that they fill the air with their sweet odors. After men have nobly endured trials, the world canonizes them. “We count them happy which endure.” The martyrs of one age are the heroes of another. The Scribes and Pharisees garnished the tombs of the prophets whom their fathers persecuted. One generation is ever raising monuments to celebrate the excellencies of those who were considered by their predecessors unworthy of life. All history chants their beatitude. “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Another quieting thought suggested by the text is:

## **6. All Trials Under God’s Direction Will Yield A Glorious Return.**

That all trials being under the direction of God, will, if rightly endured, yield a glorious return. “The Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy.” Our being and circumstances are not the creatures and subjects of accident, nor of blind necessity, nor of an arbitrary despot, nor of a cold-hearted sovereign, but of a tenderly merciful God and Father. “As a Father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.” The mercifulness of God is introduced in the text as the reason for the glorious return of well endured suffering in the case of Job.

“Ye have heard of the patience of Job and have seen the end of the Lord,” What was that end! He had been stripped of property, social status,

children, health – of all, in fact, but a tortured existence: yet he bore his trials nobly, – he blessed the Lord in all. And what was the return? Materially the Lord gave him back twice as much as he had before. But the material result was but a symbol and shadow of the spiritual. It multiplied and strengthened the spiritual power of his life.

To the afflicted and tried we say, "Let these quieting thoughts calm your mind:

- Termination to be put to them.
- To be expected in this life.
- Endurance essential to amiability of character.
- The most illustrious men have been tried.
- Trials have been the condition of honored lives.
- All trials under the direction of a merciful God."

# 17. Coming to Christ

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that Cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” – John 6:37.

UNBOUNDED CONFIDENCE in the paternal government of God is the perfection of piety and the condition of a happy existence. Everywhere in the Bible the Father seeks to awaken in man the most loving and unshaken trust in Himself and the mode of His procedure. The strength of the old saints was in this. Their heroic lives as celebrated in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews are ascribed to their loyal faith in God. Those illustrious worthies felt with Job, who said, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.” No being ever possessed or exhibited this truthfulness as did Christ. In Him it had its most perfect development and force. It buoyed Him up amid the surges of anguish that rolled over His holy soul. It never deserted Him. In Gethsemane it was as strong as ever, when He said, “Not My will but Thine be done.” It comes out in our text. He had been speaking to the multitude, who had followed Him for the sake of the loaves. He had been exhorting them to “labor for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life.” He had represented Himself as “the bread of God which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.” But notwithstanding all His teaching they believed not. Such heartless infidelity amongst those whom He had labored so self-denyingly to enlighten and convince, had a tendency to sadden His spirit, and oppress His heart as a man. Still His trust in God bears Him up. He looks to heaven and says, “All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me.” Some have laid hold on this text and assigned to it a narrow meaning. But its divine spirit overflows any such logical boundaries. It was uttered in a sublime spirit of trustful devotion and unbounded philanthropy.

We shall look upon the words in three respects:

# **I. As Expressing The Grand Condition Of The Sinner's Well Being**

What is it? Coming unto Christ. Such language is of frequent occurrence in the New Testament. "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." "If any man thirst let him come to Me." What does coming to Christ mean?

## **1. It Means Approaching Him As Your Mediator With God.**

Everywhere does the New Testament reveal to us the fact that Christ is the way to God the Father – that He is our High Priest. "In all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people," He is called of God, "a priest forever after the order of Melchisedek." What is the work of a priest? To appear by God's own appointment before the Father on behalf of sinners; – to stand as their representative in the most sacred and momentous of all positions. This Christ does. "He hath passed into the heavens, where He ever liveth to make intercession for us." So that through Him we can approach God. What is the work of a priest? To present sacrifices. Christ has offered Himself a sacrifice to God for us, once forever. "He needeth not daily . . . to offer up sacrifice . . . for this He did once when He offered up Himself." "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Such language proves that men must trust in Christ and accept His work as performed for them in order to be accepted of God. Christ represents Himself as occupying this position; for He has said, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Thus He assumes a position original and unique. He seems to stand between heaven and earth, and looking with loving interest and tenderness upon all the millions that ever have been or ever will be, He says, "No man can go up to these bright heavens but by Me. I have the key of these golden gates. No sinner can approach the Almighty but through the heavenly appointed Priest. He is the way. Coming to Him, then, means

looking to Him to undertake your case, to answer to God for you, to pardon your sins, and to present you with acceptance before God.

## **2. Coming To Christ Is Approaching Him As Your Guide To Moral Goodness**

We come to men intellectually when our general ideas approximate theirs. Modern men come to the great thinkers of past ages in this way. In the teachings of Jesus Christ we can thus come to Him. In their spotless purity, in their unerring truthfulness, in their immortal freshness, in their unbounded sweep, in their soul quickening and soul uplifting force, His teachings stand alone. We learn of Him and thus come to Him. We come to men emotionally when our ruling sympathies approximate theirs. We are one with those who love the same objects and sympathize with the same pursuits. Congruity of feeling welds hearts together. By loving the objects that Christ loves and sympathizing with the pursuits of His life we come to Him. We come to men morally when the tone and temper of our lives is like theirs. In morals like draws like. We are drawn to those who are like ourselves in temper and in aim. We must learn of Him who was “meek and lowly in heart.” He is our model. “He has left us an example that we should follow His steps.” We must imitate Him not by servilely copying particular acts, but by inbreathing the spirit of His life. In these respects you must come to Christ. This is the condition of your well being. There is no happiness for the sinner where Christ is not approached as the great High Priest to atone for his sins, and as the Guide to lead him in holiness.

### **li. We Regard These Words As Showing The Amazing Mercy Of Christ Towards Sinners**

Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." The idea is; – he that applies to Me for spiritual life and blessedness, whoever he may be, I will on no account reject.

There are at least two general accounts on which the best of us so sometimes reject the requests of an applicant.

## 1. On Account Of Something In Ourselves

There may be a deficiency in our benevolence. A person may apply to us for a favor and we may have the power to render it but lack the disposition. Our benevolence may be at fault. It is a sad fact that through the ingratitude, the dishonesties, the hollow pretensions of the world, the fountain of kindness even in the most benevolent natures gets well nigh dried up at times. Many a generous heart has grown misanthropic through intercourse with a hollow and heartless world. When our benevolence is at a low ebb, we may turn away from the request of even a deserving applicant. But will Christ ever cast out one on this ground? Does He lack benevolence? He has given the world the highest conceivable demonstration of His love: He has given Himself to a death the most excruciating and ignominious. The length and breadth and height and depth of His love passeth knowledge. It is an ocean that no line can fathom, no shore can bound. It is infinite, and you cannot exhaust the infinite. Could the wickedness of men have exhausted it there would have been none after His crucifixion. But lo! soon after His resurrection, just before His ascension into heaven, He commanded His apostles to go and preach forgiving mercy even to His murderers at Jerusalem. Christ therefore can in no wise cast out a man on account of any lack of benevolence in His loving heart.

