



10.24.23

LIBRARY OF THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

PRINCETON. N. J.

PRESENTED BY

The Widow of George Dugan, '96.

BV 1560 .P46 1892

Pentecost, Geo. F. 1842-  
1920.

Bible studies from the Old  
and New Testaments

George Deegan

George Deegan















## BY THE SAME AUTHOR.



IN THE VOLUME OF THE BOOK ; or, The Profit and Pleasure of Bible Study, with introductions by Revs. JOSEPH COOK and J. H. VINCENT, D.D.

OUT OF EGYPT ; Bible Readings on the Book of Exodus.

A SOUTH WINDOW ; or, Keep Yourselves in the Love of God.

Each 12mo.—Cloth, 75 cents ; Paper Covers, 35 cents.

BIBLE STUDIES ; covering the International S. S. Lessons for 1888, 1889, 1890, and 1891.

Each 12mo. — Cloth, \$1.00 ; Paper Covers, 60 cents.

\*\* For Sale by Booksellers, or sent post-paid on receipt of price by the publishers.

A. S. BARNES & CO.,

731 Broadway,

NEW YORK.

# BIBLE STUDIES



FROM THE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

COVERING THE

INTERNATIONAL

SUNDAY-SCHOOL LESSONS FOR 1892

BY

GEO. F. PENTECOST, D.D.

AUTHOR OF "IN THE VOLUME OF THE BOOK,"  
"OUT OF EGYPT," ETC.



COPYRIGHT, 1891

A. S. BARNES & COMPANY

751 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

# ADVERTISEMENT.

---

**BIBLE STUDIES** for 1888 are taken from the following books :

**Matthew, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth.**

**BIBLE STUDIES** for 1889 are taken from

**Mark, 1. and 11. Samuel, and 1. Kings.**

**BIBLE STUDIES** for 1890 are taken entirely from the book of

**Luke.**

**BIBLE STUDIES** for 1891 are taken from

**John, 1. and 11. Kings, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, and 11. Chronicles.**

---

## PUBLISHERS' NOTE.

The Publishers take pleasure in presenting the fifth volume of DR. PENTECOST'S "BIBLE STUDIES." They wish to announce that they expect to continue publishing them from year to year. Volumes for previous years always on hand.

## P R E F A C E .

---

THIS volume of Bible Studies has been written in India, in the midst of incessant evangelistic labors. Partly in Calcutta, partly in the "Heart of the Himalayas"; partly on the burning plains of the North-west provinces, in the Holy City of Benares, where Hinduism is entrenched in the midst of a people and a priesthood who have lived, taught, and practiced the rites and ceremonies of this "world-old religion" for more than three thousands of years; partly in Lucknow, the beautiful city of the late Kings of Oudh; partly in Agra, the famous city of Akbar the Great and Shah Jahan; partly in Delhi, the romantic and picturesque capital of the Great Moguls. Its last chapters were finished and this preface is now being written amid the beautiful Himalayan Hills, in the bosom of which nestles the fair summer capital of India, under the rule of Great Britain.

The author has had few books of reference to consult, and has been compelled to write during such fragments of time as he could snatch between two and three evangelistic meetings a day, sometimes among natives and sometimes among European audiences. He has enjoyed one advantage, however. The Old Testament has had a fresh illumination in his mind by reason of the Oriental scenes and customs which have been the familiar every-day sights of this year. The temples, the groves, the gardens, the dress and the manner of the people out here are essentially the same as they were in the days of Isaiah and Jeremiah. There are temples on every hill-top and in every grove. Baal-worship, under other names and forms, is the same; the sins and practices of the people are the same as those into which the corrupt kings and people of Israel had fallen at the time that these apostles and preachers tenderly besought them to return to the Lord. The scenery which afforded them their finest imagery is the same and the familiar every-day customs of the people are the same. Here are the ancient threshing-floors, here the same kind of wells, and the women with their water-pots, and the wheels; here the two women are still grinding at the wheel; here the same old-fashioned one-

handled plow; and here continues the conflict between the true worship of Jehovah and that of the gods of the pagans. Here, also, in this last respect, are the same problems and difficulties (only greater) which confronted the apostles and early disciples in their first essays at converting the heathen of the old Roman world. Here, the subtle and finely trained Oriental mind; here, the superstitions; here, the occasional riots and disturbances brought about by assaults upon the missionaries by "lewd fellows of the baser sort," egged on by the priests and religious leaders, who keep out of sight, and who are trembling for their gods and other "craft." It is all very vivid. It has been impossible to resist the conviction that the historical records of the Bible are true to life, both in its social, religious, and domestic aspects. It has been difficult to keep to the point of exposition from a teacher's standpoint and not go off into historical and illustrative commentary.

If this volume lacks the savor of the library, the author trusts that it will not be found deficient in the spirit of truth and light which certainly has been much present in his mind and heart. He sends it forth (the fifth in the series) with the prayer that it may prove both a help and a blessing to his readers, as the preparation of it has been to him.

In the preface to the last volume the author ventured to ask the prayers of his readers for the presence and blessing of the Spirit of God upon his evangelistic labors in this land, then in prospect. He would repeat that request, now that he is *in* the land preaching and teaching the Gospel of Christ, both to nominal Christians and heathen.

NOTE.—Teachers will note that the Twelfth Study in this volume entitled: "The Blessings of the Gospel," is based on Isaiah xxxv, 1-10, instead of Isaiah xl, 1-10, as in the regular scheme of the International Sunday-school lessons. This discrepancy occurred owing to a substitution, by the International Committee, of the latter passage of Scripture for the former, after the Study had been written. The change will not materially affect the continuity of study, as the topic is the same.

SIMLA, HIMALAYAN MOUNTAINS, INDIA, July 1st, 1891.

# CONTENTS.

## LESSONS AND GOLDEN TEXTS.

### First Quarter.

LESSON		PAGE
I.—JAN. 3.—The Kingdom of Christ.	Isa. xi, 1–10.	1
	GOLDEN TEXT: He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.—Psa. lxxii, 8.	
II.—JAN. 10.—A Song of Salvation.	Isa. xxvi, 1–10.	9
	GOLDEN TEXT: Trust ye in the Lord forever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.—Isa. xxvi, 4.	
III.—JAN. 17.—Overcome with Wine.	Isa. xxviii, 1–15. ( <i>The Quarterly Temperance Lesson.</i> )	18
	GOLDEN TEXT: Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.—Prov. xx, 1.	
IV.—JAN. 24.—Hezekiah's Prayer and Deliverance.	Isa. xxxvii, 14–21, 33–38.	27
	GOLDEN TEXT: The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth and delivereth them.—Psa. xxxiv, 17.	
V.—JAN. 31.—The Suffering Saviour.	Isa. liii, 1–12.	35
	GOLDEN TEXT: The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.—Isa. liii, 6.	
VI.—FEB. 7.—The Gracious Call.	Isa. lv, 1–13.	43
	GOLDEN TEXT: Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.—Isa. lv, 6.	
VII.—FEB. 14.—The New Covenant.	Jer. xxxi, 27–37.	52
	GOLDEN TEXT: I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.—Jer. xxxi, 34.	
VIII.—FEB. 21.—Jehoiakim's Wickedness.	Jer. xxxvi, 19–31.	61
	GOLDEN TEXT: To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.—Heb. iii, 15.	
IX.—FEB. 28.—Jeremiah Persecuted.	Jer. xxxvii, 11–21.	69
	GOLDEN TEXT: I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee.—Jer. i, 19.	
X.—MARCH 6.—The Downfall of Judah.	Jer. xxxix, 1–10.	77
	GOLDEN TEXT: Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.—Matt. xxiii, 28.	

LESSON	PAGE
XI.—MARCH 13.— <b>Promise of a New Heart.</b> Ezek. xxxvi, 25-38. . . . .	85
GOLDEN TEXT: A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.—Ezek. xxxvi, 26.	
XII.—MARCH 20.— <b>Review</b> . . . . .	93
XIII.—MARCH 27.— <b>The Blessings of the Gospel.</b> Isa. xxxv, 1-10. ( <i>The Quarterly Missionary Lesson.</i> ) . . . . .	94
GOLDEN TEXT: The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.—Isa. xl, 5.	
<b>Second Quarter.</b>	
XIV.—APRIL 3.— <b>The Way of the Righteous.</b> Psa. i, 1-6. . . . .	102
GOLDEN TEXT: Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.—Psa. i, 1.	
XV.—APRIL 10.— <b>The King in Zion.</b> Psa. ii, 1-12. . . . .	110
GOLDEN TEXT: Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.—Psa. ii, 12.	
XVI.—APRIL 17.— <b>God's Works and Word.</b> Psa. xix, 1-14. . . . .	119
GOLDEN TEXT: The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.—Psa. xix, 7; Or, Easter Lesson (Optional.) Matt. xxviii, 1-20.	
GOLDEN TEXT: Now is Christ risen from the dead.—I. Cor. xv, 20.	
XVII.—APRIL 24.— <b>The Lord My Shepherd.</b> Psa. xxiii, 1-6. . . . .	127
GOLDEN TEXT: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.—Psa. xxiii, 1.	
XVIII.—MAY 1.— <b>The Prayer of the Penitent.</b> Psa. li, 1-13. . . . .	135
GOLDEN TEXT: Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.—Psa. li, 10.	
XIX.—MAY 8.— <b>Delight in God's House.</b> Psa. lxxxiv, 1-12. . . . .	144
GOLDEN TEXT: Blessed are they that dwell in thy house.—Psa. lxxxiv, 4.	
XX.—MAY 15.— <b>A Song of Praise.</b> Psa. ciii, 1-22. . . . .	152
GOLDEN TEXT: Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.—Psa. ciii, 2.	
XXI.—MAY 22.— <b>Daniel and His Companions.</b> Dan. i, 8-21. ( <i>The Quarterly Temperance Lesson.</i> ) . . . . .	160
GOLDEN TEXT: Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank.—Dan. i, 8.	
XXII.—MAY 29.— <b>Nebuchadnezzar's Dream.</b> Dan. ii, 36-49. . . . .	169
GOLDEN TEXT: All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.—Heb. iv, 13.	
XXIII.—JUNE 5.— <b>The Fiery Furnace.</b> Dan. iii, 13-25. . . . .	178
GOLDEN TEXT: When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.—Isa. xliii, 2.	



LESSON	PAGE
XXIV.—JUNE 12.— <b>The Den of Lions.</b> Dan. vi, 16–28. . . . .	186
GOLDEN TEXT: No manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.—Dan. vi, 23.	
XXV.—JUNE 19.— <b>Review</b> . . . . .	195
XXVI.—JUNE 26.— <b>Messiah's Reign.</b> Psa. lxxii, 1–19. ( <i>The Quarterly Missionary Lesson.</i> ) . . . . .	196
GOLDEN TEXT: All kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him.—Psa. lxxii, 11.	

**Third Quarter.**

XXVII.—JULY 3.— <b>The Ascension of Christ.</b> Acts i, 1–12. . . . .	204
GOLDEN TEXT: When he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.—Acts i, 9.	
XXVIII.—JULY 10.— <b>The Descent of the Spirit.</b> Acts ii, 1–12. . . . .	213
GOLDEN TEXT: When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.—John xvi, 13.	
XXIX.—JULY 17.— <b>The First Christian Church.</b> Acts ii, 37–47. . . . .	221
GOLDEN TEXT: The Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.—Acts ii, 47.	
XXX.—JULY 24.— <b>The Lame Man Healed.</b> Acts iii, 1–16. . . . .	229
GOLDEN TEXT: And his name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong.—Acts iii, 16.	
XXXI.—JULY 31.— <b>Peter and John Before the Council.</b> Acts iv, 1–18. . . . .	238
GOLDEN TEXT: There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.—Acts iv, 12.	
XXXII.—AUG. 7.— <b>The Apostles' Confidence in God.</b> Acts iv, 19–31. . . . .	246
GOLDEN TEXT: They spake the word of God with boldness.—Acts iv, 31.	
XXXIII.—AUG. 14.— <b>Ananias and Sapphira.</b> Acts v, 1–11. . . . .	255
GOLDEN TEXT: Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.—Gal. vi, 7.	
XXXIV.—AUG. 21.— <b>The Apostles Persecuted.</b> Acts v, 25–41. . . . .	263
GOLDEN TEXT: We ought to obey God rather than men.—Acts v, 29.	
XXXV.—AUG. 28.— <b>The First Christian Martyr.</b> Acts vii, 54–60; viii, 1–4. . . . .	272
GOLDEN TEXT: He kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.—Acts vii, 60.	

LESSON	PAGE
XXXVI.—SEPT. 4.— <b>Philip Preaching at Samaria.</b> Acts viii, 5-25. ( <i>The Quarterly Missionary Lesson.</i> ) . . . . .	280
GOLDEN TEXT: And there was great joy in that city.—Acts viii, 8.	
XXXVII.—SEPT. 11.— <b>Philip and the Ethiopian.</b> Acts viii, 26-40.	289
GOLDEN TEXT: He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.—John iii, 33.	
XXXVIII.—SEPT. 18.— <b>Review.</b> . . . . .	298
XXXIX.—SEPT. 25.— <b>The Lord's Supper Profaned.</b> I. Cor. xi, 20-34. ( <i>The Quarterly Temperance Lesson.</i> ) . . . . .	299
GOLDEN TEXT: Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.—I. Cor. xi, 23.	

#### Fourth Quarter.

XL.—OCT. 2.— <b>Saul of Tarsus Converted.</b> Acts ix, 1-20.	308
GOLDEN TEXT: Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.—John iii, 3.	
XLI.—OCT. 9.— <b>Dorcas Raised to Life.</b> Acts ix, 32-43.	317
GOLDEN TEXT: This woman was full of good works and alms-deeds which she did.—Acts ix, 36.	
XLII.—OCT. 16.— <b>Peter's Vision.</b> Acts x, 1-20. . . . .	326
GOLDEN TEXT: Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.—Acts x, 34.	
XLIII.—OCT. 23.— <b>Peter at Cæsarea.</b> Acts x, 30-48. . . . .	335
GOLDEN TEXT: Through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.—Acts x, 43.	
XLIV.—OCT. 30.— <b>The Gospel Preached at Antioch.</b> Acts xi, 19-30. . . . .	344
GOLDEN TEXT: A great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.—Acts xi, 21.	
XLV.—NOV. 6.— <b>Peter Delivered from Prison.</b> Acts xii, 1-17. . . . .	353
GOLDEN TEXT: The angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear him, and delivereth them.—Psa. xxxiv, 7.	
XLVI.—NOV. 13.— <b>The First Christian Missionaries.</b> Acts xiii, 1-13. . . . .	363
GOLDEN TEXT: That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations.—Luke xxiv, 47.	
XLVII.—NOV. 20.— <b>Paul's First Missionary Sermon.</b> Acts xiii, 26-43. . . . .	372
GOLDEN TEXT: To you is the word of this salvation sent.—Acts xiii, 26.	

LESSON	PAGE
<b>XLVIII.—Nov. 27.—The Apostles Turning to the Gentiles.</b>	
Acts xiii, 44-52: xiv, 1-7. . . . .	381
GOLDEN TEXT: I have sent thee to be a light of the Gentiles.	
—Acts xiii, 47.	
<b>XLIX.—Dec. 4.—Work Among the Gentiles.</b>	Acts xiv,
8-22. . . . .	389
GOLDEN TEXT: In his name shall the Gentiles trust.—Matt.	
xii, 21.	
<b>L.—Dec. 11.—The Apostolic Council.</b>	Acts xv, 12-29. 398
GOLDEN TEXT: Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,	
we shall be saved, even as they.—Acts xv, 11.	
<b>LI.—Dec. 18.—Review</b>	407
<b>LII.—Dec. 25.—OPTIONAL LESSONS.—1. The Birth of Christ; A Christmas Lesson.</b>	Luke ii, 8-20. . . . . 408
GOLDEN TEXT: Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.	
—Luke ii, 10.	
<b>2. The Quarterly Temperance Lesson.</b>	Rom.
xiv, 12-23. . . . .	417
GOLDEN TEXT: We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak.—Rom. xv, 1.	



## INTRODUCTORY.

---

• No other prophet among God's ancient people compares with Isaiah for magnificence of style, majesty of composition, and comprehension of subject. Though we are in practical ignorance as to who he was, except that he was the son of Amoz, and that he lived and prophesied during the four reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah and Jerusalem, we are sure from the incidental biography contained in his writings that he was a man of exalted character both for spirituality and righteousness, that he was a loyal patriot, and at the same time a faithful servant of God, who, while passionately loving his people, did not overlook their faults nor spare to denounce their sins and declare the judgments of God against them. He was at once the companion and yet not the sycophant of kings, as may be seen by his faithful and unsparing rebuke of Hezekiah, which reminds us much of Nathan's faithfulness with David. His point of view was that of an intense patriot and faithful servant of Jehovah, and his point of sight that of the final restoration of Judea and Israel to a true spirituality and the ultimate triumph of Messiah's kingdom in the world. In the meantime he foresaw the captivity and subsequent dispersion of his people, and knew its reason. While he pronounced the judgments of God *against* them, he never failed to speak words of promise and consolation *to* them. His whole prophecy may be likened to a range of mountains broken by deep valleys, which occasionally spread out into wide expanses of undulating plain. The mountain range is the history of Judea and Israel, the occasional great peaks are the Messianic prophecies, and the uplands toward which all his writings lead, are the final heights of Millennial glory which await the people of God, Jew and Gentile together. The final exaltation of the ancient people in connection with the glorious reign of Messiah almost entirely filled his prophetic vision, and yet he does not fail to notice the intervening fact of that Messiah's humiliation; the climax of such foresight being reached in the wonderful fifty-third chapter. It has been remarked how little and yet how much of

Messianic prophecy there is in Isaiah. Though, in proportion to the whole matter of the writings, the allusions to the first advent of Messiah are few, yet whenever he does directly set the suffering Saviour forth, it is done so with such luminous grandeur, that there can be no mistake as to his meaning. Isaiah lived about 700 years before Christ. He probably spent seventy years in public life, living altogether not much less than a hundred years. There is a tradition that under Manasseh he was placed between two planks and "sawn asunder" (Heb. xi, 37), thus sealing prophetic ministry with martyr blood.

Much critical interest has been manifested during this century in the book that bears our prophet's name. Both its genuineness and authenticity have been strenuously denied, at least as to a great part of the prophecies; but it is quite fair to say that adverse criticism has not succeeded in showing that this great volume was not the work of Isaiah in every part, though undoubtedly demonstrating that it is not a continuous prophecy. It is almost certainly a compilation of a number of different prophetic writings, written at different times, of greater and lesser intervals, toward the close of the author's life, finally gathered together, according to some plan of the compiler, and compacted into one volume. It is by no means sure that Isaiah was not the editor of his own various works. These questions, however, do not fall within the scope of our studies, and I only mention them that the reader may know that I do not ignore them, and that in writing these studies I shall keep them constantly in mind, even though the presence of the critic does not often appear on my page.

The period in the history of Judah and Israel was peculiar and critical. For the first time the Theocratic nation was brought into real contact with the great world-powers. Hitherto Israel had only had to do with minor and inferior nations lying close against their borders; now we see Judah struggling with the Syrian, the Assyrian, the Egyptian, and finally with the great Babylonian power, which had recently attained great empire, and under whose hand she latterly succumbed. In the providence of Jehovah, this was overruled to spread the testimony of the true God among the nations of the earth and prepare the world for the coming of the long-promised Messiah. We shall not follow in detail the course of this history, but endeavor to make the most practical use of the selected lessons lying before us in its great volume.

## I.

## THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST.—Isaiah xi, 1-10.

(1) And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: (2) And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; (3) And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: (4) But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. (5) And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. (6) The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. (7) And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. (8) And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. (9) They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. (10) And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his rest shall be glorious. —Isaiah xi, 1-10.

In the four Gospels we get a view of Christ from four different standpoints. Isaiah presents us with prophetic views of Christ by much the same process. The several vivid pictures which illuminate his pages are of the Messiah viewed in this way. We have not here the Four-named Hero of the ninth, nor the Divine Sufferer of the fifty-third chapter, but the Spirit-anointed and God-breathing King, ruling the world with righteousness and bringing in the new creation, which shows the *earth* redeemed as well as man. The king set forth in this prophecy is a much more spiritual conception than that of the ninth chapter, and as we go further on in Isaiah we observe a steady advance in the spiritual character of the Messiah depicted on his pages. The opening of this particular vision is highly artistic. In the former chapters we have seen a storm of war and desolation sweeping over Israel and Judah. The Assyrians had cut down the ancient kingdom until but a stump was left; then Assyria herself is cut off in wrath by the Almighty, until she also is in no better plight. But there is this difference: Assyria passes

away forever. No shoot springs up from the roots of her dead stump; while from the apparently dried-up root of the stem of Jesse there bursts forth a young shoot, which finally grows into a strong and beautiful Branch, more mighty and more beautiful than the original tree from whose stump it sprang. Then we are led on to a view of the final doom of the world-powers and the ultimate triumph of Messiah's kingdom. Nothing in the Bible is more inspiring than the consistency with which holy men of old saw and prophesied of this final victory of Jehovah in righteousness over the rule of the world-powers. So much of these prophecies have been fulfilled that we should not for a moment waver in our faith, looking for the triumphant consummation of the rest.

### I.—THE ROOT OUT OF DRY GROUND.

In the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah we have a similar description of the origin of Christ, from which we have designated him in this study. There he is described "as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground." Here he is a sprout from the bare and blasted stem of Jesse; cut down as that tree had been, and to all appearance dead for centuries, it suddenly puts forth this young and green sapling.

**1.—The Stem of Jesse.**—This assignment of the King to the stem of Jesse, rather than to that of David, whose son Christ is everywhere declared to be, is suggestive of the fact that, when Christ came, the house of David had sunk again into obscurity such as characterized it when he himself was called, a shepherd lad, from an humble family of a poor country district. When Christ came into the world, he was indeed the Son of David, but like David, he came forth from obscurity and poverty, appearing to his nation, as David appeared to his, at the time of its deepest and sorest need. In the history of the world, no earthly family ever suffered so long an eclipse as that of David, to be revived by the birth of a great son like Jesus. So no empire or kingdom of this world ever suffered so complete an overthrow as that of God's ancient people, to be once more settled and established. For two thousand years the Jewish nation has been extinct, but God has marvelously kept the Jewish people intact, for he intends to restore them again to their land and re-establish their kingdom on the throne of their father David in the person of David's Royal Son, our Saviour and Lord. On no other hypothesis can be based the miraculous preservation of the Jews from extinction during all these ages. (Matt. xxiv, 34.)



**2.—The Rod out of the Stem.**—We have here an illustration of the prophet's manner of using double figures of speech without repetition of ideas. This "rod," or young shoot, sprung out of the old and blasted stem of Jesse, is very suggestive both of the youth of Jesus and the ministry of his first advent. We see him first a little babe in Bethlehem, just peeping his head, as it were, out of the side of the old lifeless stem, close down to the ground. How lowly was his birth! Then we see him a vigorous shoot, as he appeared a boy at twelve in the temple disputing with the doctors. By this time the "green sapling" began to give striking evidence that, though he sprang from an old and worn-out stem, yet there was a strong stream of life coursing through his veins. "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." (Luke ii, 52.) Young and vigorous, but not bearing fruit. So also we may say that the ministry of his first advent in antithesis to the glorious reign of his second, was as the comparison of a shoot to a fruitful branch. There was a strange majesty and kingliness about Jesus during his humiliation, but the fruit of a kingly branch was not yet seen. All the "power and potency" of his kingdom were in him, as all the "power and potency" of the fruit is in the young shoot of a fruitful vine, while yet invisible.

**3.—The Branch out of the roots.**—Jesus is here called a Branch, in distinction from a rod or shoot, because the prophet sees him in the fullness of his fruitfulness as a King. "That which is at first a sapling gains strength and grows into a branch." (iv, 2.) Jeremiah describes his advent thus: "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 justice and judgment on the earth. And this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." (Jer. xxiii, 5, 6; xxxiii, 16; Zech. iii, 8; vi, 12.) It will be noted that in all these references the Branch is represented as being in an especial manner a righteous ruler and strong to bring in a reign of perfect peace,—fit fruit for such a Branch.

## II.—THE SPIRITUAL ANOINTING.

This promised King is no ordinary man, though it is supposed by some that Isaiah saw in this description of a king the young and promising Hezekiah. Everything in the prophecy, however, points to the promised Messiah, who is none other than God himself manifest in the flesh. Speaking of the same person in another place

(xl, 9), Isaiah calls upon the people thus: "Behold your God." This is he whom we recognize in John i, 1-5, 14. Though he was "The Lord our Righteousness," yet, being also a man, and as such the servant of God (My Servant the Branch," Zech. iii, 8), he had need to be anointed with the Holy Ghost for his divine work. Therefore "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him." (Compare Is. lxi, 1; Matt. iii, 16; Luke ii, 40; iv, 1, 14, 18; John iii, 34, etc.) The Spirit did not come to him transiently as it comes to men, but rested upon him permanently. It abode with him. We are not concerned to answer the speculative question regarding the relation of these two Divine Persons in the Godhead, but only to note the fact that as a man the Spirit of God was present with him, in whose wisdom and power he does all his work, fulfilling his office as Messiah. The presence of the Spirit here is manifested in various gifts which group themselves in three pairs, and then in one great characteristic.

**1.—The gifts of the Spirit.**—To men the Spirit distributes his gifts, giving to one man one gift and to another, another (I. Cor. xii, 8-11), but to our Lord the Spirit bestows all the range of gifts without measure. (i) "The spirit of wisdom and understanding." By "wisdom" we are to understand ultimate knowledge. He is the Eternal Word or Wisdom of God, in whose presence and in comparison with whom the wisdom of this world is but foolishness. (I. Cor. i, 20.) By "understanding" is meant that same wisdom in respect to particular subjects. We might say of a thoroughly educated lawyer who had been preferred to the bench, that he was wise or learned in the law, and, when a particular case came before him for trial, that he had a perfect understanding, not only of that particular case, but of the relation of the law thereto. Or we might say of a learned physician, that he was wise as to medicine in general, and had understanding in respect to particular cases. Such are the wisdom and understanding of our Lord. (ii) "The spirit of counsel and of might." That is, he had the power first to originate and plan the wisest course, and then to carry his devices into action and on to success. Some generals are good at planning battles, and others are good at executing the plans; not many generals are both good strategists and brilliant fighters. Jesus was both wise to originate and courageous to execute his counsels. (iii) "The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord." That is, Jesus had perfect knowledge of the will of the Father. He said again and again that the words he spake and the utterances to which he gave expression, were not the results of mere human thinking, but the absolute

knowledge which he had with the Father. "I speak to the world the things which I have heard of him (the Father)"; "I do nothing of myself, but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things"; "I speak that which I have seen with my Father." (John viii, 26, 28, 38.) He not only had the knowledge, but the fear of the Lord. He perfectly knew the will of God, and had the spirit of perfect obedience to do the things of God. So he says of himself in this connection: "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him"; "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work." (John iv, 34; viii, 29.) This is true piety: not alone to know the will of God, but to have the will to do his will. The most casual reading of the record of Jesus' ministry on earth will show that these two things were ever his marked characteristics.

2.—**Quick understanding.**—This characteristic (v. 3) has given rise to much learned discussion as to its true meaning. It probably, almost certainly, means this: "He shall draw his breath in the fear of the Lord." In the former enumeration of spiritual enduements we see what was given him as it were from without; but here we have described to us what was the inward characteristic of his life. God was the very atmosphere in which he lived. He literally drew his breath in the fear of the Lord. This in a peculiar manner describes his sinlessness. We at our best do not always make God the sole atmosphere of our lives. We breathe much that is in the world and of the world; we breathe into our lives much that stirs up and inflames the sinful tendencies of our nature. But with Jesus, and with him alone, it was different. He never drew a breath except in the fear of the Lord, and thus breathing, he never inhaled aught that corrupted his sinless life. It is ours in a measure to cultivate this privilege. How often some of us have risen up out of a stuffy house and gone out into the open air, and with what delight we have taken in a full breath of the clean and pure atmosphere; how delicious the experience is, after having spent eleven months in the confines of a city, going in and out of all kinds of houses, and breathing in more or less of the pollution of the streets and the infection of sick rooms, to get away for a month into the mountains where there is perfect air! But Jesus, though he lived and walked among and with sinners in the atmosphere of this world, always had a keen scent for God, and though the Son of Man was in the earth, he was yet always in heaven. (John iii, 13.) He would have us even come into the fullness of this privilege. "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that

thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." (John xvii, 13-16.) In these two—this double anointing—the outward enduement and inward fullness of the Spirit's power and breath, we see the Messiah's great qualification for his kingdom.

### III.—THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS REIGN.

This divine ruler is represented as being doubly girded with righteousness and faithfulness. The girdle is a belt, by means of which one's clothes are held together and the body strengthened for any special exertion. The racer or the workman girds up his clothes about him. Now the girdle of Jesus was righteousness in action and faithfulness in purpose. In heart and in action the Messiah is perfectly qualified to rule the world.

**1.—His dealing with the poor and the meek.**—The poor he will judge with righteousness. Their poverty will be no bar to perfect justice, as is the case where the fear of God is not before the eyes and heart of the judges. In Judah particularly the poor had no chance of justice when contending with the rich, for the reason that the judges took bribes, and ruled against the poor because they were poor, and in favor of the rich because they were rich, having respect unto the recompense of a bribe. Not so with Christ. The meek of the earth, those in lowly position, should have his special favor. He would reprove or argue for them, espousing their cause where there was none to do it besides. The rich and strong of this world are in the habit of riding over the poor and trampling down the lowly; but under Messiah's reign there would be no respect of persons. The whole expression is to point out that under this reign there would be perfect righteousness and perfect faithfulness. External circumstances shall not prejudice the judgment of his reign as between man and man. "He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, nor reprove after the hearing of his ears." He will look under external appearance, and, examining the testimony lying behind the words of the witnesses, he will get at the truth.

**2.—His dealing with the wicked.**—This earth has been the seat of violence and wickedness. This king will "smite the earth with the rod of his mouth." His words will be sharper than any two-edged sword when he speaks them in judgment against the wicked earth that takes part against the poor and the meek; the breath of his mouth will be like a flame of fire when he breathes upon the wicked. When he comes to reign it will be a day of deliverance to

the poor who have put their trust in him, and a day of vengeance against those who have in haughtiness of spirit and pride of unbelief defied his righteous will. "And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the wine press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." Therefore "God will recompense to you who are troubled rest with us: when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints and admired in all them that believe in that day." (II. Thess. i, 7-10; Rev. xix, 15.)

#### IV.—THE EFFECT OF HIS REIGN.

The most astonishing results of this reign of perfect righteousness on the earth are predicted. Not only will there be peace on earth among men; not only will the rich cease to oppress the poor, and the strong and mighty no longer tread under foot the meek and lowly; but the very earth shall participate in the delights of Messiah's kingdom, and especially will the very beasts of the field enter into the pleasures and benefits thereof. There shall be no more war between man and his lower fellow-creatures. Nor between beast and beast. The wolf and the lamb; the leopard and the kid; the calf and the young lion shall lie down together, and a little child shall be their companion, ruling over them with a child's gentleness and yet a child's superiority. The most deadly serpents shall be the beautiful, yea, the harmless, toys of infants. Cows and bears and their young shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. Where I am now writing, where rages the fierce conflict between beast and beast, between man and beast, the deadly bite of the serpents, and the terror that reigns throughout the jungle on their account,—here, in India, the vividness of this picture is very great. The whole can refer to nothing else nor less than that "final restitution of all things," which was the subject of one of Peter's great sermons (Acts iii, 19-21), and that "glorious liberty" which will be ushered in at the second coming of the Lord, for which "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together until now," of which Paul so eloquently spoke in his letter to the Romans. (viii, 19-23.) How wonderfully in accord were the prophets of the Old Testa-

ment and the apostles of the New! What a sublime unity in creation is here brought out! The earth was cursed for man's sake; when man's full redemption comes the curse will be removed from the lower creation, and God will be over all, blessing and blessed forever. Here also we see how man's sin has spoiled everything, and set everything in this world at cross purposes with themselves and in antagonism with God's purpose. Man with man, beast with beast, and man with beast. When Messiah comes peace shall be restored in the whole creation. The instrument in the hands of this Divine Agent will be the knowledge of God, which shall fill the earth as the waters cover the seas. Man only lacks the spiritual knowledge of God to be at peace with him and with the whole creation.

### V.—THE GLORIOUS DAY.

The prophet closes this section with a refrain made up from what he has already said. (i) We have an intimation as to the time of this glorious day. There can be no doubt that it refers to that time when the Jesus who was rejected and murdered by the world shall come again with power and great glory, bringing all his saints with him according to a thousand prophecies. (ii) Then we see Jesus as the standard-bearer, around which the "people," that is, the scattered Jews, shall come rallying as unto a "leader and a commander." And to him also shall the Gentiles seek; for then they shall know that Jesus is both Lord and Christ. (iii) Then we have a brief but beautiful description of the whole reign of Christ. "His rest shall be glorious." All along our Lord has been, as it were, fighting for peace. His resting time is coming, and will soon be here. We are reminded of what Zephaniah says of this time, "In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear not thou; and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing." (Zeph. iii, 16, 17.)

## II.

## A SONG OF SALVATION.—Isaiah xxvi, 1-10.

(1) In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. (2) Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in. (3) Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. (4) Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. (5) For he bringeth down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he layeth it low; he layeth it low, even to the ground; he bringeth it even to the dust. (6) The foot shall tread it down, even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy. (7) The way of the just is uprightness: thou, most upright, dost weigh the path of the just. (8) Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. (9) With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. (10) Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.—Isaiah xxvi, 1-10.

This is a continuation of that song of triumph which is recorded in the twenty-fifth chapter, in which the prophet pours forth his thankfulness to God for the final victory of his poor and needy people over her enemies, through the interposition of his mighty hand. The great city and stronghold of the enemy is laid low even in the dust. (xxv, 1, 2, 12.) However dark and dreadful the passing time may be to the believer, he may always anticipate the day of triumph, and, even while passing through the judgments of the Lord which are abroad upon the earth, he may sing praises to his God. For the man of faith is enabled, by the aid of the revelation which God has made of himself and his purposes, to view with God's own all-seeing eye the end from the beginning. That end is the overthrow of all the powers of darkness, the upbuilding and victory of righteousness and faithfulness. Even death shall not cut off the people of God from participating in the ultimate triumph; for even the Lord's dead shall rise up and praise him in that day. (Is. xxv, 8; xxvi, 19.) The point of time to which this prophecy looked forward, is a matter of some difficulty. It is supposed by some that the prophet saw no further than the final victory of Hezekiah over his Assyrian enemy,

and the supernatural defense which God wrought for him in and about Jerusalem at the time of the investment of the Holy City by Sennacherib. (II. Kings, xix.) This may have been a near view of the situation; but there can be no doubt that it looked much farther into the future, even beyond the restoration from the great captivity to the final restitution. For nothing ever happened in Judea at all to compare with the realization of this prophecy, the grand subject matter of this hymn of praise and thanksgiving. The time referred to must be cotemporaneous with that happy millennial period which is the burden of all prophetic joy; the day of God (II. Pet. iii, 12-16); the time of the restitution of all things (Acts iii, 21); the happy time when the curse shall be lifted from the earth and all creation shall rejoice in the day of redemption (Rom. viii, 19-25). Most commentators make this an entirely spiritual promise; they tell us that it refers alone to the triumphs of the Gospel in the remote future; that the joy refers to that heavenly joy with which the saints in the other world shall praise God after all the righteous of the earth have been thither gathered. But the prophet is explicit and says that the place of this triumph shall be on the earth, even in the land of Judah. It is strange that good people will persist in reading one half of prophetic history in the light of literal historical fulfillment and the other half by some rule of allegory. The prophecies of all the holy men of God point out a restoration of the Jews to their own land, a splendor of peace and righteousness filling the earth, and all the Gentile nations flowing unto Jerusalem. These prophecies have never been fulfilled, and no victories of the Church can in anywise answer to them. The miraculous preservation of the Jews until this day scattered amid the nations, but reasonably points to their literal restoration.

### I.—THE CITY OF GOD.

The vision of another country, and especially of a City whose maker and builder is God, is an old one. (Heb. xi, 16.) Jerusalem of old, in the days of her splendor, was its type. Her bulwarks and walls, her almost impregnable position, was the type of the strength of the City of God. Jerusalem was the capital of the kingdom, and was often taken for the whole land, just as we say of Paris that she is France. David sung of this City, saying, "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O City of God." (Ps. xlvi, 4; xlviii, 1, 8; lxxxvii, 3; compare with Isaiah liv; Rev. iii, 12; xxi; Zech. ii.) There is no doubt that spiritual ideas are very prominent in connection with the prophetic description of this glorious city rebuilt and magnificent in



the land of Judah in millennial times; but it does not hence follow that we are only to look for the fulfillment of the prophet's vision as presented in such a passage as that of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "But ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." (xii, 22.) May it not be true that, as we sometimes speak of the inhabitants of a city as being that city (Matt. viii, 34), so we may also speak of its spiritual characteristics? So here there is no doubt a double significance. There shall be a glorious city in the earth, the Messiah's Metropolis, the center of the redeemed world and the seat of the divine government among the nations, whose inhabitants shall correspond in character to the things that are said of the city. Just as we shall see further on both a spiritual and a literal description of the city walls. Paul spoke of his citizenship being in heaven; and this helps us to understand the significance of the great spiritual commonwealth into whose citizenship we have all been introduced through faith in Jesus Christ.