Sometimes when our benevolence is not at fault, we may refuse a request because (2) of a deficiency in our resources. We may not be able to entertain the request. Many a generous man is obliged to say No! when his heart feels Yes! This is a great trial for a truly benevolent nature. Still it is better, a thousand times better, to have the disposition to give and not the means, than to have the means and not the disposition. He who has the one is a pauper in the universe; he who has the other a prince. But though our resources fail us, however benevolent we might be, Christ will in no wise cast out a man on this account. His resources are inexhaustible. Paul speaks of them as the "unsearchable riches." Whereunto shall we liken the redemptive resources of Christ? To a feast? If so, then not a feast implying limitation for so many and no more. It is like the banquet which Jesus spread out upon the mountain of Capernaum, of which all the thousands did eat and were filled, and stores of fragments were still left unused. We scarcely know to what to compare the unsearchable riches of Christ. We



think of a masterpiece of music, every note suited to touch some of the deepest chords in human nature. It has awakened raptures in the men of past generations, and seems as potent in its stirring impulses now as ever. Still it may be exhaustible. The time may come when our Handels, Haydns and Beethovens will be outgrown and left behind as relics of the past – for all that is human has its limitations. We think of the great sun who has been giving out his beams for thousands of years, in quickening and gladdening the unnumbered tribes of life that teem in air and earth and sea; in annually robing our world in forms of beauty ever fresh and affluent, and causing the earth “to bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater;” and as we think of this royal orb we are impressed with the vastness of His resources. But though vast, they are not inexhaustible, they are finite. Its beams may grow dim, its fires die out. There is nothing we can think of to which we can compare the resources of Christ. There is nothing in fact in creation, for creation itself is limited. Christ the Sun of righteousness, though He pour His soul-saving beams on millions of generations, will light up the heavens of God with blessedness through unnumbered ages, and must remain as bright and warm as ever. Christ then on the ground of the lack of resources will “in no wise cast out.”

The other general reason on which the best of men do sometimes reject applications is:

## **2. On Account Of Something In Connection With The Applicant**

Either of the three following circumstances connected with an applicant would wondrously tempt us to deny his request.

### **1. If His Character Is Unusually Vile**

Should a man, deeply sunk in the mire of intemperance and licentiousness, or characterized by systematic dishonesty and daring blasphemy, make application to us for a favor, we should scarcely tolerate his presence, still less entertain his request. If we spoke to him it would be in the language of severe reproof, if not indignant denunciation. But Christ will in no wise cast out. Take two cases out of many. Jesus is at a feast in Simon’s house. While there a woman, notorious as a sinner in the city, entered the room where He

was, stood at His feet weeping, began to wash His feet with her tears, and to wipe them with her hair. In the sight of those who reclined at table this woman was odious for her depravity. But there she kneels before Christ; she has intruded into His presence. What does He say to her? Does He cast her from Him? No. He turns to her and says, “Thy sins are forgiven, go in peace.” Take another case, – on one side of Him on the cross hangs a malefactor in the agonies of death. Society had cast him off as a wretch unfit to live. Even corrupt humanity could no longer tolerate his presence, or allow him a place among the living. He himself allows that his doom is just. But in this, his last hour, he turns imploringly to Christ, saying, “Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.” What answer does he receive? Does Christ say. My sufferings are too great to attend to thee; every nerve of My frame is on the rack, and a mountain of anguish is on My soul; I can think of nothing but My own condition? Oh! no. Does He say, Wretch why appeal to Me in this last moment of thy life? Thou hast spent the days, which mercy has given thee to cultivate thy spirit and to find acceptance with thy Maker, in depravity and crime. Away with thee to thine own place. No! With unutterable tenderness and love he says, “Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.” He will in no wise cast out.

Let not the sins of any, however aggravated, however enormous, keep him away from Christ. Let the sinner tell his sad tale. My character, he says, is too dark for description. My iniquities as a thick cloud roll over my soul. I was the child of godly parents. I had religious teachers in my early life. I listened to a faithful and impressive ministry, received deep impressions and made solemn resolutions, but they are all gone. I am an old man tottering on the verge of the grave. Fifty years at least I have spent in a career of wickedness and impiety. The thought of the injury I have done to my race by my sinful conduct and influence appalls me. I have sat in the seat of the scorner. I have endeavored to shake men’s faith in God. I have denounced Christ as an impostor and His disciples as hypocrites. I have made many laugh at sacred things. I have turned many an innocent youth into the paths of skepticism and profligacy. The memory of my enormities appalls me. Here I stand worn out in the service of sin. I feel tottering as on the edge of a tremendous precipice. Above me there is a tempest about to break in fury upon my aged head: beneath me there is a yawning retribution. Talk not to me of mercy. Mercy has exhausted herself on me. She has made her last overture to me. She has unfolded her wings and gone

forever." Oh! brother, terrible is thy tale; it is a wonder that thou art not in hell. Still I would not leave thee, even thee in despair. "The mercy of the Lord reacheth even unto the clouds." Avail thyself of the departing hours of thy life, and come to Christ, and thou wilt find that "He will in no wise cast thee out."

Again we reject a man's request:

## **2. If He Has Sought To Injure Us**

Were a man to apply to us for a favor, who we knew had been acting the part of an enemy towards us for years, endeavoring to stain our reputation, thwart our plans, and injure our interests, should we not be likely to deny his request? Perhaps we would say to him, We wonder how you can have the audacity, knowing as you do the villainous manner in which you have acted towards us, to ask for a single favor. But Christ will not repel on this account. Look at Saul of Tarsus. He was a persecutor of Jesus of Nazareth, and he laid himself out with great determination to blot His memory from the minds of men and to annihilate His influence. Like a furious beast breathing out slaughter, he hastened to Damascus, having "received authority and commission from the chief priests" to persecute the men who dared to profess their attachment to Christ. "I verily thought with myself," said he, "That I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." And he did so. To use his own language, "I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities." He was indeed a hater of Christ, and he proved his hatred. Yet one day, struck with the heavenly light of moral conviction, he was prostrated before Jesus of Nazareth, and said, "Lord what wilt Thou have me to do?" And how was he received? Did He whom he had hated and opposed, whose disciples he had persecuted, drive him from His presence? No. To the poor prostrate soul. He said, "Stand upon thy feet, for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee." Paul having met with this wonderful reception, leaves this testimony to after ages: "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."

Still again we reject a man's request:

### **3. If, After Once Having Granted His Application, He Has Persisted In Doing Us Wrong**

Suppose a man to whom you had done a great favor in answer to his application, and who afterwards displayed shameless ingratitude, were again to apply to you, would you not be tempted to drive him from your presence, whatever might be his expressions of sorrow, and promises for future improvement? But Christ will not cast you out on this account. There is Peter to whom He had shown many special favors, whose applications He had often graciously granted: – this Peter denies Him: – denies Him in the hour when friendship is most needed – denies Him with impious oaths, – thrice denies Him. Yet did not Christ cast a gracious look on him, that stirred his heart, and melted him to tears? Far enough am I from encouraging backsliding. It is a dreadful sin. A step backwards is of all movements the most daring and hazardous; but having done so, do not be afraid to make another application to Christ. He “will in no wise cast you out.”

What is your position in the spiritual domain? "Where do you stand in relation to Christ? Have you come to Him? Is He your Priest through whom you have been reconciled to God, and enjoy every blessed enjoyment with Him? Is He your Pattern and Guide, leading you to an acquaintance with His doctrines, a fellow feeling with His sympathies, an assimilation to His character? If so, gratefully adore the Everlasting God for thus giving you Christ; and giving you to Christ. By His Holy Spirit He made you feel your need of a Saviour and influenced you to apply to Him.

Where are you in relation to Christ? Have you not yet come to Him, but merely inclined to do so, and are about making the effort? Cherish, I entreat you, the impulse which inclines you Christ-ward, yield to every feeling flowing in that direction, for such feeling is the gift of the Father.

Still again, where are you in relation to Christ? This of all questions is the most vital and momentous, and it must be reiterated, re-impressed, re-enforced. Are you far away from Christ and are you making no effort to approach Him? Then your condition is a terribly sad one. Awake, I entreat you, to an appreciation of it. Do you feel any sense of sin, any moral

misgivings, any reproaches of conscience, any craving after reconciliation with God? If so, the Spirit is still working upon your heart, seeking to give you to Christ. Take heed that you resist not the Spirit. Follow His leadings, and the directions which He gives in His word, and He will bring you to One who will not cast you out.

# 18. The Fullness of Salvation

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come unto me: hear and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” – Isaiah 55:1-3.

THE NAME OF THE AUTHOR of this book signifies “the salvation of the Lord,” a name which was peculiarly appropriate and expressive. It is evident that the salvation of the Lord was possessed and enjoyed by this prophet; he was one of those, not merely by outward privileges, but by a spiritual incorporation, of whom Moses spoke in his dying charge, “Happy art thou, Israel; who is like unto thee, people saved by the Lord!” The prophetic gift was, in itself, no evidence of the personal piety of those by whom it was exercised; for we are assured that in the great day many will say, “Have we not prophesied in Thy name?” to whom the righteous Judge will declare that He never knew them. Isaiah, however, was not a prophet of the Balaam class, but a true servant of God.

He could, also, with special propriety, be called the salvation of the Lord, not merely on account of his being a personal partaker thereof, but because he was honored in making it known to others. “How beautiful upon the mountains,” to use his own incomparable words, “are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings; that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation!” With that beauty he was himself peculiarly adorned, being one of the most eminent of those messengers of mercy who were commissioned by the God of heaven to announce His gracious purposes to guilty men.

The clearness and fullness with which Isaiah proclaimed the glad tidings of salvation, seem scarcely to accord with the comparatively obscure dispensation under which he lived. That his ministry was distinguished by these qualities is abundantly evident from many portions of his writings, but by none more prominently than by the words before us. Indeed, the whole chapter would be scarcely out of place among the richest disclosures of the New Testament. Confining our attention at present to its introductory section, we remark that we have here:

## **I. A Gracious Invitation**

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” Concerning this invitation three particulars demand our notice.

### **1. The Persons To Whom It Is Addressed**

It is to “every one that thirsteth.” There are various kinds of thirsting, or, rather there are various objects for which men thirst. There are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, and all such the Redeemer pronounces to be blessed. There are many who hunger and thirst after wickedness, and they are as assuredly cursed as the former characters are blessed. It is evident, however, that the thirst referred to here, is that natural thirst for happiness which is common to the whole human family. It is an invitation to the unhappy from whatever cause their wretchedness may arise. Whether it proceed from earthly losses, bodily affliction, domestic bereavement, disappointed pride, remorse of conscience, the dominion of unruly passions – the simple fact that they are oppressed with any of the diversified distresses which are the heritage of fallen humanity, brings them within the range of this tender and loving appeal.

### **2. The Blessings Of Which They Are Invited To Partake**

They are the blessings of the Gospel; those spiritual blessings which are treasured up in Christ Jesus our Lord. Their nature and importance are set

forth by a threefold similitude (1) Water. The frequency with which this element is used to represent the blessings of the Gospel, is known to all who are familiar with the holy oracles. By many important features it is distinguished, but its property of quenching the thirst is here chiefly intended.

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters,” not that ye may wash and be clean, though provision is made for the removal of your pollution; but come that your raging thirst may be allayed from those streams which never dry. Hence the striking language of the Saviour – “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink.” And in the concluding chapter of the sacred canon it is said: “The Spirit and the bride say. Come; let him that heareth say come; and let him that is athirst, come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” (2) Wine. While water quenches the thirst, wine cheers and exhilarates the spirits. With oil, which makes the face to shine, the Psalmist connects wine, that maketh glad the heart of man. However objectionable and injurious in many respects the habitual use of it may be, none can deny that it possesses this quality. But the Gospel, unaccompanied by any evil effects, makes the heart glad indeed. (3) Milk. Nourishment is the idea which is here conveyed. Not merely do the blessings of salvation fill the soul with gladness, but they nourish and support it. Reviving cordials though necessary under certain circumstances, will not of themselves sustain life; for that purpose something more nutritious is required. If we would have our souls to prosper and be in health, we must desire the sincere, unadulterated milk of the Word, for it is thus only that we can grow in grace.

### **3. The Terms On Which These Blessings Are Offered**

“Come ye, buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price.” At first sight there appears something strange and contradictory in this announcement; for how can a thing be bought without money, or at least without that which will be taken as an equivalent or substitute for money? It is evident, however, that the words simply denote the mode by which any commodity is procured, whether it be by labor, by barter or by purchase. A thing may be lawfully obtained in either of these ways; but if it was bestowed upon us as a free gift, it would on that account



be no less our own. Yet it would seem that the special and somewhat peculiar phraseology which is here employed was intentional, and its design will appear from the following considerations: These words were intended, (1) To encourage those who are spiritually poor and penniless. How many are deprived of various things which they are most anxious to obtain, through their not possessing the means to secure them. But what are all the blessings of this life, health, competence, knowledge, an honorable position in society, when compared with the glorious treasures which the Gospel unfolds? But in reference to the latter none need be discouraged on the ground that they are placed out of their reach, inasmuch as they are free to all. They are to be had by simply applying for them; and not a single soul ever applied in earnest who was sent unblest away. (2) To impart confidence to those who may feel a degree of timidity and hesitation in applying for what can be gratuitously obtained. As a general rule persons feel far greater confidence when they go to purchase what they require, than when they go to solicit a free favor. There is, therefore, the most compassionate kindness shown in the style adopted for setting forth the terms on which the blessings of grace are to be secured. The design appears to be to assure us that we may come and receive those blessings as unhesitatingly as if we had wherewithal to purchase them; and that having accepted them, we may appropriate and enjoy them as thoroughly as if we had paid a full price for them. (3) To intimate that the blessings of salvation are inexpressibly valuable and important.

Were they procurable by purchase on our part, that would show at once that their worth was only moderate, since anything we could offer for them must be limited, even were our resources such as are generally regarded as most ample. Hence the apostle Peter says, "Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." Our redemption is thus a purchased possession, and the price which was paid by our adorable Surety, even His most precious blood declares its inestimable value. But while it cost Him so much, it is offered to us without money and without price. Both circumstances therefore unite in confirming the same truth. Is redemption with all the innumerable blessings it offers altogether priceless? The sacrificial death of Christ on the cross answers that question on the one hand; and the fact that we are unable to purchase it and that it can only be received, as heaven's free gift, answers it on the

other. (4) To reduce the pride and presumption of those who imagine that they have something of their own to recommend them to the Divine favor. With what a burst of holy indignation did Peter rebuke that wretched man, Simon the sorcerer: “Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money!” Alas! how many are there who still indulge in the vain imagination, that the gifts of God’s grace can be purchased either in whole or in part, if not by their money, yet by their supposed merits. Acting on the principles of earthly commerce,, they would fain render something to God as a kind of compensation for what they expect to receive from Him in return. The uprightness of their general conduct, their religious observances, the charities in which they have abounded, their good intentions and resolutions, their penitential frames and feelings, their penances and their prayers – with which things they hope to receive the remission of their sins, the acceptance of their persons, and the salvation of their souls. But to all persons we must say, if you wish to trade with the Most High successfully, you must trade with Him on His own terms, and what those terms are, the words before us show in a manner the most unambiguous and decisive.