**1.—A strong city.**—The city was the fortified capital of the kingdom. In the previous chapter the prophet speaks of God as having made of "a city" an heap, of a defended city "a ruin." Now, in contrast with that city, which may have been the great Babylon, whose strength was only relative and gave way before the judgment of God in the hands of earthly powers, the prophet speaks of the city which God will build in the day of Israel's restoration. A strong city suggests to us a place of absolute safety. The spiritual idea underlying this is that the Salvation of God is immutably sure and certain. It is not a salvation which may be prevailed against. There shall no trial come upon a true child of God that shall finally overcome him. Just as God was the invisible defender of Jerusalem from the attack of Sennacherib, so he is the secret strength of the believer. "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish." "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." For Jesus "is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him."

**2.—A walled city.**—The strength and pride of an ancient city depended on her walls, towers, and bulwarks. (Ps. xlviii, 13.) Now there is a remarkable thing about the description which the prophet gives of this Strong City. He does not see any material walls, but declares that God will appoint Salvation for walls and bulwarks. The city which John saw (Rev. xxi) had walls of precious stones. It has hence been said that these two cities could not in anywise synchronize with each other. Yet one might be a figura-

tive, the other a literal description of the same. Isaiah seems to substitute a spiritual defense for a material, when he says that God will appoint "salvation" for her walls and bulwarks. And may we not see a harmony in Isaiah's other description of this same city: "Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise. (Ix, 18.) Again he speaks of the defense of Mount Zion as being the "glory" or shekinah of God. (iv, 5.) In any case, when salvation prevails both within the city and without, there will be no need of walls, save for adornment. If within the people of God are all righteous, and without the nations are all living under the irresistible rule of Messiah's righteousness, then the city's defense will be in the prevailing salvation. When there is "peace on earth and good will among men" there will be no need of walls and bulwarks. Let us anticipate that day, each one of us in his own heart and life, and "live peaceably with all men." For "when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."

**3.—An open city.**—The command is given by the singers to open the gates of this city for the entering in of the righteous nation. This city describes the dwelling-place of the saints. To all such the gates stand open wide. "Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them; and I will praise the Lord. This gate of the Lord into which the righteous shall enter." (Ps. cxviii, 19, 20.) When the Jews shall repent of their rejection of Messiah Jesus and shall receive him, then will they "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." (Is. xxxv, 1-10.) And not only shall the Jews be permitted to come into this city through the open gate of Praise; but Gentiles also shall flock thither, "for many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people and I will dwell in the midst of thee: And the Lord shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land and shall choose Jerusalem again." (Zech. ii, 11, 12.) If we want Gospel application of this truth we may easily find it in what Jesus says of himself as the Good Shepherd, who is also the door of the sheep, and through whom, if any man enter, he shall be saved and shall go in and out and find pasture. (John x, 9.) This he set before the Jews, telling them also that he had other (Gentile) sheep whom also he must bring, and that there should be one fold and one shepherd. Whilst the time is not yet come for the rebuilding of the material city in the land of Judah, it has come for us, whose conversation is in heaven

(Phil. iii, 20), to be making ourselves ready for the glorious time here spoken of.

**4.—The characteristics of the inhabitants.**—Three things shall characterize all the people that shall dwell in that city: (i) A steadfast mind; (ii) perfect peace; (iii) an everlasting trust. “The prophet’s mind throughout the first paragraph of his song is running on the security and immovableness of the New Jerusalem.” He then describes the state of mind which characterizes the inhabitants. The rendering of the verse thus: “The steadfast mind thou wilt keep in peace,” will give the idea. The peace of God’s people is of a two-fold character: (a) There is the peace of justification: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God.” (Rom. v, 1.) This is peace from all torment of conscience by reason of sin, because Jesus, who was delivered for our transgressions, has been raised again for our justification. God has settled the whole question of sin as guilt under the law; and so we, accepting the settlement, are at peace. (b) Then there is “the peace of God which passeth understanding,” that holy poise of soul which, trusting God entirely, is not shaken by the distractions of the world or the mysterious movings of Providence. It knows that God is over all, and that therefore all things are working together for good, and so is at peace. “Peace I leave with you” (the peace of justification), “my peace I give unto you,” said Jesus to his troubled disciples. (John xiv, 27.) The exhortation, which follows the assurance of perfect peace to the steadfast mind, is to trust in Jehovah at all times; never to doubt him, never to falter or flinch from his word. He will always do right, he will always be true to his promise; and since he is Love and Power as well as Wisdom and Goodness, we can trust unhesitatingly. How happy a city when all these things are in fullness of exercise!

## II.—GOD IN THE MIDST.

“The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty. He will save. He will rejoice over thee with joy. He will rest in his love. He will joy over thee with singing.” (Zeph. iii, 17.) This is the expianation of the safety, the peace, and the trust. The prophet gives us incidental sketches of the great and blessed God who makes this city strong and peaceful and happy by his presence.

**1.—He is strong of purpose.**—“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace.” Think of the centuries in which God has held on to his purpose of grace toward Israel, and all the world as well. He says, “I know the thoughts I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not

of evil, to give you an expected end." (Jer. xxix, 11.) The purposes of God stand sure. His covenanted word shall never pass away. This is that strong consolation, which God has afforded us by the two immutable things, his word and his oath, in which it is impossible for God to lie. (Heb. vi, 18.) Hence the attitude of the believer is one of unmovable confidence and calmest repose: "He shall not be moved forever." "His heart is fixed, trusting in Jehovah." (Ps. cxii, 6, 7.) Let us rejoice and be glad that our salvation is not a haphazard matter, but is according to the eternal purpose of God which he purposed in Christ before the world began, a purpose that shall stand after time has ceased to be.

**2.—He is the Rock of Ages.**—This is the literal translation of the words rendered "everlasting strength." We have here one of the four places where our translators (King James's) have left the original word Jehovah. (See Ex. vi, 3; Ps. lxxxiii, 18; Is. xii, 2.) This name shows us the gracious side of God; it is the revelation name of God to us sinners. He is called the Rock of Ages. The constancy and unmovableness of his Being, as revealed to us in grace, offers us a solid and abiding ground for faith. The title Rock is often applied to God, but only in this place is he called the Rock of Ages. He who trusts in this Rock becomes a part of it, and shall never be moved. Upon this Rock of Ages—Jehovah-Jesus—is the Church of Christ built, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matt. xvi, 18.) That the reader may follow up the idea suggested by the title Rock as applied to Jehovah God, he is referred to the following passages of Scripture: Deut. xxxii, 4, 15, 18, 30, 31; II. Sam. xxii, 2, 32, 47; xxiii, 3; Psalms xviii, 2, 31, 46; xix, 14; xxviii, 1, etc.; Is. xvii, 10; xxx, 29; xliv, 8; Hab. i, 12. All Israel's troubles came upon her because they forsook the "Rock of their Strength." (Is. xvii, 10.) Let us find all our strength in cleaving with an everlasting trust to our Rock of Ages.

**3.—He is invincible in his power.**—The fifth and sixth verses describe how this Jehovah at last overthrows all the haughty world-powers and lays them low in the dust. He rises up and tramples them under his feet. The world-powers, as seen in the proud dynasties of kings, have ever trodden under foot the "poor and needy" who have espoused Jehovah's cause in the earth. The proud and imperious intellectualism of all ages has scoffed and scorned the simple revelation of God and despised those who have received and adhered to it. But in this day God will rise up and bring them down that dwell on high; and then the "poor and needy" will trample "the high and mighty" under foot. It was no meaningless declara-

tion of Paul when he said: "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the earth," and "the meek shall inherit it." He is a fool who fights against God. For God is invincible in might, and has given both abundant warning and example of the certainty of the judgment that shall overtake the persistently and willfully wicked. For God does not cast men down simply because they are in high places, nor does he lift them up simply because they are in low position in this world. It is no eminence but pride against which God fights. Nor need we necessarily understand that this downfall of the lofty city is simply that of physical defeat. Rather it is the triumph of the "poor and needy" who through faith have subdued kingdoms and triumphed in spite of all the opposition of the unbelieving world. Have we not already seen this in the steady and unimpeded progress of the Church of Christ even over the ruins of hundreds of high cities, and in spite of the lofty pretensions of the wisdom of this world in ages past?

**4.—God is most upright.**—Not wisdom, nor power, nor everlastingness are sufficient in themselves to secure the unwavering faith of people. There must be absolute uprightness in God before men can finally and under all circumstances trust him. "The way of the just is uprightness"; or the path of the just is straight. Two meanings may attach to this: Either that God leads his people always in a plain path (Ps. v, 8; xxvii, 11; exliii, 8), or that he causes them through the constraints of his grace to maintain a righteous walk in the world. "He leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." (Ps. xxiii, 3.) Perhaps both are comprehended, though the dominating thought here is that, in the midst of great perplexities and overflowing judgments, God will keep the path of the just straight, will not leave them in the dark as to what course to pursue in given circumstances, nor as to the truth and tenderness of his mercy, though at times they seem even to suffer more than the wicked, and are made to pass through fires that are kindled for the wicked only. The whole first epistle of Peter is an exposition of this truth and an exhortation to the fainting saints not to despair at what may seem at times to be the unjust and cruel dealings of God in providence. For God is "most upright," "doth weigh as in a balance the path of the just." He keeps it level, as justice keeps her scales straight, in perfect equipoise.

### III.—AN ANXIOUS AND WAITING PEOPLE.

Trusting in the uprightness of Jehovah and expecting the deliverance he has promised his people, they have waited in the way of his judgments. That is, during the long period of his dealings with the world-powers in which they have been, as it were, put off and the promises deferred, they have still waited for him. Sometimes perhaps they have cried out: "Lord, how long?" But still they have not been impatient. In the waiting for his coming they have desired to keep in remembrance his name, or rather that for which his name stands. It is so with us, and to this end our Jehovah-Jesus has given us a most precious memorial of his grace, and has bidden us "eat the bread and drink the cup" in remembrance of him till he come. Not only will they wait for him, but even in the night of deepest affliction will they seek after him. Not only will they look for but will hasten the coming of Jehovah-Jesus to set up his kingdom. (II. Pet. iii, 12.) Like David, the prophet here says of the people: "One thing have they desired, and that will they seek after." Nor was it entirely with selfish desire that they longed for and hastened the coming of Jehovah to make an end of their long waiting, by overthrowing the wicked; for "when thy judgments are in the earth the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." It was a desire to see multitudes of men converted to God. The true believer never selfishly longs for anything. David prayed that he might be forgiven and washed, cleansed in heart, and the joys of salvation restored unto him, that sinners might be converted to God through this new testimony to the goodness and grace of Jehovah. Every Christian is bound up with the purposes of God, and in seeking his own he is also bound by the constraining love of Jesus to seek the good of every other inheritor of grace.

### IV.—THE INCORRIGIBLY WICKED.

There is also another view of the matter. The righteous in the earth, patiently enduring the long waiting time and the long night of affliction, and desiring the conversion of men, felt also that to delay any longer would be of no good to certain determined and incorrigible sinners. "Why should they be stricken any more? they will only revolt more and more." (i, 5.) "Let favor be shown to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of God."

He will abuse the goodness of God, that ought to lead him to repentance, and interpret God's delay and reluctance to take final judgment against him as being either weakness or indifference in the face of sin. The example of righteousness will be thrown away, and they will go on dealing unjustly, nor will they in anything see the majesty of God. They will not see it in the universe that declares his glory; they will not see it in his providence that manifests his goodness; they will not see it in his Gospel that reveals his grace; nor will they behold it in his impending judgments which declare that, full of goodness and mercy as he is, he will by no means clear the guilty. The righteous wait for, and seek after the fulfillment of God's promise, that those who may be and will be converted by his coming may speedily be brought in, and that the incorrigibly wicked may be cut off from further hindering the purposes of God toward his people. God's answer to this desire is found in the New Testament. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promises, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (II. Pet. iii, 9.)

## III.

## OVERCOME WITH WINE.—Isaiah xxviii, 1-13.

(1) Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower, which are on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine! (2) Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one, which as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand. (3) The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under feet: (4) And the glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley, shall be a fading flower, and as the hasty fruit before the summer; which when he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in his hand he eateth it up. (5) In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people, (6) And for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment, and for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate. (7) But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. (8) For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean. (9) Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. (10) For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: (11) For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. (12) To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. (13) But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.—Isaiah xxviii, 1-13.

Isaiah has in the previous chapters taken a general survey of the whole world, his eyes piercing down the vista of time to remotest ages. All the principal nations of the earth have passed in review under his eyes, and he has denounced upon them the woe and doom of judgment. He has even seen the final judgment and destruction of the earth itself, with a vivid description of that final cataclasm. (xxiv, 17-20.) In the midst of all this he has not failed to see and predict the establishment of Messiah's kingdom, and the gathering into it of all the Gentile nations, which vision has caused him again and again to sing praises unto God and songs of deliverance for the people. His prophecies are so vivid and so real to him that he



seems to be personally present and a participator in their fulfillment. These things, unseen by the world, had become substantial realities to him by revelation's prophetic vision. After his general survey of all nations and all times, he comes back again to the immediate present, describing the state of things existing in Samaria, the capital of the kingdom of Israel, and depicting also that condition of Judah herself. He pronounces doom both upon Samaria and upon Jerusalem.

The present chapter, and especially the portion at which we are particularly looking, affords us a striking illustration of the terrible evil of strong drink, God's judgment upon it, and the certain doom which will overtake the drunkard, and tells of the only possible remedy and deliverance for its victims. If we were asked the question whether the Bible condemned absolutely the use of wine as a beverage, we should be compelled to answer in the negative; but if we were asked what the testimony of the Bible is as regards its excessive use, then we have "line upon line and precept upon precept" to show that it is one of the worst evils with which the Spirit of God has had to contend among men in all ages. If we were asked whether it is the duty of Christian men to become total abstainers, we should be compelled to answer that every man must be the judge of that for himself. The Bible lays no such command upon the people of God; but the Bible does warn and admonish all men to the effect that "no drunkard shall enter into the kingdom of God," and that it is not lawful for a Christian to "eat," that is, to hold communion with any man who calls himself a brother, who is a drunkard. Drunkenness is classified with fornication, covetousness, idolatry, railing, reviling, thievery, and extortion. (I. Cor. v, 11; vi, 10.) If any brother plead for the lawful use of wine he must remember that he uses it at his peril, and that his *example* is also a matter which he must consider; and, in any case, however lawful he may esteem it to be for him to use wine, he must be sure that he is never brought under the power of it. (I. Cor. vi, 12.) In giving the scriptural teaching on this subject, we must exclude our own personal convictions as to personal duty and say that in any personal decision, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind," remembering that "every one of us shall give an account of himself to God." It is not for one to judge another in these matters, but it is for every one of us to take the whole matter into consideration in the light of the times in which we live, the habits of the people around us, and evident perils that are besetting both nations and individuals, and "judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-

block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way." (Rom. xiv, 5, 12, 13.) It is certain that God has laid no universal command of total abstinence on his people, but it is equally true that he has not put anything in the way of any Christian man using his liberty in the way of total abstinence. I am as free not to touch or taste wine for conscience sake and my brother's, as I am free to use it temperately for my own use or benefit in all good conscience. I am not afraid that I will be misunderstood as being an advocate of even moderate or temperate drinking, while I am thus trying to set the teaching of God's word before my readers. For myself, if by the stroke of my pen or the opening of my mouth I could sweep away every distillery and brewery and wine vat in the world, I would do it instantly; yet I am not prepared to judge another as being untrue to God or his obligations to his brother who still does not see his way clear to the total abstinence position. On the other hand, we are bound to look the whole subject of drunkenness squarely in the face, and then decide for ourselves before God. It is certain that there are more temperate users of wine in the world than there are drunkards. It is not certain that temperate use of wine leads to drunkenness, even in a majority of cases; but it is certain that total abstinence is an absolutely safe rule both for each man and each man's neighbor. This is much more true now than it ever was, for the simple reason that the modern discovery of artificial production of alcohol has, by its introduction into the manufacture of all manner of alcoholic drinks, made them more dangerous and deadly than they were in any other age of the world. A glance at the history of the world will show, I am sure, that no one practice has led more to the final overthrow of nations than that which culminates in the almost universal habit of wine-drinking. This habit is the sure sign of general debauchery of life and decay of conscience. It is more than probable that the violence which filled the earth in antediluvian times was caused for the greater part by the excessive use of strong drink. It must have been a universal habit, if we may judge by the fact that even so good a man as Noah allowed himself to be overcome by it so soon after landing in the new world. That it was one of the master sins of Sodom may be found in a like example in the case of Lot, who allowed himself to be made drunk with wine by his unholy daughters. Drink was then, and has always been, the instrument and associate of sensuality and licentiousness, as well as of all manner of violence. Drunkenness was a capital offense, punishable by death under the Mosaic law. (Deut. xxi, 20, 21.) It was absolutely forbidden to a priest while performing his priestly functions, and its

use was not allowed within the precincts of the temple. No Nazarite might ever touch it. There can be no doubt but that the sin and crime of drunkenness was that which led to the final overthrow of Israel and Judah. If not the direct cause, it was the ripe fruit of the underlying causes. We have only to refer to the frequency with which the prophets referred to and denounced this sin to be instantly convinced of the abhorrence and detestation with which God regarded it. (Is. v, 11, 22; xxii, 13; lvi, 12; Hos. iv, 11; vii, 5; Amos vi, 6, etc.) In these and other passages we read of whoredom and wine together, of luxuriant living and bottles of wine, and bowls of wine, as though excessive drinking were the certain accompaniment to all the worst sins of the flesh. Certain it is that wine unto drunkenness is the devil's strongest weapon; a very counterfeit and substitute in wicked men for the Holy Spirit in the child of God. Therefore "be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the spirit." (Eph. v, 18.) Perhaps here we have the best and safest rule for temperance among God's people. They who are filled with the Spirit are certain never to be drunk with wine. The two will not go together, for one is of the God of heaven and the other of the god of this world.

### I.—THE DRUNKARDS OF EPHRAIM.

The prophet opens this chapter with a woe against or a warning to Samaria, which he saw steeped in drunkenness, and careless of her impending peril. The danger to Samaria was growing more and more threatening by the advance of Tiglath Pileser and Shalmaneser, but in the face of this she insisted that she was strong and was giving herself up more and more to every form of self-indulgence and carnal luxury, fasting and stretching herself on beds of ivory, dancing to the music of the viol, inventing new instruments of music to arouse sated senses, and utterly refusing to believe in the danger that was frowning upon her. (Amos iv, 1; vi, 6, 13.) Against this drunken and luxury-besotted capital Isaiah launches his woe. In doing so he describes her beauty and tells her how it shall all be laid low. It is agreed by all that Samaria was most beautiful in situation and one of the most magnificently glorious cities of her time, pinnacled on a high eminence that was itself embosomed at the head of a beautiful valley lying among the still higher mountains. At the head of a fat valley that was fairly embroidered with flowers, the inhabitants, under the lead of the sensual kings, had beautified their city with magnificent palaces of ivory and every manner of architect-

ural device. They had their city palaces and their country houses. They cultivated magnificent gardens and formulated every invention for giving pleasure to every sense of the body. They were as proud and dissipated as they were rich in the glory of their natural situation and beautiful in their artificial adornments. But in the midst of all this they were a nation and city of drunkards, swallowed up by strong drink, and broken morally, mentally, spiritually, and physically with wine. For this the prophet denounces against them a swiftly impending destruction. Their crown of pride should be trodden under foot, their glorious beauty, like the flowers about them, should fade and wither away under the fierce blast that was gathering from the clouds in the northern horizon. They were proud and defiant, but God had an instrument prepared to bring down their pride: "Behold the Lord hath a mighty and strong one." This was the Assyrian power which he was using as his sword (Ps. xvii, 13) with which to chastise this foolish, proud, defiant, and wicked kingdom whom he had nourished from a child, and who had returned all his love by the most deliberate and wicked apostasies. The destruction which was coming upon them is described "a tempest with hail," "a destroying storm," "a flood of mighty waters overflowing." Underneath this triple assault the Samaritan city and all the kingdom of Israel would be cast down and trodden under foot; her crown in the mire; her beauty withered; herself swallowed down as a man swallows down the first ripe fig that comes into his hand. War is fearful even in modern times, vastly more was it in antiquity; and amongst all the nations none were so pitiless and cruel as the Assyrians. We are justified in drawing for ourselves this lesson, that they who give themselves up to a mere sensuous life, seeking only after pleasure, indulging in vain and worldly pride, ambition, and all self-indulgence, are preparing for themselves a like fate. Drunkenness, which may be taken for all manner of carnal living, will certainly lead to the casting down of the proud crown of man's superiority, and the withering away of his glorious beauty. What havoc strong drink makes of man, overthrowing his manhood, withering up his capacities and accomplishments, and sweeping him away from the earth as a storm with hail and tempest, and flood! Truly has the wise man said: "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whoso is deceived thereby is not wise." "New wine taketh away the heart." "Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine, that go to seek mixed wine." Therefore: "Look not on the wine when

it is red, when it giveth its color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." (Prov. xx, 1; xxiii, 29-35; Hos. iv, 11.)

## II.—A GLORIOUS REMNANT.

Isaiah had warned Samaria of the impending consequences of her confirmed sensuality and utter disregard of God's voice, had swept them with the terrible words of prophetic judgment and left them wallowing in the mire and dirt, cast down and trampled under foot. But as a true moralist and faithful preacher of righteousness, he summons their attention, and especially does he intimate to Judah that, though judgment is sure to the persistently wicked, God's mercy is ever held out to those who heed his warning voice. He tells of a remnant who have been saved from the prevailing drunkenness, and so intimates the secret of that strength which may resist temptation. "In that day," the day of casting down of the crown and the withering of the glorious beauty, it will be seen that there is a "residue of his people," to whom the Lord of Hosts shall be "for a crown of glory and for a diadem of beauty." (v. 5.) He tells them of judgment, but offers them mercy. He warns them of coming destruction, but holds out to them the sure hope of salvation. "The wages of sin is indeed death, but the gift of God is eternal life." This hope is not in mere human strength or moral uprightness. The Lord of Hosts shall be for a crown of glory and for a diadem of beauty. Those who have made him so are seen to preserve the spirit of justice in their administration of judgment and courage in the day of battle. Nor only courage, but victory too; for such are able to chase away their enemies even to the very gates whence they came out. This referred no doubt historically to the good King Hezekiah, who "trusted in the God of Israel, and clave to the Lord and departed not from following him," therefore, "the Lord was with him, and he prospered withersoever he went forth," and "he smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza and to the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchman to the fenced city." (II. Kings xviii, 1-8.) Thus shall they all triumph in stemming the tide of iniquity, who, like Hezekiah and the residue of the people, make God their crown of glory and their diadem of beauty. He will keep all such from falling, and present them at last faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. (Jude 24.)

### III.—JUDAH'S SINFULNESS.

Isaiah had called the attention of Judah to the stubborn sinfulness of Samaria; had warned them of the judgment coming upon her, and held out to them the hope of deliverance from a like evil which he saw was surely coming upon them for like sins, and sought thereby to turn the whole house of Judah to the Lord. But he had cast his pearls before swine. In Hezekiah and a small remnant there was found a people who heeded his voice, but the mass of the people only mocked at his warnings and cast them back in his teeth. The reformations of Hezekiah were both religious and political. He took away the idols out of the land; he threw off the yoke of Assyria and restored the temple; but the priests and the judges continued immoral, and especially did their habits of drunkenness continue. "They also erred through wine and strong drink, and were far out of the way." The picture which the prophet draws is most vivid and humiliating. They imitated the pride, unbelief, and drunkenness of Samaria. The priests and the prophets reeled with wine and staggered. Wine had swallowed them up. The judges erred in vision; that is, they failed in clear-eyed justice, and they went staggering on to the judgment seats. The very tables and furniture of the court-rooms and temple were fouled with their drunken vomit, and there was no place clean from the filthy evidences of their debaucheries. Something similar to this awful condition of things was witnessed in the church at Corinth, which the Apostle Paul had to denounce with such bitter and mournful protests. (I. Cor. xi, 21, 22.)

To the prophet's warnings, and, we may be sure, tender exhortations, they hurled back sarcastic, perhaps drunken retorts. Isaiah reports them as replying in this fashion: "Whom will he teach knowledge, and whom shall he make to understand tidings?" Does he take us for a lot of babies? Do not we know truth as well as he? Does he set himself up as better than we are, that he comes to us with these everlasting reiterations of commonplace moral maxims? "Line upon line and precept upon precept." The prophet's remonstrances irritated them; they complained bitterly and mockingly that they were tired of it, and gave him to understand that they would have it no more. It is a sure sign of the last stage of infidelity when unbelievers and sinners turn mockers. "There shall come in the last days scoffers, saying: Where is the promise of his coming?" (II. Pet. iii, 1.) In our day there is a strong tendency to scoff at

the constant repetition of the simple doctrines of the Gospel, the preaching of repentance, faith, atonement, and regeneration. And proud unbelievers reject such Gospel preachers, and say, "Why does he not cease these everlasting repetitions? Why does he not produce some new grand and original theories, consistent with the advancing thought and culture of the dawning of the twentieth century? Let us have done with this everlasting babbling of precepts and worn-out exhortations. Are we children that we should be taught in this way? Line upon line and precept upon precept. Sin is sinful, and must be punished. Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish. The wages of sin is death and the gift of God is eternal life. We are tired of all this. Let him preach this twaddle to the women and children, but we are men, and know as much and more than he does." Well is it for us teachers and preachers if we stick to the method of "line upon line and precept upon precept," and woe to the proud and sensual, the vainglorious and unbelieving, if they make a mock of God's truth and tidings.

#### IV.—GOD'S ANSWER TO THE MOCKERS.

The prophet turns on these mockers with a scorn whetted on their own grindstone. They mock and scoff at line upon line and precept upon precept, which they liken to a stuttering and stammering man who says over and over his words, and does not get on in speech beyond his first utterances. So, says the prophet, God will speak to you "with stammering lips and another tongue." This refers without doubt to the speech of the Assyrians, who would speedily come upon them and sweep them away. The speech of the Assyrian was a kind of vowelless guttural which made its sound jerky, and not unlike that of stutterers to the ears of the Jews, whose tongue was a smoother and more cultivated branch of the same family of language. God had by the prophet pressed upon them his mercy and exhorted them to turn to him, saying, "This is your rest and this is your refreshing;" but they would not hear. They had scoffed at his "good tidings," and would not hear his gracious words (Deut. xxviii, 1-14); and now because they had thus rejected his "line upon line and precept upon precept," he would speak to them by war and desolation before the speech of which "they would go, and fall backward, and be snared, and be broken, and taken." God would carry them all away captive and devastate their land. God has two methods of speech. One is by word of mouth in warning and promise. If the people will not hear God's Gospel, then they

will hear his judgments. Thus did Jesus speak to the Jews. He wept over them, and would have gathered them under his wings, but they would not come to him. Therefore their house was left to them desolate, and the enemies came upon them and destroyed them. (Matt. xxiii, 38; Luke xiii, 35.) If we are not blind and dead in sin and determined to provoke God to judgment, we will hear his sweet and tender words of grace, offering to us forgiveness and justification through Jesus Christ. If we will not hear the Gospel, then we had better hear this word of warning: "Behold ye despisers, and wonder and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in nowise believe, though a man declare it unto you." (Acts xiii, 38-41.) Let it be well taken to heart that both the concluding clauses of the great Gospel commission are true. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark xvi, 16.) It may seem like a stammering, commonplace reiteration of "line upon line and precept upon precept" to the willfully proud and sinful, but God has his commonplace too; and all history combines to prove that they who will not repent of sin shall inevitably perish, whether as nations or individuals.



## IV.

HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER AND DELIVERANCE.—Isaiah xxxvii,  
14-21, 33-38.

(14) And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it : and Hezekiah went up unto the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord. (15) And Hezekiah prayed unto the Lord saying, (16) O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubim, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all kingdoms of the earth : thou hast made heaven and earth. (17) Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear : open thine eyes, O Lord, and see : and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God. (18) Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations, and their countries, (19) And have cast their gods into the fire : for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone : therefore they have destroyed them. (20) Now therefore, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord, even thou only. (21) Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent unto Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Whereas thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria : (22) Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. (23) By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the Lord. (24) For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. (25) Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand : and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. (26) So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. (27) And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword ; and they escaped into the land of Armenia : and Esar-haddon his son reigned in his stead.—Isaiah xxxvii, 14-21, 33-33.

In the struggles, defeats, and final triumph of the ancient people of God in their conflicts with the surrounding nations, we have a key to the purposes of God in respect to the kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms of this world ; a key to the interpretation of the principles and powers underlying the conflict between the people of God and the unbelievers of this world. God's hand is in this earth's history ; his eye is upon all men and his ear open to their counsels ; at the proper time and in the proper place he will frustrate all the combinations of evil and bring to pass all his purposes of righteousness. Evil men and seducers will be overthrown, and his people will be

brought off more than conquerors. It is not by might or by power that believers triumph over their spiritual enemies or win their victories, but by the interposition of God's almighty arm. The preceding chapter is so closely connected with that from which our present study is taken, that the two must be read together. Jerusalem was under siege, or at least was threatened with siege and capture by the Assyrian king. In spite of all Hezekiah's efforts to buy a peace for himself and his kingdom, the greedy, haughty, and most powerful king was determined to be satisfied with nothing short of entire and full possession of Jerusalem itself. (For further historical setting let the reader consult II. Kings xviii, 13; xix; II. Chron. xxxii, 1-21.) It seems almost certain, from similarity of language and close agreement of facts, that Isaiah was the author of the histories as recorded in Kings and Chronicles, as well as the chapters now under consideration in the book bearing his name. The first peremptory message, with the proud and blasphemous boasts of Sennacherib, threw Hezekiah into great distress of mind and profound dismay. He appealed to the prophet Isaiah, who encouraged him to keep silence and trust in God. (vs. 1-7.) A sudden rumor of an army marching in his rear caused a diversion of the Assyrian's purpose, but meantime he sent another haughty message to Hezekiah, warning him that he was powerless to resist, and intimating his return presently to capture the city. This was a written message (14), and it again disturbed Hezekiah, but apparently his faith in God was not shaken, and so he resorted again to the temple and spread the whole matter out before the Lord and sought help and deliverance. Hezekiah's action in this matter is a lesson to us as to how we should meet impending dangers and how to behave ourselves before God and men when in trouble. His prayer is a model, both in order and composition, and worthy our deepest study.

### I.—THE PRAYER OF HEZEKIAH.

Hezekiah was a righteous, though not a perfect man. He was habituated to prayer, and so now, when a great emergency was upon him, he betook himself to prayer, not as one who was frightened into it, but as one who knew his God, had often had dealings with him, and counted on his interposition. As the prayer unfolds itself, every point of his need is brought clearly into view.

**1.—The place and attitude of prayer.**—"Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord." This was the proper standing-ground on which to make petitions. God had promised to meet his people

there and hear and answer their prayers. (II. Chron. vii, 14, 15.) We have not now any particular place in which to pray, but we have a Name which to plead. The name of Jesus, and "whatsoever we ask in his name," other conditions being also fulfilled, "shall be done unto us." Jesus is the true "meeting-place" between God and his people; he is the true ground on which prayer is to be made. By him we have access to God. (Eph. ii, 14.) Then Hezekiah did another thing. He took the haughty and insolent letter of Rabshakeh and "spread it before the Lord." Thus he would lay the whole matter just as it was before God, put him, as it were, in possession of all the facts in the case as they had come to him. Of course, we do not understand that it was the material letter that he submitted to the eyes of Jehovah, but the actual spreading out of the letter was symbolical of the fact that he submitted the case to God. This act of the good king reminds us very much of the prayer of the disciples after the authorities had threatened them and forbidden them to speak any more in the name of Jesus: "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings, and grant unto thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy word." (Acts iv, 29.) They spread out the whole case before the Lord, asked him to look at the circumstances, and deliver them by making them bold to do that which they had been commanded of God. So should we take God into our confidence, and "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make our request known unto God." (Phil. iv, 6.) We too often plan our own deliverance or our own work and then ask God to ratify it, whereas the first thing to do is to spread the matter at once fully before God, reverently submitting to his plan and will, seeking in his wisdom the right thing to do.

**2.—The address.**—Here was a reverent remembrance of his majesty and a silent appeal to his power, in which also Hezekiah renewed his own confession of faith: "O Lord of hosts, God of Israel." Israel was in trouble, and God was Israel's God, not a mere titular deity, but the great God of hosts. This is a familiar designation of God and Jehovah, and refers to his universal sovereignty and power. "That dwellest between the cherubim." This is a reference to the fact that God had been pleased to make his dwelling-place on the Mercy-Seat between those mysterious figures called the cherubim, from which place he was always graciously inclined toward his people. If the cherubim symbolize the incarnation (of which I, at least, have no doubt), then the reference to God's position between them, or, as we would now say, "God in Christ," is very significant. David made a similar appeal to God on behalf of

Israel: "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel; thou that dwellest between the cherubim shine forth. Stir up thy strength and come and save us." (Ps. lxxx, 1-3.) "Thou art the God, thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth." The views of Sennacherib were that each nation and kingdom had their own gods (xxxvi, 18-20), but Hezekiah ascribes to God not only aloneness in his being, but oneness, and universal sovereignty over all the kingdoms of the earth. He therefore could interfere in the plans of the Assyrian king for the purpose of frustrating them, as well as come to the defense of his own peculiar people; besides, there was a refutation and repudiation of the boasted idol gods who had been compared to him. It is a remarkably strong declaration of Old Testament monotheism, and is similar to other declarations (*e. g.*, vi, 1-5; Micah i, 2, 3; iv, 5; vi, 6-9; vii, 17, 18.) "Thou hast made heaven and earth." It is a favorite thought of Isaiah and the old prophets, and indeed all the Jews who were instructed in the knowledge of God, to couple his redemptive with his creative power. The whole earth and the heavens, and everything in them, are the works of his hands, and therefore he is over all, God blessed forever. Thus did Hezekiah throw himself on all the great attributes of God before he began his petition.

**3.—The supplication.**—"Incline thine ear and hear, open thine eyes and see." Shall all the doings of this vain and proud braggart go past without thine observation? Shall all his scandalous words in which he has openly derogated thee pass by thine hearing? His words are no reproach to us, but they have reproached thee." Hezekiah is outraged for the name and majesty of Jehovah. He is jealous for his name, as much, possibly more, concerned for the glory of God in this moment than he was for the temporal deliverance of himself, his people and city, from Sennacherib's hands. True prayer has always reference to the glory of God, however much our own personal desires and needs may be involved in the things asked for. "Let not thy God in whom thou trusteth, deceive thee." (v. 10.) "Lord, refute and roll back that scandalous speech and reproach."

**4.—Confession.**—Hezekiah was not unmindful of the difficulties that opposed themselves to him, of the dangers that confronted him, nor of the truth of the statements of the letter concerning the power of Sennacherib. "Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their countries, and have cast their gods into the fire." For two centuries they have had a steady career of conquest. There was no denying this; and many of the countries and kingdoms that had succumbed to their power were

much stronger than that of Hezekiah at this time. There was therefore some show of truth in what they said. (II. Kings xv, 19, 20, 29; xvi, 9; xvii, 5, 6; Is. xx, 1.) Faith does not ignore difficulties nor close its eyes to precedents in which the enemy has triumphed, but then it is bold in the belief that God is able; and that what may seem to be failure is due to other causes than the lack of power or covenant faithfulness on the part of God. Let us admit the worst of the case when we come to God, but only that there may be an opportunity hence for the "manifesting forth of his glory."

**5.—The faith in which the prayer was made.**—Hezekiah having admitted the prowess of the great enemy, proceeds to say to the Lord that the triumph of Sennacherib over other nations and their gods proves nothing in this case, from the fact that the gods of the nations were no gods at all, but mere idols of wood and stone, the work of men's hands. Therefore they were overthrown, and so it proves nothing as to the power of Sennacherib on the one hand, or the lack of God's power to defend his people from this hitherto triumphant power on the other. Hezekiah, in thus declaring his faith in God above all idols, seems also to call on God to make this truth apparent to the Assyrians. Here his jealousy for God momentarily rises above his anxiety for Jerusalem.

**6.—The petition.**—"Now therefore, O Lord our God, save us from his hand." This is the simple, brief, and comprehensive petition. Just save us. We do not dictate the means, we do not dictate the nature of the salvation. Just save us out of his hand. Sometimes the most effective prayers are the shortest. "God be merciful to me a sinner," was a very brief prayer. So was "Lord save me," but both were heard and answered; so was Hezekiah's.