## **II. An Earnest Remonstrance**

“Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.” We have here,

### **1. A Foolish Course To Be Avoided**

What egregious folly must it be to seek happiness in those objects, the pursuit of which is sure to end in disappointment. However eagerly and however successfully the things of time may be sought, they never have yielded and they never will yield, substantial satisfaction. That the world in its best state is unsatisfying is the doctrine of the Bible, and all experience loudly proclaims, and most emphatically confirms it. In the striking language of the prophet in a preceding chapter: “It shall even be as when a hungry man dreameth, and behold he eateth j but he awaketh, and his soul

is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and behold he drinketh; but he awaketh. and behold he is faint, and his soul hath appetite.”

## **2. A Wise Method To He Pursued**

“Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.” While the history of 6000 years has given unanswerable evidence to the insufficiency of every terrestrial object to afford true enjoyment; while it shows that there are wants which no earthly riches can supply, diseases which no human skill can cure, fears which no mortal courage can quell, penalties which no finite resources can discharge, and miseries which no earth born sagacity can control; how cheering is it then to hear the voice of mercy inviting us to turn from all lying vanities, and to partake of those blessings which are distinguished by every feature that is necessary for yielding what our utmost exigencies require. There is, (1) *Their suitability*. Nothing can satisfy that does not possess this quality. A person on the point of perishing for want of food on some desolate island, discovers a mine of gold: of what use is it to him? What he requires is something to appease his hunger, and the sight of any stunted tree, if it contained anything in the shape of fruit upon its half withered branches, would be unspeakably more gladdening than heaps of shining ore. But to any one in pecuniary embarrassment, how acceptable would be a few of those nuggets which the other so lightly esteems! Now the blessings of the Gospel satisfy, because they meet the sinner’s actual condition, so that he can say of them – this is what I need! Here is pardon for my innumerable offenses, a fountain to cleanse me from my guilty stains, peace for my troubled conscience, grace to help in every time of need. These are the very things I require. (2) *Their continuance*. Supposing that in their worldly pursuits, some of the more favored of the children of men met with successes so numerous, and encountered disappointments so few, every event having turned out according to their most sanguine expectations – granting this to be the case, and that as regards enjoyment, every succeeding day had been as the former, and even much more abundant; yet the consideration that this prosperity, at the longest, could be only of brief duration, would hang like a dark cloud over the whole scene. Ah! that it would continue! might the successful votary of the world exclaim, but it cannot be. If, exempted from those unexpected vicissitudes to which the

most prosperous are exposed, his possessions are not taken from him, he will very soon be taken from his possessions. And then when separated from them all, and his soul about to be cast adrift upon the shoreless wastes of eternity, he cannot fail to feel if he never felt before, how unsatisfying a portion is that which appertains only to our present fleeting existence.

But what we are here invited to partake of is the good part which will never be taken away from us. "He that drinketh of this water," said the Saviour, " shall thirst again; but whosoever shall drink of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst."

### **III. A Wonderful Assurance**

Incline your ear, and come unto Me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." For God to enter into covenant with such creatures as we are

#### **1. Displays Amazing Condescension**

This will appear when we bear in mind the Greatness of God, It is looked upon as something remarkable for persons of exalted rank to have familiar intercourse with their inferiors; but what is the distance between the mightiest prince and the meanest peasant, when compared with that which exists between God and us I He is the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity; and for him to enter into covenant with poor worms of the dust, what tongue can express, what mind can conceive the marvelous condescension.

#### **2. What This Covenant Embraces Is Unspeakably Glorious**

"I swear unto thee and entered into a covenant with thee and thou becamest Mine." All who lay hold upon His covenant can adopt these blessed words: "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, and therefore will I hope in Him." This strikingly confirms what was said before; for if God is ours and we are His, our largest desires must be satisfied. Indeed, our immortal spirits have

never enough until they have more than enough. They have not enough till they have God, and they have more than enough when they have Him. The cup will then be, not merely full, but overflowing.

### **3. The Utmost Confidence May Be Placed In The Stability Of This Covenant**

Not only is it an everlasting covenant, but its mercies are sure mercies, “even the sure mercies of David.”

Who is meant by David here the next verse clearly shows; it is none other than David’s Son and David’s Lord – the great Captain of our salvation, who was given for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people. All the promises of the covenant are in Him, yea and in Him, Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

It is important, however, for us to remember, that it is not with souls dead in trespasses and sins that this covenant engagement is formed. We must be made spiritually alive before God will become our God, and before He will acknowledge us as His sons and daughters. In more than one sense He is not a God of the dead but of the living. It is therefore declared, “Incline your ear and come unto Me; hear, and your soul shall live.” The words addressed to us in the Gospel, whether invitations or appeals, or gracious promises, are spirit and life; and such they will be found in the case of those who give proper heed to them. To do whatever is there said we are to hearken diligently, we are to hearken prayerfully, and above all, we are to hearken believingly. In the passage before us we are commanded to hear that our souls may live: faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Our hearing is to no purpose unless we are quickened to newness of life thereby.

# 19. The Resurrection of the Just

“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands: and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection.”—Rev. 20:4, 5.

THAT THE DEAD WILL RISE AGAIN from their graves is the belief of all Christians. Even in the Old Testament this doctrine is set forth. The patriarch Job uses the following remarkable language, “Though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold and not another.” The Psalmist speaks as follows, “God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for He shall receive me,” Isaiah declares, “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise,” Daniel says, “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” And the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that Abraham accounted that “God was able to raise him (Isaac) up even from the dead:” and that other saints of Old Testament times “were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.”

In the New Testament this doctrine is clearly revealed in unmistakable terms. The Saviour Himself has made it known. To the Sadducees who did not believe in resurrection, when they came to Him asking questions in regard to it He replied, “As touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God

of the dead, but of the living." And on another occasion He spoke as follows, "The hour is coming in 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 have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." The apostles also taught in the same manner what they had received from their divine Master. We are told that the priests and Sadducees were grieved at Peter and John because they "preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead." The Athenians thought that Paul was a "setter forth of strange gods; because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection." And in the Sixth Chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews this same doctrine of the "resurrection of the dead" is mentioned as being one of the "principles of the doctrine of Christ."

Nor is this doctrine simply a matter of faith; it is not a thing merely to be believed because it is taught, but we have positive evidence that there is such a thing as the resurrection of the dead. Jesus Himself dies and is laid in the dark tomb. But after three days, He rises from the dead, and walks forth again, showing Himself to hundreds of His followers. And after His resurrection the evangelist tells us that the "graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." "They whose dust had mingled with the elements took form and life again. And men gazed on these inhabitants of the tomb – these citizens of distant ages – walking forth as living tokens of the resurrection."

There is then to be a resurrection of the body which is deposited in the grave. The particles which have mouldered in the dust shall be rejoined and resuscitated and made to move with vitality. "The redemption wrought out by Jesus Christ takes in the whole man. Body and soul alike are to share it. It is a perfected redemption, a redemption of the entire being of those who have part in it. No part of their nature is to be shut out from it. Who, without the deepest pain could contemplate the thought that the body, the companion of the spirit through all life's pilgrimage, should be severed from it at death; to be reunited no more! The body thus fearfully and wonderfully made, is not destined to destruction. It is a wondrous display of God's wisdom and power, and skill. Sin has invaded it; and marred its fair proportions; and blunted its powers; and spread through all its mechanism, the witnesses of its fall. Sickness attacks it. Death seizes upon it. But shall it

be left in the dark tomb! No. If like the leprous house it must be taken down: it is only that it may be reared again; in glory surpassing its first estate. It lies in the grave. But it is not to be left there forever. The eye of the All Seeing One watches over it: The power of the Almighty is around it. It shall rise again. At the appointed time, it shall awake from its slumbers, and come forth in the loveliness of a new creation.”

All then upon whom death passes, will be raised from the dead. All are raised again; but all are not raised at the same time. There is a resurrection of the just, and a resurrection of the wicked. The resurrection of the just takes place when Christ first returns to our earth and the resurrection of the wicked one thousand years thereafter. The bodies of the righteous dead are raised, and the bodies of the wicked dead sleep on in their graves until the thousand years are over. This the words of our text sufficiently prove. “I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, which had not worshiped the beast neither image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection.” It is here distinctly asserted that there is a first resurrection, and that those who have part in it are "blessed and holy." And it just as distinctly affirms that the “rest of the dead,” that is, those who are not raised at the first resurrection, live not until a thousand years have passed away. There is then a resurrection at the advent of Christ in which the martyrs and saints, they that sleep in Jesus, and they who have not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark, the blessed and holy have part. And there is a resurrection one thousand years after that event which embraces the rest of the dead. There are some to whom this may be a new view. The general opinion seems to be that all the dead rise at once. But the doctrine of a twofold resurrection was not new to the ancient Christian church; nor to the Jewish teachers. Calmet says, “The ancient fathers acknowledged a twofold resurrection: first that which is to precede the Messiah’s reign of a thousand years upon earth; secondly that which is to follow the reign of a thousand years. This sentiment,” he goes on to say, “is found clearly enough in the second book of Esdras, in the testament of the twelve patriarchs, and in several of the Rabbins.” Bickersteth says, that “the Jewish writers generally mention together the coming of the Messiah, and the resurrection of the



dead, and frequently consider them as branches of the same proposition.” Professor Stuart remarks, that “the doctrine of a first resurrection as taught by John was not novel,” and that “the great mass of the Jewish Rabbins believed and taught the doctrine of the resurrection of the just in the days of Messiah’s development.” Dr. Duffield says “The millennium John predicts, is exactly coincident in its leading features with the expectations of the pious Jews before the coming of Christ.” And I here adduce some quotations from ancient Jewish writings, so that you may see the opinion they held in regard to the resurrection of the just at the advent of the Messiah. Jonathan the Paraphrast who lived about thirty years before Christ, says of the people of God, “They shall be gathered from their capacity; they shall live under the shadow of the Messiah; the dead shall rise, and good shall increase in the earth.” Rabbi Kimchi says, “The holy blessed God will raise the dead, at the time of deliverance.” The same author thus quotes an ancient apothegm, “The benefit of the rain is common to the just and to the unjust, but the resurrection from the dead is the peculiar privilege of those who have lived righteously.” Rabbi Chabbo says, “The dead in the land of Israel shall live or be quickened first in the days of the Messiah, and shall enjoy the years of the Messiah.” Rabbi Jochannan says, " There are some who study in the law as they ought, and those are they who shall rise first to everlasting life." A Jewish comment of the 8th verse of the 25th chapter of Isaiah is in these words, “The world cannot be free from guilt, until king Messiah shall come, and the blessed God shall raise up those who sleep in the dust.” And Maimonides testifies this is the opinion of many Rabbis. “In Yalcut Rubeni we read as follows,” “Know that we have a tradition that when the Messiah with the collected captivity shall come to the land of Israel, in that day the dead in Christ shall rise again.” In the Sanhedrin it is written, “There is a tradition in the house of Elias, that the righteous whom the blessed God shall raise from the dead, shall not return again to the dust, but for the space of a thousand years, in which the holy blessed God shall renew the world, they shall have wings like the wings of eagles, and shall fly above the waters.” These quotations have been gathered by commentators from the ancient Jewish writings. “No Rabbinical testimony or mere tradition is adequate to prove an article of religious faith; but these quotations are not without their significance.” Joseph Mede speaking of them wisely says, “I can hardly believe that all this smoke of tradition could arise but from some fire of truth, anciently

made known unto them. Besides why should the Holy Ghost on this point speak so like them, unless He would induce us to mean with them? In fine the second resurrection with the state of the saints after it, seems to have been less known to the ancient church of the Jews, than the first resurrection and the state to accompany it.” From all this then it appears that the Jews believed in a resurrection of the just when their Messiah should come. In this connection we must recollect that to them were committed the oracles of God. That from their nation exclusively the prophets and apostles were taken. That from the days of Abraham down to the days of our Saviour, they were the only people on the face of the earth that had the true worship. That Jesus Himself was a Jew. That their learned men form their opinions upon these subjects from the same Bible that we get ours, and from the traditions and commentaries handed down from their fathers. Their views then cannot be without their value; and it would be well for us to give heed to the testimony of a people who were so highly favored of God, to whom He committed His truth, and around whom so many sacred associations cluster.

In the New Testament there are also other passages besides the text that teach this doctrine.

In the 15th chapter of 1st Corinthians Paul speaks of the resurrection. In it he refers to the resurrection of the righteous only. He speaks of those who are Christ’s being raised at His coming. He says moreover, “As we have born the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” Now he cannot here mean the wicked, for they will never bear the image of the heavenly; and they are certainly not Christ’s. He goes on to say also, “So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death shall be swallowed up in victory.” He refers to the saying that is written, “death shall be swallowed up in victory.” On turning back to the Old Testament we find that this saying is written in the 25th chapter of Isaiah, which chapter contains a song of praise to the Lord, who has just been represented, at the close of the preceding chapter as coming to reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem before His ancients gloriously. In that connection these words are used, “He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken

it.” Connect now these two passages in Corinthian and Isaiah, since the one contains a quotation and reference to the other, and we find that St. Paul says the resurrection of the just described by him happens when death is swallowed up in victory, and Isaiah tells us that death is swallowed up in victory, when Christ comes to wipe away tears from off all faces, and shall take away the rebuke of His people from off all the earth. Only resurrection of righteous, here spoken of.

Again in Phil., 3:11, Paul speaking of his labors and losses for the sake of the Gospel, says he suffers and labors, “If by any means he might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” If he refers here to a general resurrection there is no meaning in his expression. Why would he express the hope to attain unto the resurrection, when he knew all men would be raised? He must mean some special resurrection, to attain which would be a great privilege. He therefore evidently had before his mind the first resurrection, in which the righteous are raised. And the phraseology of the expression sustains this opinion. “If by any means I might attain the resurrection from among the dead.” That is that resurrection in which some are taken out from among the dead, and the rest are left. Or in other words the first resurrection.