**7.—The argument.**—Hezekiah's argument is all gathered up into this consummation, "that the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art Jehovah, even thou only." This is not only an argument for the glory of God's name and being, as against the vain boasts of the enemy and the insulting comparisons instituted between the God of Israel and the gods of the nations, but there is in it also that sublime spirit which made Hezekiah long even that these heathen nations, yea, even the Assyrians who were threatening them, might come to the knowledge of the truth. True believers long always that others may know their God. It is right for us to desire that our own may know God, and even our friends, but it is the part of the true Christian spirit to desire that even our enemies might know God, to long to see even all the nations of the earth brought to a saving knowledge of the truth. This was a true missionary prayer

of Hezekiah. Sometimes the knowledge of God can only be spread by the overthrow of some great political power or the removing of some gigantic enemy, such as Assyria and Sennacherib. It proved to be so in this case.

## II.—THE DELIVERANCE.

After his prayer (we do not know how long after) Isaiah, who seems to have been supernaturally informed of the prayer, and in like manner put in possession of Jehovah's reply, "sent word to Hezekiah," that inasmuch as he has submitted the matter concerning Sennacherib to him for help and deliverance, his request would be heard and answered. The following verses give an account of the answer.

**1.—The promise.**—The first part of this promise is to the effect that the "virgin daughter of Zion hath despised thee and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee." (22, 23.) This seems to be not only an answer to Rabshakeh, for his vain and blasphemous bragging and boasting, but also an assurance to Hezekiah. The daughter of Zion, like a virgin maid, was in herself weak and helpless; nevertheless she held all the threatening of the Assyrian in scorn and contempt, and would shake her head in derision at him, either in defiance of his onset or following him with mockery in his retreat from the city. Then follows a message to the Assyrian direct, in which God rebukes him for his boastful blasphemies, and reminds him of how in the ages past God has overthrown and destroyed the nations which had presumed to oppose themselves to Jehovah. Then he is told that God's eye has been upon him, and that now Jehovah was about to "put a hook in his nose" and lead him away out of the country in contempt, not even giving him the glory of a battle. Then follows another promise to the remnant of Judah that they should again "take root downward and bear fruit upward." (vs. 24-32.) Then comes again God's "Therefore," concerning the Assyrian. (i) "He shall not come into the city," not even near enough to shoot the first preliminary arrow at it, much less near enough to use shields, or even raise an embankment against it for the purpose of a siege. Sennacherib's army was not then under the walls, but only gathering in the distance, when the "letter" came to Hezekiah. God now assures the king that it shall not approach the city. He should be delivered, and that without even a siege. (ii) "I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake." This of course meant that, without even the

secondary help of man, he would in a supernatural way defend it, and that for his own sake. Rabshakeh had defied God and put contempt upon his name, while boasting his own prowess, or that of his king. God would vindicate his name and save his city by such a demonstration of supernatural power, without the immediate agency of man, as would leave no doubt in the minds of the Assyrian as to the fact that the Lord was God indeed. Now and again God has done such things just to clear up the testimony and leave men no excuse for their opposition on the ground of ignorance. He did it with Pharaoh, who challenged his power; he did so with the Midianites when he used Gideon's little band; he did so with the great army that besieged Samaria; he did so when he delivered Elisha at Dothan; now he will do so in delivering Jerusalem out of the hands of Sennacherib.

**2.—The fulfilment.**—“Then the angel of the Lord went forth and smote in the camp of the Assyrians, an hundred and four score and five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold they were all dead corpses.” This was an awful visitation. All the more so that it was done in the night and with perfect silence. (II. Kings xix, 35.) This awful destruction of the larger part of Sennacherib's army was not discovered until the morning. It was done so silently. What a terror must have frozen their hearts, and that of the king, when the remnant discovered that their great companies, with which they were probably that very morning going to march against Jerusalem, were all dead in their places! “Who can withstand his judgments?” Who is strong enough to fight against God? Let the wicked wonder before they perish at the rebuke of his countenance and the breath of his mouth. When men ask in derision: “Where is thy God?” the probability is that before they expect it, suddenly, “as the lightning flashing out of the sky,” sudden destruction will be upon them.

**3.—Sennacherib's humiliation.**—In this awful visitation the king himself did not die, but lived to “enjoy his humiliation.” Without even so much as striking a blow, or coming near the city against which he had so proudly vaunted himself, he was compelled to gather together the miserable and terrified fragment of his army and return “by the way that he came.” It must have been an awful humiliation for this proud king to take his march over the same route by which he had approached Jerusalem, not laden with the spoil of the captured city, leading thousands of the chief men and princes, and King Hezekiah himself, in his triumphal captive train, but with his shattered army to be the gazing stock of the countries

he had subdued and a by-word among his own people. We must fancy that he entered Nineveh with muffled drums, or no drums at all, with trailing or furled banners. When God does rise up to humble the proud, he does it thoroughly. A further humiliation awaited him. He went after up into the house of his idol to worship, not immediately, for he appears to have lived some twenty years after this defeat. But, at any rate, instead of his god defending him, much less giving him assurance of further victories, his own sons, who should have stood by and comforted their father, conspired together and slew him. So ended the career of this proud boaster, and so began the decline of this great Assyrian power. The lessons of prayer and deliverance are very wonderfully illustrated in this undoubtedly true history of the conflict between Sennacherib and Hezekiah. Let us learn the secret of prayer and wait in quietness and confidence for our deliverance out of the hands of all our enemies.



## V.

## THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR.—Isaiah liii, 1-12.

(1) Who hath believed our report ? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed ? (2) For 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. (3) 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. (4) Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows : yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. (5) But 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. (6) 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. (7) He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth : he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. (8) He was taken from prison and from judgment : and who shall declare his generation ? for he was cut off out of the land of the living : for the transgression of my people was he stricken. (9) And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death ; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. (10) Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him ; he hath put him to grief : when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. (11) He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied : by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many ; for he shall bear their iniquities. (12) Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong ; because he hath poured out his soul unto death : and he was numbered with the transgressors ; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.—Isaiah liii, 1-12.

In the forty-second chapter we see the Servant of Jehovah going forth, divinely commissioned and endowed with the Spirit, to bring forth judgment to the Gentiles and to set righteousness in the earth. In this chapter we see him in humiliation and suffering, the necessary conditions for his success in the salvation of the people. In the fifty-fifth chapter we shall see him graciously calling sinners to himself, and guaranteeing to them the redemption and the blessings of salvation which he hath purchased and won for them. It is impossible not to see the personal Messiah in this sublime prophecy, nor was the personality of the Messiah as portrayed here denied even by the Jews themselves until the twelfth century, when the

celebrated Aben Ezra denied its personal signification, and made it apply to the Jews as a people. Without referring to the almost unanimous concensus of Christian writers on this point, it is enough for us that the prophecy is distinctly applied to Christ by the writers of the New Testament in at least the following passages: Matt. viii, 17; Mark xv, 28; Luke xxii, 37; John xii, 37, 38; Acts viii, 32, 33; Rom. x, 16; I. Pet. ii, 24, 25. This chapter has well been called "the Holy of Holies of revelation." The sufferings of Christ and the glory that shall follow is the theme of the Old Testament. (Luke xxiv, 25, 26; I. Pet. i; ii, 1-10.) Here we are introduced into the very innermost sanctuary of this sublime mystery. It has been called the "golden passion of the Old Testament evangelist." "It is the center of this wonderful book of consolation (ch. xl-lxvi), and is the most central, deep, and lofty thing that the Old Testament prophecy, outstripping itself, has ever achieved." (Delitzsch Com. on Isaiah, vol. II., p. 303.) It is so sublime and simple, so unmistakable in its meaning, and so full of hope and life just as it stands, that one hesitates exceedingly even to offer the briefest word of comment. It seems like attempting to paint the lily with the almost certain result of marring its original beauty; or to adorn the doctrine of Christ, which is in itself, like its author, "altogether lovely."

The chapter opens with a lament by the prophet: "Who hath believed our report?" Hitherto Isaiah had portrayed the Messiah on the side of his glories and triumphs, and yet he was conscious that his "report" had been mainly communicated to unbelieving ears. If the people were not aroused to faith by the report of a glorious Immanuel and a Mighty God, a Wonderful Prince of Peace, whose government should know no end, what might he expect of these unbelieving ears when he begins to clothe the Messiah in the sombre hues of suffering and death? "And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Hitherto all the wonderful workings of God's arm in the deliverances as well as the captivities of the people were not discerned, but set down to mere natural causes; will they now see them in this suffering Messiah when he comes the Servant of Jehovah? If they have not seen the arm of God in the outward works which he has wrought for them, how will they see his hand in this mysterious inward work of redemption? Will they see the necessity of these sufferings, their hidden meaning, and their glorious fruit? The prophet gives his reasons for his fears in this respect, and in so doing he unfolds to us in sublimest poetry the very mysteries of our redemption, gradually taking on an enthusiasm

of faith himself until he sees the triumph of Christ in the "dividing of the spoil with the strong." Sometimes the very statement of our troubles is the most effectual way to their disposal. The prophet's vision, however, was correct; for when Jesus came, how few believed that he was the Christ of God; how many despised and rejected him; howbeit, not all, for some received him, and to them he gave eternal life. The same state of things is true to-day as in the prophet's time, and in the days of our Saviour's suffering here on earth. Thanks be to God, though apparently so few believe the report and see the arm of the Lord in the coming, ministry, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, yet somehow he seems to have been steadily gaining empire in human hearts and compelling a reluctant world to his recognition.

### I.—MESSIAH'S HUMILIATION.

The first vision of the Messiah that meets the prophet's eye was his deep humiliation, whereat he seems amazed himself. In his description of it he foretells what was afterward exactly true in fact. And his portraiture agrees with the apostolic declaration: "Who being in the form (equal with) of God, made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. ii, 6-8.) The various points of his humiliation are stated.

**1.—He is as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground.**—These two expressions do not denote the same thing. First there is the idea of feebleness. He came into the world not as the glorious Angel of Jehovah, such as appeared to Joshua and other Old Testament saints, but as a helpless babe wrapped in the swaddling clothes of poverty, and laid in a manger. This indeed was a tender sapling from the old fallen tree of the house of David. "A root out of a dry ground" referred no doubt to the barren and unpromising circumstances and surroundings of his appearance. His lowly place in the world. A poor peasant girl his mother. A poor ship-carpenter his reputed father. The mean and despised town of Nazareth his home, and the rude and contemptible Galilee his country. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" was the natural exclamation of Nathaniel when he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was reported to be the Messiah. No earthly advantages were his such as Moses had, or Joseph, or Daniel, or Nehemiah. Not in kings' courts was he

brought up, but in a poor carpenter's shop, to whom he was subject during his youth. Yet two things are said of him thus growing tenderly out of dry ground. He grew up before Jehovah, and though the ground was dry, he was a root striking deep down into soil that the world knew not of, and drawing life from a source beyond the reach of other men. In the contemplation of the outward appearances of men we are often ignorant or oblivious of the hidden resources in themselves or of their unseen excellencies. "Whence knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" was the amazed inquiry of the Jews. They did not know that he was in himself endowed with the spirit of wisdom and counsel, that "in him were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

2.—**"Without form or comeliness."**—This probably means that he was accompanied in his public ministry by no outward forms and ceremonies common to princes and great men; that there was no regal pomp and splendor to attract the eyes of men about him. "And when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him." There was indeed meek beauty about him, and a majestic dignity of carriage that sometimes awed his disciples and amazed his enemies, but ordinarily there was nothing specially attractive about Jesus. He wore the ordinary peasant garb, he traveled the dusty streets and highways of the cities, villages, and country, oftentimes carrying dust and stain on his person, with the evidences of weariness in his face. He probably was not beautiful in face as was David, nor head and shoulders above his disciples in physical stature as King Saul among his brethren. His beauty was in his sublime character rather than in his countenance. It is singular that before the days of Constantine, when Christianity was made a state religion, the tradition of Christ's face was that of a very plain and unattractive man; after that period the spiritual and moral power of his life idealized and glorified his face. When men see the inward beauty of Christ, there is life for them in the vision; when they only see the outward earthly pomp of his Church, the art and poetry of "Christianity," then there is nothing but death in the view.

3.—**"Despised and rejected of men. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."**—This was certainly true of him, so far as most men were concerned, during the time of his earthly sojourn; it is true now. "He came to his own and his own received him not." More than that, "we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not." What could more perfectly portray the attitude of most men to-day, and alas, not a few women? They will not look at the humiliation and suffering of Christ. They

turn their faces away from that view of him and hide their faces from the glance of his sad and sorrowful eyes. There will be another hiding of faces from him by and by when he comes in glory. Those who hid their faces from him in humiliation and suffering will call on the very rocks to hide them from the face of him that sitteth on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. (Rev. vi, 16.) The reason for this dislike and aversion to Christ may probably be found in the fact of (i) his sorrowful face; (ii) his serious manner; (iii) his spiritual teaching; (iv) his consecration to his Father's business; (v) his single walk with God, his habits of retirement and prayer. Men hate and reject Christ for these characteristics. The world's spirit and all worldly religion resent these aspects of spiritual life.

4.—“**Stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.**”—To the outward appearance the hand of God was against him, and so far he was discredited in the eyes of the world. The offense of the cross is still apparent whenever the shameful sufferings of Christ are presented to men. He was left apparently abandoned and deserted by both man and God, taken from arrest (prison) to judgment, numbered with the transgressors, cut off from the land of the living, and appointed to have a grave with the malefactors, from which he was only rescued by the interposition of two timid friends. Was there ever such an apparent contradiction of his high claims as seen in his awful and universal desertion and death? It is not flesh and blood that sees or teaches us that this suffering and humiliated man is the Son of God; this the Father in heaven only can reveal. A thief and a centurion saw it, but not his own people, or even his own disciples.

## II.—THE SUFFERING MESSIAH.

In the vivid, tender, and matchless account of the sufferings of Messiah as detailed by the prophet, all the mysteries of the atonement of our Lord are brought out.

1.—**For whom did he suffer?**—It is evident that this suffering man did not suffer on his own account, for there is no hint that he did any sin, nor was there deceit found in his mouth. The sorrows, griefs, and afflictions that marked his life, and the death that cut him off were not brought about by any transgressions of his. The sixth, eighth, and twelfth verses tell us why and for whom he suffered. “For the transgression of my people was he stricken.” “The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.” “He bare the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” Here then is the reason. “All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have

turned every one to his own way." Whether this refers to Israel as a people or to all sinners, it is equally true, for all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God, both collectively and individually. All have gone astray, and each one has followed the devices and desires of his own heart. If he did no sin, then neither death nor suffering had any claim against him; yet we see him suffering and dying, and that under the hand of God. It must be then that he died for some one else's sin. It was for us he died. Surely this is the central truth of the great redemption, so far as the sufferings of Christ are concerned. "He died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." "He was made a curse for us." "God made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Let us draw near then and behold our sin and guilt as we see it laid on this holy and sinless sufferer; let us learn God's judgment of it, and see our only way to justification and cleansing.

**2.—His sufferings were vicarious.**—The prophet gives us twelve distinct items in the enumeration of the sum of the Saviour's sufferings. We may but just call attention to them. "He hath borne our griefs." "He hath carried our sorrows." "He was wounded for our transgressions." "He was bruised for our iniquities." "The chastisement of our peace was on him." "With his stripes are we healed." "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." "For the transgression of my people was he stricken." "Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin." "He shall bear their iniquities." "He hath poured out his soul unto death." "He bare the sins of many." In all these passages except two, and in them by implication, his sufferings are distinctly said to be not only for us, but, if language means anything, in our place and stead. The chastisement was due for our peace. "Wounded for our transgressions" cannot mean anything else than this. It has been the faith of the Church in all ages that thus Christ "bare in our sins his own body" (I. Pet. ii, 24); and that "he was delivered for our offenses" (Rom. iv, 25); that in fact he was made sin for us; and that his death expiated our sins, and so made it possible for us to be reconciled to God. The intense and bitter opposition to this soul-resting and peace-speaking truth is the most absurd and unreasonable, for the reason that in a very great measure we are constantly doing the same thing for each other in things pertaining to this life. This chapter more than any other in the Bible has been the house of mercy to souls wherein Jesus has met them and bade them be whole, and take up their beds and go to their own house.

**3.—The Father's hand in the transaction.**—It is remarkable how the prophet brings out this solemn and important truth. "The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all;" caused all our iniquities to meet on him. "It pleased the Lord to bruise him." His death was no accident; no heading up in calamity of the untoward circumstances which surrounded him. The Jews did with wicked hands take and crucify him; but it was according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God (Acts ii, 23), for he was a Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world.

**4.—His own patient and active acquiescence in the suffering.**—It is often alleged that the holiest principles of justice are outraged in this interpretation of the death of Christ; that it is unjust and immoral for God to cause his innocent Son to suffer for man's sin. But such forget that Jesus was as active in his willingness to take upon himself our sins and suffer and die for us as the Father was in giving him up to bear the sin of the world and expiate it by his death. Therefore when his hour was come he "opened not his mouth" in protest or remonstrance. "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." "He hath poured out his soul unto death." Passive in allowing himself to be brought to the cross on which he was offered, he was active in the offering, pouring out his own soul unto death. "He through the Eternal Spirit offered up himself to God." (Heb. ix, 14.) "The Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." "No man taketh it (my life) from me. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again." (John x, 11, 18.) Speaking of Christ's sacrifice for him, Paul says: "The Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal. ii, 20.) What more do we want in the way of redemption than is here offered us? Let us take it as freely as it is given, and rejoice in the love and grace of the Father and the Son and the Spirit by whom it was all accomplished.

### III.—MESSIAH'S REWARD.

We not only see the suffering of Messiah here, but also his reward. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name." (Phil. ii, 9.) Let us see what are his rewards.

**1.—He shall prolong his days.**—That is, though he poured out his soul unto death and was cut off out of the land of the living, God, by raising him from the dead, prolonged his days eternally. He dieth no more. A mere earthly or human Messiah might have lived

longer than Christ, but death would have ended his reign; Christ's reign in resurrection glory is forever. He was dead, behold he is alive forever more.

**2.—He shall see his seed.**—“Who shall declare his generation?” is a question asked in view of his cutting off. Christ had no natural descendants, but through faith in him he has a generation of spiritual children whom no man can number. “Behold I and the children which God hath given me.” (Heb. ii, 12, 13.) We are the generation of Jesus Christ. Let us walk worthy of him.

**3.—He shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.**—He shall not be disappointed. He died to save sinners. He will see them saved in multitudes. He is so seeing them saved. Even in this dark land of India, where I am writing and preaching the Gospel of Christ, his children are coming to him. “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.” He shall be satisfied with the number of them; he shall be satisfied with the glorious character which he will work out in them; he shall be satisfied with the place they shall occupy in his glory with him.

**4.—He shall divide the spoil with the strong.**—This is a strong example of the accommodation of language. It does not mean alone that he will win a share of the human race in this battle for the salvation of souls; but that, among the great conquerors of the world, Jesus will be seen to be a conqueror mightier than all the strong ones. God has given him a name that is above every name. I have no doubt, when we are with him in glory, we will be amazed at the number and glory of the redeemed; far above our most vivid expectation will heaven be filled with the multitude of the redeemed, all washed and made white and clean in the blood of the Lamb. “Even so come, Lord Jesus.”



## VI.

## THE GRACIOUS CALL.—Isaiah lv, 1-13.

(1) 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. (2) 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. (3) 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. (4) Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people. (5) Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee. (6) Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: (7) Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (8) For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. (9) For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (10) For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: (11) So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. (12) For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. (13) Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.—Isaiah lv, 1-13.

We have before remarked that Isaiah's conceptions of the Messiah's kingdom not only steadily enlarged, but in a very marked degree advanced in spirituality. He saw indeed other nations incorporated, or at least flowing into Israel under the blessings of Messiah's reign, but he also saw that the blessings of that reign were to be more and greater than mere temporal prosperity, with external peace as to the surrounding nations. He saw an inward condition of heart and mind, a peace that pertained to the individual who trusted in Jehovah and stayed himself on the Rock of Ages. In our last study we saw the Messiah as a suffering substitute for sinners; "pouring out his soul unto death, being numbered with the transgressors;

bearing the sin of many and making intercession for the transgressors." In this chapter there is a Gospel appeal to "every one" to accept that Saviour who is made a Witness and a Leader to the people. The way of acceptance is not by an external submission to a conquering king, but by a subjective hearing and coming of the thirsty and hungry soul to one who can and will satisfy those innate spiritual longings. The second or last half of the chapter shows how, on the other hand, we must forsake our sins and abandon our wrong thoughts and come to Jehovah, as manifested in Christ, for pardon and mercy. This is an entirely new revelation, and sets the Gospel in sharp apposition to the law, which tells how the condition of temporal blessing depends upon the external doing of God's commandments. (Deut. xxviii, 1, *seq.*)

### I.—THE OPEN PROCLAMATION.

The Gospel in Isaiah is strikingly like that in the Acts and Epistles. One might almost think, if left to his own resources, that these prophecies were modeled on the preaching of Paul rather than anticipating him by nearly eight hundred years. But it was the Spirit of Christ in the prophet which did signify these things to him. In this proclamation we see appeal, remonstrance, exhortation, explanation, promise. Let us look at them in order.

**1.—The appeal.**—"Ho, every one that thirsteth." This is a rousing cry to people who are consumed with unsatisfied desire. The anguish and distress of hunger and thirst are the most painful and bitter of the sufferings that come to man. The prophet evidently refers to inward want and distress of mind, and not to bodily hunger and thirst, for the reason that he offers his wares not on barter as greedy tradesmen offer them in times of distress, nor to hand and mouth, but to eye and ear; that is, he clearly shows that what he offers is to be applied inwardly and not outwardly, is remedy for the mind and not for the body. His address is to every one, and yet its limitations imply that out of the mass to whom this proclamation comes, there will be but some who will hear and heed. Yet there are always *some* thirsty souls longing for water. This is like the cry of Jesus, who stood on the last great day of the feast and cried: "If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink." (John vii, 37.) "Come ye to the waters." The Bible is very rich in symbolisms, and water is one of the most familiar, striking, and refreshing among them all. Here is a beautiful illustration from a former utterance of our prophet: "I will pour water upon him that is

thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will put my spirit upon thy seed and my blessing upon thine offering; and they shall spring up as among the grass and willows by the water-courses." Water stands for almost every manifestation of God's grace to sinners, as far as inward soul-satisfying portion and energy goes. It is presented to us under all forms as simple "water," as "rain," as "dew," as "steams," as "floods." (xxxv, 6; xliii, 20; xlv, 3, 4; v, 6; xxx, 23; lv, 10; xxvi, 19; xli, 18; xliii, 19; xxx, 25; xxxv, 6.) When our Lord came he took up this symbolism and applied it himself to himself, and that which he came to give. (John iii, 5; iv, 10, 11, 13-15; vii, 37-39.) One of the sweetest hymns of the modern Church is that of Horatius Bonar:

"I heard the voice of Jesus say: Behold I freely give  
The living water, thirsty one, stoop down, and drink, and live.  
I came to Jesus and I drank of that life-giving stream;  
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in Him."

Next the prophet offers "wine and milk." These are not the symbols of temporal blessings. "Wine, water, and milk," says Dalitzsch, "are the figurative representations of spiritual revival, recreation, and nourishment." Wine is the symbol of gladness. (Judges ix, 13; II. Sam. xiii, 28; Ps. civ, 15.) Men sometimes drink wine to drown their sorrows, but the wine of the Spirit cheers them; men get drunk on wine in the vain hope that therein they will find pleasure, but to be filled with the Spirit is to be filled with blessed joy. Milk is the symbol of nourishment. (Deut. xxxii, 14; Judges iv, 19; v, 25; I. Cor. ix, 7.) Here we have then that which makes us glad, fills us with joy, nourishes our bodies and causes us to grow. Especially are these two symbolic blessings meet for those who are fainting and dying, to revive them and give them the first food they need. These blessings are not for sale, they are the free gift of God to sinners. "Buy and eat, without money and without price." This is a new kind of selling, and a new kind of buying. But then all God's ways are new to this world. He introduced an altogether new fashion of life and salvation to man. Who offers things for sale without price and without money but our gracious God? Who, having no money, buys and possesses himself of things absolutely indispensable to life and salvation but the sinner to whom the Gospel is sent?

**2.—The remonstrance.**—The prophet, having appealed to the people to buy his wares, now remonstrates with them for a course of folly in spending their money, which he does not want, on things

which will not and cannot satisfy. In fact, he cries down his opponent's goods and competes with them. Men throughout the whole world are deluded with the belief that vast earthly possessions, and the things which gratify the body, such as eating and drinking and taking pleasure in carnal things, will make them happy. But the prophet remonstrates with them for weighing out their silver for larger houses and wider fields, and laboring in the vain pursuit of happiness in connection with things of this world. How true was his remonstrance, witness the testimony of Solomon, who sought satisfaction in the things of this world which he obtained, more than any other man that ever lived, with vast expenditure of money and great labor, only to declare that they were vanity and vexation of spirit.

**3.—The exhortation.**—Having remonstrated with them for a course of folly, he now offers them a better way. "Hearken diligently unto me." I have that to offer you which is essential good; which will delight your soul (not your body) with fatness. It is that which will give you life indeed and confer upon you all the sure mercies of David. Not the fleeting glories which had their accompaniments of trouble and sorrow, but the sure and abiding blessings of forgiveness, peace, happiness, righteousness, and likeness to God in Christ. All these things are offered by the prophet. They are not obtained by purchase or good works, but by believing and trusting in God. "Hearken." "Incline your ear." "Hear." These words remind us of the words of Jesus: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my words, and believeth him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into the judgment, but is passed from death unto life." Here are the sure mercies of David, offered to the believing hearer.

**4.—The method.**—The prophet now calls the people's especial attention to the method of Jehovah in conferring these spiritual blessings upon them. He introduces this thought by the word "Behold," which always indicates something of special importance, like our Lord's word, "Verily." "Behold I have given him for a witness to the people. A leader and commander." Who is this witness? Certainly it refers to the Messiah, the coming one. Jesus is the true witness of God to men. He has brought the life-giving word to us, and bears witness to the truth. (John viii, 14-30.) God also bare witness to him that he was the true witness when he transfigured him on the mount and spake from heaven, saying: "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him." (Matt. xvii, 5.) What untold blessings come to men who hear the testimony of this great God-sent

Witness, believe his testimony, and act upon it. Then he is "Leader and Commander." It is not only that we are to hear, but also to follow and obey. "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and come after me." And again, "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." So he is the Commander, and blessed is the man who does what he bids. "Whatsoever he saith unto you do it," was his mother's word to the servants at the marriage feast at Cana, and he says to us: "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them shall be likened unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock." (Matt. vii, 21-29.) True hearing always leads to true faith, and true faith always shows itself in true obedience.

**5.—The promise.**—The prophet now promises to those who hear his word and enter into the blessings of it a great thing, which again he introduces with "Behold." "Thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not; and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee." Here is the prophecy of the increase of Messiah's kingdom by means of spiritual multiplication. If this promise is first of all one made to Messiah himself, as supposed by some, it is no less true of his people, with whom he is in all things closely identified. We have only to compare this promise with Psalm xviii, 43, and Rom. x, to see its drift. If we are to understand this increase to be brought about by means of the co-operation of the people with their Witness and Leader, we can see the force of that beautiful passage in John vii, 37-39, in which we are told that, having drunken of the living water ourselves, there shall then flow out of us streams of that living water unto others. This is the divine method for increasing the kingdom of Messiah. First we hear the words of the great Witness, and then we become his witnesses to the whole world, who through our witness shall themselves believe,—as many of them, at least, as "gladly receive our word." (Luke xxiv, 48; Acts ii, 41.) The attraction will be the glorified Christ: "For he hath glorified thee," by raising Jesus from the dead and setting him at his right hand in heaven. (Acts ii, 32-35; iii, 13-15.) Our witness then is everywhere to Jesus and the resurrection. (Acts xi, 19; xvii, 18.)

## II.—THE METHOD OF GRACE.

Having set forth the purpose of God to provide spiritual blessings for the people through Jesus Christ, the prophet now proceeds to show the people what are some of the essential conditions of these blessings. He has before shown them where they are to be had;

that is, in Jehovah, through the great Witness who had previously suffered for them, bearing their iniquities (liii); now he shows them that the life involved is a life inconsistent with wickedness and worldly wisdom.

**1.—What we are to do.**—Four things are mentioned. In the previous part he has bidden the people to hear and hearken, now he bids them (i) “Seek the Lord, while he may be found.” Two things are implied in this. First, that he who comes seeking us (John iv, 23) must himself be sought. He does not cast his pearls before swine, but makes a display of them, showing us where they may be had, and then he sets us on the search for them. Not that he hides them, but that he will have us testify our sincerity and desire. Men seek after the treasures of this world which, when found, do not satisfy, but here are treasures much more worth, which therefore it is meet should be sought. Second, there is an intimation that the Lord may be found. “The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth” (Ps. cxlv, 18; xxxiv, 4; lxxvii, 2); but also another, that the time for seeking will not be unlimited. “While he may be found.” There is a time coming when men shall seek him and shall not find him. When they shall knock and vainly cry, “Lord, Lord, open to us;” but the door will be shut. (Matt. xxv, 12; Prov. i, 28.) (ii) As we seek we are to “call upon him.” This is the natural method when we are seeking a person. If we were seeking for things only we would not call, but all our blessings are found in “him” (Eph. i, 7); therefore as we seek we are to call upon him. The publican, when he went up into the temple to seek the Lord, called upon him, saying: “God be merciful to me a sinner.” (Luke xviii, 13.) “The Lord over all is rich unto all them that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the Lord shall be saved.” (Joel ii, 32; Rom. x, 11–13.) Then there is this positive double injunction: (iii) “Let the wicked forsake his way.” In God’s salvation there is no place for deliberate living in wickedness. It is true that no man can of himself entirely forsake wickedness, for it clings to us as a part of our very being; but then, turning to the Lord, we can be willing to part with our sins, as a man who is not able to cure himself of disease may be more than willing to be cured. “God commandeth all men everywhere to repent.” This is a part of repentance. (iv) Then there is this also, “and the unrighteous man his thoughts.” I think this must refer to the wrong thoughts, the false philosophies of this world which men take up in respect of God and his ways. It is most common for a class of men who pride themselves on righteousness to make answer to God, but

in this fashion: "But I think," or, "My opinion is." It is not what we think or what our opinions are, but what God has revealed to us; and we are to bring our thinking into conformity with his revelation, for our thinking is at best but speculation, whereas God's revelation is the certain and final truth. Wrong-thinking has more to do with keeping men out of the kingdom than wicked ways. David was right when he said "I hate thoughts."

2.—**Why are we to do so?**—God has commanded that we forsake our ways and our thoughts. Not only the wickedness but the futility of our ways; not only the iniquity but the errors of our thoughts. God does not think as man thinks or work as man works. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord." God's ways are higher than ours as the heavens are higher than the earth. Man would save himself by his own works, but God's way is to save us by his works. Man would come to God full of his own merit, but God will have us come to him with our sins. Man would live to do, but God says first accept life as my gift and then do. There is not a step in the way of salvation that does not proceed upon principles of truth entirely contrary to those which by nature man knows and accepts. So then we are to humble ourselves and listen to what God says, and then abandon our ways and accept his way.

### III.—THE INFALLIBLE WORD.

The God of nature is the God of grace, and so we are constantly finding in the Scriptures the way of God in the spiritual world illustrated by his working in the natural. When God calls upon men to give up their way of thinking and doing, and accept his word and way, they are afraid to trust him. He appeals to certain fixed and well-known laws and operations of nature. So he says: "As the rain and snow descending from heaven do not return thither by evaporation until they have accomplished their purpose in causing the seed lying buried in the ground to germinate and bring forth the harvest, for seed and bread, so shall the word, that proceedeth out of his mouth, not return without producing the effect for which he has designed it. He has made a promise to man; he also has declared the consequence of disobedience. Men have learned to trust to the effect of rain and snow upon the seed planted in the earth; but have no confidence in the operation of his word on which they may as infallibly rely. "It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please; and it shall prosper in the thing

whereto I sent it." We might abundantly illustrate this truth by appealing to the promise and the fulfillment of the word in the matters which God designed. For instance, Jesus said of the Gospel that it "shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations." (Matt. xxiv, 14.) This was uttered nearly two thousand years ago, and, humanly speaking, it was the most unlikely prophecy ever uttered, and yet we are now seeing its daily fulfillment. The missionary enterprise of the Gospel has prospered, and is prospering as no human enterprise in the world. The Gospel to-day is translated into nearly three hundred different languages and dialects, and the heralds of the cross are everywhere preaching its glad news to the nations of the earth. A score of Scriptures twice and ten times multiplied, tell us that whosoever believeth on the Son of God shall be saved. Let the millions of Christians all over the world testify to the saving and sanctifying power of the Gospel. (I. Tim. i., 15, 16; John i, 11, 12; v, 24; James i, 18; Eph. v, 25.) There is another thing whereunto God's word has been sent, namely, to judge the world. "I am come a light into the world, that whoso believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words and believe not, I judge him not, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." (John xii, 46-48.) God has confirmed his word with an oath (Heb. vi, 17, 18.), that we might put absolute confidence in it. Happy is the man who does so to the extent of believing and obeying it; and woe to the man who disregards it. Let all then understand that the gracious promises contained in this chapter may be relied on. As we are confident that God's word in Nature (natural law) is infallible, so let us be sure that the word of the same God in the spiritual world has the same binding force and operative power.

#### IV.—JOYFUL EFFECTS OF BELIEVING.

The prophet closes his wonderful chapter with assurances of Jehovah that the people who hear and believe his word shall go forth with joy and be led forth with peace. Again he declares the creation to be in profound and glad sympathy with man. It shall partake of his joy, both in its glad song, in its regeneration, and its fruitfulness. These concluding verses have, like those previous, a primary reference to the temporal deliverance from captivity, but their chief significance lies in their spiritual foresight as to the



regeneration of man and Nature. Under the power of God, man shall throw off his captivity to Satan and sin, and go forth redeemed and sanctified; shall henceforth no more bring forth the works of the flesh, but yield the fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. v, 18-25.) Nature herself shall cease to bring forth briers; and the regenerated creation—earth and man—“shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.” Then shall “all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ; to the intent that now unto principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.” (Eph. iii, 9-13.)

## VII.

## THE NEW COVENANT.—Jeremiah xxxi, 27-37.

(27) Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast. (28) And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the Lord. (29) In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. (30) But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge. (31) Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: (32) Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith the Lord: (33) But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. (34) And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (35) Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The Lord of hosts is his name: (36) If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. (37) Thus saith the Lord; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord.—Jeremiah xxxi, 27-37.

Jeremiah lived and prophesied more than an hundred years after Isaiah. He was a sorrowful prophet, because he was constantly the bearer of heavy tidings to the people of God. They had waxed worse and worse, and so, as the day of their captivity drew near, the prophet, with loyalty to God and sincere affection for his deceived and sin-blinded people, continued through good report and evil to be faithful to them in warning, rebuke, and exhortation. He was a man who suffered much for the truth, but suffered gladly, though with a sorrowful heart,—sorrowful more for the people than for himself. When the captivity came he went with his people into it, and continued with them in Babylon. The chapter from which our study

is selected is one in which there is a rift in the dark and lowering clouds of heavy prophecy. The particular portion of the chapter under study is the only clear evangelical declaration in the book. It reads more like Isaiah than Jeremiah. It must have been a great gladness to that sad-hearted and sorrowful prophet to have this glimpse of coming restoration and grace for his sinful and sorely afflicted people. He was all the more glad to pour in this balsam because he had hitherto been giving them salt for their wounds and wormwood to drink. The prophet seems to have had his previous visions in sleep (v. 26), and he found that sleep sweet to him; for in it he had seen things that comforted his soul as well as satiated and replenished other weary souls (v. 25). Whether he went to sleep again and saw this marvelous truth concerning the new covenant does not appear. But it is certain that he is the first to see the fact of the new covenant of grace in its relation to the old covenant, and the condition of the people under it.

### I.—THE NEW PLANTATION.

Hitherto it had been his sad and sorrowful duty to declare to the people God's purpose to "root out, to pull down, and to destroy and throw down"; but now the time has come to fulfill his task of declaring God's purpose to "build and to plant." (i, 10.) The devastation of the land of Israel and Judah had been complete, the slain of the people vast in numbers; the utter taking away and dispersing of the ten tribes had left but a remnant even before the captivity of Judah. The promise of a restoration of Judah to the land would be, even when fulfilled, but the return of a mere handful of people and cattle. So small, indeed, that the land would still seem to be desolate for want of inhabitants, and in poverty, for want of cattle. In view of this very discouraging outlook, the prophet speaks this most comforting promise.