In the 14th chapter of Luke we are told that Jesus on one occasion went into the house of one of the Pharisees to eat bread, and while teaching those around Him He gave utterance to these words, “When thou makest a feast call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed: for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. Does not this expression of our Lord’s resurrection of the just,” at which those who do righteously shall be recompensed, imply that there is another and quite a different resurrection of the unjust at which no recompense shall be given? It seems to me that any candid mind would conclude that there was.

Again in the 20th chapter of Luke 34, 5, 6th verses our Saviour uses the following words, “The children of this world marry and are given in marriage. But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.” Now take this in the sense of a general resurrection, and it leads to an absurdity. For then

all would be the children of God, since all have part in the resurrection: and we know that all are not the children of God. But some particular resurrection must be meant here because our Saviour speaks only of those obtaining it who are worthy. He must refer then to the resurrection of the just.

“When we come to sum up all these facts and assign them the force which belongs to the words of inspiration, the conclusion seems unavoidable, that the doctrine of a twofold resurrection has a solid foundation in Scripture. The resurrection of the holy is entirely separated, in nature and in point of time, from the resurrection of the rest of the dead.” As soon as Christ comes the righteous shall be raised. The unrighteous and wicked remain in their graves till the thousand years are over.

A word now as to the manner in which the dead shall be raised. The Scriptures intimate that the saints shall be raised silently without noise, and without those who are on the earth knowing it at the time. It is true that Paul says, “The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised.” But the sounding of this trumpet is not for living ears.

It is the dead alone that will hear the voice, our Saviour says, “The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.” But those who are alive on the earth will not necessarily see the dead rise. “No human eye saw Jesus rise.” “And it may be that His saints will ascend one by one, just as quietly as they now sleep.” Silently the power of God shall reach the sleeping dust of His saints. Silently they shall arise as did the bodies of the saints after our Lord’s resurrection. Business and pleasure and vice and folly and crime, shall pursue their usual rounds. But in due season all the sainted dead shall be raised to unite in the glory of their Lord when He shall come in the clouds of heaven with great power and glory.

Closely connected with this subject of the resurrection of the just, is the translation of the righteous who are alive upon the earth at Christ’s coming. These will not die at all. But they will be translated like Enoch and Elijah were. “Behold I shew you a mystery,” says Paul, “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” “The dead in Christ shall rise first:

then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them." "And when the process of the translation of the living commences, it will no doubt be like the resurrection to which it corresponds. It will not be with great pomp and public demonstrations, but quietly and in a manner hardly understood by those that remain." From the midst of the occupations of their daily life, they will be taken. " Then shall two be in the field, the one shall be taken, the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill, the one shall be taken the other left." But no sudden outburst of power – no circumstances of terror or of grandeur – shall attend the taking. An invisible hand shall be stretched forth to take the living saint out of the midst of his unbelieving companions. "In a moment" it shall be done. In the twinkling of an eye they shall be caught up: and corruption put on incorruption. "And what a thought is this that it may be there are some listening to me who shall never see death." Those who are Christ's at His coming will be caught up to join Him; and "so shall ever be with the Lord."

Such is the first resurrection and the translation. Blessed and holy are those who have part in them. But it is only those who are Christians who can look forward to this blessedness. I should be derelict to my duty if I should hold out to any one the hope of future happiness who was not a believer in and follower of the Lord Jesus. Only those who receive Christ now, will He receive hereafter. Let me ask you then friends and brethren, have you made your peace with God; have you made Jesus Christ your friend and Saviour. If not I can hold out to you no expectations of happiness.

Your part will be with those whose resurrection takes place at the end of the judgment period, which promises nothing to be desired. Now while you have the opportunity apply to Christ to cleanse and save you. He invites and entreats you to come, and is ready and waiting to receive you. "Come and He who laid down His life for you will not deny you a hearty welcome." Time is flying: and the scenes of the resurrection may be ushered in before you are aware. Let not that day witness your banishment from the Saviour who stretches out His arms to you now. Fly to His embrace that He at last may make you a partaker in His joy.

## 20. A Great Commission

“Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.”— Acts 5:20.

WHEN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH was young great numbers of poor were gathered into it. “To the poor the Gospel is preached,” said Jesus. And yet there were none among them that lacked: “for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.” A notable instance of such self-denial and Christian charity is found in the case of Joses, “who was of the country of Cypress,” whose gift of love was so marked as to gain special mention in the records of the Divine Word. As if to show that just as in the number of the apostles who were the constant attendants of our Lord, there was a Judas, so in the Christian church hypocrites would always be found, until all things that do offend are gathered out of the kingdom, the statement which tells us of the sweet charity of Joses, is immediately followed by the account of the selfishness and duplicity of Ananias and Sapphira. They, “sold a possession, and kept back part of the price . . . and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles’ feet.” But they could not hide their hearts from the searching gaze of the Holy Spirit. Their grievous sin of lying unto God was detected and exposed. Swift and severe, but righteous retribution was visited upon them. They fell down dead at the apostles’ feet, their dead bodies taking the place where they should have laid their money, and they were carried out and buried together. What they were unwilling to give to Christ’s suffering church, God took from them by force.

The punishment meted out to this unhappy couple had a marked effect upon the survivors: “Great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.” But this act of severity for the cleansing of the

church from false and hurtful professors within its fold, was immediately followed by miracles of clemency and mercy towards those who were without, to show “that however awful the manifestations of God’s displeasure with the wicked may be, He is always ready in His infinite mercy to help, to heal, and to save all those who seek His face.” “By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; inasmuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.” This state of peaceful progress, however, did not continue long. Though “the people magnified the apostles,” the rulers looked upon them with an evil eye, and regarded their work with anything but satisfaction. Nor were they content to leave them unmolested in their labors for the good of men. They again laid upon them the hand of persecution which had been tried before in vain. “The high priest rose up and all that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees) and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.” But God showed Himself just as ready and able to deliver His people that served Him truly as He was to rid His church of hypocrites and deceivers. When the ordinary means of help failed, extraordinary ones were used. “The angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth.” It was notably the Sadducees who co-operated with the High Priest in this arrest of the apostles, the same who said “there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit.” It was for preaching Jesus and the resurrection, and working miracles in the name of their ascended Saviour that these faithful ones were cast into the common prison, and now the mighty Lord of heaven and earth vindicates His truth and confounds His enemies through the agency of one of those holy beings, whose very existence they denied. An angel delivered them.

Not for flight, however, when danger threatened, nor for silence as the foe demanded, were they delivered. The angel said unto them “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people, all the words of this life.”

How great in the sight of God is the Gospel! Prophets called and endowed by the Holy Spirit proclaimed it age after age in the olden time. In

these latter times it has been spoken unto us by God's only begotten Son, made incarnate for this very purpose. When He ascends to the place of glory and power of God's right hand, apostles are chosen and fitted and commissioned for the same blessed work. And when the minions of Satan, that old arch adversary who at the first deceived and still maliciously opposes, rise up to prevent the proclamation of the precious evangel, an angel is sent to bring them out from their, prison cell and recommission them, bidding them "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." So necessary is this Gospel for the salvation of the sons of men, and loath is God to give them over to their sins. From that day to this, as generation succeeded generation, men have been called and equipped and sent forth with the same commission. These words of the angel form the charge given to every minister, and will be found to be Ms directory in the work He has given him to do. The sentence naturally divides itself into heads according to the several principal words which form it, and it is in this manner that we propose to consider it.