1.—**The sowing.**—"I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast." The same promise was made to Israel and Judah by Ezekiel (xxxvi, 9-11), and by Hosea (ii, 23). This promise seems to include the gathering in of the Gentiles as well, just as the same covenant promise is made to them as to the returned Jews. The figure is one of the greatest encouragement. The remnant of the people and cattle are as the handful of seed for the ground, but God will so bless them that they shall increase like seed sown before a great harvest that shall fill the land. The same thought is expressed in Psalm lxxii, 16:

“There shall be a handful of corn in the earth on the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon; and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.” This prophecy was scarcely realized in the return from Babylon, but it had the beginning of its fulfillment then. Like almost all the other predictions of final blessing and glory in connection with Messiah’s reign, it looked beyond the time of the return, to the second coming of Christ, when all the scattered Jews shall be gathered into their own land, and the Gentile nations shall also be incorporated with them and become joint heirs with them of the promises of God. There is a suggestion here of the method of multiplication of the people, as seed sown in the ground multiplies into a great harvest, so shall living Christians multiply themselves in those whom they are the means of converting to God. How Andrew multiplied himself when he found Peter, who after was the means of winning three thousand souls at one preaching. Stephen multiplied himself through Saul of Tarsus. In this latter case seed was literally sown in the ground, and out of the martyr blood sprung the Apostle of the Gentiles.

**2.—The watching.**—“And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them to pluck up,” etc., “so will I watch over them to build and to plant, saith the Lord.” The growth of God’s kingdom in the earth among men is not a mere process of nature. It goes on in the power of God’s special and supernatural gifts of grace, and is carried forward under his watchful eye and fostering care. Not one least convert makes his appearance in the world but that God watches over him to protect and defend. His promise is that “their soul shall be as a watered garden.” (v. 12.) It is comforting to know that God’s promise of grace and favor is as true as his threats have proved. He warned the people that he would pluck up and cast down and destroy and root up. (i, 10.) This he had done most thoroughly and completely until the land had been shaved as with a razor. They had in their misery and desolation the evidence of God’s faithfulness to his word. Now let them know that he would be as true to his promise. If sin has abounded to our ruin, let us know that grace doth much more abound to our salvation.

**3.—The new individual relation between God and the people.**—The saying which the prophet alludes to: “The fathers have eaten a sour grape and the children’s teeth are set on edge,” shall no longer be in vogue when that day of grace of which the prophet speaks comes. He condemns the saying, as does Ezekiel. (xviii, 1-3.) There was a certain truth in the saying, but it had been perverted, and the entire proverb had been quoted in such a way as to

cast a reproach of injustice upon God. It is true that God had proclaimed that he was a "jealous God, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Ex. xx, 5), but he had also distinctly affirmed that this great law of entailed suffering was not meant to teach the doctrine that God unjustly held the innocent children of sinful fathers guilty of their fathers' offense. The passage in question, *i. e.*, the second commandment, distinctly affirms that the consequences shall be upon the generations of them that hate him. The same visitations which shall come upon the fathers who commit iniquity shall come upon their children if they commit iniquity; there is one rule for the father and for the son even down to remotest generation. Again it is distinctly affirmed: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin." (Deut. xxiv, 16.) An illustration of this law is seen in II. Kings xiv, 6. Notwithstanding, the unbelieving and wicked Jews had taken this law of God and perverted it into a proverb which charged God with injustice. As a matter of fact, there is a law of heredity, both physical and moral, to which every one must submit. It is impossible to shut one's eyes to the fact, but then, according to God's law, and especially according to his grace, moral responsibility does not attach to this hereditary transmission of consequences unless the heir consents to the father's sin and walks in his way. Any individual descendant may break the heredity at any point he pleases by turning to the Lord. It is also true that in former times God dealt with the nation as such, rather than with individuals. The nation's sin brought their present calamities upon them, in which many individually righteous men suffered; but in the days to come the national will give place to the individual relation. This for two reasons. First, the nation as a whole will have learned righteousness in that day, and so it will come to pass that the individual transgressor will be so conspicuously by himself, that it will be seen at a glance that his suffering or judgment will rest upon the fact of his own sin. Hitherto the individually righteous man had been so rare in the nation that he was overlooked and swept away in the tide of the nation's punishment, just as Caleb and Joshua were carried back into the wilderness for forty years, with the whole unbelieving nation. But, second, there is a distinct advance in thought by the prophet in the direction of that individuality of relation which characterizes the new covenant in distinction from that which was so apparent in the old. Under the law the oneness and entirety of the nation was

maintained; under the Gospel the individual soul is brought before God. "Every one of us shall give an account of himself to God." (Rom. xiv, 12.) Nothing could more mark the great advance in thought than this prophetic declaration; nothing could, in the light of the New Testament revelation, be a greater proof of the inspiration of this passage and the Spiritual control of the prophet.

## II.—THE NEW COVENANT.

The progressive thought and promises of the prophet in the name of Jehovah must excite wonder at their radical character, especially in respect of the individuality which he had just proclaimed. As if to explain and justify his new doctrine, he announces the fact of a new covenant. This is the first distinct announcement of the new dispensation under this title. This covenant is to differ radically in terms and contents from the old covenant which God made with the children of Israel when he brought them out of Egypt. Reference is clear to the New Testament dispensation, as may be seen from Heb. viii. By a covenant is meant an appointment by God. We are not to understand that God entered into a contract with man. He appointed certain things, promised certain things, upon certain conditions which the people were to perform. But the covenant or agreement was wholly of his own making. He did not say to the people, "If you will do so and so, I will do so and so." But he says, "I have chosen of my own free will and grace to promise certain things to you upon conditions which I propose." The old covenant, so far as the blessings were concerned, had failed utterly because of the utter failure of the people to "do the things" which God commanded. Therefore he has taken it away and substituted another covenant, based upon better promises—one in which he not only proposes blessings, but undertakes to fulfill the conditions upon which they shall flow in to us.

**1.—Some contrasts.**—The old covenant was broken by the disobedience of the people, though in the administration thereof God had acted throughout as a forgiving husband who was constantly compounding the sins of an unfaithful wife. But this new covenant is kept and secured by the performance of all its conditions by God himself, acting in and through Christ. (Heb. viii, 6.) The old covenant was a faulty one, never intended indeed to be the means of their salvation, but only to remind them of their sin and show them their helplessness. Not faulty in the thing it was intended to accomplish, but in its final ability to save; whereas the new covenant,

made in and with Christ for our sakes, is a perfect covenant in terms and in fulfillment, and so does secure our salvation. (Heb. viii, 6-13; x, 1-22; Rom. viii, 3, 4.) The old covenant had a complicated and elaborate ceremonial, which could not be understood or administered except by priests and ministers, and then but imperfectly; the new covenant is simply based on the one complete offering which Jesus Christ has made for all time and for all people; he being at once, tabernacle, priest, altar, offering, and minister. We simply, as sinners, go to God by him, confess that we are sinners, acknowledge that we are helpless either to get rid of sin or maintain righteousness, and call upon him to save us. This he does fully, freely, and eternally by his grace, without any merit of our own. Under the old covenant the provisions for the canceling of sins were not only imperfect, but utterly futile, every offering made by man through the priests being in fact but a remembrance of sin, not a removal of it; whereas in this new covenant there is perfect provision. (Heb. x.) Therefore on its basis the forgiveness of sins is freely proclaimed. (v. 34; Heb. x, 17, 18.)

**2.—Chief characteristics.**—The prophet mentions three: (i) *Inwardness*. “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.” The terms of the old covenant, indeed its whole contents, were written first in tables of stone, and then all its detail in external laws, which the people were compelled to bind between their eyes, on their wrists, and fix them on the door-plates of their houses and the posts of their gates. The whole relation was as between an outward law and an outward obedience. The law commanded and the subject had to obey. The law of Moses did not take account of thoughts or motives, only of actions. The action was not that of faith, but of works. But this new covenant is not so proclaimed and written. Jesus shows in the Sermon on the Mount that true righteousness extends to thoughts and motives, and so the true life of God is not in externals, but in heart relation to God. Therefore we are God’s children, not by national or family relation, but by a new birth, by faith in Jesus Christ. We obey the law not because of outward pressure, but from inward conviction, not by the fear of external punishment, but by the constraint of an inward love. In the new creation which comes to believers under the new covenant (II. Cor. v, 17), they are not bound by a multitude of statutes and minute rules, but constrained by a personal love to and for Jesus Christ. It is now an affectionate loyalty to a Divine Person; no longer a fearful obedience to an external, cold, and pitiless law. God in the new birth (which is in fact the birth of Christ in the soul)

brings in great principles of righteousness with which every Christian, without respect to age or intellectual training, becomes instinct, and by which his life is regulated. David caught a glimpse of this when he said in his penitential psalm: "Behold thou desireth truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom." An old writer says, in answer to an anxious inquiry as to what a Christian may and may not do: "Love God and do what you please." That is, if the heart is controlled by the love of God, if the law is written in the heart, then the Christian will know what is right and wrong by the instinct of the law of righteousness in him, and will only desire to do that thing which heart and conscience teach him. Christ in us the hope of Glory is the best law a Christian can have. This is to walk with God, and to walk with God is certainly to walk in paths of righteousness. (ii) *Knowledge*. "And they shall teach no more every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord." I think the sense of this passage is that, under the new covenant with the law in the inward parts and written in the heart, the system shall not be dependent on intellectual training or culture. Philosophical or scientific knowledge must be painfully taught and more painfully learned. The uneducated and the young cannot grasp the principles or master the details; but with the knowledge of God in the heart by the new birth, the preaching of the Gospel becomes intelligible to every hearer renewed by the Spirit. The young child is often as enlightened in the things of the Spirit as the aged scholar; the ignorant negro as intelligent in spiritual things as his cultured master. This knowledge is for the least as well as the greatest, and is dependent not so much upon teaching and learning as upon spiritual apprehension. Therefore the greatest of all Christian teachers declared that his "speech and his preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and in power;" and therefore the wise and prudent, the great and the mighty, were not so apt to become Christians as the simple-minded (not simpletons) and the poor, who, knowing they have not intellectual culture, look at once to the Spirit to teach them in connection with the preaching of the Gospel. (I. Cor. i, 13-end; ii, 1-10.) So also John declares that, with this law in our hearts and the Spirit of God for a teacher, we are not dependent upon any one to teach us the essential truth of the Gospel. "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth and is no lie, and



even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him." (I. John ii, 27.) (iii) *Universality*. "From the least to the greatest" is an expression which carries with it the idea of universality as to the race. The old covenant was confined to the Jewish people, the new covenant, or the Gospel, is "for all people." The terms of the covenant of grace are the same to all; the masses of heathendom are to be dealt with just as the so-called Christian nations. "There is no difference" now, for as all have sinned, all have been brought under the provisions of grace. Let the covenant, then, be published abroad.

**3.—The contents of the Covenant.**—These are three. (i) "I will be their God." This was a promise under the old covenant; it shall be more than confirmed under the new. They had forfeited the right of having him for their God by their breach of his covenant, but now that which could not be theirs by law comes to be theirs by Grace. After his resurrection, Jesus sent this message to his disciples: "Go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." (John xx, 17.) This is the relation now. He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the same close and blessed way he is our God and Father. This was better than any relation under the old covenant could have been, even if it had been kept. Then, as it were, he could have been but as a step-father, but now he is our Father, as being the father of our spirits. (ii) "They shall be my people." Not an outward and earthly people, but an heavenly and spiritual. Every one shall be born of the Spirit, and each one is so an offspring of God. This promise is often emphasized in the closing book of Revelation: "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." (Rev. xxi, 3, 4.) (iii) The forgiveness of sin. "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." This is the most precious promise in the new covenant. It is that which Jesus himself emphasized when he expounded to his disciples the meaning of his death: "For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins." (Matt. xxvi, 28.) This is the great promise which the apostle held out to the people: "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." (Acts xiii, 38.) This is that which more than anything else illustrates the blessing of redemption: "In him (Jesus)

we have redemption, through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." (Eph. i, 7.) We might multiply passages innumerable to show this great blessing, and how it glows in the forefront of all those of the new covenant. Not only does he forgive our iniquities, but he utterly forgets them. They never come into his mind again. How happy the man whose sins are thus blotted out and forgotten! (Ps. xxxii, 1.)

### III.—ASSURANCES.

The wonderful covenant promises are now guaranteed by such assurances as must satisfy any people or any soul. God appeals to the heavens, where he has set the sun, moon, and stars for lights by day and night, whose permanency is accepted; he appeals to the ocean, which obeys some mysterious power, and never fails. As long as they endure, so shall the terms of this covenant stand. When heaven and earth can be measured and searched out, and the ordinances of heaven and earth fail, then shall the seed of Israel fail, but not till then. (vs. 36, 37.)

## VIII.

## JEHOIAKIM'S WICKEDNESS.—Jeremiah xxxvi, 19-31.

(19) Then said the princes unto Baruch, Go, hide thee, thou and Jeremiah; and let no man know where ye be. (20) And they went in to the king into the court, but they laid up the roll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and told all the words in the ears of the king. (21) So the king sent Jehudi to fetch the roll; and he took it out of Elishama the scribe's chamber. And Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes which stood beside the king. (22) Now the king sat in the winter house in the ninth month: and there was a fire on the hearth burning before him. (23) And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth. (24) Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words. (25) Nevertheless Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah had made intercession to the king that he would not burn the roll; but he would not hear them. (26) But the king commanded Jerahmeel the son of Hammelech, and Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel, to take Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet: but the Lord hid them. (27) Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, after that the king had burned the roll, and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah, saying, (28) Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned. (29) And thou shalt say to Jehoiakim king of Judah, Thus saith the Lord; Thou hast burned this roll, saying, Why hast thou written therein, saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast? (30) Therefore thus saith the Lord of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. (31) And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them; but they hearkened not.—Jeremiah xxxvi, 19-31.

We have before us one of the most tragic acts of wickedness recorded in the history of the kings of Judah. It is in striking contrast with the act of the good King Josiah (II. Chron. xxxiv, 15-33), who, when the lost book of the law was found, humbled himself and gave instant heed to its warnings and precepts; all the more so because the good king was father of this wicked and defiant one. Truly grace does not run in the blood. Jehoahaz succeeded his father to the throne, but reigned only a few months when the king of Egypt deposed him, and put his brother Eliakim on the throne instead, at the same time changing his name to Jehoiakim. Of his

reign we have little account, the incident recorded in our study being the chief event of his life that we know. He was but a vassal of Egypt, and was soon to be the captive of the king of Babylon. (II. Kings xxiv, 1-6; II. Chron. xxxvi, 1-9.) His whole reign was marked by impiety and abominations, of which this act of daring sacrilege and defiance was the chief. The chapter before us relates how Jeremiah had written out a summary of the prophecies concerning the impending captivity, and caused it to be read to the people assembled at a great and special fast in the temple, and afterward to the princes in private, and finally to the king. (1-19.) The object of the special message was one of compassion and pity on the part of Jehovah. "It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way: and present their supplication before the Lord: that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin." (vs. 3, 7.) It is wonderful how, in the midst of his wrath, God always remembers mercy; and though he knew that the king and the people would not hear, would not supplicate, would not turn from their evil way, yet his gracious purpose in sending them the warning was in good faith, and testifies his love. The reading of the prophecy to the people evidently made a deep impression, for the news of it was carried to the princes, who sent for Baruch and had him read it to them. They in turn were deeply affected, and said it must be brought before the king. They, however, knew his tyrannical temper, and took two precautions. First, after hearing from Baruch's lips how he came to write this prophecy of woe, they warned him to go with Jeremiah, and both to secrete themselves from the wrath of the king; then they laid the writing up in the house of the scribe (vs. 15-19), and lastly went in to report the matter to the king. These princes seemed favorable to the prophet and to the word of God, but they feared the king. An evil king can suppress the good that is in his people and prevent a whole nation from repentance or reformation. Men in authority have great privilege, but also great responsibility. We have a case in point out here in India. The Queen of England, in her proclamation of 1858, after the Sepoy rebellion, guaranteed to the Hindoos absolute protection for their religious rites and customs, and has forbidden any official to attempt to convert any heathen from his heathenism to Christianity. The result is that almost the entire European population, both official and unofficial, has taken its cue from this royal edict to justify themselves in an almost absolute indifference to all missionary enterprise, and many of them even oppose all such efforts.

## I.—THE WORD OF GOD DESTROYED.

The burden of the word of Jeremiah, which was a summary of all his prophecies on this point, was that Judah should be carried away captive by the king of Babylon. (v. 29.) This was not the first warning, but the gathering up of all past threats; it was God's final word to the king and the people. The picture of the reading of the solemn word is briefly but graphically told. When the king heard of the prophecy, he sent for the roll; and seating himself in his winter house (which was a part of the royal palace), where he had a brazen or earthen pot before him filled with fire for the purposes of comfort, he ordered the writing to be read to him. As it was read, he ordered it bit by bit to be cut away and thrown into the fire until all was consumed. He was a tyrant, and his word was obeyed by his immediate servants, though the princes who had brought him word protested, or rather entreated him not to do so. In this action the following points may be noted.

1.—**The contempt of the king.**—The princes had put the writing away in the house of the scribe (20) before they went in to the king. This was a testimony of their respect for a message sent by a prophet of the Lord, and of their fear for its safety. The king, however, had no such feelings of reverence for God's word. He did not even dignify the document by sending a proper official to bring it; but showed his contempt by telling a page or under secretary to fetch it. This act was a suggestive prelude to what followed afterward. We do not encourage Bible worship, but we certainly do feel that even the paper on which the word of God is printed, and the book into which it is bound, is entitled to more respect than that which attaches to any other book. We may show this respect to the material Bible without being accused of superstition. The Bible of all books is entitled to the place of highest honor, and it is a bad sign when this due respect ceases to be manifest.

2.—**The rage of the king.**—As the book was being read, the king overlooked the message, which undoubtedly was incorporated, that God hoped that the reading of it might induce them to turn from their sins and claim his promised mercy. Many people, who declaim against what they call the hard and bitter denunciation of sin and of the judgments of God, seem persistently to forget that the book which condemns sinners to death and hell is mostly taken up with earnest and loving entreaties to repentance, with promises of life and salvation. The anger of the king was really against God, though

it was manifested against his word. God was beyond his reach, but his word being within his grasp, he poured out his wrath against that. He ordered it to be cut to pieces and burned with fire. This was not a hasty and impulsive action on the part of the king, but deliberate and premeditated. He perseveres in his evil work, notwithstanding the remonstrances of his princes. He was a "proud and haughty scorner, who dealt in proud wrath." (Prov. xxi, 24.) There are times when remonstrance ceases to be wise, and a willful sinner must be given up to his chosen way. The reason for his wrath was the evil tidings which the prophet's words brought him. Yet how foolish was his wrath—how impotent his rage! For what did he destroy? Only the parchment on which the word of God was written; not the word of God itself. That had been spoken; and the word of God, once spoken, is like the rain and the snow which cometh down from heaven, and returneth not thither again until it accomplishes that whereunto it is sent. It is related of a heathen princess of hideous countenance, that, on looking into a mirror which a missionary had, and seeing her ugliness, she destroyed the glass in rage, and ordered that no more mirrors should be brought into her kingdom. I once saw a man in a railway carriage, to whom a leaf of the New Testament had been given, crumple it up in his hand, fling it on the floor, spit on it, and grind it under his heel. This action was as ridiculous as it was impotent. The rage of the hater of God's word was evoked, but the word of God was not destroyed.

**3.—The attitude of the witnesses.**—There were two classes of witnesses present. (i) The king's servants; his pages and immediate attendants. "Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king nor any of his servants that heard all these words." This implies that the message not only failed to bring about any repentance or desire that the evils threatened might be averted (compare II. Chron. xxxiv, 19), but that the servants were not even horrified at the action of the king in ordering the writing to be destroyed. They silently acquiesced in the king's wickedness, choosing rather to obey and fall in with the sin of an earthly tyrant than to fear and reverence the heavenly and merciful ruler of the universe. They became parties to the act of the king in his willful unbelief, in his contempt and deliberate defiance of Jehovah. When we join ourselves either in service or companionship with unbelieving men, we must be prepared either to go with them or break from them, when a crisis comes by reason of God's word. This is a lesson that all Christians ought to lay to heart in view of their social and

business relations with an unbelieving world. We may serve an ungodly king, like Daniel, if we have the courage to take God's part when occasion comes, or we may have social and business relations with unbelievers, if we are prepared to act in a like loyal manner. But how often a timid Christian finds himself overborne by his wicked companions when they warm themselves at their fire, as with Peter in the High Priest's palace. (ii) On the other hand, there were three princes present who "made intercession to the king, that he would not burn the roll; but he would not hear them." They had, however, cleared their skirts and washed their souls from the iniquity. They did not prevent the king from his wickedness, but they made their protest and appeal, and so were not included in his guilt. Are we as faithful in all such like emergencies? I once knew a young convert, a gentleman in high social position, who, when Jesus Christ and his Gospel were being openly scoffed at by his host, with whom he was dining, first stood up for Christ and protested against the scoffing; then, when it continued, he rose from the table, saying that he could not longer sit at table, with even his best earthly friend, who mocked at his Saviour. This was true heroism, though he was denounced by the worldly company as being discourteous to his host, and rude in presence of the guests.

**4.—The baffled king.**—Having destroyed the writing, the king began to reflect that he had not avoided God's word or put himself beyond the further reach of it, so long as the scribe and the prophet were at large. He therefore sent to have them arrested. Probably he contemplated their murder, thinking thus he would get rid of the word. This is an old method with the haters of God. "But the Lord hid them." Let us suppose he had succeeded in getting hold of the prophet and had killed him; would he next seek to destroy God too? This would be the logical course. How men forget that when they have destroyed the outward revelation, they have not destroyed the word of God; and when they have killed the prophets they have not baffled the Spirit by whom the prophets speak. God hid his prophet and his scribe. Man is immortal till God has no further need of him. God does not always thus hide his prophets from the wrath of men; but he can do so if he has further need of them. He so hid Elijah from the wrath of Ahab. He delivered Elisha, by concealment, from the wrath of a heathen king. He preserved the lives of Daniel and the Hebrew children even in a lion's den and in a furnace of fire. Yet he suffered Stephen to be stoned to death at his first testimony; while, on the other hand, he sent an angel to deliver Peter out of prison, and an earthquake to set Paul

and Silas free. Who shall say whether Stephen or Peter served the Lord best and wrought most powerfully, one by death or the other by life? Let all God's witnesses know of a truth that God can deliver his servants from any manifestation of the wrath of man, if it is best for them and for his cause; and let them know when he does not deliver, it is neither for want of love, faithfulness, or power, but because all round it is best that they should seal their testimony with suffering or death. He delivered up his own Son to the cross; but then a little later he delivered him out of the power of death and the grave. Let us trust God. He will in one way or the other always baffle his enemies and deliver his servants; if not always in this world, certainly in the next.

## II.—THE INDESTRUCTIBLE WORD.

The facts in this incident bring out clearly the truth, that man's hatred and rage against God's word are as impotent as is the broken wave that falls back in spray from the rock against which it has spent itself. In this conflict of man against God's message, we see that it is neither a book nor a man against which the enemies of Christ fight. God can reproduce his word, either by the same prophet, as he did in this case, or by another. Before the world can get rid of the Gospel, it must kill all the believers in the world, and then they must not be too sure that God has not hidden his word as he hid his prophet, to come forth unexpectedly, as the law came forth in the time of Josiah. Millions of Bibles may be destroyed, and the preachers and witnesses of the word burned and put to the sword, but it only serves to both increase the word of God and multiply the witnesses. When will the world learn that they cannot fight against God? Look only at the impotence of men in this conflict in the past. One Herod destroyed the little children, but God hid his Christ; another Herod beheaded John the Baptist, but failed utterly to destroy his testimony. The world crucified Christ; but God raised him from the dead. The world imprisoned the apostles, stoned Stephen, put James to the sword, persecuted the young Church, but this only served to increase the number of believers and multiply the revelation. Paul wrote more Epistles while in prison than he would have if he had been free. John wrote the Revelation while he was exiled for the word of God. Even could the enemy destroy every word which God has spoken to this world, so far as the written word is concerned, they could not then prevent God from fulfilling his word of promise to the faithful, or from executing his



judgment upon unbelievers. "The word of God cannot be broken," or defeated,—as this foolish and wicked king found out. Several points more may be noted in connection with this latter half of our study.

**1.—God takes note of our treatment of his word.**—It is evident that the eyes of the Lord were upon the king while he was burning the roll, from the fact that, immediately afterward, he commissioned Jeremiah to rewrite it. If men only realized the fact that God is taking note of all that they do, listening to all that they say, making record even of their secret thoughts, there would be less of this foolish and mad defiance of him and his word. "Thou God seest me," is a word that we should keep ever before our minds.

**2.—The word rewritten.**—"Not one jot or tittle" of God's word shall pass away till all be fulfilled. Jehoiakim destroyed the first writing of Jeremiah with penknife and fire, and would have destroyed the prophet; but no sooner had he got through with his wicked and defiant work, than God immediately commanded it all to be written again. What was the king advantaged by his work? What are any of us advantaged by our unbelief? Suppose we say: "I do not believe God's word," will that alter the fact that it will be carried out to the letter? Suppose, instead of destroying God's word, we keep it closed, never look into it and never go where it is preached, or, reading and hearing, do not heed it; will that prevent it from being fulfilled? Shall our unbelief make God's word to be a lie? Did the unbelief of the antediluvians prevent the flood? Did the unbelief of the Sodomites prevent the destruction of their city, and themselves in it? Did the unbelief of the Jews prevent their captivity? Will the unbelief of the men and women of our day prevent the solemn words of Jesus Christ, "He that believeth not shall be damned," from being carried out?

**3.—More words added.**—In the first message God had simply told the king that he and the people would be carried away captive, but now he adds more, saying that for this act of wickedness he himself should be deprived of a direct heir, and his body should be cast out and exposed to the heat of the day and the frost of the night. He would not only bring upon the men of Judah all that he had first declared, but would add an especial punishment to the king. Cumulative unbelief brings cumulative punishment. "With the burial of an ass shall he be buried; dragged and east out far from the gates of Jerusalem," and none shall mourn for him, either as brother, or kindred, or king. (xxii, 19.) To mutilate the word of God, either by adding to it or destroying it, is to bring special additional plagues and sufferings upon the transgressor. (Rev. xxii, 18, 19.)

Let us learn this solemn lesson in connection with the word of God. His word is eternal; it can neither be bound nor broken; that it will not cease in the world until all that is written therein be fulfilled. All the unbelief, neglect, and rage against it is utterly futile. "All flesh is as grass, and the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field; the grass withereth, and the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever." (Is. xl, 6-8.)

**" Within this ample volume lies  
The mystery of mysteries.  
Happiest they of human race  
To whom their God has given grace  
To read, to fear, to hope, to pray,  
To lift the latch and force the way:  
And better had they ne'er been born  
Than read to doubt, or read to scorn."**

## IX.

## JEREMIAH PERSECUTED.—Jeremiah xxxvii, 11–21.

(11) And it came to pass, that when the army of the Chaldeans was broken up from Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh's army, (12) Then Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin, to separate himself thence in the midst of the people. (13) And when he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the ward was there, whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah; and he took Jeremiah the prophet, saying, Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans. (14) Then said Jeremiah, It is false; I fall not away to the Chaldeans. But he hearkened not to him: so Irijah took Jeremiah, and brought him to the princes. (15) Wherefore the princes were wroth with Jeremiah, and smote him, and put him in prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe; for they had made that the prison. (16) When Jeremiah was entered into the dungeon, and into the cabins, and Jeremiah had remained there many days; (17) Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took him out; and the king asked him secretly in his house, and said, Is there any word from the Lord? And Jeremiah said, There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon. (18) Moreover Jeremiah said unto king Zedekiah, What have I offended against thee, or against thy servants, or against this people, that ye have put me in prison? (19) Where are now your prophets which prophesied unto you, saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land? (20) Therefore hear now, I pray thee, O my lord the king: let my supplication, I pray thee, be accepted before thee; that thou cause me not to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there. (21) Then Zedekiah the king commanded that they should commit Jeremiah into the court of the prison, and that they should give him daily a piece of bread out of the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city were spent. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.—Jeremiah xxxvii, 11–21.

After the captivity and death of Jehoiakim his brother Zedekiah, another son of Josiah, sat upon the throne. He seems to have been of weak and superstitious rather than of vicious character, though it is said that neither he nor his servants, nor the people of the land, hearkened unto the words of Jeremiah. They seemed to be infatuated with the idea that Jerusalem had, with the help of their Egyptian allies, strength to resist the assaults and siege of the Chaldeans. False prophets had persuaded the king that he would break the Chaldean yoke, and as this event was more favorable to his own wishes than were the stern words of Jeremiah, they had been accepted as truthful, while the true prophet was discredited. Jeremiah seems to have been at liberty in the meantime. The king

had sent a message to him to pray for the deliverance of the city from the besieging Chaldeans. Jeremiah had again told the king plainly that the city was doomed. The Egyptian army had in the meantime come up and the Chaldeans had withdrawn. Yet the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah to tell the king that this was but a temporary withdrawal of the enemy; that they would return again; and, moreover, that even though the Chaldeans should be reduced to a few wounded men, even they should rise up and burn the city. The city was doomed; nothing could defend it. The cup of the people was full of their iniquity, and they must drink it dry. When God was for Jerusalem, he could make them victorious over their foes, though they were but a handful, and without weapons; but when he was against them, he could make their foes, however small a company of wounded men, to have complete victory over them. He whom God is for, is invincible; he whom God is against, is impotent. This was in effect the message which Jeremiah sent to Zedekiah.

### I.—JEREMIAH IMPRISONED.

The advent of the Egyptian allies had compelled the Chaldeans to raise the siege; and the gates of the city were opened, so that the people could go in and out again at will. This opportunity was seized on by Jeremiah to leave the city for the country, which action led to his arrest and imprisonment.

1.—**Jeremiah goes forth.**—The question of what was the object for which the prophet left the city, has given rise to much discussion. The reading of the authorized version simply is that “he went” (or purposed) “to go into the land of Benjamin, to separate himself thence in the midst of the people.” This is not very intelligible. It has been supposed that there was a new allotment of land in the tribe of Benjamin, and that Jeremiah had gone up to secure his portion. It is not very material to the lesson of the story what his object was. The simple fact is that, having left the city or been observed in the act of so doing, suspicions as to his purpose were aroused in the mind of the keeper of the gate, and so he was arrested. Jeremiah was perfectly free and within his rights as a citizen to depart from the city if he chose, and to go up into the land of Benjamin, where he belonged; but whether he was wise under the existing circumstances is a question.

1.—**Accused and arrested.**—As the prophet was departing from the city by the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the guard being there and recognizing him, either suspected him of desertion to the enemy

or hating him for his prophecies against Jerusalem, feigned suspicion, charged him with the treason of intending to desert the city and go over to the Chaldeans; and arrested him. The times were critical, and suspicions were rife on every hand. Jeremiah had persistently declared that the city would fall into the hand of the Chaldeans; had advised the king and the people quietly to accept the situation and surrender; had warned them again and again that resistance was not only useless, but would bring worse calamities upon them. All this, of course, irritated the people and made Jeremiah very unpopular. Though he was free in the city, he was the object of universal execration and hatred. Under these circumstances it would have been wiser for Jeremiah to have remained in the city and taken his part with the inhabitants; certainly it was unwise to lay himself open to a suspicion of desertion by leaving the city at such a time, just after the delivery of his last message to the king. Possibly he did not think that his visit to the country would be misconstrued. Innocent men are not always men of prudence. Having no evil intention themselves, they cannot understand how others will think evil of them. Jeremiah's visit to the country may have been (and doubtless was) perfectly justifiable and harmless, yet it had the appearance of evil to those who were of suspicious inclinations. It is not always wise to do the lawful things which lie before us, even though there be no actual harm in the action. While a true child of God must not be hindered from doing his duty through fear of what evil-minded men may say or do, it is not always necessary that they should do what is lawful for them to do in mere defiance of malignant enemies. The prophet's business to the country seems to have been entirely of a private character. Perhaps he was disgusted with the king and people, and just left the city in that state of mind. In any case he should have taken counsel of God and considered the circumstances before exposing himself to the suspicions and malice of his enemies. In times of excitement and contention between God and an evil-thinking generation, his servants have need to walk with the greatest circumspection. On the other hand, the action of the captain of the guard was most reprehensible, and illustrates the injustice with which unbelieving and wicked men are commonly disposed to treat God's people. He had no real ground for suspecting Jeremiah of treachery and desertion to the enemy; for though he had prophesied the fall of Jerusalem, there was nothing in his conduct hitherto which would indicate that he was not the true friend of his country. But enemies who wish to find an occasion against God's people can readily do so. Nothing is more common

than for the actions of good men to be misjudged. Action can only be interpreted by motive, and many a man of God has been suspected of wrong-doing, even of crime, by reason of an action which, instead of being evil, has been, if judged by motive, most praiseworthy. Unbelievers are apt to judge the actions of God's people by their own method of procedure. I heard an officer in the English army say last autumn that all missionaries in India were the merest mercenaries; that their only motive in coming out here was salary. I asked him why, and on what ground he made such a charge. His reply was that he could conceive of no other motive, and admitted that nothing would induce him to devote his life to trying to convert heathen but a good round salary. I immediately denounced him as a mere mercenary soldier and not a patriot. He indignantly denied the charge, and asked me to explain myself. I replied to him that my evidence was that he received "pay" for his services, and I could conceive of no other motive for a soldier beyond that. He was gentleman enough to withdraw his charge against the missionaries, and to admit that they had a motive for their work which he could not understand. Thus some men who hate God, hate also his servants, and without any other reason than their hatred of the truth they lay hold of them, as the Jews laid hold on Jesus, being enraged against him "for the truth's sake," and charge them with all manner of crimes of which they are perfectly innocent. In like manner, through envy, they assailed and arrested Paul; and such has been their action in all ages. "Marvel not if the world hate you," said our Lord. The servant is not greater than his Lord.

**2.—Jeremiah's denial.**—Upon being charged with treasonable intentions in leaving the city, Jeremiah indignantly denied that he had any such purpose. He met the charge with a simple sharp word. "It is false"; or, as the margin has it: "A lie; I fall not away to the Chaldeans." He was both indignant at his arrest, and, perhaps, from the heat of his denial, more so still at the charge of treachery. To defame a man's good name is often more intolerable than the prospect of endurance of any amount of physical suffering. To know that such an evil report had gone out against him must have troubled Jeremiah as much or more than all the rigors of the prison and pillory. Joseph in Egypt thus suffered, being innocent; Moses suffered in like manner; David seemed to care more that Saul could think him capable of conspiring against his life, than for the persecution with which he was pursued, and sought more earnestly to clear his name than to save his life. The first question that arises out of this part of the story is: How should we meet such false

charges as this, under which Jeremiah was arrested? That must depend on circumstances. Paul defended himself by an elaborate argument. Jesus adopted more than one method. Oftentimes he refuted the charges which the Jews brought against him, by showing them how absurd their statements were, as in the case when they charged him with being the agent of the devil. Again, when he was under the cruel and awful charge of blasphemy, when death was hanging over him, he met the judge and false witnesses with perfect silence. Silence does not always give consent. There are circumstances when it is better to suffer both in reputation and body rather than attempt a defense. There may be higher interests involved even than the preservation of a good name and life itself. While it is perfectly right to assert innocence if one be innocent, sometimes silence is a more effectual answer than denial. Time often proves the best vindicator. I once heard Mr. Spurgeon say that he never attempted to brush off mud that was thrown at him, for he was sure that to attempt to do so would only result in smearing himself with the filth; but that he always waited till it was dry, and then he could deal with it as dust, and get rid of it without a stain being left behind. It was said of Jesus that when he was reviled, he reviled not again. This, however, does not mean that he never denied or repelled an untrue or unjustifiable attack on his character. Usually we are more sensitive to our reputations than we are to our character. It has been truly said that if we only take care of our characters, God will in the end vindicate our reputations. Every one must be guided by the circumstances in which he finds himself placed, first looking toward God and toward those with whom we are associated, and then deciding on the course to be pursued. Most important for us to remember, after all, are these two precepts: "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely (lying) for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets." (Matt. v, 11, 12.) No doubt Jesus had this case in mind when he uttered that beatitude. Let us first be sure that we give no just cause for men to say evil against us, and then, when they do lie about us, we may remember that God is ready to compensate us beyond any hurt that man's lie can inflict. Again we are told that "this is thankworthy, if a man, for conscience toward God, endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." (I. Pet. ii, 19, 20.) Though Jeremiah

indignantly denied the charge, the denial did him no good. It was not the truth which his enemies were seeking, but only an occasion to persecute him. So we are told that the captain "hearkened not to him," but carried him to the princes. Biased as they were by passion and hatred, not seeking the truth, but moved to cruelty and revenge, Jeremiah fell a victim to the malice of his enemies.

**3.—He is imprisoned.**—Irijah took the prophet to the princes. These were not the same who befriended him in the previous reign and took measures to conceal him from the wrath of Jehoiakim, but another cabinet who were in authority under Zedekiah. They were as willing to believe the charge of treason against Jeremiah as was the captain to prefer it. So, without trial or an opportunity of defense, they beat him and cast him first into a dungeon, and then thrust him into the stocks (so the word "cabins," v. 16, signifies). Peter and John, Paul and Silas afterward all shared his fate, as have hundreds and thousands of God's witnesses since their time. It looks not only hard that wicked men should be allowed to do these things, but it seems mysterious that God does not interfere for their deliverance. We have, however, learned that to suffer for Christ's sake is a part of the privilege which is accorded to every disciple. There seems to be a double necessity for this. First we must ourselves, even as did Jesus himself, learn obedience by the things which we suffer, and so to be "perfected through suffering." (Heb. v, 8; ii, 10; comp. I. Pet. ii, 21, 23; v, 10.) Besides, it is a matter of clear demonstration that suffering for the truth has always been the most powerful testimony thereto. The cause of Christ and the purity and strength of spiritual life is never so manifestly of God as during those times when the disciples are called on to suffer. It is hard to the flesh and trying to faith; yet if there be a willing mind it can be done, can be borne joyfully for his sake who led the way over this thorny path, and at last arrived in glory there, whither he has guaranteed to bring us hereafter.