## 1. The First Word Of The Charge Is Go

Ministers are to *go out* in the performance of their mission as the ambassadors of Christ. The evangelist Mark tells us in his account of the calling of the apostles, that Jesus ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that He *might* send them forth to preach." Accordingly, after His resurrection, just before He was taken from them, when He gave them their final commission He said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." It was the same in the former dispensation. To Jeremiah God said, "Thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee." Paul aptly asks, "How shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent?" There must then be a going out on the part of God's ministers before the nations shall hear and believe. The word missionaries which is often used to designate them implies this – it means those sent.

There should not be a *hasty* sending, or a haste to go. Not every one that is called into the kingdom of Christ, is called to preach publicly for Him. On one occasion while upon earth, a certain man said unto our Lord, "I will



follow Thee whithersoever thou goest.” But Jesus saw that He was not a proper person to have in such a position, and He frankly showed the difficulties of it, and his unfitness for it by saying, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests: but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.” But to another He said, " Follow Me. But he said. Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God." No novice should be received. Hands should be laid suddenly on no man. It is not the part of wisdom to hustle men into the ministry simply because they offer themselves or the demand for them is pressing. They should first be proved. Previous preparation and training and time for inspection into their character and habits and capacity is necessary. Among the ancient people of God, schools of the prophets were established. The apostles were under the immediate care and training of our Lord, beholding His miracles, listening to His words, imbibing His spirit for three years, before they are commissioned. Paul says, “When it pleased God . . . to reveal His Sou in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood . . . but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem.” If he needed previous preparation in communion with God and the things of God, before starting out in his missionary work, who in our day can do without it? And something more than this even is required. The charge given by Jesus to His apostles was, “Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.” The gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost in addition to all his other acquirements, are made to make a man a true and successful minister of God. Without these he will be but a blind leader of the blind – a mere hireling that careth not for the sheep, and knoweth not how to feed them.

But when fitted by the help of man and endowed of God, the minister is to go out to preach the Word. He is to seek in order to save them that are lost. Out in the highways and among the hedges let him go to search for the straying. In the cities where men do congregate, and in the villages and in private houses let him lift up his voice, as his Redeemer did before him. If he is called to the ministry his Lord has a place for him. If he but contentedly follow the leadings of Providence he will find it, and there he will be happiest and most successful. But he must be willing to go and labor

wherever the Great Head of the Church appoints, even though it should be to the ends of the earth.

Another idea contained in this word go must not be overlooked. The minister must be satisfied to go out and leave behind him all expectations of earthly preferment, all schemes of mere earthly ambition, all hopes of earthly ease. Yea, he must be ready to suffer the loss of all things not only that he may win Christ, but that he may preach Christ. The apostles forsook their boats and fishing nets. It was not much it is true, but it was their all, and in its stead they took poverty and persecution, bonds and imprisonment, even death itself. Jesus said, "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." "No man having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

## **2. *Stand* Is The Next Word In The Angel's Charge To The Apostles**

Standing is the attitude of activity. It is the opposite of reclining, which is the posture of rest and sleep. It implies readiness to do. The person who stands is on the alert, and prepared to move at the slightest warning or call. The sentinel stands, watchful of the open or insidious approach of the enemy. The helmsman stands, so as to take instant advantage of any favorable or unfavorable circumstance, and to guide the vessel aright. So the minister is to take his place prepared to meet every emergency, and to obey every proper call that pertains to his office. He is not to be a servant of men in the sense of doing their bidding and yielding to their demands according as they may wish. The world will gladly use him if it can, to promote its ends, and self-constituted, imprudent, bungling reformers will be glad to avail themselves of his help if he will give it; and a thousand unseemly requests will be made of him if he is inclined to please men. To all these he must turn a deaf ear, and resolutely but kindly say, no. His office is a holy one, and he must not prostitute it to unholy uses. He is especially the servant of God, and stands ready to do His will as shown in His Word or indicated in His Providence. When the word is to be preached or the truth defended; when the weak are to be encouraged or the willful

reproved; when the poor are to be fed or the suffering relieved; when the young are to be preserved from the tempter's wiles, or the dying supported and cheered as they pass through the dark valley; then is he to be at hand with his ministrations of mercy and love, standing up for the help of God's children.

Standing also indicates firmness and boldness. When the angel commanded the released apostles to go stand in the temple, at the very place where they had been arrested and where they had labored, he meant that they should display moral courage before their enemies, and steadfastness of mind in their holy calling. When Jeremiah was ordained a prophet he said, "Ah! Lord God, behold I cannot speak: for I am a little child." But the Lord said unto him, "Say not I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatever I command thee, thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces, for I am with thee to deliver thee." Even the enemies of Jesus bore this testimony concerning Him, "Master we know that Thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest Thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly." The apostles displayed the same spirit, for when the rulers of the Jews saw their boldness, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. " The great apostle to the Gentiles while at Corinth was encouraged by the Lord in a vision with these words: "Be not afraid, but speak and hold not thy peace." Afterwards he wrote to Timothy, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear: but of power and of love and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord." This spirit of holy boldness in the face of danger and in the defense of truth that should actuate the godly minister, is very different from that of the swaggering "brawler," whose "profane and vain babbling" upon "foolish and unlearned questions" constantly genders strife. It is perfectly consistent with that conduct which is "gentle unto all men; patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves." But it so animates the man of God with courageous fervor, that it will prosecute its heavenly work in spite of Belial and all his forces; that it will give place to "false brethren unawares brought in," no, not for an hour; and that it will withstand iniquity to the face even if found in an apostle.

### **3. The Angel Charged The Apostles To Stand And *speak***

This indicates the mode in which God's gracious purposes are revealed to men, and converts are brought into his kingdom. Some there are who, even in our own day, profess to receive direct spiritual revelations, and would fain persuade men that they are in communication with the great and good in the heavenly world, and that it is by these spiritual intelligences that men are to be guided. That they do hold communion with kindred spirits we doubt not, and that they are guided by them, their lives sufficiently attest, but we beg to be excused from believing that these beings are either holy or in the heavenly world. An old Book that never flatters and has never deceived men, and that was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells us that "In the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils," and we prefer to obey the injunction of the apostle John and "Try the spirits whether they be of God," before yielding to their influence. Others there have been who have propagated their false religions by the power of the sword and have generously given men the privilege of choosing between submission and death. Very zealous were they in gathering followers, but their demoniac spirit abundantly shows the source of their inspiration. And some who called themselves after the name of him who would not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax, when men would not accept their false teachings nor join in their idolatries, have given them over to the cruel flames, and quietly stood rejoicing while their bodies consumed to ashes. Far different from these is the mode of the Christian church in dealing with sinners. The ambassadors of the Most High are commanded simply to speak unto men, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear. "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Paul says that Christ sent him to "preach the Gospel." He charges Timothy to "Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine." He asked the Ephesian Church to pray for him that utterance may be given unto him, that he may open his mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel." He tells the Corinthians, "Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech." And among the qualifications of the servant of the Lord he enumerates

“aptness to teach.” The minister of God though he “Walk in the flesh” does “not war after the flesh,” “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.” Just as Jesus embraced every opportunity to instruct the people, so must His ministers speak His word that it may be as the dew unto the church: that she “may grow as the lily, and cast forth her roots as Lebanon,” That her “branches may spread,” and her “beauty be as the olive tree.”