## II.—THE KING AND JEREMIAH.

After the prophet had been many days in prison, the weak king sent for him secretly, and brought him out of prison to make inquiry of him. This was a triumph for Jeremiah and a humiliation for the king. In the long run, the highest and haughtiest enemies of God will have to bow to the lowliest of his friends. There are many instances where men who have scoffed at religion and mocked at its messengers have, in moments of great fear and extremity, sought out



the very people whom they have despised and persecuted to beg for intercession with God on their behalf. The city was apparently re-invested by the Chaldeans, and in great straits for food (v. 21), and the king hoped that at last the prophet would relent and secure some favorable word from the Lord. He seems, like all unbelievers, to have had the curious idea of God, that he might be brought round to favor if only the prophets could be won over first. So Barak, king of Moab, thought when he sent for Balaam to curse Israel. (Num. xxii, xxiii.)

**1.—Is there any word from the Lord?**—This was the king's question put to Jeremiah. The Lord had previously given to the king a very sure word (v. 10), but he still vainly clung to the hope that the word of God would be altered, though there was not the least evidence that the king or the people had altered their lives. There are many persons in our day expecting that in the end, notwithstanding that the word of God, finally communicated to us in the Bible, is God's last word to this world, the Almighty will change his mind and not punish persistent sinners. Yet there was a word from the Lord. It was very brief, and exactly to the point. "And Jeremiah said: There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon." Now this was a very brave and courageous action on the part of Jeremiah. Already the princes were enraged against him for a similar prophecy many times repeated, and he was now in their power. If ever a man might have been tempted to temporize and prophesy smooth things, this was the time. No doubt there was that in the manner of the king which held out the hope to Jeremiah that his imprisonment would end with a favorable word. But Jeremiah, timid and retiring as he was by nature, and extremely sensitive to physical suffering, did not hesitate for a moment, but delivered his message without equivocation or qualification. There is nothing more sublime in this world than a clear and undisguised declaration of the truth under any and all circumstances.

**2.—Jeremiah pleads his own cause.**—Having first delivered the message from the Lord, wholly regardless of what might be the effect, upon the mind and disposition of the king, he now ventures to plead for his own release from prison. It is a great testimony to Jeremiah's loyalty to God that he suffered his own private and personal interests to be in the background until he had delivered the Lord's message. He sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, leaving the things which appertained to his own comfort to be added afterward. But now, having discharged the Lord's business, he

ventures to undertake a plea on his own behalf. He put his plea on two grounds: First, his absolute innocence of any wrong done to either the king or the people. Why had he been cast into prison? The only thing that could be said against him was that he had delivered the Lord's word as he had received it. Could he do less than that? (Acts iv, 19.) Would the king have had him speak lies to please the princes and the people, which must ultimately have brought them much damage? Secondly, he appeals to the truth of his predictions, and asks the king to produce the false prophets who had flattered him and the people with pleasant lies. (xxviii, 1, etc.; xxix, 27-32.) Had their false prophecies done the king any good? Was it not now manifest that they were false friends as well as false prophets? He therefore pleaded with the king not to add to his already heavy account of iniquity by keeping him unjustly in prison.

**3.—The prophet's sufferings mitigated.**—The king was evidently moved by the prophet's plea, but he was afraid of his princes and did not dare to grant the full petition of the prophet, but he so far ordered a mitigation of his imprisonment, that he was taken out of the stocks and the dungeon and simply confined in the gaol court. Jeremiah was, as we have said, a shrinking and retiring man by nature, and keenly sensitive to physical pain. His imprisonment was very severe, though there was worse in store for him. (See the next chapter.) He felt that to stay in that dungeon and in the "cabins" would end in his death. The king softened his imprisonment and ordered the prophet to be fed with a piece of bread from the baker's street as long as there was bread to be had in the besieged city. In this incident we see how God tempers the severity of suffering even when he does not entirely deliver us from it. There was a good reason, a divine reason, for the prophet's imprisonment, and yet God suffered him to be a little relieved from its rigor. If the prison discipline was more than he could bear, then God would take him out of it; for he had yet need of the prophet, both for testimony and for suffering. Let us trust God in our trials, that he will not suffer us to be afflicted more than we are able to bear, or else that he will give us more grace wherewith to endure hardness as good soldiers.

## X.

## THE DOWNFALL OF JUDAH.—Jeremiah xxxix, 1-10.

(1) In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, came Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon and all his army against Jerusalem, and they besieged it. (2) And in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, the ninth day of the month, the city was broken up. (3) And all the princes of the king of Babylon came in, and sat in the middle gate, even Nergal-sharezer, Sangar-nebo, Sarsechim, Rab-saris, Nergal-sharezer, Rab-mag, with all the residue of the princes of the king of Babylon. (4) And it came to pass, that when Zedekiah the king of Judah saw them, and all the men of war, then they fled, and went forth out of the city by night, by the way of the king's garden, by the gate betwixt the two walls : and he went out the way of the plain. (5) But the Chaldeans' army pursued after them, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho : and when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he gave judgment upon him. (6) Then the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah in Riblah before his eyes : also the king of Babylon slew all the nobles of Judah. (7) Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with chains, to carry him to Babylon. (8) And the Chaldeans burned the king's house, and the houses of the people, with fire, and brake down the walls of Jerusalem. (9) Then Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carried away captive into Babylon the remnant of the people that remained in the city, and those that fell away, that fell to him, with the rest of the people that remained. (10) But Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard left of the poor of the people, which had nothing, in the land of Judah, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time.—Jeremiah xxxix, 1-10.

The siege and sacking of Jerusalem under Nebuchadrezzar is the most tragic story in history. The second destruction of the city under Titus, the Roman general, was analogous, but did not equal the first in horror of detail. The siege was more prolonged under the king of Babylon, the resistance by the Jews more desperate, and the determination with which the people held out more stubborn, preferring starvation to surrender. During those eighteen months the city presented an awful spectacle ; delicately reared princesses were seen clawing over dung-heaps and street refuse to find a morsel of food ; the once snow-clad Nazarites walked the streets in filthy garments ; the fairest and best-liking of the people were reduced to the merest skeletons ; desperation of hunger forced fond mothers to boil and eat their own children. The horrors depicted even in outline by the sacred writers almost beggar the imagination. I have in a

former study minutely set forth these details and pointed out the Scriptures where they may all be found, and now would refer the reader to that study. (Vol. IV, 1891, pp. 191.) The king of Judah was the vassal of the king of Babylon, but, being deceived by false prophets, he rebelled against his foreign sovereign, and sought, through an alliance with the king of Egypt, to throw off the Chaldean yoke. Hearing of this attempt at rebellion, the Chaldeans had sent a strong detachment of their army to reduce Zedekiah to obedience, when an Egyptian army making its appearance forced them to raise the siege. Subsequently the Egyptian army was defeated, and then, with his entire army, Nebuchadrezzar came up and besieged Jerusalem for eighteen months, and took it. Jeremiah had persistently warned the king that it was folly to contend with Babylon, for the Lord had determined upon their captivity. There was a time when God would have spared them had the king, the princes, and the people hearkened to his voice and repented of their iniquities; but they would not hear. Again they were offered a mitigation of the horrors of captivity by making a voluntary surrender, in which case the king's life was to be spared, the city would be saved from fire, and the people from the worst horrors of captivity; but the king was weak and afraid of his nobles, who were infatuated with the idea of the impregnability of Jerusalem and the veracity of the false prophets, while they disbelieved the word of God. So the king and the princes not only rebelled against the king of Babylon, but set themselves in defiance against God himself.

### I.—JERUSALEM TAKEN AND SACKED.

The prophet does not dwell on the details of the siege, as it was no part of his plan to detail the military processes by which the holy city was at last put into the hands of the Chaldeans. His purpose was simply to record the fact, and thus mark the fulfilment of God's word. After eighteen months, in which the city had been completely invested, a breach in the walls was effected, and the Babylonian army was in full possession. The princes of the Chaldean king entered the city and took up their head-quarters in the middle gate. This was probably the gate through an inner wall within the city which surrounded the citadel. At any rate, the presence of these Babylonian princes in that place showed that the city was entirely in their hands. For further details, compare II. Kings xxv with our present text, and Jer. lii. These three accounts are substantially the same. For details of the horrors and sufferings of the inhabit-

ants of Jerusalem during the siege, compare Lamentations (especially chap. iv), in which the heart-broken prophet pours forth his sorrow over the downfall of the city, and especially over the woes which had come upon his people. See also Ezekiel iv, v, xii, xxi, where minute prophecies of the downfall of the city are recorded. After the subjugation of the city, and the flight, capture, judgment, and imprisonment of the king, under the command of Nebuzar-adan, the captain of the guard, the Babylonian soldiers burned the city, including the temple, king's palace, and all the houses of the princes and chief men; the walls were razed; the whole city was turned into a waste and ruinous heap. (v. 8; lii, 13, 14.) Jeremiah laments the destruction of the glorious city of God in these sad and pathetic words: "How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people; how is she become a widow, she that was great among the nations. . . . She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks; among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they are become her enemies. . . . And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed. . . . How is the gold become dim; how is the most fine gold changed; the stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street. The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter." (Lam. i, 1, 2, 6; iv, 1, 2.) The great lesson to be deeply pondered from this awful judgment upon Jerusalem is the certain retribution of God upon persistent sin. When God put his people into the land, he warned them that, if they transgressed his law and gave themselves up to idols and the practice of iniquity, he would punish them and scatter them among the nations. (Deut. iv, 25-28; xxviii, 62-67.) These warnings had been repeated over and over again, line upon line and precept upon precept, with admonitory chastisements and afflictions, for nearly a thousand years. God had besought them, by every argument and entreaty, to repent of their sins and cease from their wickedness, that he might forgive them, and save them from the calamities which their sins were certain to bring upon them. These warnings and entreaties they had neglected and despised. The prophets, whom he had sent them, they had stoned, imprisoned, sawn asunder, and put to death. Before the time of Judah's downfall, Israel had been carried away captive and scattered. God had used this as his last warning to Jerusalem, and declared to her that a like fate was impending over her, at the same time giving opportunity for repentance; but Jerusalem, the kings, her princes and her people, would not hear; and now the cup of wrath was

pressed to her guilty lips, and she was made to drink it to the bitter dregs. No honest and thoughtful man can read these prophetic and historic records without being profoundly impressed with the long-suffering mercy of God toward sinners, and the certainty of retribution following upon unrepented and persistent sin. God's judgment may be slow in coming, but it is as sure as it is slow. How long he had borne with Judah and Jerusalem before he began to pour out his fury upon them! Long as God postpones his judgment, when once it sets in, it goes on to the end; "though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small." What a culmination of calamities at the last! There is no stopping or turning them back. All the skill, the courage, and the endurance which Jerusalem brought to bear in order to avert this awful judgment, availed nothing. When the time for judgment comes it is too late for prayer and entreaty. God, who is long-suffering and slow to anger, is obdurate and merciless when once he has begun to pour out his fury. When will men learn this lesson? We have not to do with the judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem, but with that which is coming upon all men who, like this apostate people, despise God's word and believe not his prophets. No amount of theory or argument will prevent the doom of the persistent sinner. Men may say that death ends all; but the resurrection of Jesus proves that it does not; men may say that God is too merciful to punish sinners according to the declaration of the Scriptures; but is he? Let the story of the flood; the overwhelming fate of Pharaoh; the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; the terrible calamities that came upon Israel and Judah, be our answer. After God's mercy has been ruthlessly trampled under foot, then his righteous retribution comes and proceeds to the bitter end. Nor can men complain; for God is slow to anger and of great kindness, not willing that any should perish, and he gives all men more than ample time in which to repent. Men may say that we are punished in this world for our sins; so in some cases we partially are, but in many cases sin seems to be one long success, while righteousness goes unrewarded and trampled under foot of iniquity. Men may say that Christ's death atones for all sin. So it does, but in what sense? Not for the sinner who tramples the Son of God under foot, and counts the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and does despite to the Spirit of grace. (Heb. x, 29.) The grounds on which the divine retribution for persistent sin is denied cannot be the outcome of irresistible conviction, or of any satisfactory supposition that the doctrine of God's word on this point is not true; but of a desire to avoid a doctrine

that is repugnant to their wills, which long to be free from divine government. Such denials can at best but deaden the conscience of men and give them liberty (not divine liberty) to go on in sin, with the hope that grace may abound. The reader is most earnestly commended to a careful and repeated study of God's word on the subject, and especially to the historic illustrations of this awful truth as contained in the Bible, if he is anywise inclined to deny the truth of the final and utter retribution that awaits the deliberate sinner.

## II.—THE FLIGHT AND CAPTURE OF THE KING.

When the king saw the city in the possession of the enemy, he hastily gathered his army and family, and by night fled from the city by a secret way through his garden, and between two walls which concealed his movements. (v. 4; lii, 7; II. Kings xxv, 4.) His flight, however, was of no avail; for though he nearly effected his escape, having reached the borders of the Jordan, his absence was discovered, and the Chaldeans pursued after him; and while his army was scattered abroad, probably on a foraging expedition, the king and his family and the princes that were with him were captured. Too late the king sought safety in flight. It was not to be. God had decreed his capture, and no precaution could prevent it. Had he heeded the warning of Jeremiah, who brought him the word of God, and surrendered to the king of Babylon, his own life would have been spared, his children's lives would have been spared, his princes' lives would have been spared, and the glorious City of God would have been spared. (Jer. xxviii, 17-20.) The king was a weak man, and hesitated to do the word of God because he was afraid of being taunted with cowardice by his nobles and the people. How many men are cowards before their fellow-men, and yet brave before God! They fear the reproach of weak, feeble, and sinful men, but fear not the word of God. Surely the sorry flight of the wretched king from his ruined city, a fugitive from God and the king of Babylon, was infinitely more humiliating than an honorable surrender to Nebuchadrezzar. He would not go out of the city in surrender, when he might have done so with safety to himself, his people, and his city; now he seeks safety in flight when it is too late. How many will seek salvation wildly when it is too late! Let it be remembered again that, when once the master of the house is risen up and hath shut the door, then flight or petition is of none avail. When once Jesus ceases to be the Advocate of sinners and becomes their Judge, then repentance is too late, and no man may flee the

judgment. What unutterable miseries are added to the main consequences of our sins, when we think of what "might have been," had we not been too late! How conscience will sting; how deep will be our humiliation; what remorse at the sufferings which our delays, our disastrous delays, have entailed upon others. What miseries that wretched king-father must have undergone when he saw his children butchered before his eyes, and his nobles slain; when he remembered that all this was the result of his failure to heed the warnings of the prophet to leave the city while he might do so with safety.

**1.—Prophecy and its fulfilment.**—In connection with the flight, arrest, condemnation, and punishment of the king, we have a most remarkable series of prophetic fulfillments. Ezekiel, under the command of God, had before this final calamity, by means of pantomime, as well as by clear and unmistakable words, depicted every detail of the king's flight, capture, and punishment. Read Ezekiel xii, 1–11; and then this which follows (12, 13): "And the prince that is among them shall bear upon his shoulders in the twilight, and shall go forth; they shall dig through the wall to carry out thereby; he shall cover his face that he see not the ground with his eyes. My net also will I spread upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare; and I will bring him to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there." Thus have we seen the king laden with his valuables, fleeing at night, digging through a wall to escape the Chaldeans; we have seen God spreading his net, catching and delivering him over, to be first blinded, then loaded with chains, carried to Babylon and thrust into prison; there we have seen him die. How impossible to have understood Ezekiel's prophecy until it was fulfilled; how then does it appear to have been the very letter of subsequent fact!

**2.—Arrested, condemned, and punished.**—The details are briefly but graphically told. When the soldiers arrested the flying king, they brought him to the king of Babylon, who (i) "gave judgment upon him." Zedekiah was, according to the law of nations, a traitor to the king of Babylon, who had set him upon the throne of Judah as his vassal, and against whom Zedekiah had rebelled. So while the Chaldean king was carrying out God's decree against Zedekiah for his persistent sin and iniquity, he was also executing his own law upon him as a rebel. God's providence ever fits in with the ordinary workings of human history. (ii) The first part of the judgment was that the sons of the king should be butchered before his eyes. What a horrible thing this was! Alas for that poor king!



He had brought this upon them. What may be the agonies of a sinful father who, through precept and example, has encouraged his own sons to infidelity and the final loss of their souls! It will, I think, be no small part of the torment of the damned, that they shall constantly see those about them whom they led astray, and brought to the place of torment. Then followed the slaughter of the nobles before his face; this too was in part his doing; for though the king's action, in holding out against the king of Babylon contrary to the counsel and entreaty of Jeremiah, was due to his fear of the nobles, yet as king it was his duty to have asserted his authority and saved them and the city in spite of their mockeries of God's word. (iii) Finally the king of Babylon ordered Zedekiah's eyes to be put out, then loaded him with chains, sent him to Babylon, and there cast him into prison, until death released him into the other world. Let us hope that a gate of repentance was opened for him before he passed thither. But what an awful punishment for a king and a father! The last impression on his brain from this world was the awful sight of his butchered sons and nobles. Who can tell the horrors of his lonely confinement, shut up with these memories forever haunting his dark soul? The words of Abraham to the miserable rich man, tormented in the flame of eternal punishment, are irresistibly suggested to us: "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things . . . but now thou art tormented." (Luke xvi, 25.) Men choose the ways of sin in this life, counting them to be "good things," but they forget that in the hereafter the "evil things" which they contemptuously denied will be their portion, soured with memory's poisoned sting. Instead of such a fate, let us pray devoutly that we may be spared for the "good things" that God has in reserve for them that fear him.

"Help, Lord, that we may come  
To thy saint's happy home,  
Where a thousand years  
As one day appears;  
Nor go  
Where one day appears  
As a thousand years  
For woe."

### III.—THE BLESSED POOR.

Only one ray of light penetrated the dark cloud of doom that hung over and burst on Jerusalem. The city burned with fire, the temple destroyed, her fair stones scattered, the king and his family, the

princes and nobles and all the city's inhabitants carried away, slain, or held in a wretched captivity, which brought them naught but sighs and tears; what exception was there in all this misery? Just this; and it is not unsuggestive. The wretchedly and miserably poor were left behind; and more; for the captain of the guard, acting for the king of Babylon, gave them fields and vineyards. In the general judgment that overwhelmed Jerusalem, the sparing of these poor people and the gift to them of fields and vineyards suggest to us the blessings that are in reserve for those on earth who, though "poor in this world, are rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to them that love him." (James ii, 5.) It also suggests the beatitude of Jesus: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." (Matt. v, 3, 5.) Poverty in itself is no guarantee of heaven, but those who have chosen the riches of the world rather than the riches of God are the truly poor; and those who have gone to the wall in the fight for the world's prizes rather than contend unlawfully by grinding their neighbors are the truly meek. God will not forget such. Here is seen God's reversal. The rich and great of Jerusalem, who had grown so by grinding oppression of the poor, are carried away captive, slain with the sword and cast into prison, while those whom they oppressed are now inheriting their lands and vineyards. (See Is. lvii, 15; lxvi, 2.) Till the captivity the poor were only a portion of the people, but now they were the whole. This event, therefore, would seem to indicate that the poor, meek and contrite in spirit, are the whole sum of those who shall constitute the people of God in the day of judgment. What shall we say to these things? "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not, for behold I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the Lord; only thy life will I give thee for a prey, in all places whither thou goest."

## XI.

## PROMISE OF A NEW HEART.—Ezekiel xxxvi, 25-38.

(25) Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean : from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. (26) A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you : and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. (27) And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. (28) And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers ; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. (29) I will also save you from all your uncleannesses : and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. (30) And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen. (31) Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. (32) Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you : be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel. (33) Thus saith the Lord God ; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded. (34) And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by. (35) And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden ; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited. (36) Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate : I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it. (37) Thus saith the Lord God ; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them ; I will increase them with men like a flock. (38) As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts ; so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men : and they shall know that I am the Lord.—Ezekiel xxxvi, 25-38.

God has not utterly cast off his people, though we have seen how terribly he fulfilled all his threatenings against them, after failing by precept, warning, and entreaty to win them away from their sins, iniquities, and idolatry. The heathen were used as his instrument for their chastisement ; and they, not knowing that God himself was delivering his people into their hands, boasted themselves over the people of God and over the land which they had made desolate, saying in their pride : “Aha, even the ancient high places are ours in possession.” (vs. 1-6.) Jehovah, however, does not suffer the heathen to rejoice over his people as though he had utterly forsaken and forgotten them. This arrogant and boastful conduct toward the captives, and the heathen’s covetous and high-handed division of

the land of Israel among themselves, provokes the Lord to jealousy, and he turns now against the heathen and toward his people. The difference between the heathen and the people of God is this: that Israel has a permanent interest in the power and watchful love of God, whereas the heathen have none at all. Therefore, though Israel may for a time become the prey of the heathen, and apparently be completely overwhelmed, it is sure to revive again by the blessing of God, while the heathen, who seem to triumph for a time, must ultimately fall, to rise no more; because a nation that is without God, having once succumbed to other powers, cannot rise, but must simply become débris and drift in the stream of time, to be absorbed by other new world-powers, which in turn will follow their predecessors in overthrow and ruin. I was much struck, a few months back, with the disposition of the ruins of the great buildings of the early and later Romans. The Colosseum itself was built in part from the stones of older ruins, and the stones of the ruined Colosseum again enter into the construction of later buildings, themselves now in process of ruin. So it is with all the nations of the earth, except the ancient people of God. They indeed may be in ruin so far as their national life is concerned, but God preserves even their stones—they may not enter into the construction of other nations—until he shall build them again in their own land. Ezekiel now turns his face outward from the captivity, and looks again toward the desolate land and prophecies of its restoration to the captive people of God, sees its cities and villages rebuilt, its waste and desolate places becoming again as the Garden of Eden, and the uninhabited land teeming with men as fields with flocks of sheep. But before this he sees and promises to the people a spiritual rebuilding of themselves. Before their land is recovered and restored, they must become a regenerate people, restored to sympathy with their Preserver. Whether the passage under study refers to the promise of God to sinners in New Testament times, or simply to the restoration of the Jews from the informed captivity, or from the dispersion which they are now suffering, is one of those questions which are constantly being debated by different schools of interpreters. I can see no reason why the truth of the prophecy may not be seen in the first return of the Jews to their land, in the spiritual blessings in connection with the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost during the present dispensation, and also in the final return of the Israelites to their land from every country and nation whither they are now dispersed, after their conversion to Christ at his appearing and kingdom.

## I.—SPIRITUAL RENEWAL.

God's holy name had been profaned among the heathen through the captivity of the Jews. The heathen took occasion to mock and scoff at God because the Jews had been delivered into their hand, and especially because of the sins and iniquities of the chosen people. Whenever a Christian either falls or is afflicted, the unbelieving part of the world are apt at once to profane the holy name by crying out: "Where is now thy God?" But now God says, "I will sanctify my great name which was profaned among the heathen; which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes." (v. 23.) God's glory is so inseparably wrapped up with his people, that their downfall brings reproach upon his name, and correspondingly their uplifting, especially their spiritual exaltation in the beauty of holiness, brings him praise. Therefore, when God wishes to be sanctified among the heathen, he causes his name to be first glorified among, by, and in his own people. In order to this sanctification of his holy name, he proceeds to deliver them out of the heathen lands, restoring them to their own, and then and there to work out their spiritual regeneration. We may henceforth follow this historical regeneration of Israel in the light of New Testament truth, and make lawful application of it to the spiritual blessings promised under the new covenant.

**1.—Their conversion.**—"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean." This famous passage cannot, in my opinion, be made, by any ingenuity of interpretation, to refer to baptism. The result or effect of this sprinkling is never seen as an effect of baptism: "From all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you." Now, baptism is never for the purpose of putting away the filth of the flesh (I. Pet. iii, 21); and certainly it cannot turn men from idols. There is undoubted reference to the effect upon the mind, heart, and life, produced by hearing the word of God, through which the soul sees how God has provided forgiveness and justification by means of the atonement of Christ. It is the blessing for which David prayed when he said: "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquities, and cleanse me from my sins." (Ps. li, 2.) Water cannot do that. Water is used here simply as the symbol of the cleansing power of God. That this cleansing power is seen in connection with the word, which is the vehicle for conveying the mind, heart, and conscience, the effects of the redemption, is seen

in the declaration of Paul: "Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." (Eph. v, 25, 26.) A further proof of this, that the water refers to the cleansing or, we might say, the converting power of the word, is seen in the effect of the preaching of that word in power and in the Holy Ghost among the Thessalonians; who, when they received the word of the Gospel, "turned from idols, to serve the living and true God." (I. Thess. i, 5, 9.) This is the second effect of the word of God. James also tells men that they are to "lay aside all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save your (their) souls." (i, 21.)

**2.—Their regeneration.**—"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and will give you an heart of flesh." Here we have a fuller description of the work of regeneration, which is the complement and so far the completion of conversion. A new heart and a new spirit does not mean another heart and another spirit in any sense of removal of old and substitution of new faculties. "Regeneration does not consist in annihilating the man, nor in the entire removal of sinful corruption and the old Adamic disposition, but in the creation of an entirely new disposition and nature." Undoubtedly something new comes into a man's heart. Eternal life, the gift of God, is the seed of the regenerate man, and this working in the natural man brings forth a new man, just as the casting into a mass of molten iron a certain quantity of ferro-manganese converts the entire mass into finest steel. Nothing is taken from the iron; something is added to it which changes its entire "disposition and nature." (II. Cor. v, 17; John i, 11, 12, 13; iii, 3, 5, 6.) This great change is further described as the taking away of a stony heart out of the flesh and substituting an heart of flesh. The unregenerate man has a hard and obdurate heart in him, like a stone, which is not responsive to water (teaching), and is incapable of bending itself to the will of another. In the place of this, God gives a heart of flesh, plastic as well as soft and sensitive. The brittle iron, which is converted into steel, becomes soft and pliable and twice as strong. "Of flesh" and "fleshly" are two different things. "The former may always be dealt with; the latter becomes always harder."

**3.—The indwelling Spirit.**—"And I will put my spirit within you." This is the third step in the direction of the inward recovery of men to God. First they are converted under the preaching of the word; then they are made regenerate by the action of the Spirit of God

upon their natures ; and after that the Spirit, not as the regenerating agent and power of God, but as the personal Comforter, comes and takes up his abode in the heart. (John xiv, 23 ; I. Cor. iii, 16.) The man is now, and by these means, won back to God.

## II.—HOLY LIVING.

Reformation proceeds upon an order that first corrects the outward, and finally takes effect on the inward ; but God's order is first to effect the inward and then stimulate and direct the outward life. Hence we are prepared for what follows.

**1.—Statutes and judgments.**—It was the historic fact that Israel had always failed under the old covenant to keep the statutes and judgments of God. But now, with a new heart and a right disposition, with the addition of the indwelling presence of God's Spirit, Jehovah could cause his people "to walk in his statutes, keep his judgments and do them." Our holy walking is the evidence of a new life within us, and while the regenerate sinner keeps and does the statutes of God, it is because God himself "works in him to will and to do"; who first "repairs us unto every good work," and then "works in us to do that which is well pleasing in his sight." (Phil. ii, 13 ; Eph. iii, 20 ; Heb. xiii, 21.) The proof of regeneration is seen in a holy and obedient walk ; the power of a holy life is the inward energy of the Holy Spirit, teaching, and guiding, and strengthening.

**2.—Divine communion.**—"And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave your fathers ; and ye shall be my people and I will be your God." This is a beautiful description of heavenly communion. God has made a home for us on the earth, and in this earthly home we dwell in peace as his people, and have always confidence, knowing that he is our God. "Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." All regenerate men stand in the covenant of grace with God, and one of the chief articles of that covenant is, that we shall dwell with God and be his people while he is our God. These are they who truly inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

**3.—Sanctification.**—The first blessing was the cleansing from filthiness. Now that we are fairly his children by a new birth, and in communion with him, God promises to keep us from falling back into sin (Jude 24), and to save us from all our uncleanness. Regeneration is not sanctification, but only the incoming of the Holy Spirit as a new power in our lives. His work in us is to save us from the inward corruptions of nature and the flesh, and to present

us at last before the Glory without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. Jesus is Jesus because he saves his people, not *in* their sins, or *with* their sins, but *from* their sins. Now we are no longer under the law, but under grace, and sin need have no more dominion over us, for we are no longer debtors to the flesh to live after the flesh. (Rom. vi, 14; viii, 12.)

**4.—All need supplied.**—God is not a Father to us in vain. He does not leave us to our own resources, either for inward victory over sin or outward supply. He does not bring us into a good land and large, to die of starvation or to perish from want. “I will call for the corn and increase it, and lay no famine upon you.” “I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field, that ye receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen.” It is common for the world to say that to embrace God as Saviour is to cut one’s self off from the necessary things of life, or at least from its good things. This is not so. He that seeks first the Kingdom of Heaven has God’s word for the supply of all needful things. He will withhold no good thing from them that walk uprightly. In their sins Israel suffered famine, and the heathen reproached them for having a God that left them to starve for bread. As a matter of fact, famine came to them when they turned to idols; if they had hearkened to the word of God, then would he have fed them with the finest of wheat. There is a deeper significance in the text than that which looks to the supply of physical need. There shall be no famine of soul as there was when they were in the land serving idols. Their soul’s hunger should be fully satisfied with God. In both these senses the promise may be taken. “To the heavenly among men there is no lack even on earth; to him who has what alone is worth having, there shall be nothing wanting.” In the evident fullness of the Christian’s supply of earthly need, or in the sublimer contentment which marks the true child of God even in poverty, the heathen (unbelievers) shall see the hand of God, and will no longer reproach him as having abandoned his people.

**5.—Self-loathing.**—After all this grace comes to the believer, there is such a sense of gratitude as turns itself into an instrument to stir up the memory of past transgression, which in turn brings about a self-loathing, destined to go on till the very bottom of the evil nature is reached and the whole being is given up to God. It is no doubt true that a repentance, or change of mind, precedes regeneration, but all truly regenerate people agree that the repentance and deep self-loathing on account of present corruption and past iniquities comes subsequent to the new birth. Some one says that



our life must become sorrow to us, or sorrow will not become life. This apprehension of our deep sinfulness is the true corrective of that self-complacency which is so often the death of all spiritual life. It was not until long after Paul's conversion that he said, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) there dwelleth no good thing." (Rom. vii, 18.) If God stirs up the substratum of corruption that is within us, it is only that he may remove it. If he stirs up our memory to take knowledge of old sins that have been forgotten, it is only that we may bring them up to judgment and have them cast behind his back. Thank God for the workings of his Holy Spirit to make clearance of sin out of our lives.

**6.—All of grace.**—"Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God." This restoration and regeneration, keeping an abundant supply, was not a reward of any righteousness found in his people. Had he dealt on that principle, they would have been overwhelmed in confusion and utter destruction. He wants them to know that his salvation is all of grace, that their doings were only such as should make them ashamed and confounded. Certainly every regenerate person knows the full meaning of this. It is a truth that is repeated many times in the Bible, yet which we are as slow to learn as it is important for us to learn it. It is a truth which serves to keep us in hope and yet in humility. In hope because, in spite of our abominations, there is grace with God that bringeth salvation; in humility because, in spite of our salvation, there is that in our lives, present and past, which would but for grace consign us to the lowest pit.

### III.—THE MISSION OF THE REGENERATE.

The end of our salvation is not simply to be cleansed from sin and brought into communion with God; nor are we to spend our time in a mere life of introspection. There is work for us to do. Sin had ruined the holy land, desolated its cities, and left its fair fields to the boar and the wild beast. So soon as God shall cleanse his people, the prophet tells us for Jehovah that he will cause them to dwell in the cities, and the waste places shall be rebuilt. The desolate land shall be tilled again and the ruined cities shall be repopled and fenced. And people shall see it and say, "This land has become like the garden of Eden." The life and works of the regenerate tend to make everything around him beautiful, and the effect is to attract the attention of those who have seen the effects of sin and to communicate to the unbeliever the knowledge of God.

“Ye are God’s husbandry ; ye are God’s building.” (I. Cor. iii, 9.) In the light of this text the sanctification of character and life, by which the doctrine of Christ is adorned, is the great testimony to the world of the truth of the Gospel. In addition to this, we are to build up each other and to extend such nurture to those who need it as will cause them to bring forth fruit unto God. It is not theoretical but practical Christianity that convinces the world of the truth of the Gospel. This is the end of our salvation in the earth. Do not let us forget it, for “I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it.” If we are not doing it or he is not doing it in and through us, then we are not his. “Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.”

#### IV.—PRAYER AND ITS RESULTS.

In view of all these great promises and assurances of blessing to the people of God, yet in captivity, the Lord adds a word of instruction and a further promise.

**1.—Prayer essential to the blessing of God.**—“I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.” God tells us what he has devised and has in store for us ; but he assures us that these blessings must be so appreciated that we will seek him for them, and that in such faith and earnestness that there shall be no doubt of our sincerity in asking. Prayer is not a meritorious but a necessary condition. God knows what we need without our asking, and has prepared his gifts not for our asking, but for his own name’s sake, yet he will be asked. Time and space do not allow opportunity of explaining this necessity. Let us accept it and put ourselves in communication with God concerning the things promised.

**2.—The fruit of prayer.**—While we pray for things which God promises us, God is planning through us to bring like blessings to others. “I will increase them with men like a flock. As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feast, so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men ; and they shall know that I am the Lord.” The last clause evidently points to the conversion of many heathen who see the salvation of God coming to his own people. (v. 36.) When we are cleansed, purged, have a new heart and a right spirit, when the joys of salvation are restored to us, then it is that we teach transgressors God’s ways and sinners are converted unto him.

XII.

REVIEW OR OPTIONAL LESSON.

## XIII.

## THE BLESSINGS OF THE GOSPEL.—Isaiah xxxv, 1-10.

(1) The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. (2) It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon; they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God. (3) Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. (4) 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. (5) Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. (6) Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. (7) And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass, with reeds and rushes. (8) And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. (9) No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: (10) And 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 thirty-fourth and the thirty-fifth chapters of Isaiah are by the best scholars supposed to constitute one entire and complete prophecy, not connected specially, or at least organically, with what goes before or follows. It is a masterpiece of poetry. A single poem divided into two parts; in the first part, the prophet sets forth in lurid colors the universal judgments of God upon all the nations of the earth which have arrayed themselves against him and oppressed his people. As an instance of what shall come upon all, he selects a single nation, that of the Edomites, and shows forth in them what shall come upon all. This awful storm of wrath passes away; and we see in the "clear shining after rain" the beautiful prospect which is opened up to both earth and man, when God's enemies cease from troubling and his people are gathered unto himself. The almost universal habit of spiritualizing this, and all like prophecies, and allegorizing them into an exclusive application to present Gospel blessings, has served to hide the chief significance of the passage from the eyes of the ordinary reader. The promise of this glorious chapter is without doubt primarily and chiefly to the Jews, referring

to their final restoration to their own land in the last days. That it has a preliminary reference to the return from the Babylonian captivity is possible, but it looks far beyond that time to the return from the dispersion which the Jews are now suffering. Even the joy of that first return did not fulfill the glorious promises of this vision. The awful judgments portrayed in the previous chapter correspond too exactly with that time of desolation and destruction, everywhere in the New Testament described as to take place just before the return of the Lord, to leave us in doubt as to the time when the glorious predictions of the thirty-fifth chapter will be fulfilled. God's day of vengeance, and the year of his redeemed, are thus set side by side. (Compare with lxi, 2; and lxiii, 4, with Matt. xxiv, 27-31; Luke xxi, 25-28.) But while this is undoubtedly the place in time in which to look for the fulfillment of this prophecy, there is no doubt that the spiritual truth underlying it is of universal application to the people of God in all ages, included both in the earthly people of God and in the Church of Christ. If in reading prophecy we would only always keep in mind the simple truth that the whole human race is divided in the Scriptures into three main classes, the Jew, the Gentile, and the Church of Christ, we would avoid much confusion. In interpreting prophecy strictly according to its evident meaning, we need lose nothing of its spiritual or even its allegorical worth. For "the outward incidents of the Jewish people have a singularly close correspondence with the inward experiences of human souls in Christian times. The captivity of Egypt, and also that of Babylon (also the dispersion), find their analogy in the state of spiritual bondage, which is the constant penalty of sin. The way back to Jerusalem stands for our homeward journey as we travel to the city of the blest. As here described, there stand several features in which the one answers strikingly and instructively to the other." With this understanding we shall endeavor to get from this beautiful portion of God's word not only a glimpse of its literal significance in respect of the ancient and now dispersed, but miraculously preserved, people of God, but also such practical lessons as will serve our own need, and delight our own hearts with the hope of final and glorious salvation.