#### **4. The Apostles Were Charged By The Angel To “go, Stand And Speak *in The Temple*”**

They were not, therefore, to seek concealment, but to make known their message in the most public of all public places. The Christian church has no unhallowed mysteries that she hides from the view of the world, and no suspicious doings that may not see the light, as the heathen religions even of enlightened Greece had. Nor has she any secrets known only to the initiated, nor any furtive ceremonies veiled from public gaze, nor any bestowments reserved only for the favored few. Her words are for all, into her fold all may come, her worship all the world may unite in, and her works of beneficence are co-extensive with the habitable globe. " Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets; she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates; in the city she uttereth the words, saying. How long ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and . . . fools hate knowledge?" The minister of Christ has nothing to suppress, nothing to screen from the eye of the most searching inspection. The words given him to speak will never offend true modesty, nor grate harshly on the most sensitive feelings. He is to aim to make his tidings known in the widest possible manner, as being suited to the varied spiritual wants of mankind. He is not to aim at notoriety; not to seek to attract attention to himself with " excellency of speech" or "enticing words of man's wisdom," but by "manifestation of the truth commending" himself "to every man's conscience in the sight of God." There are some who have crept into the holy office who entertain the gaping crowd with foolish "talking and jesting," and seek to fill their pews by means of theatrical displays and buffoonery, that would better become the mountebank than one appointed to speak in the name of the Most High God. Their utterances would be silly

if it were not that they are sinful. No such shameful publicity as this should the true preacher court, but with all sobriety and earnestness endeavor to instruct men, "if peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth."

Nor need he fear any opposition that the widespread proclamation of his message may provoke. For his message he need not fear. It is God-given and no argument or wit of mortal can overturn or weaken one jot or tittle of it. Let him renounce "the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully." Then if the "Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

For Himself He need not fear. He who said, "Go preach the Gospel to every creature," also said, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth . . . lo, I am with you even unto the end of the world." "He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." From the cell of the prison, from the hands of malicious rulers, from the power of evil doers, they can deliver and will deliver, till the fight is over and the course is finished and the crown of glory is given.

## **5. The Next Emphatic Phrase In The Commission Given To The Apostles Is To The People**

"Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people. The angel did not say. Speak to your own company, but to the people. The high priest and the Sadducees had imprisoned these men because they did not wish the people to hear, hence when released they were commanded to go speak to them. It is God's intention that His Gospel shall be made known to all people. The word of Jesus when He sent the apostles forth was, "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations." It behooved "Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem," All mankind need salvation, and for all mankind it has been provided. That

fatal temptation of Satan, by which our first parents sinned and fell, affected the whole race and made all men sinners and unfitted them for heaven. Poison a spring, and all the waters which flow from it will be poisoned. Injure the seed which you plant, and the growths that spring from it will show the marring. So the first pair, from whom all the rest of the children of men have sprung, lost their state of blessedness and became sinful and so under condemnation, and all their descendants are necessarily like them. Far as the influence of Satan's evil work has gone, must the work of the Redeemer be able to reach. The blessings following from the sufferings borne upon the tree of Calvary, must at least be co-extensive with the evil influences of that fatal eating of the fruit of the tree of Eden. The sufferings and death and resurrection of Christ have an infinite value, and can atone for every one. Christ assumed not the person of a man, but of man. He became the second Adam and stands at the head of the race. The blood of our humanity flows in His veins, and that blood has power to cleanse all men from all sin. It is the will of God that all should be saved; hence His words, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish but have everlasting life"; and hence also His command, "Go preach the Gospel to every creature." If every creature do not hear that Gospel the fault is not God's but ours, on whom rests the duty of making it known according to that command.

There are some who withhold this Word from the people, saying that it is injurious to them to have it. And in their preaching they mingle tradition and man-made dogmas with the inspired word. They show themselves false teachers and deceivers of the people, keeping from them what God designed they should have, and feeding them on husks instead of the sincere milk of the Word. The humblest and obscurest as well as the greatest and noblest are entitled to all that our heavenly Father mercifully vouchsafes to grant, and he lords it over God's heritage, to their hurt and damage and to his own condemnation, who refuses to speak to the people as he is commanded.

## **6. The Last Clause In The Change Of The Angel Is, All The Words Of This Life**

“Go, stand and speak in the temple unto the people all the words of this life.” To understand clearly what is meant by this last clause of the sentence, recur again to the circumstances under which it was uttered. The apostles had been preaching Christ, and the blessings of eternal life procured for us on the cross and conferred on us in the Gospel. They had also been performing miracles of healing, and so renewing the bodily life of men, which was a type of that spiritual renewal that Jesus works. For this the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection and life hereafter, had them cast into prison. The angel brought them out and charged them to go again to the temple where they had preached before and speak the words of this life – he must have meant life in Christ.

Christianity is a life. “I am come” said Jesus, that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly.” It is a life begotten. Man is dead in “trespasses and sins,” and must be “quickened” ere he can be made to sit in heavenly places. “Ye must be born again” said the Saviour. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” This new birth is effected by the Holy Spirit through the Word. “Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth,” says James. “Being born again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.” Hence the appropriateness of the charge of the angel to the apostles to speak “all the words of this life.” The Gospel has life begetting power.

Christianity is a life lived as well as a life begotten. Christ died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again.” “I through the law am dead to the law,” says Paul, “that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Christians are “a chosen generation,” “a royal priesthood,” “an holy nation,” “a peculiar people,” that they may show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light, that they may by their good works glorify God. This new life is lived by the power of the Holy Ghost working by means of the Word. “ Sanctify them through the truth; Thy word is truth“; prayed Jesus.” “Ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.” “Christ loved the church,



and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." See, therefore, again the appropriateness of the charge of the angel to speak unto the people the words of this life.

Christianity is an eternal life bestowed, as well as a life begotten, and lived. "My sheep hear My voice," said Jesus, "and I knew them and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish." "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." This is the will of the Father, "That every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him might have everlasting life," yea He is the "resurrection and the life," he that believeth in Him, "though he were dead yet shall he live." "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." This eternal life is promised and given to us through the Word of God, and is secured by our belief and reception of that word. See again the appropriateness of the charge of the angel.

And the apostles were instructed to speak "all the words of this life." It is prophesied that "the time will come," and has it not already come? when men, "will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears: and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." It was the comfort of the great apostle to the Gentiles that with a clear conscience he could say, "I have kept back nothing that was profitable for you," and that when he knew that those among whom he had gone preaching the kingdom of God, would see his face no more, he could boldly "take them to record," that he was pure from the blood of all men, and had "not shunned to declare all the counsel of God." However materialists may oppose amid the thickening troubles of these ungodly days; however distasteful it may be to the carnal mind; however scorners may jest and sneer; the ambassador of God must boldly deliver unto the people, all that they have received of the Lord. How responsible, but how glorious then is the ministerial office. The minister stands to plead with men from God. His message is freighted with life! everlasting life! "Who is sufficient for these things?" His consolation is "that God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty." Oh! let him be faithful, and "do the work of an evangelist," and "make full proof of his ministry," and his reward will be

great. To the apostles it was promised that in the regeneration “when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory, they should sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” An older promise declares “They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever and ever.”

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# How Can You Find Peace With God?

The most important thing to grasp is that no one is made right with God by the good things he or she might do. Justification is by faith only, and that faith resting on what Jesus Christ did. It is by believing and trusting in His one-time *substitutionary* death for your sins.

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## Benediction

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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