### I.—THE REJOICING CREATION.

It is almost impossible not to associate the magnificent opening words of this chapter with the hope held out to the "whole creation which travaileth and groaneth in pain together until now, waiting

for the manifestation of the sons of God, when it shall also be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." (Rom. vii, 19-23.)

"The wilderness and the solitary places shall be glad for them." This is a beautiful picture of the sympathy of the earth with man. Not only do the beautiful parts of the earth rejoice with the homecoming of man from his wanderings from God, but the very wilderness and solitary places rejoice and are glad for them, because also in man's redemption the creation which was cursed for man's sake is set free from that curse. The gladness which is here ascribed to the inanimate creation corresponds with the songs and everlasting joy which crown the redeemed of the Lord on their return. The arid sandy deserts and the solitary places of the earth shall suddenly take on a glorious new life and become as fruitful and beautiful as the noblest of God's creation. The glory of Lebanon shall be given unto them and the excellency of Carmel and Sharon. Two other things are ascribed to the creation. They are represented as consciously participating in the great goodness of God to man. They rejoice even with joy and singing; and they see the glory of the Lord and the excellency of our God. It is the habit of our prophet thus to invest nature with consciousness and intelligence. It is the habit of all scriptural writers to put man and Nature into close sympathy with each other, declaring that God is the maker of both. There is a great spiritual as well as poetic truth in this. How powerfully are we affected by plastic nature! How responsive the soil, the fruits of earth, and trees of the forest to the loving touch and sympathy of man! Who does not know how wonderfully different all nature seemed to us when we were first converted to God. The very sun took on new splendor; the stars and the moon shone and twinkled almost with intelligent joy to us; and the woods and the flowers, and the streams and the pools of water, all seemed to participate in the gladness of our salvation. What a world of beauty this will be when the curse is removed and man and Nature, so manifestly made for each other, shall rejoice and be glad together!

## II.—THE BLESSINGS OF SALVATION.

The outline of blessing which the prophet sets before us is not complete, but simply consists of a few bold strokes, serving to fill us with the hope of perfect and complete recovery to God.

**1.—Men shall see God.**—The vision of God has already been ascribed in a metaphorical sense to the inanimate creation. It is

certainly true that, among the chiefest blessings of salvation, is the vision of God. When Jesus came into the world, we are told that in him we beheld the glory of God, full of grace and truth. We are also told that the first effect of the new birth is the ability of the sinner to see God. The purification of the heart which comes with the new life of God in the soul, carries with it the promise of seeing God. (John i, 14; iii, 3; Matt. v, 8; II. Cor. iii, 18.) But there is manifestly something more than this meant. "They shall see the glory of Jehovah and the excellency of our God." This can refer to nothing else than that beatific vision of God spoken of by Paul in I. Cor. xiii, 12; by John in the Revelation xxii, 4. Yet again, if we are to include the saints of the Church in this prophecy, then we shall also have to look for a more literal fulfillment still. When the Lord himself shall descend from heaven in power and great glory (Matt. xxvi, 64; Dan. vii, 13; John i, 51; I. Thess. iv, 16; Rev. i, 7), then the scattered Jews shall see their long-rejected Lord, as Saul of Tarsus saw him on the way to Damascus (Acts ix, 3), and be instantly converted, and start on their homeward way, greeted by all the smiling and rejoicing flowers and trees and pools and newly fertilized wildernesses and waste places of the earth. Yet again this blessing is in store for the Church, even before its time for the Jews. For our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour; and when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; and beholding his face, we shall have his name written in our foreheads. (Phil. iii, 21; I. John iii, 2; Rev. xxii, 4.) Hitherto it has been declared that no man could see God's face and live (Ex. xxxiii, 20), but now, since God has both veiled and revealed his glory in Christ Jesus, we cannot live without looking upon it, first spiritually as it is in Christ Jesus (II. Cor. iii, 18), and then actually when he shall appear in glory. During all these dark centuries the veil has been over the eyes of the Jews, but in this time the veil shall be taken away and they shall see the face, the glory, the excellency of Jehovah-God.

**2.—They shall strengthen and encourage each other.**—This is most probably a retrospective exhortation. In view of this promise and the certain coming of Jehovah and their restoration, they are exhorted to strengthen and encourage each other. There are those whose hands are weak, whose knees are feeble. They cannot fight the good fight of faith with courage, they cannot run with patience the race that is set before them. The long delays and afflictions experienced during the time of waiting has taken not only the courage out of many, but has filled them with despair. Therefore they were

to say to those of a fearful heart or of hasty tendency to unbelief: "Be strong, fear not; behold your God will come with vengeance; even God with a recompense; he will come and save you." Thus the prophet calls upon the strong to impart their strength to the weak and their faith and courage to the faint-hearted. The New Testament writers transfer the spirit, and in part, the very words of this exhortation to the saints of the Church of God. Especially does the author of the epistle to the suffering and sorely tempted Hebrews take the very words, applying them to their comfort and edification. "Wherefore lift up the hands which fall down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but rather let it be healed." (xii, 12.) Paul distinctly exhorts the Galatians to be on the lookout to help and restore those believers who have been overtaken by faults, and to bear one another's burdens (vi, 1), and again he says distinctly: "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." (Rom. xv, 1.) If only we who are filled with the "hope of his coming," and who have been able by grace to maintain any degree of spirituality, would keep constantly before us the hope and assurance of his coming, would diligently lift up the hands that hang down and strengthen the feeble knees, would encourage and inspire the faint-hearted and discouraged, would heal and restore the backsliders, how different would the Church appear, how different would she be in this world! What a testimony she would give! what power she would exercise!

**3.—Infirmities shall be removed.**—Here is a glorious promise. Not only shall the earth be restored to primitive beauty, clothed with redemption glory, and filled with an almost conscious sympathy and joy, but all the infirmities which sin has entailed on our poor sinful human nature shall be removed. In view of this entire deliverance from all the consequences of sin, along with the people of Jehovah, the sore spots of earth shall be healed too. Waters in the wilderness, streams in the desert, pools covering the parched sand, and springs bursting out of thirsty lands; no longer a mirage thrown up from a few turfs of dried herbage, but veritable grass with reeds and rushes shall greet the returning and healed pilgrims. The beginning of this marvel of redemption came when Jesus was first here, opening blind eyes, healing lame limbs, unlocking deaf ears, and loosing silent tongues. Our Lord's miracles of physical healing were the type and foreshadowing of those far deeper spiritual blessings which he came to give to man, the opening of the eyes of our understandings, unstopping our deaf ears to hear his word, loosing our



silent tongues and filling our mouths with songs of praise, and sin-ewing our paralyzed powers for new and blessed service. And yet, further on in the progress of his Messianic work and saving power, it points to the time when these bodies of ours, humiliated by sin and brought under the power of disease, sickness, and death, shall be changed by the resurrection power of immortality and fashioned like unto his glorious body. (Phil. iii, 21.) What an inspiration to faith, courage, and constancy these wonderful promises are; and what measures of strength we lose by not laying hold of them and turning them into practical use! Surely, if we have the will to do the will of God, we shall know of this doctrine whether it be of God.

### III.—THE WAY HOME.

Now follows a wondrous picture of the way of the return for the long absent wanderer. The way of the transgressor is hard, and the world away from God is a barren and thirsty land; but so soon as the face is set toward God and heaven, heaven's God makes the way of return easy and sure. The dispersion of the Jews was a way of misery. Peeled, scattered, and driven forth by every by-path throughout the world, they shall come back by a highway that God himself shall build, without obstacle or hindrance. He will make paths for them through the desert which shall welcome their return with flowers and pools of water, and the waste places shall welcome them with songs of gladness. In the return of the Jews to God and their own land we behold the truth of the spiritual way which God has prepared for every sinner to return to him, and by him to heaven.

**1.—It is an highway.**—"An highway shall be there." A broad and open way, cast up and distinguished from all other roads and tracks. It has both breadth and narrowness. Broad enough for all the world to travel over,—and he will have all men to be saved,—and yet in the highway there is a "narrow way," in which every man must walk for himself, alone and yet not alone—alone in that he must believe for himself; not alone, in that others are walking with him on the same terms and surrounded by the same conditions. "Whosoever will, let him come," and yet let every one know that the path in the highway is straight and narrow.

**2.—It is a way of Holiness.**—That is, it is a way clean in itself, and only for the clean to traverse. "The unclean shall not pass over it." Drunkards, liars, adulterers, fornicators, covetous, idolaters, and extortioners, may not walk in that way. It is not for them. They may approach to the highway encouraged by the invi-

tation to "whosoever will," but as they enter the highway and find in it the gate to the narrow way, they will discover that it is too narrow to take them and their sins along; they must either forsake their way, or else be turned back from God's. For none of these sins shall see or enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. When the scoffer points to such characters in the "visible" Church, the sufficient answer is that the Church is not the way, but Jesus himself is the Way, and all that are in Christ Jesus are new creatures, old things having passed away and all things having become new. (II. Cor. v, 17.)

**3.—God is with them in the way.**—For such is the meaning of the expression: "It shall be for those." God's children have in a sense to walk alone, and entering this way, they have to break with many who in the days of their flesh were their companions, but the presence and companionship of God with them in the way will more than compensate. I do not think that Enoch was lonesome for one single moment in all those three hundred years in which he walked with God. Moreover, if God walks with each one of his people, the company suddenly becomes very large, for it consists of all who are walking with God. No man who knows the fellowship of God and the saints ever misses the company of the world.

**4.—It is a way of perfect plainness.**—No one need fear getting lost in this way. It is so simple and straightforward, so guarded and marked, that the simple and unlearned need not err therein. On the highways cast up to the cities of refuge, there were signboards inscribed so legibly that the running fugitive could read the sign as he ran. But this way is even more plain; for an unlearned and illiterate man need not err therein. "He that followeth me," saith Jesus, "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Besides, God has promised to hold us by our right hand, and to keep us from falling. (Is. xli, 13; Jude 24.)

**5.—It is a safe way.**—No lion or any ravenous beast shall be there, nor be permitted to go up thereon. God has cleared the way of enemies, so far as their ability to harm us is concerned. It was only when "Christian" turned out of the way that he met the devil and had to fight him, and even when the lions fiercely growled at him, he discovered that, by keeping in the middle of the path, they could not approach him, being chained. The most of our enemies are not able to do more than bark at us. In the highway of holiness and in the narrow way of righteousness the believer is perfectly safe from any harm. The redeemed of God, his own purchased people (Ex. vi, 6; Hos. xiii, 14), shall walk therein safe, alone with their Lord.

**IV.—SAFE AT HOME.**

What a picture is here presented to the poor outcasts of Israel! There had been a dispersion and a home-coming from Babylon. There was to be yet another far wider and more prolonged dispersion, and then at last a final home-coming. In view of this the prophet bursts out with a triumphant exclamation of victory, in which he sets all the redeemed singing for joy. He sees the wanderers and outcasts gathering from every quarter of the earth. (Ch. xi, 12; li, 3.) They come with songs of everlasting joy on their lips, bursting from their glad and happy hearts. Coming they are anointed with the spirit of praise and joy, for everlasting joy shall be on their heads; and so proceeding on their way, they obtain new gladness and rejoicing, and the last vestige of sorrow and sighing flee away. It has been a long night to them, but joy has at last come with this thrice-blessed morning. Is not this a blessed picture, too, of the triumphant entrance into the presence of God of those who have fought a good fight, kept the faith, and finished their course? And when Jesus shall come to call his sleeping ones from the grave and catch up his living and believing saints to meet him in the air, "Death will be swallowed up in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it." So declared this same prophet in another place. (xxv, 8.) And this also agrees with what John saw on the Isle of Patmos, when he was in the Spirit on that wondrous Lord's day: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying: neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." "Even so, Come, Lord Jesus." (Rev. xxi, 4; xxii, 20.) Then will the Jew and the Christian have fulfilled to them the last of the exceeding great and precious promises of their God.

## XIV.

## THE WAY OF THE RIGHTEOUS.—Psalm i, 1-6.

(1) Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. (2) But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. (3) And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. (4) The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. (5) Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. (6) For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.—Psalm i, 1-6.

The authorship of this psalm is unknown. It is almost certain that it is not David's; it may be Solomon's. It was most likely written in the earlier period of the theocratic kingdom, while as yet the law of God was still venerated, though there were those in the nation that were giving strong evidence of the beginning of that apostasy of life and faith which culminated in the complete overthrow of the people of God in the days of the captivity. It was probably selected by the compiler of the psalms for its place as first in the book because it puts in concise and yet comprehensive terms the general principles of the Jewish theocracy: "That a righteous life will be attended with prosperity and happiness; and that the life of the wicked will be followed by sorrow and ruin." The psalm divides itself into two parts, the first having to do with the righteous man and the last with the unrighteous or wicked man. It is not the expression of an opinion, but the announcement of a law, which has been thoroughly verified by experience. It is one of those truths, stated so often in the Bible, that can be verified in all ages and under all conditions of society. It is as true to-day as it was in the days of Solomon, and it always will be true. Let any man contradict it if he will. What ungodly man, what sinner, what scorner will rise up and solemnly affirm that blessedness is his portion in this world, that he is full and satisfied in every part and on all sides of his nature; that spirit, soul, and body are in harmonious accord with each other, with God, and with the world; that he has found the secret of peace and blessedness in the denial of God, in the prac-

tice of life after the desires of his own heart, and in scoffing at all religion. Such a man does not live; and if such an one should rise up to affirm that blessedness is found in ungodliness, the whole world would instantly confront him with denial. On the other hand, the man who shuns ungodliness, transgression, and flippant unbelief (scorning), who delights himself in the law of the Lord and meditates in its holy precepts constantly, is a man of happiness. He may not be rich, he may not be great, he may not be a genius; on the other hand, he may be poor, obscure, and a man of no extraordinary gifts; nay more, he may be afflicted, he may be unfortunate, he may be a sufferer for righteousness' sake; yet will he protest to you and testify to the whole world that he is a blessed man; and there will be none to deny it. Nothing is more infallible than the law laid down in this psalm; nothing is more easily proved. If there be any to doubt its truth, they have but to inquire of the two men described in the psalm;—or of themselves. If the inquirer is a godless man, a transgressor, and a scorner, he has but to turn into the path of righteousness to prove the truth of the psalm, not by the testimony of others, but by his own experience. Like many others of these wonderful psalms, this one is so complete, so simple, so self-evident, that one hesitates an exposition for fear of marring its simplicity, and even obscuring by words its transparent teaching.

### I.—THE RIGHTEOUS MAN.

There is a strong element of individuality in this and in other psalms. There was at the time of the writing of this psalm, as always among the Jews, a remarkable national life, but at the same time the fact of individual life and personal responsibility was always strongly emphasized. There was happiness or blessedness in a national sense, as when the great Law-giver spoke his parting words to Israel: "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them. Israel then shall dwell in safety alone; the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; and the heavens shall drop down dew. Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency. And thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt tread on their high places" (Deut. xxxiii, 27-29); or as when the psalmist declared: "Happy is that people that is in such a case; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord." (Ps. cxliv, 15.) But a nation

may be blessed as a whole and have within its people individuals who have rebelled against God and turned atheistic; or a nation as a whole may, under the lead of wicked and godless kings and rulers (as did Israel and Judah in later times), become wholly alienated from God and given over to unrighteousness, yet may contain within its commonwealth men who are individually righteous, and so blessed in themselves. At any rate, the judgment will search men out individually, and their standing and condition in eternity will be determined by their individual characters. The righteous man in this psalm is described both negatively and positively.

**1.—Negative righteousness.**—A man's character is as much determined by what he is not as by what he is; by his repulsions as by his affections. One of the marks of the regenerate man is that he hates the things he once loved and loves the things he once hated. Show me the way wherein a man walks and the company he keeps, and it will not be difficult to know with fair accuracy what is his true character. A righteous man cannot, will not (i) "walk in the counsel of the ungodly." How can he? What counsel or teaching has an ungodly man to give to a righteous man? What counsel have the ungodly ever given to this world except that which has led to darkness of understanding, corruption of heart, and final ruin? Ungodly and unrighteous men are they that hold the truth back from acting upon the religious nature of men; not desiring to retain God in their consciences, they give themselves up to vain speculations; esteeming themselves to be wise, they invariably become fools; and are given up to the final wages of their doings. How can a man keeping the company and walking in the counsel of such be a blessed man? However clever an ungodly man is, his every advice must be disastrous to those who take it. Nor can he (ii) "stand in the way of sinners." An ungodly man is one who has banished God from his conscience, and has become atheistic in thought and life; on the other hand, a sinner is one who has deliberately given himself up, in spite of conscience and conviction, to the transgression of God's law; who takes delight in evil-doing. The ungodly man may be moral in outward things, his counsel may be worse and more dangerous than his example; but the sinner is a man who is going the way to hell. If one stands in his way, he will be in danger of being persuaded or swept along by the tide or the crowd that goes in the same way. That was wise counsel given by Solomon: "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." (Prov. i, 10.) Paul also taught the same thing when he warned his beloved Ephesians to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." (Eph. v, 11.) The

sinner's way is a dirty way, a way that leads to the pit, and no man who is truly righteous or blessed of God can walk therein. If a man professing righteousness is seen in that way you may be sure that, if he is there from choice, his heart is not right with God. Much less can the righteous man (iii) "sit in the seat of the scornful." David says, in the twenty-sixth psalm: "I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go with dissemblers: I have hated the congregation of evil-doers, and will not sit with the wicked." To sit with the mockers of religion, or those who are light and frivolous in respect of these deeper things of the soul, is to take part with them in their scorning, and to vitiate all that is good in one's own heart and life. It is one of the conditions upon which the scornful allow us to sit with them, that we applaud their scorning and venture not to give testimony to a more serious way. Scorners are always intolerant of serious men. In this look at the negative righteousness of the blessed man, we have a very striking picture of the progress of sin in the heart of the unrighteous. First there is ungodliness, which is nothing more nor less than atheism, either in fact or in theory; then follows sinfulness, which is the natural outcome of godlessness, for if there be no God, there is no moral distinction between right and wrong; then comes the scorner's way. This is the natural third consecution on the other two classifications of sin. Besides this, we see the downward progress of unbelief or unrighteousness. First it is seen walking, then standing, and finally sitting down with sinners. As long as a man is on the move, there is a chance of his turning; when he stands in the way of sinners, he must have been so far enticed as to stop awhile in their company; but if he is found sitting down with infidels, be sure he has given in to them and entered into full communion with them.

**2.—Positive righteousness.**—It is not enough that a man should abstain from the counsel, walk, and companionship of sinners; he must take on a positive righteousness. To lay aside the old man, without putting on the new man, is only to become naked; to cease getting drunk with wine without being filled with the Spirit, is only to be consumed with a burning thirst which will drive back to the old habits. On this principle, the righteous man, turning from the counsel, way, and companionship of the ungodly, sinful, and scornful, seeks the law of the Lord, and gives himself up to meditation on its contents day and night. The truest test of righteousness is found in love of God's law. I do not mean mere Bible reading, but real companionship with the word of God. The law of the Lord is the place where, more than in any other, the soul meets God.

Out of his law God speaks to the soul; here he has laid up his exceeding great and precious promises; here we find "doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness." (II. Tim. iii, 16.) Here we find all the magnificent unfoldings of God's purpose of grace; here we come to know the truth concerning God, the world, and ourselves; here we have the unseen world set before our eyes, in such wise that we may gaze upon and become familiar with it. In this word we have a cleansing as well as a regenerating power; here are words of comfort and inspiration, such as can be found nowhere else. No wonder the psalmist prays: "Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." (Ps. cxix, 18.) There are many who read the Bible more or less regularly, who yet tell us that "it is a dull book, and they only read it from a sense of duty"; that they cannot get interested in it, etc. But the righteous man is he who "delights himself in it." No man can delight himself in the law of God who does not "do" it. The moment we begin to do God's law we find God. "If any man willeth to do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." (John vii, 17.) But he does more than delight himself in the law of God. He meditates on it day and night. To meditate is to ruminate or, as we would say, to chew it again as a cow chews her cud. Many persons read the Bible as they look into a glass, and then go away and straightway forget what manner of persons they are. To read the Bible and not to turn it over and over again in thought and in action is to get no delight or strength out of it. Thus meditating on God's law, it becomes sweet to the taste as honey is in the mouth. Moreover, when the word thus becomes sweet it yields understanding, wisdom, power, and hatred for every evil thing. (Ps. cxix, 97-104, and whole psalm.) Some people possess Bibles and never see inside their covers; some never see much more than the printed page; some find their favorite doctrine or texts to support their hobbies and fads, or to justify their sins or unbelief; but the righteous man searches it for the knowledge of God and God's will, and deals with it as with a lamp and a light; then the word entering into the heart gives light and life. The righteous man and the Bible are inseparable.

**3.—The fruit of righteousness.**—The righteous man becomes one of the trees of the Lord. He is planted by the river of waters. The Bible is a soil near to the streams of the Spirit. It is a spirit-written book, and the man that lives in it is planted near the water-course of life. He gets rooted and grounded in faith and love. He never knows a drought, because his roots draw their nourishment



from a river and are not dependent on the passing rains. His roots have struck deep, and so he stands unscathed while the storms pass over him. He may be seen swaying and bending underneath trials and tempests of doubt and temptation, but he is not permanently moved; for the Holy Spirit is not only the source of life, but of power also. If we are to understand by the river of water the word itself, spirit-inspired, then we see also how it is that with the word in mind and heart he is always prepared, as was our Lord, to meet the devil at all points with the omnipotent: "It is written." Blessed is such a man. His leaf also shall not wither. The scorching suns of criticism and the blasting winds of doubt do not efface the sweet and perennial greenness of his life. This man is rejoicing in the Lord always. But then he is more than a leafy tree; he shall bring forth fruit in his season. As occasion demands, he blossoms forth with "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." None approach him in vain. There is always fruit on his boughs. He is one of those trees that are fruitful not only in season, but out of season, for his season is always. Still more, he has this reward: "Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." This whole description reminds us strongly of what the Lord said to Joshua: "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do all that is written therein; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success; for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." (Josh. i, 8, 9; Ps. xcii, 12; Jer. xvii, 7, 8.) Such is the righteous man. His back toward sinners, his face toward God, he is green with everlasting life, full of fruit, and always prosperous. If some doubt this as to material things, he yet declares that, "having nothing, he possesses all things"; and though he may be poor, yet he is able to make many rich. The prosperity of the righteous is often in those things which with the wicked would only be calamities. This is one of his greatest advantages; he knows how to extract blessings out of afflictions, get riches out of poverty, and joy out of suffering; for his life consisteth not alone of the things which he possesses. He has meat to eat that the world knows not of; he has treasure and wealth not to be digged out of the earthly soil.

## II.—THE UNGODLY.

Here is a background against which the blessed man is shown off. The ungodly are not so. Not so in character, or companionship;

not so in fruitfulness or blessedness. Theirs is a different way. Let us look at it.

**1.—They are like chaff.**—At a distance a heap of chaff and a heap of wheat could hardly be distinguished. One cannot always at a glance distinguish between the godly and the ungodly; but there is always sure to come a time of revelation and testing. Chaff is light, and cannot withstand the wind which catches it up and blows it away. Who can find it when it is blown away? who will claim it? who will want it? what use is the chaff? The prosperity of the wicked, which is evidently the thought in the mind of the psalmist, has ever been a subject of comment and perplexity to the righteous, and not unfrequently to the on-looking world. The wicked are often in great apparent prosperity, flourishing like green bay trees; their lives seem devoid of trouble; everything they touch is turned into gold; they seem to be the very favorites of heaven as well as of earth, while the righteous seem to be forsaken. But is it so? Wait till the wind rises and then see. The tree that is rooted in mere earthly prosperity is laid low at the first blast of the judgment's tempest. The green leaves wither and the fruit of pleasure turns to ashes in the mouth of the man who seeks to gather it. Look at Dives and Lazarus. See them on earth. Which is the prosperous man—the one who had the fear of God in his heart, though his body was covered with sores and his stomach famishing with hunger; or the one who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day? Look at them in the other world. Who is the prosperous man—the one tormented in hell; or the other in Abraham's bosom? Look at the fair and beautiful house built on the sand in the rich valley of pleasure. Now look again. Is it not swept away by the storm of wind, rain, and flood?—not a vestige of it is left. See the fair and fruitless fig-tree. It is cut down as cumbering the ground. God takes account of the prosperity of the wicked and marks every one for future destruction, even as he holds them in contempt now. Be not envious of the ungodly. Read the thirty-seventh psalm whenever you are inclined to doubt the truth of this first; read it when you are puzzled or troubled at the prosperity of the wicked.

**2.—They shall not stand in the judgment.**—Nothing stands in the judgment but character, character founded on the truth and righteousness of God. Gold and silver, fame and position; cleverness, genius, science's lore, will avail nothing without character. As the chaff cannot stand before the wind, but is blown away and gathered not again, because it is light and has no worth in itself, so

shall the wicked be driven away in his wickedness and the unrighteous man in his lightness. No covenant which he can make with wealth, with the world, with the flesh, with the devil; with the kings and princes of the world; with the wit, wisdom, and learning of earth, will avail him when the day of judgment comes. Though sinners thrust themselves even into the congregation of the righteous, the judgment wind, the fan that is in the hand of the Lord, will thoroughly purge his floor of all chaff. (Matt. iii, 12.) On the other hand, not one grain of his wheat shall fail of entering his garner. The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; he is in harmony with it; his eye is upon the righteous and his ear is open to his prayer; but the way of the ungodly shall perish. It ought not to take a wise man or woman long to decide between the true prosperity of the righteous and the sham prosperity of the wicked. It ought not to take a wise man or woman long, therefore, to decide which of these two ways he will take. There is no doubt of the truth of the law laid down here as to the course and destiny of men according to character, any more than there is as to the certainty of the result upon a heap of wheat and a pile of chaff when a fierce wind blows over both together. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear; and he that is wise, let him do what he hears: so shall he build his house upon the Rock of Ages.

## XV.

## THE KING IN ZION.—Psalm ii, 1-12.

(1) Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? (2) The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed, saying, (3) Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. (4) He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. (5) Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. (6) Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion. (7) I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. (8) Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. (9) Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. (10) Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. (11) Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. (12) Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.—Psalm ii, 1-12.

The authorship of this famous psalm, like that of the first, is unknown. It has by different scholars been ascribed to David, Solomon, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Again we remark that the human author of any portion of the Scripture is comparatively unimportant; only the fact that it is an inspired utterance of Jehovah is that which makes it precious to us. Of its Divine origin there is absolutely no doubt. Nor is its significance any doubtful question. That it is highly and almost purely Messianic is written over the whole face of the psalm itself. The frequent allusions and direct appeals to this psalm by New Testament writers leave us in no doubt as to the fact that it is a prophecy of the enthronement of Christ (the Anointed One) and the triumph of the kingdom of God under his reign over all the earth. We shall have occasion to refer to several of the more important instances in which this psalm is so used by the writers of the New Testament. The faith of the Christian is greatly strengthened by a careful study of such Scriptures as these, whereof certain portions are clearly and manifestly fulfilled in Jesus Christ, while others yet await fulfillment. As to the latter, we can take our stand on the former and look forward with confidence to a final and com-

plete vindication of their truth. Having seen Jesus, the Anointed of Jehovah, highly exalted (Acts v, 31), notwithstanding the machinations of the people and the rulers, we can confidently wait till the heathen become his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth his possession. It is a great mistake, in my judgment, to allow ourselves to be turned away from the argument of prophecy in support of the truth of revelation, to that of pure and abstract reason, as to the order of nature, the possibility of a revelation, and the supernatural interposition of God in the affairs of men for their salvation. Prophecy and its fulfillment are demonstrations of the truth which men seek to establish; where lies the use of arguing that the thing is possible and probable, when the fact is before our eyes? As to the future progress of the Gospel in the work of converting the heathen, and the success of Jesus Christ in subduing the nations, there can be no doubt; the decree has gone forth that it shall be done. This psalm is giving me at least great boldness in preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ among the heathen at this time.

### I.—THE REBELLION OF THE EARTH.

The first three verses of this psalm give us a picture of the consensus of the various earthly forces against the reign of the Lord's Anointed. The heathen, the people, the kings of the earth, and the rulers are all agreed in opposition. The prophet asks a question only in order that he may answer it. It is as though he had said: To what purpose is this rebellion? It is a vain imagination that leads you to think that ye can prevail against the Lord's Anointed, or hinder the success of the decree that has gone forth in respect of the triumph of the Gospel.

**1.—The unbelieving confederacy.**—This confederacy is composed of the heathen, the people, the kings of the earth, and the rulers. They are described as "raging"; as "imagining a vain thing"; as "setting themselves"; as "taking counsel together."

(i) *The heathen rage* because the reign of the Anointed means the destruction of their heathenism and the overthrow of their gods. This raging consists in the mad and infuriated mutterings of an angry multitude before the outbreak of an actual rebellion. A few years ago, here in Calcutta, there was a remarkable movement of the Spirit; and a number of young men, high-cast Brahmins and others, were converted to Christ and boldly confessed him in Baptism. This fact so incensed the Hindoo leaders that there were several large mass meetings held, and angry and excited speeches were

made, in which they raged against Christ and his Gospel, against the missionaries and the young converts. But why did they rage? to what end? Did they reconvert these young men to heathenism? did they suppress the Gospel in this land? have they silenced and quenched the Spirit? Certainly not. Have the heathen ever been successful in hindering the final triumph of the Gospel in any land where it has been faithfully and simply preached? Let the history of the conflict of Christ with heathenism for the last nineteen centuries answer the question and demonstrate the vanity of the imagination. (ii) *The people imagine a vain thing.* They devise a foolish and useless scheme for the subversion of the Gospel, and the destruction of Christ. This is seen in the violence of the populace that surrounded Christ when he was before Pilate, shouting out: "Crucify him; crucify him." That was their vain scheme. They, it is true, were instigated to that course by their rulers; but later, when the "lewd fellows of the baser sort" assaulted the house of Jason and sought to kill the apostles (Acts xvii, 5), they were simply acting out the instinct of human enmity against God and his Christ. People—the mass of people—who are self-centered, who live in their own desires, are instinctively opposed to God and Christ, because they know that by the Anointed One they are being brought into judgment, and they suppose they can by violence put down the truth. Their devices are impotent as their passions are brutal. (iii) "*The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together.*" The best illustration of this is that cited by the apostles themselves in their prayer. (Acts iv, 25.) "The kings of the earth stood up and the rulers of the earth were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ." Herod and Pontius Pilate and the rulers of the Jews, who had previously taken counsel together, appealed to the temporal power of Cæsar, which they fancied was imperiled by the appearance of this Anointed Man. They were not wrong in the last induction. Earthly kings and rulers, who arrogate to themselves power and right which belong only to the sovereignty of God, are naturally opposed to the Anointed of the Lord,—who everywhere declares that not might but right shall be the power of government, and that every transgression of this law will but hasten the downfall of the human power which they arrogate and bring them into judgment. The enemies of the Christ of God are of many minds and many classes; they may be at bitter strife with each other, yet they are united in their opposition to the Kingdom of Heaven. Herod and Pilate are made friends over this, and the rulers of the Jews themselves, who hated Cæsar with a perfect hatred, declared themselves

to be Cæsar's friends if that were necessary to the crucifixion of Jesus. Although without the limits of the kingdom of God, they feel that they are under its sovereignty for judgment; and they would destroy it.

**2.—The object of their hatred.**—It is directed against the Lord and his Anointed. Now, it is perfectly manifest that these combinations and devices are never organized and schemed against any of the gods of the heathen. Any man may profess himself a Theist or a Deist, and preach these doctrines to his heart's content, and neither the heathen, the people, the kings of the earth, nor the rulers will make any opposition. So long as God is left in heaven and is only an object of speculation or worship in the abstract, they do not mind; but when God becomes incarnate on earth and begins to call men to repentance and judgment, then the earth rises up against him, because he brings the cords and bands of authority to bear upon them down here, and that interferes with their lustful plans. Have you ever thought how wonderful it is that Jesus, the best man who ever lived, became the object of the most bitter hate the world has ever known? It is because he was God manifest in the flesh, who came to take the sovereignty of the world into his own hand. (John v, 22-25.) Have you observed how strange it is that the very men who deny utterly the supernatural origin of Jesus Christ and his resurrection are the most bitter against him? Why should they be bitter against either a deliberate impostor or a self-deceived religious fanatic, who has been dead two thousand years? Because, though he was dead, he is alive again. Deny it as they may, they fear his power and dread the possibility of his sovereign judgment.

**3.—Their plan.**—"Let us break their bands asunder and cast their cords from us." The bands of Jehovah are of two kinds. First, they are bands and cords of authority and power, such as those with which Pharaoh once bound Israel, until God brake them and set his people free. (Jer. ii, 20; Lev. xxvi, 13.) Second, they are cords of a man and bands of love." (Hos. xi, 4.) These latter are not for bondage and oppression, as were those of Pharaoh, but for salvation. These cords and bands break the yoke of sin and set the oppressed free. Now, it is madness for the sinner to suppose that, by raging against God and Christ, he can break the bands and cords by which he is bound to the supreme moral government and made subject to judgment. On the other hand, what folly for sinners, who are hopelessly doomed to judgment and death, to reject and resist the gracious effort of Jehovah to cast the cords of the God-Man about them and the bands of everlasting love round their souls.

Whilst they cannot succeed in resisting the Almighty who will bring men to Judgment, they can resist the Jehovah of love who would save them from sin.

## II.—HE THAT SITTETH IN THE HEAVENS.

Whilst the heathen are raging and the people imagining a vain thing, the kings of the earth sitting and the rulers taking counsel together, Jehovah is sitting in heaven looking down upon them and laughing; as he sees them laboriously perfecting their plans to frustrate the sovereignty of Messiah, and lashing themselves into a fury of hatred, he holds them in derision. Laughter in this sense is the expression of quiet and confident strength, as against a vain and foolish opposition. To see men opposing themselves to him causes Jehovah to laugh,—to smile, as it were; then, as he looks further and notes their defiance and the magnitude of their disjointed combination, his laughing confidence changes into a scornful derision, as though he had exposed their folly and helplessness, had already defeated their plans, and held them up to contempt before the universe. “With the rage and exertion of his enemies the poet sets in beautiful contrast the laughing quiet of his God, who can with one word bring these proceedings to naught.” After this God “speaks unto them in his wrath and vexes them in his sore displeasure.” The rebellion of the enemies is not only impotent and ridiculous as against Jehovah and his Anointed; it is wicked too, and having shown its folly and absurdity, God proceeds to pronounce his judgment upon its wickedness, and to follow up his condemnation with the vexation of his wrath. Perhaps the speaking here may refer to remonstrance as well as warning. If remonstrance and warning are disregarded, then comes the rod of his anger. God’s arm is strong to save; but it is as terrible to punish. Sin, and especially rebellion against the Anointed, vexes God, and arouses the indignation of his righteous wrath; and when that is awakened, though he is slow to anger and plenteous in mercy, the visitation on the rebels must be terrible. Let even his dealings with his own people, according to what we have seen in some former studies, testify to the vexation and sore displeasure of God. But more particularly let the student read the account of the wrath of God poured out on incorrigible sinners and rebellious nations, as written in the book of Revelation; there will be seen the end of God’s wrath. “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and the nations that forget God.” The twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew also gives us a glimpse of the judgment of God



upon the nations, with the mercy to individuals who have for Christ's sake been good and kind to those who were his disciples.

### III.—THE ENTHRONEMENT OF CHRIST.

After exposing the folly of the enemy and setting forth what he will do with these rebels, he proceeds to depict the uselessness of all their combinations to prevent the reign of the Anointed. "Who hath resisted his will?" His will is that Christ shall be enthroned and rule over this world.

1.—"Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill."—What God has determined to do he counts as already accomplished. If we purpose anything for the future, we say "if possible" or "if God wills," but there is nothing which God cannot do, for "all things are possible with God," and there is no other will in the universe which can prevent him from carrying out his purpose. How vain for men to combine to defeat the will of God concerning Christ and his kingdom! Notwithstanding all he answers, "Yet have I done it." "It does not yet appear"; but it is done in the purpose of God, and will be accomplished in time, spite of all the powers in earth and hell. Following the line of prophecy and history, we see that, when the time was filled up, God did send his Son into the world; and in spite of the efforts of Herod to kill the young child and defeat God's purpose, God saved him and sent him forth on his heavenly ministry of humiliation and suffering; the Jews slew him upon the tree, and then taunted him with being the "Son of God," and said: "If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him; for he said, I am the Son of God." (Matt. xxvii, 40-44.) How little these raging heathen, people, kings, and rulers knew of God's resources! They had forgotten or ignored all he had said to them of his resurrection. "On the third day he arose from the dead." What can these combinations of men do with angels who roll away the stone, what with the resurrection power which laughs at death and hell, which bursts asunder the bands of corruption, and wrenches the gates of the grave, even as Samson tore from their hinges the gates of Gaza. How God must have laughed, and had them in derision, when he thought of how he would rescue his Son out of their hands, and make their very crime the instrument for carrying out his purpose. (Acts ii, 23; iv, 27, 28.) It is wonderful afterward to hear Peter preaching, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of

God exalted." And again: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour." (Acts ii, 33; v, 30, 31.) Truly it is vain to strive against God and his Anointed. And have the people, the heathen, the kings of the earth, and the rulers met with any better success in opposing the progress of his power and kingdom since he was raised from the dead? If they have slain one Christian, another and a score of others have been converted from among men to take his place. Stephen was slain, but Saul was converted, and by him the whole of western Asia was evangelized. Truly that was a significant word: "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion."

**2.—The decree.**—"I will declare the decree." This is the saying of the Anointed, preliminary to his message to the world. God's purposes are not impulses, and his works are not dictated by passing circumstances. He has made a decree, and he works all his purposes in accordance with that decree. "The determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" is of more importance to us than the appearance of passing events. If we can get at the decree of God, then we may rest content as to what will come to pass. This decree of which the Anointed One now speaks contains several provisions. (i) "Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten thee." Here is the first announcement of the wonderful relation between the Christ and the Eternal Father, the Great God and Jehovah. Jesus is the eternal Son of God. This was not known. Now it is to be known; and on a certain day, spoken of as "this day," the fact of his Sonship should be manifested in time to the world. When the time drew near, the birth of the Eternal Son was announced to the Virgin Mary (Luke i, 35); when he appeared on the banks of the Jordan God proclaimed him to be his Son: "And lo, a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. iii, 17.) Again, on the Mount of Transfiguration: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." (Matt. xvii, 5.) So much as to his Sonship in birth and ministry. The apostle alludes to this psalm when he speaks of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead: "God hath fulfilled the same (*i. e.*, the promise made to the fathers) unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten thee." (Acts xiii, 33.) This Sonship of Jesus is confirmed and demonstrated by power, and the fact of his resurrection from the dead is appealed to as settling the question. (Rom. i, 4.) His supremacy above all angelic power is another testimony to the

truth of the decree of revelation: "For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee?" (Heb. i, 5.) Let all people, therefore, know assuredly that Jesus is both Lord and Christ. (Acts ii, 36.) (ii) The universal possession, "Ask of me and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." This is a part of the decree also. Jesus, as the great and prime favorite, is challenged to ask a favor of God. Earthly kings were wont to promise the half of their kingdom to their favorites, but God outstrips them in his bounty to his only begotten Son, whom he has set on his holy hill as King in Zion, and says he will give him universal sovereignty over all the heathen and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession. We are to understand that now "all judgment is committed into the hands of the Son," and all "men must honor the Son even as they honor the Father. (John v, 22, 23.) Therefore, when he arose from the dead, he gave his commission to his disciples and bade them go and preach the glad tidings to all creatures, and to make disciples of all nations, assuring them that "all power in heaven and earth had been given unto him." (Matt. xxviii, 18-20.) (iii) The use he shall make of his vast power. "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." This passage must be understood, it seems to me, in this sense: That the heathen, the people, the kings of the earth, and the rulers, who conspired against the Lord and the Anointed One, are in his hand for final disposition, that they are as helpless as a potter's vessel is before a strong man, who with a touch of his finger can break it or dash it to pieces on the ground. How will he use this vast power? Certainly not first for destruction, but for salvation; then if men are still rebellious and will not have him to rule over them in grace and love, he will dash them to pieces as a useless potter's vessel. Of what use in earth, of what use in heaven is a man who will not have Christ to rule over him, and who persists in rebellion against the Lord and his anointed?

There is yet another sense in which I am always glad to read this passage: "Thou shalt dash the heathen systems and world-powers that oppose the Gospel in pieces as a potter's vessel"; that the people, having been freed from the tyranny of their systems and powers, may be made at liberty to accept Christ personally and individually. So will Christ at his coming destroy the authority of the heathen nations and world-powers, and give the rule of them to his saints: "And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as a vessel of a potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I received of my Father."

(Rev. ii, 27.) In this we see the significance of the turning and the overturning of the nations. (iv) Final exhortation. The first is to the rulers of the earth: "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings, be instructed, ye judges of the earth." Know that your power is only subordinate; that any rebellion on your part against Christ is folly, and the end of you and your power will be that of a shivered potter's vessel. Rather recognize the fact of the Sovereignty of Jesus Christ, and serve him with fear; let the rejoicing which characterizes kings be with trembling, for you are in a place of responsibility and privilege, which exposes you to many temptations of haughtiness and tyranny. The second exhortation is to the individual: "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry with you and ye perish from the way, when his anger is kindled but a little." To kiss the Son is to be reconciled to him. To fail in this, to be found out of the way of truth and holiness, is to perish even by a very little anger of God. The individual is not as strong as the king; and it will not require as much anger to overwhelm an individual as to overthrow a kingdom. The last word is a benediction upon the man who, heeding the decree and the words of grace from the Enthroned Christ, yields him his heart and confidence. "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

## XVI.

## GOD'S WORKS AND WORD —Psalm xix, 1-14.

(1) The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy-work. (2) Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. (3) There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. (4) Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, (5) Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. (6) His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof. (7) The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. (8) The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. (9) The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. (10) More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. (11) More-over by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward. (12) Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. (13) Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. (14) Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.—Psalm xix, 1-14.

The harmony between nature and revelation, or between God's works and his word, is everywhere apparent in the Scriptures. He who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth, is the Creator and Redeemer of man. All nature is in sympathy with man, both in his fall and in his recovery. The earth was cursed for man's sake, and the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together until now, waiting for the adoption, namely, the redemption of the body, which will be the culmination of the great salvation wrought out by God for man. In the magnificent and highly poetic opening of the prophecy of Isaiah he calls upon the heaven and earth to bear God witness as to the things which he is about to say to Israel: "Hear, O heavens; and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." (Is. i, 2.) When the same prophet was trying to encourage Jacob to trust in God in a time of discouragement, he bade him view the heavens: "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold, who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth

them all by names, by the greatness of his might, for he is strong in power; not one faileth. Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?" (Is. lx, 26-28.) And when he wishes Israel to know the certainty of his promise, and that the word which proceedeth out of his mouth will not return to him void, but will accomplish that whereto he hath sent it, he appeals to the infallible operation of the law of nature in respect to the mission of the rain and the snow. (Is. lv, 11.) Our Saviour's well-known parables of nature illustrate the same great truth. The prophets and the psalmists of the Old Testament needed not to have a chair in their theological schools for the harmonizing of science and revelation. The glorious creation was to them always a voice of God, and all their inspired utterances were in perfect harmony with the facts of nature.

This psalm of David is strikingly in harmony with the eighth and the one hundred and nineteenth psalms. In the eighth we have this same upward look at the heavens, and in the one hundred and nineteenth, we have his profound meditations in the law of the Lord. In the eighth his consideration of "the heavens; the work of thy fingers; the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained" (v. 3), wrought in him great humility: in the present psalm, when he beheld the sun, in the glory of his young morning strength racing across the heavens, the sight wrought in him a great prayer for the enlightening and cleansing of his heart. In the eighth he especially beholds the heavens at night, while in this, not forgetting what he had seen of the night, he particularly beholds the glory of God in the light of the sun. Surely every child of God knows the joy of contemplating the limitless heavens and the wonders that God has placed in the firmament, and rejoices that the God of Nature is also his God, the God of the Bible, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The book of nature and the book of revelation were certainly the work of the same hand.

### I.—THE GLORIES OF NATURE.

David learned to love Nature, no doubt, when he was a shepherd boy, tending his father's sheep in the wilderness. We can fancy the lad, both by day and night, lying under the shade of some over-spreading tree and looking up into the deep blue sea of the heavens, and being filled with a sense of its vastness, lighted all by the glory of the sun; or reclining on some hillock at night, contemplating the

myriad stars and the lovely majesty of the moon, and being thrilled with awe and reverence. Nature to him, however, was never so great as God. He saw in the sun and moon and stars, not objects of worship, but only the handiwork of God, the mere embroidery which his fingers had wrought on the face of the universe. To him they did but declare the glory of God. Moses desired to see the glory of God when he was in the wilderness with the children of Israel; he desired to see the face of God himself, not the splendor of his works. He wished to see God unveiled in his majesty. This he could not see and live. It was given him afterward to see that glory veiled but resplendent in the face of Jesus Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration, and it is given us to see it in the same face, as that face is revealed to us in the Gospel. (II. Cor. iii, 15-18.) It was in anticipation of this great truth that David was led to turn from the contemplation of the heavens to the wonders of God's word, where there was a yet deeper glory revealed. When he looked up into God's heavens, he was filled with glorious admiration; but when he turned to contemplate the spiritual depths of God's law he was filled with a sense of his deep need, and his soul poured itself out in prayer for cleansing.

**1.—The speech of the heavens.**—"Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge." The first word of the heavens to man is that of a question: "Who hath made these things?" And the second word is the answer to the question: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"; or in the language of our psalmist: "The heavens declare the glory of God." Surely he is but a madman who can listen to the voiceless speech of the heavens and not become conscious of the presence of God the Creator. Day and night the speech is the same. The speech of day, when there is no cloud in the sky, as for days I have seen it out here in the tropics, with only the sun shining in his strength, and the blue vault above suggestive of limitless space, tells us one story; the speech of the night, when the sun has sunk to rest and the moon rises in her majesty with a myriad host of stars in her train, tells us another. In some respects the speech of the mighty heavens is more vocal, their story more voluminous than that of the day. I was sailing recently for three weeks under a tropical sky, and the glory and delight of the voyage was to lie on the deck at night, when all the rest were asleep, and look up into the star-lit heavens. How vast! how unspeakably magnificent! how overwhelming the sense of space and distance! how inexpressibly mighty the extent of creation! How incomprehensible the wisdom

and power of God, not alone in the creation of all these multitude of worlds, but in adjusting and balancing them and arranging their several orbits! Surely the "undevout astronomer is mad." The speech of the heavens is "phaneron" (Rom. i, 19), clear and distinct as a manifestation or revelation of God, not indeed a full revelation, but a sufficient unveiling of his eternal power and Godhead to leave every creature, who has eyes to take in the visible speech of the sun, moon, and stars, without excuse for either atheism or idolatry. So Paul puts it. "Because that which may be known of God, is manifest to them; for God hath shown it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." (Rom. i, 19, 20.) The speech of the heavens, though wordless and voiceless in the ordinary sense of those words, is yet a speech and voice which is everywhere understood—which, in fact, constitutes a universal language. Men of all speech and language understand the speech of the heavens. Moreover, the voice and speech of the heavens have penetrated to the utmost limits of the world; wherever men dwell, "Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." Thus the speech of the heavens is a kind of forerunner to the preaching of the Gospel, which is to follow into every nation and to every creature. So Paul, speaking in a historic-prophetic vein, quotes a passage of this psalm: "But I say have they not heard?" (That is, the heathen.) "Yes, verily, their sound went into all the earth and their words unto the ends of the world." (Rom. x, 15-18.) The speech of the heavens teaches all that is grand in Theism, while the revelation of God in his law teaches the sublimer doctrines of Redemption and Salvation.

**2.—The bridegroom of the heavens.**—Turning from a general contemplation of the heavens, the psalmist concentrates his attention on the most glorious object within their limitless expanse. His imagination shapes the vast heavens into a tabernacle or dwelling-place, with the sun as its central and chief inhabitant. A gorgeous mansion built for the bridegroom of the day, whither he will finally bring his bride. Of the sun he says: "He is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, rejoicing as a strong man to run a race." Nobody who has not seen the sun rise in the East can quite understand the strength and beauty of this figure of speech. In our Western world the sun rises, as it were, gradually and somewhat lazily after a long dawn; but in the East he fairly leaps up, as out of a bed of fire, and springs by bounds up into the sky. I have spoken



of my delight in the contemplation of the midnight skies in the tropics. That delight was only equaled, and even surpassed, by the unspeakable delight of watching, morning after morning, the rising of the sun literally as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, decked in resplendent robes of light, a glory of gold and crimson such as the eye never beheld elsewhere. David must often have seen the sun so rising and speeding away with all the glorious strength of a strong man, who rejoices not in the race, but in the running of it, every step of the way being a joy to him, as the joy of Jesus made him strong to run his race through the heavens and the earth, despising cross and shame that faced him on the path. The course of the sun is fully unto the ends of the heavens. He spans the whole circuit, and leaves no part of the heavens untouched by his presence. Nor is it a mere passing visit. He leaves blessings behind him. "There is nothing hid from the heat thereof." The old writers were certain of the allegorical significance of this part of David's psalm. Jesus, like the sun (Mal. iv, 2; Rev. i, 16; x, 1), rises in this dark world and chases away the darkness; like a bridegroom he passes through the world seeking a bride for himself, to dwell with him in the tabernacle which God has built for him in the heavens; and like the sun he will not rest until he had thoroughly passed over the entire earth's circuit, and all people shall feel the effects of his passage in the light and life which he sheds upon the world.

## II.—THE BLESSINGS OF REVELATION.

Whether or not David was allegorizing when he thus wrote of the heavens, their speech, their central figure, and their glory, it is certain that his thoughts reverted from the contemplation of the heavens and the speech thereof to the Law of the Lord, with its speech and mission. The transition is both natural and inevitable, and ought to dispose of the foolish criticism that would make this psalm a patch-work of different authors, sewed together by some comparatively modern editor.

1.—**The Law of the Lord.**—In speaking of the revelation of God, as given by holy men of old, who were moved to speak by the Holy Ghost, David included it under several different designations: "The Law"; "the Testimony"; "the Statutes"; "the Commandments"; "the Fear"; "the Judgments." Thus is the revelation of God to man summed up. In these various forms of revelation we may find the whole mind of God unfolded to us. The Law, as a general designation of the Scriptures, means more and comprehends more than is

meant or comprehended by the same word when used in its technical sense. In the Law of the Lord we have not only a revelation of his righteousness and the eternal principles of his moral government; but also a foreshadowing of his Gospel. In the various statutes and testimonies in connection with the service of the tabernacle we see the great truths of expiation by sacrifice, the forgiveness of sins, and the cleansing of the soul. In "the fear of the Lord" we have the suggestion of the doctrine and practice of the Law of the Lord, and in the "Judgments of the Lord" we have a statement of the final revelation of the judgments of God on every question involved between himself and man, and shows how these judgments are founded on principles of everlasting righteousness and truth.

**2.—The mission of the Law.**—In the various designations of the law the psalmist finds occasion to point out its varied mission to man. The law being perfect, converts the soul. This expression is probably not to be understood in the same sense as that used in the New Testament to describe the effects of the Gospel. It rather means that the law turns the soul from mere self-centered contemplation to a consideration of its relations to God. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," is a word of revelation in advance of the mere speech of the heavens, which says "There is a God." The sure testimony of the Lord makes wise the simple; that is, a sure word is the ground of that wisdom which leads to salvation, and it is so plain that a simple-minded man cannot fail to understand and be moved by it. The statutes of the Lord being right, rejoice the heart. A heart given up to God takes delight in knowing exactly what is the right action in every given circumstance. In the various statutes and minuter definitions of revelation man has a sure guide to conduct, and rejoices that he is not left to decide doubtful questions himself. The pure commandment of the Lord enlighteneth the eyes of our understanding. There is no delphic mistiness about God's commandments, but a clear and pure word which gives light at once to the understanding and leaves us in no doubt. The doctrine and practice of the law of the Lord lead to cleanness of life and tend to permanence of character, which it both forms and establishes. The judgments or decisions of God's word on all questions are so manifestly based on truth and righteousness, that there is nothing further left for mind or heart to desire. No further revelation in this respect could be received or comprehended by man.

**3.—The value of the judgments of God.**—This point the psalmist puts in three ways. First, "They are more to be desired than gold." Like Wisdom, their price is beyond rubies. Whatever gold

may have in itself, it cannot convert the soul, it cannot make wise the simple, it cannot rejoice the heart, it cannot enlighten the eyes, it cannot purify the life, and it cannot certify the possessor that all his hopes rest upon a foundation of truth and righteousness. It is not wonderful that it has come to be a kind of current phrase in the Christian's lips, that he would not give up his hope in Christ for all the gold and silver in the world. Second, "It is sweeter than honey and the honey-comb." The whole law of God, including all its truth of redemption and salvation, is sweeter in the personal consciousness of the believer than the pure honey that drops from the honey-comb without any admixture of bee-bread. "O, taste and see that the Lord is good." "His commandments are not grievous," but delightful. Third, "In the keeping of them there is great reward." Not of merit, but of result. It would require pages simply to enumerate the blessings, which come to the soul that simply keeps God's word stored up in the memory and diligently walks in the way of its precepts. He is the truly happy and rich man who delights in the law of the Lord, and who meditates thereon day and night. These are the results of the psalmist's meditations on the law.

### III.—SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE.

The movement of the psalm is perfectly natural. From the contemplation of the heavens and their voiceless but universally understood speech, he turns to the "more sure word of prophecy" written in the law of the Lord, and considers what the quality of its speech. Having discovered the excellency and meaning of revelation, he finds conviction seizing on his soul, and he breaks forth into a great prayer for salvation. He who contemplates the heavens without beholding the glory of God has turned a deaf ear to their speech; he who studies God's word only to find doctrine has missed the end of the revelation. But he who beholds the law of sin and death, and also the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, has come to the place where God meets souls for salvation. The psalmist shows the power of the law in his heart in the threefold prayer which he utters.

**1.—A prayer for cleansing.**—The law had revealed to him the errors of his heart. These he could not have understood but for the clear law of God, by which comes the knowledge of sin. Having seen himself in this revealing glass, he prays for cleansing; by which we may suppose he comprehends all the blessings of forgiveness, justification, and the new birth. All these are based upon the one great sacrifice of Christ, whose "blood cleanseth from all sin."

**2.—A prayer for keeping.**—The secret faults of life, the deep-seated sins which corrupt the whole nature, are not all the troubles of a soul. After being cleansed and set right with God, the soul is beset by many sins and assaulted by many temptations. Presumptuous sins may be generally classified as the sins of believers. This prayer is then to be understood as a prayer for the keeping power of God. The New Testament ground for such a prayer may be found in the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, where we are urged to flee from sin because we are saved by grace, and warranted against its power because we are not under the law, but under grace. "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies." This prayer is that God would so energize our spiritual life, and strengthen the new man in us, that we will not be led presumptuously into sin. Perhaps, nay, without doubt, David had a thought of the way in which he was tempted into the great transgression. If God would keep him now and henceforth, he would in the future be innocent of any such sins. We all need most earnestly to pray to be kept from presuming to sin because we are under grace, and not law.

**3.—A prayer for a worshipful spirit.**—"Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer." These two designations of God, "Strength" and "Redeemer," show how evangelical were the psalmist's conceptions of God, who created the heavens and revealed himself in the law. He desires that his speech may be in harmony with that of the heavens and the revelation in the law; that the very thoughts of his heart may be such as will give pleasure to God. This is true worship. A right speech proceeding out of a pure heart, whose thoughts are inspired by and wakened into a tuneful harmony with the soul of God's perfect word.

## XVII.

## THE LORD MY SHEPHERD.—Psalm xxiii, 1-6.

(1) The Lord is my shepherd ; I shall not want. (2) He maketh me to lie down in green pastures : he leadeth me beside the still waters. (3) He restoreth my soul : he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (4) Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (5) Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies : thou anointest my head with oil ; my cup runneth over. (6) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life : and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.—Psalm xxiii, 1-6.

Perhaps there is no single passage in the whole Bible so familiar to the whole people of Christendom as this twenty-third psalm, unless it be that which is called the Lord's Prayer. This psalm stands in relation to the whole book in which it is incorporate much as the parable of the Prodigal Son stands to all the other parables of our Lord. It is a psalm universally appropriated. It seems somehow to have sung itself into harmony with all hearts. In joy or in sorrow, in depressed spiritual condition, or in exultation of confidence and victorious faith, it seems equally appropriate for giving expression to the deepest religious feelings of the heart. Its literary beauty is without comparison. Its smooth and sweetly-flowing measures are apparent to the most uncritical reader. It has afforded a never-failing theme for commentators and expositors, for preachers and Bible readers. The literature of the twenty-third psalm would make a good library of itself ; and that with this peculiarity, that it is without an element of controversy. When critics and expositors come to deal with this psalm, its sweet spiritual significance, its green pastures and still waters so refresh and quiet the soul, that all spirit of controversy dies out of the mind of the critic and polemic, and he surrenders himself to the charm of this heavenly song, as I have no doubt all contending saints will surrender their points of contention at the pearly gates of heaven. Every verse, every clause of the psalm, is a sufficient text for a whole sermon or homily, and to deal with it briefly is the most difficult part of the expositor's task. There seems to be no doubt that the psalm was written by

David. The greatest variety of opinion exists as to the period in David's life when it was written. It seems too full and mature to have been composed in his youth, as some suppose; while others think its freshness and peaceful numbers preclude the idea of its composition at a later and more turbulent period of the great king's life. Its historical setting is uncertain, as well as the date of its composition. From all the circumstances, and especially from certain internal evidences, I am inclined to the opinion that it was written either during the king's flight from Jerusalem at the time of Absalom's rebellion, or at least suggested by that event. Such a point, however, does not matter. The precious treasure contained in the psalm does not depend for its value on the time when it was mined, or the circumstances under which it was dug up.

### I.—THE SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP.

The term Shepherd is frequently applied to God in the Scriptures. (Gen. xlviii, 15; xlix, 24; Ps. lxxviii, 52; lxxx, 1; Mic. vii, 14; Is. lxiii, 11.) It is used to designate the Messiah. (Is. xl, 11; Ezek. xxxiv, 11-16; Zech. xi, 4.) It is therefore applied to Jesus in the New Testament. (John x, 1-16; Heb. xiii, 20; I. Pet. ii, 25; v, 4.) The term "flock," or "sheep of his pasture," is used to designate the people of God. (Ps. lxxiv, 1; lxxix, 13; xcv, 7; c, 3; Jer. xxiii, 1, etc.) All these passages, and many others, may be studied with profit in connection with this psalm, and will greatly increase the richness of the feast spread on this table.

**1.—The relation between Shepherd and sheep.**—We have at the very outset a contrast between weakness and strength. The sheep, of all animals, is the weakest and most dependent on care and protection. It is the most helpless creature; as stupid in all the emergencies that come upon it as it is timid and powerless in the grasp of its foes. I think it is on this account that the "sheep" and the "flock" have been chosen by the Holy Spirit to designate in a figure the people of God. It is only when we realize what sheep we are, and in what danger as sheep among wolves, that we turn with sweet and sublime confidence to our Great Shepherd, who says to us encouragingly: "Fear not, little flock." The Lord is the Shepherd of the psalmist, and ours too, if we have claimed him as such. The Lord is not alone God, but Jehovah. God is in his covenant of grace with us, to make us, through redemption, more than conquerors in every conflict and over every danger. It is helpful to study the names in the first part of the ninety-first psalm, and then gather

them all up with their deep significance and give them to our Shepherd. "The Almighty"; "The Most High"; "Jehovah"; "God." This is our Shepherd; and if he has undertaken to watch over us, feed us, defend us, and lead us, surely we may be very confident. As to the relation, the psalmist seems very sure. "The Lord is my Shepherd." If there is doubt here, then there is no comfort in the psalm. "The Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." (John x, 11.) The Great Shepherd repairs us for every good work. (Heb. xiii, 21.) And the Chief Shepherd will give a crown of glory when he appears. (I. Pet. v, 4.) But of what avail is all this, if he is not "my" Shepherd? So far as he is concerned, he offers himself freely to every soul in the universe, and puts all his vast power and wisdom, his faithfulness and his love, his strength and his might, at our disposal. If he is not our Shepherd, it is then only because we are proud and self-sufficient, and will not become his sheep. Before we can go further into the comfort of this psalm, and avail ourselves of its promises, we must settle this first question: "Is the Lord my Shepherd?" If he is, then we can go on and appropriate all that follows, and rejoice in the fullness of assurance.

**2.—All need supplied.**—"I shall not want." This is the first conclusion from the original statement. If the Lord is our Shepherd, of course it follows that we shall not want. Our wants are very great, both spiritually and temporally. But with Jesus for our Shepherd, we shall not want. We shall not want for redemption, for he has laid his life down for us; we shall not want for any of the blessings of redemption, because "in him we have" everything that the soul needs. (Eph. i, 7 *seq.*) We shall not want in time of health or sickness, in life or death, in prosperity or need. Though death overtake us, the great Shepherd of the sheep, who was brought again from the dead, will bring us with him into his glory. We shall not want for any earthly thing which we need. "The Lord God is a sun and a shield, he will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." (Ps. lxxxiv, 11.) "My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Phil. iv, 19.) The guarantee in these, and many other passages like them, is for "need," not for "lust." Paul knew how to be full and how to be hungry; how to be abased and how to abound; he knew the secret of having nothing, and yet possessing all things; of being poor, and yet able to make many rich; of being filled with divine contentment in whatsoever state he was. This indeed is not to want. Yet we are not to understand that the Lord is meager in his supplies; for the psalmist goes on to tell us

how richly he has been provided for. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." What more can a sheep desire or need beyond this? A pasture of young and springing grass. A sheep lying down in such a pasture, is a sheep fully satisfied. A hungry sheep would not be lying down. This is a beautiful picture; satisfied in the midst of plenty. No doubt the Lord has many hungry and lean sheep in his flock, but none in his pasture. If his sheep, as, alas, many do, will jump the bars and get out into the world, and feed among the goats, they must expect leanness to their souls, for whatever a sheep may get among the goats, he cannot get fatness and spiritual supply. "He leadeth me beside the still waters." The waters of stillness, or refreshing. This must suggest to us the refreshing and life-giving Spirit. May not the pasture be the rich word of God on which we feed, may not the waters be the life-giving Spirit of God that is ever inseparable from the prayerful study of his word?

**3.—Soul-restoration.**—If this psalm was written, as I think it was, after David's great sin, when he was a fugitive from Absalom, one of the bitter consequences of that sin, his thoughts naturally reverted to that sad chapter in his history. He comforted himself with this, that though there were sad and bitter temporal consequences still to be reaped from his sin, Divine forgiveness had come to him, and his soul was restored, brought back to God, and with this comfortable assurance, he could bear the other afflictions with patience. But apart from any historical connection, what more precious thought than this: that when we go astray like wandering sheep, our Shepherd is such an one that he restores us and brings us back. It may also carry another and even deeper meaning: "He restoreth my soul"; he keeps it up with heavenly enrichment and constant supply. The waste of spiritual life is constantly made up by new supplies of grace, as the waste of physical tissue is restored by our daily food. The Christian has great need of this, for every temptation resisted, every bit of work done, every trial endured, takes "virtue out of us," and if we were not constantly restored, we should soon become exhausted.

**4.—Perfect guidance.**—A sheep does not know where or how to walk. No more does a Christian. If God, our Shepherd, did not undertake to guide us with his Spirit and hold us by our right hand, we should be making innumerable blunders, taking all kinds of wrong paths, and getting into all kinds of dangerous places. "He leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." Paths of righteousness are paths of rightness and safety as well. "Who



is he that can harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" (I. Pet. iii, 13.) If we walk by the Spirit, we shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. (Gal. v, 16.) In the twenty-seventh psalm David prays that God would lead him in a plain path because of his enemies, those who were watching him to see him make some crooked mistake; in this psalm he rejoices that he is so led in a right, and consequently a safe path. How many of God's sheep would go over the precipices of destruction if it were not for the Good Shepherd's patient and faithful leading! And their sweetness is made more sweet because he does it for his name's sake. Not alone for our sake, but for his own. His own glory and his own joy are so wrapped up in the safety and beauty of his flock, that he makes our need his care.

**5.—Victory over death.**—In the valley of the shadow of death he would fear no evil. There were many dark and narrow defiles in the deep valleys through which the shepherd of Palestine had to lead his sheep and protect them from the wild beasts that lurked therein ready to spring upon them. It is possible that, as David was fleeing from his rebellious son and his treacherous subjects, he thought that death might be his portion; but in this also he was confident in his Shepherd. I may walk through the valley of the shadow of death, but I will fear no evil. "Thou art with me." How can I fear if Jesus is with me? "Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." The rod of the shepherd was for guiding and correcting the flock, the staff was the heavy, iron-shod mace which the shepherd carried at his side in order to beat off the wild beasts that might attack his flock. The presence of the Great Shepherd of the sheep, who has passed through death and the grave, with his mighty weapons of defense, brings "comfort,"—substantial aid to the weakest sheep as he passes through this valley of shadows, and not only protects and saves him from the power of death, but delivers him from its very fear of it. The believer passes through this valley not dead, but, as it were, full of life, "walking"; he escapes the very substance of death, at most but encountering its shadow. No wonder the psalmist sung when he thought on these things.

## II.—QUIETNESS AND CONFIDENCE.

The psalmist now changes his figure, but keeps to his thought. In the former part of the psalm he is a sheep, and the Lord is his shepherd. Here he is a guest, with the Lord as his host. As a sheep his need was supplied out of green pastures and still waters;

as a guest his table was supplied out of a bountiful storeroom, and he was enabled to sit down quietly and eat without a fear.

**1.—The table supplied.**—If we are right in supposing that this psalm was written during the king's hasty flight from Jerusalem, he may have been thinking with gratitude of how Ziba, and Shobi, and Machir, and Barzillai brought him out great supplies of raisins, wheat, barley, flour, parched corn, beans, lentils, honey, butter, sheep, and kine to supply all his need in the wilderness. (II. Sam. xv, 1; xvii, 27-29.) Thus did the Lord supply his table even in presence of his enemies. So will the Lord take care of us and enable us in quietness to eat and drink of both spiritual and temporal supplies. The complete lesson of the verse is that, whatever be our surroundings or perils, our gracious God is able to keep us, if stayed on him, in perfect peace, and will supply all our needs, according to his riches, in Christ Jesus.

**2.—The anointing.**—“Thou anointest my head with oil.” David was a fugitive; humanly speaking, he was hopelessly ruined. His kingdom had been wrested from him and another ruled in his stead. Yet, when he thought the matter over, and saw how God was caring for him in the wilderness, by spreading a table for him in presence of his enemies, he remembered that he was king not by his own choosing or seeking, much less by his own merit. God had sought him out, anointed him as king, and made a voluntary covenant with him respecting his own reign and that of his descendants. “I am a king by God's appointment; he set me on the throne, and not I myself; that anointing is the pledge of my return. He will devise means that his banished be not expelled from him.” So he comforted himself and took hope for his return. This may we all do. We also have an anointing and a sealing for our salvation, and for kingship with our Lord in his new and everlasting kingdom. The times may be out of joint; the perils around us may be great; our own sins may have brought us into great and grave troubles; our enemies may be numerous and strong; yet God has “anointed us,” and he will see that the pledge of the Holy Spirit is redeemed, and that we are brought off more than conquerors through Jesus Christ, who loved us.

**3.—The overflowing cup.**—“My cup runneth over.” Here indeed is triumph. A banished king, with everything against him; a man suffering the temporal consequences of his own sin; surrounded by enemies; walking, as it were, through the very valley of the shadow of death, that man rejoices over what he calls “an overflowing cup.” His soul is in an intoxication of joy and gladness. And

what was the occasion of it all? Why, just what he has been rehearsing to us. The Lord was his Shepherd; he was in no want, but supplied to the full; his soul was restored, and though he had taken some bad and crooked paths, he was now in the hands of a Shepherd who would lead him for his own name's sake; death had no terrors for him; his table was spread in presence of his enemies, and he knew that his God was able to deliver him; the holy anointing was upon him, and he was still God's king, and would find his kingdom in spite of his enemies. All this made him glad with an exceeding great and happy gladness. His cup was running over with joy. And may not we rejoice in like manner? Is it not to good purpose that we are bidden to "rejoice in the Lord always?" Surely we have had enough experience of the Lord's goodness and grace to fill our hearts with joy and our lips with songs of praise. What hath not the Lord done for us? The mere fact of our sins being forgiven and our souls born again is enough to make us sing songs forever; but when we remember all his loving-kindnesses and tender mercies, how can we express our gladness except in some such way as this? Surely our cup runneth over. God has filled it to the brim with good things, and then in turn our joy is like that which comes from a well-filled and overflowing cup of good wine, "which maketh glad the heart of man."

**4.—The heavenly footmen.**—"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." This is the conclusion which the psalmist came to, even while, to the outward appearance, he was suffering the deepest affliction and the greatest misfortunes. It is one of the riddles of the Christian life, which is inexplicable to the unbelieving world, that what seems afflictions to them are really, if not the actual means, at least the occasion of such soul-blessing that the saints know how "to rejoice in tribulation also." What seems ill to others is good to them. Ill that God blesses is always our good; unblessed good must ever be ill. It is true in this life that those who are rich in earthly possessions are followed, as they travel about, with footmen to wait on them. I am seeing this every day out here in this Oriental country, where everybody is waited on by crowds of footmen and servants. But David, poor and bereft as he was of the servants who were always ready to do his bidding while he reigned in earthly splendor, now saw himself attended by two heavenly footmen, "Goodness" and "Mercy" by name, who were appointed by God to follow him all the days of his life. These heavenly footmen do not desert us in our affliction and times of need, but then more than ever they follow and serve us. They are

God's servants, appointed to wait on his children, and they serve the lowly with no less diligence than the great. Moreover, each servant of God's giving has his special appointment; nor should we be "complete in him" without both. "Goodness supplies our needs, and Mercy blots out our sins."

**5.—At home with God forever.**—"And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Dwelling in the house of the Lord does not mean taking up an abode in the sanctuary, but being in the family of God, having part and lot with his children, enjoying his love and communion, feeding on his plenty, profiting by his instruction, and being protected by his power. Henceforth there are to be no more wanderings, no more compromises with the children of this world, but a quiet and happy contentment in the Father's house. I think when the Prodigal Son returned to his father's house, experienced his goodness and mercy, and saw the gladness with which he was welcomed back, he must have said: "This is my rest; here will I stay." My father's house shall be mine forever; nor will I stray again into far countries, where I have wasted my substance, done hurt to my soul, and put shame on my father's name. It is not "I *will* dwell in the house of the Lord forever;" but "I *shall*." God will by his grace put sweet compulsion on my soul and keep me. It is my choice to do this certainly, but my will is not sufficient. I have availed myself of God's everlasting "shall"; I have so surrendered to him, so submitted myself, that he will keep me, therefore I shall be kept. May the Lord interpret this sweetest of psalms to our souls, teach us its divine lessons, and lead us into its green pastures, and, beside its still waters, restore our wandering and wasted souls; lead us in right paths; give us victory over all fear; spread our table for us; appoint his goodness and mercy to keep us and give us a happy home with him forever.

## XVIII.

## THE PRAYER OF THE PENITENT.—Psalm li, 1-13.

(1) Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness : according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. (2) Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. (3) For I acknowledge my transgressions : and my sin is ever before me. (4) Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight : that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. (5) Behold, I was shapen in iniquity ; and in sin did my mother conceive me. (6) Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts : and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. (7) Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean : wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (8) Make me to hear joy and gladness ; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. (9) Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. (10) Create in me a clean heart, O God ; and renew a right spirit within me. (11) Cast me not away from thy presence ; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. (12) Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation ; and uphold me with thy free Spirit. (13) Then will I teach transgressors thy ways ; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.—Psalm li, 1-13.

Luther said that this psalm had been used more in prayer and song in the Church than any in the psalter. Like the twenty-third psalm, it strikes a deep and responsive chord, though of a different nature, in every heart that knows God, and has had the spiritual experience of the bitterness of sin and the joy of forgiveness. Concerning the authorship and the occasion for the writing of this psalm there is no doubt. It is a psalm of David, the king of Israel, who, through idleness and indulgence, neglect of duty, and love of ease, had fallen into a great sin, the details of which are recorded in II. Samuel xi, xii. It was probably written some considerable time after the events which these chapters narrate, and was intended as an offering of praise and gratitude to God for his great mercy in forgiving his sin and restoring him to divine favor. It is remarkable as being a clear analysis of sin, and an exhibition of the way of salvation based on an evangelical insight into the method of God's grace with sinners. Though uttered by a saint under the Old Testament dispensation, it is perfectly fitted to express the penitent desires and thanksgiving of a believer in New Testament times. It is also remarkable as showing that a man who is in the most exalted position,

when really convicted of sin, will not hide behind his position, to seek special favor or exemption on that ground. It further shows that past grace is not in anywise a warrant for present sin, and no amount of gracious character exhibited in the past is any guarantee against temptations in the present and future, against which even the most gracious soul must be constantly on guard. There is also this gracious lesson contained in it. No matter how deep and desperate sin is, grace is greater than sin. Nor is high position, either of earthly estate or spiritual eminence, a guarantee against a great and deplorable fall. Many years of a gracious life and of distinguished favor with God tends to strengthen the Christian character, but character itself, apart from a constant dependence upon the momentary keeping power of God, is not sufficient to preserve a man from a wave of temptation. Even Jesus our Lord, though he had no inward bias toward sin, yet having taken our nature, having put himself voluntarily under the law and subjected himself to the trial of temptation, had to pray against the power of sin and the assaults of Satan. In fact, this psalm ranges over the most complex questions, and is a measuring line and a plummet, of which it will be profitable for us all to learn the use by personal application. There is just another general lesson that is well worth our thought before we enter upon the detailed examination of David's prayer. All true penitence must take account of God's willingness and readiness to forgive. The repentance which deals only with sin, and not with grace, is nothing more or better than despair, and will lead a man to go out and hang himself, as did Judas, rather than to go out and weep bitterly, as did Peter. It was that single glimpse of the Saviour's face that saved Peter from the fate of Judas.

### I.—THE PRAYER.

This prayer of David was both general and specific. He desired mercy, and he desired it to be specifically manifested in several ways, which he enumerates. The petition also contains specific acknowledgment of his trouble and the cause of his need. That he had a large and right apprehension of the character of God is seen from the ground argument which he uses: "According to thy loving-kindness, and the multitude of thy tender mercies." He knew that the nature of God, though just, was also gracious; that though he would by no means clear the guilty, yet he was "merciful and gracious, abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." (Ex. xxxiv, 6, 7.) There is no

doubt that David had this great passage in mind when he made his prayer, for he quotes its very words in his petition: "iniquity, transgression, and sin." It is a great advantage to the petitioner who comes to God if he is familiar with the Word, and so can use the very arguments with which God thus provides him. Moreover, he had much experience of past loving-kindnesses and tender mercies. He did not plead that he had not sinned before, and that he had not in the past taxed the divine compassion and mercy; but, in fact, makes the past mercies, which he has experienced in so many cases, the very ground of his expectation in coming to God again. "Thou hast so often forgiven me in the past, that I am the more bold to come to thee in this bitterest time of need." This was not presumption, but a large and profoundly reverend apprehension of the greatness of the grace of God.

**1.—The general petition.**—"Have mercy upon me." He did not plead right or merit; he did not plead a mitigation of the righteous law of God. He knew exactly what he needed and wanted; and so, like the publican, he sent the arrow of his prayer straight to the mark of his need: "Mercy, mercy, mercy." This is the sinner's need; this must be the sinner's plea. Mercy is the unmerited favor of God to a sinner. It is not mere favor and compassion; not pity and good-will; but it is the favor of a righteous God, who has ground for anger and punishment, and yet who remits penalties and turns aside judgment on the ground of a propitiation made for sin. God is not unjust in forgiving sin, but "faithful and just." (I. John i, 9.) The mercy of God to sinners flows out to us through the bleeding wounds of Jesus Christ, who "died for our sins," and "bore them in his own body on the tree."

**2.—The specific petition.**—Sin is manifold, and needs mercy variously applied. As soon as David began to look his sin well in the face, he saw that it was a complicated matter. He speaks of it under three different heads. (i) "My iniquity." Iniquity is properly rebellion: that act of the will which deliberately takes itself out of God's hands, casts off his government, and does the thing that is pleasing to itself without reference to the will or law of God. It is a declaration of spiritual independence of God. Sin entered the world through an act of rebellion on the part of our first parents. Iniquity is always the first element in sin. (ii) "My sin." To sin is to "miss the mark"; to "come short of the glory of God." God has given us a standard of righteousness by which to regulate our conduct, and if in our lives we have failed to conform to that standard, we have sinned. No man, therefore, can claim life on the ground

of a perfect obedience, because all have sinned; all have missed or failed of a "perfect score." David saw in his recent actions a lamentable failure to fulfill the law both in respect of God and man; therefore he saw that he had brought himself under a fresh condemnation of that law. (iii) "My transgression." Transgression means to cross over a line. It is an advance on sin in this: that sin fails to come up to a prescribed line of conduct, while transgression deliberately crosses over a line of prohibition. In three particulars David had transgressed the law of God: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife." He had done that. "Thou shalt not commit adultery." He had done that. "Thou shalt not kill." He had done that. Here, then, was his sin fairly analyzed. "I am a rebel; I have come short; I have transgressed. Now, in view of his triple sin, he desires from God three things: (a) "Blot out my transgressions." All of them; the covetousness; the adultery; the murder. To blot out carries with it the idea primarily of forgiveness. "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sin." "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." (Is. xliii, 25; xlv, 22.) (b) "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity." This is a prayer for justification, as the former petition was for forgiveness. Forgiveness is an act of the gracious and sovereign will of God; but to justify a man from his iniquity is to do so on the ground of some expiation. Hence David's allusion to the ceremonial law. This reference is more manifest if we compare it with verse 7: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." (Compare Lev. xiv, 4, 9; Num. xix, 18; Heb. ix, 22.) The allusion may be illuminated if we remember the word of Isaiah to sinful Israel: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool;" and the ascription of praise to the Lord Jesus: "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood." (Is. i, 18; Rev. i, 5.) (c) "Cleanse me from my sin." This is a prayer for sanctification. To be forgiven sets us right with God personally; to be justified, sets us right with his offended and outraged law; to be cleansed or sanctified, sets us right as to character. Sin is an offense against God, against the law, and it leaves a stain deep and dark on our souls. God's mercy provides for this also, and we are assured of such cleansing. "Sanctified and cleansed with the washing of water by the word, not having spot or wrinkle, . . . but wholly and without blemish." (Eph. v, 25-27.) Here indeed is mercy, when all these things may be done for a sinner, and that



“thoroughly.” All this David sought in his prayer. Nothing short of this ought to satisfy, or will satisfy, a soul “thoroughly” awakened to a sense of the enormity of sin and its consequences.

## II.—THE CONFESSION.

Petition must always be accompanied with confession. David was bold in his petition, but no less thorough in his confession. He did not deal with God on account of his sins in any half-way measures. He wanted all that God could do for him, and he would keep back nothing in his penitent confession.

**1.—Frank acknowledgment.**—Until a sinner is deeply convicted of sin he will always palliate it, and refuse a frank acknowledgment. David made no excuses, offered no justification. “I have sinned.” That is the long and the short of it. This he confesses to God, when casting himself on him for mercy. Many persons will acknowledge sin to men who will not confess it to God. But not so this penitent. Like the publican, he goes straight to the mark and says, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” That he was a child of God; that he had enjoyed much of God’s favor; that he was the favored and great king after God’s own choice and heart, made no difference. Sin is sin, in whomsoever it is found and under whatsoever circumstances it is committed. “All unrighteousness is sin.” Better to accept this position and frankly confess it. Moreover, it was not anybody else’s sin. He did not excuse himself on the ground that he was tempted—as possibly he was—by the actions of another. He did not lay the blame on Bathsheba, as Adam laid his on Eve. “It is my sin; I acknowledge and confess it.” This is very fine and true and honest, and shows, after all, that David was a true-hearted man, though he was a sinner; and no doubt God was as pleased with this as he was offended with the sin.

**2.—A standing offense.**—Until the sin was thoroughly put away it was ever before his mind, and ever on his conscience. This was not the case when he wrote the psalm, but the words express the state of his mind at the time of the transgression, and until he had been entirely restored to God. Forgiven sin is not ever before the mind of the forgiven sinner; but unforgiven sin is a standing offense to a true Christian. It is one of the worst possible things for a Christian to allow sin to fade away from the conscience before having it purged away by forgiveness. It was a sign of the thoroughness with which David dealt with his sin that he kept it in the grip of his penitence until he had handed it over to God for its removal.

When sin ceases thus to be an offense constantly before the conscience of the transgressor, the soul is certainly in a very dangerous condition. David could not rest, day or night, with this hideous thing confronting him; nor can we, if we have any right apprehension of sin. Unforgiven sin is before us and before God; but forgiven sin is cast behind God's back, and is among the things upon which we also may turn our backs.

**3.—An offense against God.**—David had done a foul wrong to both Bathsheba and her husband, who was his devoted friend and loyal servant; but in dealing with sin, neither Uriah nor his wife were taken account of. Sin is against God. We may wrong our fellow-man, but in the true sense of it we can only sin against God. This confession was a sure indication that David rightly understood his relation to God in the matter. It is a part of the consequences of an alienated mind that man does not recognize the wrong done to God. "God is not in all his thoughts," and so sin is not considered as an offense against him. But this penitent considered that God was more wronged by his offense even than man, and while no doubt he sorrowed that he had wronged his friend and his friend's wife, he most bitterly grieved that he had wronged God in them. He gives an explanation of this declaration when he says: "That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." The apostle uses this expression in Rom. iii, 4, to establish the fact of the righteousness of God in his word and in his judgment. God has spoken clearly about sin, and has pronounced judgment against it. David had accepted both the word and the judgment of God as true, and now acknowledges that sin is against God, is guilty, and deserves punishment. This is what is involved in every true confession.

**4.—Deep conviction.**—"Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Considering the source and cause of his sin, David is convinced that an inherent depravity of nature is the evil root from which all sin springs. So herein he confesses his sinful nature as well as his sinful deeds. It is out of the heart that all evil proceeds. He lays this also before the Lord and seeks deliverance from an evil nature as well as forgiveness for his sins. Hence his further prayer: "Behold thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part, thou shalt make me to know wisdom." In this we have a strong hint of regeneration. The nature that is spoiled by sin must be renewed inwardly. Not until then will a man turn from sin with loathing and hatred.

### III.—RENEWED PETITION.

David was set upon thorough work with himself, and desired above all things that this bitter experience might be turned to account by binding him more surely to God, and more entirely deepening his spiritual life. He had plowed over the field once; but he is not content, and now he subsoils his heart with the plow of repentance and begins to plant in faith. He rises in his petition to grasp the blessings of faith and the fruits of real conversion and renewal. He repeats his prayer for purging and washing, just as oftentimes, even after we are forgiven, the memory of the bitter sins still remains, and we are in some doubt whether it is all gone. It is like the burning and itching of a wound that is healed. It is the sign of returning health; the desire of the soul for an after-bath in the cleansing tide.

**1.—Joy and gladness.**—Not content with mere forgiveness and the following blessings, he longed now that God should speak some word of power to him that should fill his soul with gladness. God had broken his bones with the words which Nathan had spoken to him. (II. Sam. xii, 9–13.) The whole framework of his spiritual life had been crushed. Now he pleaded that with forgiveness might come some word of favor and love, that would build him up in gladness as the word of condemnation had crushed him. Again, as he prays, the bitter remembrance of his sin appears, and he beseeches God to hide his face from them and to blot them out; well knowing that until God had made an end of them there could be no joy for him any more.

**2.—He prays for a new heart.**—With his longing for God's favor there arises an intense desire for inward holiness. "Create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me." His desire is intense, and the fear of not being heard in this, and the awful consequences of being left to himself, lead him to break out in a passion of fresh importunity. "Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me." How dreadful if sin should be the final cause of thus depriving him of the privilege of coming into God's presence and of the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit. He was just beginning more fully to realize how completely sin cuts a soul off from God, and in what a terrible state he had been, before he was awakened to a sense of his awful transgression by the word of God in judgment, and to the sweeter knowledge of forgiveness by the prophet of the merciful Jehovah.

3.—**Prays for the restoration of salvation's joy.**—"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." He had hitherto sacrificed the joy of salvation for the pleasures of sin. The latter he now renounced with bitter repentance, and pleaded for a restoration of the former state of salvation with its pure delights. Who can tell to another what is the joy of salvation? The joy of knowing God in personal reconciled relation; the joy of knowing that all sins are blotted out; the joy of knowing that the law which condemns has been satisfied by the atoning love of Christ; the joy of knowing that God is working in our souls a new nature, which will finally conform us to the image of Jesus Christ; the joy of heavenly communion and daily walk with God; the joy and delight in the word of God and in prayer—all these things enter into the joy of salvation. It is not until they are lost, and the bitter dregs of the draught of worldly pleasures from the bottom of that cup are tasted, that one fully realizes how great and pure they were. A man may be restored to favor and recovered from backsliding, and yet not have the joy of salvation. That is not so easily obtained; it cannot be got by effort; it must be restored by God himself. David goes further, and begs to be upheld, hereafter, by the free Spirit of God. Or, as it is sometimes read: "Uphold me, O thou free Spirit." There is no compulsion laid upon the Spirit of God. He is *free* to uphold a soul. David longed that his free and loving power might be granted to him, that, being strengthened with might in his inner man, he might not again fall into the depths of sin. Such a prayer will never be without profit to any one of us.

4.—**A vow of consecration.**—David was not altogether selfish. He was grateful for the recovery of his own soul, and began to feel sympathy and longing for the souls of other transgressors. He therefore declares that, when salvation's joys are restored to him, being fully strengthened by the Spirit of God, he will make it his business to testify the grace of God to other sinners. He does not say that he will convert sinners. This he knew he could not do; but he says he will *teach* sinners the ways of God; and that so teaching, transgressors shall be converted to God. Nobody is so well calculated to teach sinners God's ways as a man who has himself been saved, and especially a man whose life is filled with the joy of salvation. A rejoicing believer is a believer who has power over men. A rejoicing Church is always the mother of many children. Nor is there any better way to maintain spiritual joy and cultivate spiritual strength than by teaching sinners the ways of God.

Altogether this was a noble prayer and beautiful consecration of the penitent king and the restored transgressor.

And let us remember that, by reason of such a state of soul within as prompted such a prayer, notwithstanding his sore misdoings, he was still declared to be a man after God's own heart.

## XIX.

## DELIGHT IN GOD'S HOUSE.—Psalm lxxxiv, 1-12.

(1) How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts ! (2) My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord : my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. (3) Yea, the sparrow hath found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God. (4) Blessed are they that dwell in thy house : they will be still praising thee. Selah. (5) Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee ; in whose heart are the ways of them. (6) Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well ; the rain also filleth the pools. (7) They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God. (8) O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer : give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah. (9) Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed. (10) For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. (11) For the Lord God is a sun and shield : the Lord will give grace and glory : no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. (12) O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee —Psalm lxxxiv, 1-12.

The authorship of this and eleven other psalms is ascribed to the sons of Korah. There are, however, two ways of reading the inscription : Either "for" the sons of Korah, or "of" the sons of Korah. Some authorities hold that this and the other Korahite psalms were simply dedicated or directed to these musical sons for their use in the worship of the Temple, but were in fact written by David. That they have much of the style, both in their subject and structure, of the Psalms of David, there is no doubt ; but it does not follow that they were written by the king. The Korahites were a musical family descended from Levi, who had charge of the temple music. There is no reason why they should not have composed the words of the psalms they sang as well as the music to which they sang them. But again we remark, the authorship of the psalm is of the least importance ; the contents, the teaching, of the poem is that which we are anxious to get at and profit by. One characteristic of the Korahite psalms is the "longing which they express for the worship of God in the Holy City." This feature is the leading thought in the psalm before us. There is no evidence that the psalm was written during the captivity, or expresses the desire of an absent person to worship in the Temple of God at Jerusalem. Nothing in

the psalm is necessarily inconsistent with the presence of the worshiper in the Holy City, and within reach of the temple. Indeed, those who most frequent the house of God are mostly they who most love it and long for its worship. So we think of the writer of this psalm; he was a frequenter and lover of God's house, and found a blessedness in dwelling there.

### I.—LONGING FOR GOD.

The psalm opens with an inscription of praise to the house of God, "How amiable are thy tabernacles." The meaning of the word amiable is both beloved and worthy of being beloved. The idea is that to love the tabernacle of God is to have a rational love for a thing which is in every way worthy of being loved. If we remember that the true tabernacle of God, his real dwelling-place, is Jesus Christ, by whom he came into the world to dwell with us, the true Immanuel, then we can all understand the secret of the spirit of praise that inspired the writer of this psalm. For he is "the chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely." The real worshiper is not a mere fanatic; he is a soul that is able to give a reason for the hope that is in him. "I know whom I have trusted," said Paul. "I love the Lord because he hath heard my voice and my supplication." True worship calls out all the intelligence and all the affections of the worshiper. The tabernacle was the place where God had appointed to meet his people; there on the Mercy Seat he dwelt between the cherubim, to speak forgiveness and blessing to them that sought him; and as none ever sought the Lord in vain, those who went the most frequently to the tabernacle received most blessing, and so came to love the tabernacle for the sake of God, who dwelt there, and the blessings there received from his hand. He is here addressed as "Lord of Hosts," both because this title sets forth both his Saviour's name, "Jehovah," and the grand fact of his sovereignty. God is the true source of all love, grace, and mercy to the sinner, as well as of all authority and power. There was therefore every reason for this sweet singer to love the Lord.

**1.—Soul-hunger.**—Here is a man on the highway to blessedness; for has not the Lord said: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness." "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord." There is not only a great desire for the blessings found in the courts of the Lord; there is a positive need of these blessings. Religion is not a mere pleasure to the soul; it is the soul's deepest necessity. A man in good health enjoys his food, and

when he is hungry, he desires it; yet not only is there a desire, but a positive fainting of the body if the food is withheld. So it is with the soul of man that has been brought from death unto life. The sinner who is yet dead in trespasses and sins, does not hunger, faint, and long for God. He lives without God. Natural life is independent of God in this sense. If the body is well fed, if the outward man is provided with all its necessities, there is at least carnal satisfaction and contentment. But once the soul is quickened, it must have "bread to eat that the world knows not of." The "heart and flesh cries out for the living God." It is not merely the "Courts of the Lord," but it is the Living God himself whom the soul wants. Merely frequenting the house of the Lord and going through certain acts of worship, listening to fine music, hearing eloquent sermons, bathing one's self in the dim religious light of a cathedral, does not meet the needs of a hungry and fainting soul. It may satisfy a mere formalist; but the living soul must have the Living God. Life is the characteristic of true Christianity; and hunger and thirst are sure signs of vigorous health.

**2.—God's altars.**—The psalmist had often seen the little sparrows flitting about the temple, and even building their nests in the eaves of the house, wherein to lay and nestle her young. He thought how happy it would be for himself to have a home in such a place. And yet we must not suppose that his idea was a mere sensuous and literal thought. I suppose the meaning of this beautiful passage is something like this: "As the sparrow has found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself about the temple of God, so would I fain build a house for myself, and rear my children, even about the very altars of God." He passes from the idea of an occasional visit to the tabernacle for frequent refreshment, to that of perpetual dwelling there in God's house. He would fain dwell in the house of the Lord forever. It is the same thought with which David concludes the twenty third psalm. The Prodigal Son thought of his father's house, of the "bread enough and to spare" to be found there, and he fain would have the bread and a dwelling-place there, even though as an hired servant. The altars of God are suggestive of the forgiveness of sins, of communion, and protection. For there were the various sacrifices made which brought the soul into communion with God, through the burnt offerings, the meat offering, the peace offering, and the sin and trespass offering; there the man who was fleeing for his life might ever find a place of safety and refuge.

Having expressed this desire, he ascribes two other titles to the



Lord: "My King and my God." He who would call God his King must yield himself to God by faith, as well as do homage to him; then will he be taken into his family and given a place in his house.

**3.—The blessings of God's house.**—It is quite true that God has no dwellers in his house, no members of his family who are not his servants; but, on the other hand, true religion is not a mere clinging to God for life and subjection for service. To dwell in God's house is to be filled with all blessings. "O, blessed dwelling! In God's house everything will be granted to the soul, and nothing be asked of it in return but the praise of him." Yet this is no bargain. These blessings and the answering praise, which leads on to the truest service, are the natural and necessary complements of each other. "The Kingdom of Heaven is not meat and drink (alone), but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." When Jesus went up into the temple and was found there by his parents, he justified his stay by saying: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

## II.—THE BLESSED MAN IS A BLESSING.

It is a peculiarity of the construction in this psalm that each successive strophe begins with the thought with which the last one ended, only carrying it farther on. The psalmist now raises his thought from that of being blessed in God's house to that of being a blessing to others. It reminds us of the teaching of Jesus in connection with the gift of the Holy Spirit: "If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." (John vii, 37, 38.)

**1.—The blessed man described.**—This description is of a two-fold character. (i) "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee." To be of help to others we must be strong; but it is not natural strength that blesses a man. "When I am weak, then am I strong." The man who has changed his natural strength for God's strength, even though he be a mere weakling in himself, has all the power of God as his resource. "Without me ye can do nothing." So said Jesus to his disciples. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me," said Paul. The Lord becomes the righteousness and strength of the man who puts his trust in him. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." (Eph. vi, 10.) (ii) "In whose heart are the ways of them." This clause, as it stands in our authorized version, is rather blind and un-

intelligible. It most probably means: "In whose heart are the highways of the Lord." Here again we have the idea of a channel through which the "rivers of water" flow to others. Not that the true servant of God is a mere dead channel, serving only as a pair of river banks; but he is active in the discharge of the blessed waters. His will and desire, all his powers and purposes are so surrendered to God, that God can use him in blessing others. "For me to live is Christ," said Paul. That is: "I live by and in Christ, and I live only that I may show forth his virtues to others, to the end that they also may live in him."

**2.—How the blessed man becomes a blessing.**—"Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools." This again is a blind passage, as it stands in our authorized version. But it is both simple and beautiful in thought. The valley of Baca was an arid desert, in which there were no water springs. In order that the pilgrims, who had to pass over it, might not famish, pools were built in which to catch and hold water, during the rains. But there were long seasons of drought, in which no rain fell, and the pools became dry. The valley then became a place of death—a place of tears and distress. Such, indeed, is this world. No natural fountains are here; and the world has forsaken God, "the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." (Jer. ii, 13.) What then shall keep this lost world from tears and death, if some means are not provided for their salvation? God has ordained that his people, especially those who themselves have been filled and refreshed by his own blessed life, by dwelling in his house, shall be the means of saving the world. The blessed man, whose strength is in the Lord, who has given himself up to be the active channel of his grace, passing through this world's arid desert, shall bless it as man would who should sink wells in a desert, and fill up the empty pools as with rain. What a blessed mission is this; what a glorious privilege! Therefore did Jesus, when about to depart for heaven, meet his disciples and say unto them: "Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." (John xx, 21, 22.) This, then, is the mission of the true Christian; to go through this vale of tears, dig wells and fill up pools with water, that the perishing may drink and live.

**3.—Reflex blessings.**—Here are two added blessings, which come to the man who makes himself a blessing to others. "The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered

also himself." (Prov. xi, 25.) Let us see how. (i) "They go from strength to strength." Every grace in us is increased by the use of it. The mere ascetic shrivels up into a starveling; he consumes his grace upon himself without opening his life to receive more strength. "But they that wait on the Lord (to get blessing and use it) shall renew their strength; they shall mount up on wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." (Is. xl, 29-31.) (ii) "Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." Now the mere blessing of salvation in this life is unspeakably precious; but they that dwell in God's house, they that identify themselves with God for salvation and service, and then consecrate themselves for the ministry of grace to others, shall in the end appear before God in person and in glory, and so appearing, shall receive the blessed rewards of grace, and hear from the Master's own gracious lips the words of welcome: "Well done, good and faithful servant, . . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." (Matt. xxv, 23.) To such, when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, will be given a crown of Glory.

**4.—The prayer of the blessed man.**—With this prospect before him, the man, whose longing heart went out toward God in the first instance, now goes out to him in a fresh prayer, in which he embodies a new petition with the old one: "O Lord God of Hosts, hear my prayer; Give ear, O God of Jacob." Let me dwell in thy house, and build my nest about thine altars, let my heart be a highway for thee, let me be a blessing to others, and so let my strength be increased that I may come into thy presence at last and receive thy gracious commendation, and enter with thee into the joy which animated thee in thy blessed ministry of salvation to a lost world. The appeal to the God of Jacob is significant as being in harmony with that magnificent prayer of the most distinguished son of Korah, Asaph, as recorded in the eightieth psalm, where the strength of the Lord God of Hosts is implored, that it may be stirred up to the salvation of Israel.

### III.—THE BLESSINGS OF SALVATION.

The third strophe of this song opens with an invocation to God as the Shield of him who trusts in him, and an appeal to him to look upon the face of his Anointed. When a man is fully surrendered to God and resigns all care of himself, he appeals to God both to protect him and to guarantee to him all the blessings covenanted in Christ. The address to God as "my Shield" brings vividly before our minds what God before had said to Abraham: "Fear not, Abra-

ham; I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." (Gen. xv, 1.) Protection and supply are guaranteed in this promise; both of which thoughts are reproduced in our psalm. Also we are reminded of the concluding words of Moses' benediction upon Israel: "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, who is the sword of thy excellency. And thy enemies shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt tread upon their high places." (Deut. xxxiii, 29.) And again of the words of one of the later prophets: "In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem: and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David: and the house of David shall be as God, and the Angel of the Lord before them." (Zech. xii, 8.) God is the complete protection of his saints. He is the whole armor with which we clothe ourselves. When the psalmist calls on God to look on the face of his Anointed, it is the same as if he had said in our language: "Remember all the covenanted promises confirmed in Jesus Christ: look upon him, and then remember me for his sake."

**1.—Complete satisfaction.**—Sometimes the unbelieving world looks with pity upon the Christian who has turned his back upon all the carnal pleasures of the world; but the answer of the man who has found satisfaction in God and in his service is simple and emphatic. (i) "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand." That is, one day in communion with God affords more real satisfaction to the soul than a thousand days filled up with this world's pleasure. This is the testimony of every truly converted soul who maintains communion with and is consecrated to the service of God. (ii) "I would rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." The idea of a door-keeper, though that be a sufficiently lowly position, is not really in the text. The thought is, "I would rather be the very least of the servants of God, one who lies on a mat at the door of his house, than to be a dweller in the house of the wicked." I have a native servant with me out here in India. He sleeps on a mat at my door, and is ready at all times, day and night, to spring up to do my least bidding. When I asked him, after engaging him, where he would sleep, he replied, "I will sleep at master's door, and when he wants me he will just call out." There he is all day and night, and it is literally true that he is ready to do my least bidding, and seems happy in the doing of it. To be such a privileged servant of God is better than to be like Dives in the midst of all his feasting and reveling.

**2.—Every need supplied.**—"The Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and glory: No good thing will he

withhold from them that walk uprightly." Protection from all evil, and every needful thing he will supply out of his energetic goodness, as the sun causes the earth to be fruitful with every good thing by the power of his rays. Chief among these things is "grace" for the time being, and "glory" for the time to come. What can man want more? Grace on earth and glory in heaven. These two things guaranteed, no good thing will be withheld; for these which are the greater, comprehend and include all lesser blessings. This expression reminds us of what Paul said of God: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things." (Rom. viii, 32.) The general condition and qualification of this assurance is that we shall walk uprightly. Grace and glory are not gifts that come to the careless and antinomian believer, but to the man who has given himself to the "paths of righteousness." Let not the man who walketh after the flesh presume to claim the unspeakable blessings of this blessed man; on the other hand, let no humble soul, who is hungering and thirsting after God, and seeking him by all the means of grace which God has put in his way, despair of obtaining every blessing described in this psalm, because in himself he finds nothing but unworthiness and weakness.

**3.—A final beatitude.**—The psalm closes with an outburst of beatitude. Every strophe of the psalm closes with such a beatitude. Thrice blessed is the man, then, who hungers and thirsts after God, who faints and longs for the courts of God's house; who surrenders his life to him for service and testimony, and walks uprightly before him amid the crooked and perverse generations of this world. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in thee." May the Lord of Hosts, the God of Jacob, our King and our God, fulfill all his goodness to us in these things, by creating in us a longing thirst and desire, which shall be converted into prayer, and trust and real possession.

## XX.

## A SONG OF PRAISE.—Psalm ciii, 1–22.

(1) Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. (2) Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits : (3) Who forgiveth all thine iniquities ; who healeth all thy diseases ; (4) Who redeemeth thy life from destruction ; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies ; (5) Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things ; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's. (6) The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. (7) He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. (8) The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. (9) He will not always chide : neither will he keep his anger for ever. (10) He hath not dealt with us after our sins ; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. (11) For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. (12) As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. (13) Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. (14) For he knoweth our frame ; he remembereth that we are dust. (15) As for man, his days are as grass : as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. (16) For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone ; and the place thereof shall know it no more. (17) But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children ; (18) To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them. (19) The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens ; and his kingdom ruleth over all. (20) Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. (21) Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts ; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. (22) Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion : bless the Lord, O my soul.—Psalm ciii, 1–22.

This is a song of David, in which he pours out his soul in grateful thanksgiving to God for the multiplied and continuous blessings personally bestowed on him ; blessings chiefly spiritual, but also temporal ; but always bountifully and continuously poured forth upon him. He is also grateful for similar blessings bestowed on Israel at large. He points out the source of these blessings, and calls on the whole intelligent world to join with him in thanksgiving to God. Nothing is so common, nothing so liberally and continuously bestowed as the daily benefits of God to us, and to the whole world ; on the other hand, nothing is so uncommon as gratitude for these mercies. It has been said that ingratitude is the commonest sin of mankind. It would seem that the more bountifully God's benefits are heaped upon us during this brief life of ours, in which our need

is constant as our breath, the more forgetful we are of the source of them all. This makes our ingratitude all the more inexcusable. David at least will not forget God's benefits, nor, if he can help it, will he suffer us to forget them. We should ever be as ready and as speedy with our thanks as God is constant in supplying our need.

### I.—THANKSGIVING FOR PERSONAL BENEFITS.

This sweetly-flowing psalm begins with an appeal to his soul to bless the Lord. The soul here is to be understood as covering the whole intelligent man. It is the seat of all the faculties, intelligence, memory, reason, and will. It is also the home of the affections, in the highest sense of that word. With David the term comprehended the spiritual part of man as well, for he does not seem to have made Paul's threefold distinction of man, "spirit, soul, and body." Lest any part of him should forget or fail to join in this song of thanksgiving, he calls upon all that is within him to bless the holy name of God. The reference to these inward powers is suggestive of the pipes of an organ. That is, he opens every stop of the instrument of praise, and would sing his thanksgiving to God accompanied by the full organ. Wishing the holy name of God to be fully praised, he desires that not one of the benefits conferred on him should be forgotten. Not only will he have the full sum of them remembered, but he would not have one of them, even in detail, forgotten. What a theme of thanksgiving we have in thus singing of the holy name of God and of all his benefits! Who can exhaust the name of God, calling up, one after another, all his attributes and all the manifestations of his goodness and grace to the children of men? Who can enumerate the sum of all his promises, or tell the tale of all his blessings?

1.—**Thanks for forgiveness and inward healing.**—It is clear that, while bodily blessings are included in his thanksgiving, the mind and heart of the grateful psalmist is dwelling more especially on the inward and spiritual blessings which he has received from God. The first of these is the forgiveness of his sins,—a common theme of praise to all the ransomed race. He was thankful that forgiveness not only covered the great transgression of his life, but all his iniquities. The fountain which God has opened for sinners is for all sin and uncleanness,—sins which are for depth of iniquity red as crimson, sins which are as the sands of the sea for multitude. But forgiveness is not the only benefit that had come to him, and that has come to us. "Who healeth all thy diseases." Iniquities,

the outward sins of our life, proceed from depravity, the inward disease of our nature. The salvation of our God takes account of both, and, while he forgives our iniquities, he also heals by a new birth our spiritual diseases. The heart that is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," comes under his divine treatment, and is healed by the Holy Spirit in the washing of regeneration.

**2.—Thanks for redemption and glory.**—God does not simply redeem us from destruction; but he adds to this by crowning the redeemed life with glory. "Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies." Those who only think of God's redemption as a plan and work for saving them from hell, the destruction that waits upon all men who are living in sin, have but half a conception of the grand purpose of his grace. He redeems us from destruction that he may crown us with glory. He purges us from sin that he may clothe us with the robe of righteousness. He takes us from the dung-hill that he may set us with princes. I think the soul rises to its best appreciation of what God has done, and is still doing, for us according to his purpose of grace, when it thinks on this, that the Christian is being changed into the image of Christ. There is satisfaction in the thought that we have been delivered from destruction; there is glory in the anticipation of awaking in his likeness. "We shall be like him," is a certain hope which has ever awakened the praise of his people. The crown of loving-kindness and tender mercies, which comes to the soul during its pilgrimage from earth to heaven, is but the pledge and guarantee of the crown of life which awaits us in glory at the journey's end. What could be more expressive of the attitude of God toward sinners than these sweet expressions: "loving-kindness" and "tender mercies." They are favorite words with David. (Ps. li, 1.) To him God was no austere and hard Sovereign, only and always watching to find an occasion against him; but a gentle, a divinely patient and loving God, ever on the watch to bestow his grace. God's gifts are doubled in their value by reason of the tender mercies which always wrap them round.

**3.—Thanks for intermediate blessings.**—"Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." There is a great spiritual distance between forgiveness and regeneration at the beginning of salvation, and sanctification and glory at its end. There is a long journey from the mouth of the pit of destruction, whence God has rescued us, to the gate of glory by which God will bring us in to receive our everlasting inheritance. On that way we are not left to our own resources. He gives us the



supplies needful for the journey, and ministers the strength with which we may reach the end. "The Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not." (Is. lviii, 11.) The Lord never does anything by halves. He does not give us the mere necessities of life, but he "filleteth our mouth with good things." Choice dainties as well as essential food. Nor does he minister strength in any ordinary way: "he reneweth our strength like the eagle's." The progress of the Christian who is living in full communion with God is like that of an unwearied eagle in the sky, rather than that of a jaded and worn pilgrim on the earth. The outward man may seem to be faint and perishing, but the inward man is renewed day by day, being strengthened by might with his spirit. (II. Cor. iv, 16; Eph. iii, 16.)

## II.—PRAISE TO THE CHARACTER OF GOD.

In the opening of his song the psalmist called up his soul to bless or praise the holy name of God. In enumerating some of the benefits which he had received, he has not forgotten that they all proceed from the God whose character is worthy of every song of praise. He now briefly sketches that character, and at the same time calls to remembrance that he is not alone the favored recipient of his gracious benefits, but that all Israel has also been blessed with similar bounties.

1.—**The righteousness and judgment of the Lord.**—It must not be supposed that the benefits which God bestows upon the sinners of Adam's race are mere gifts of good nature, as those with which an over-indulgent father spoils his children. There is a principle of righteousness upon which he acts throughout. It is not that he excuses sin or makes light of it, passing it by without notice or care. Sin is the awful problem of the universe. It must be dealt with and disposed of. God must be just before he can justify the ungodly. (Rom. iii, 22-26.) He cannot deal with us in righteousness for our sins without delivering us to destruction; therefore he had to deal with Christ "our righteousness" for our sins, that he might redeem us from destruction. It is only when the soul comes to know how firm and inflexible is the righteousness of God, that it can appreciate the greatness of the benefits of grace, flowing to us through the righteousness of Christ, who himself bare our sins in his own body on the tree. The Lord hath showed us mercy and grace by "executing righteousness" on his only begotten Son, our blessed Saviour.

“And judgment for all that are oppressed.” Judgment here is to be understood in the sense of deliverance. The oppressed are they who are not only condemned on account of sin, but have come to feel its oppression, as the children of Israel felt their oppression in Egypt, and cried out by reason of their bondage. (Ex. ii, 23–25.) But there is a deeper significance here. God’s grace, because it is grace, is turned toward those who are oppressed, who are taken captive by sin and the devil, for their deliverance. In the very beginning, when man sinned, God came to him, and having assured him of his favor, announced that it was of his own gracious purpose to take man’s part against the devil, who had overcome him, and to deliver him through the seed of the woman. (Gen. iii, 14, 15.) It was then and there that our gracious God of Heaven announced himself as the sinner’s champion against the god of this world. The psalmist refers, for illustration of this sublime truth, to the revelation of his ways to Moses. By ways we understand his purpose of grace, or “his ways” of dealing with sinners. It was to this that Moses appealed for encouragement, while conducting the people up out of Egypt: “Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, show me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight; and consider that this nation is thy people.” (Ex. xxxiii, 13.)

**2.—The mercy and grace of God.**—The way of the Lord was further manifested to Moses as he went on his way, in the further revelation of God’s character and disposition toward sinners. The psalmist undoubtedly refers to that magnificent declaration which God made to Moses in answer to a second prayer for further revelation: “And the Lord passed by him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.” (Ex. xxxiv, 6, 7.) Here we have the double revelation of God’s righteousness and God’s grace. It is clearly stated that his way is that of mercy; but still that he cannot forget that sin is guilty, and as such must not be excused. In thus dealing with sinners, he “is slow to anger and plenteous in mercy.” This declaration might be fortified with a score of passages taken from every part of the Bible, might be illustrated by all his patient dealings with sinners. Even when he is driven to deal with severity with his people for their persistent sins and the stubbornness of their hearts, David is reminded that he will not “always chide;” that he will not forget his purpose of grace in an endless course of severity. “He will not keep his

anger forever." That is, although he might justly persevere in his anger and send us to destruction, he will be entreated by the penitence of his people and turn again and save them. "He is easily entreated." God always waits to be gracious. The whole history of Israel is an abundant illustration of this. Even now, though Israel has been an outcast nation for two thousand years, he is preserving them wonderfully from obliteration; and when Israel "shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away," and so all Israel shall yet be saved. (Is. xxv, 6, 7; II. Cor. iii, 15; Rom. xi, 26.) This is a sublime truth for the encouragement of the most hopeless sinner, for those especially who have fallen away from God under temptation; but it is not a truth to be presumptuously trifled with.

**3.—The principle of grace restated.**—"He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." (Ezra ix, 13; Job xi, 6; Lam. iii, 22.) Had he done so we should have been destroyed; but he has dealt with us according to his purpose of grace, and that purpose has controlled and governed him in all his transactions with men. In this may be seen one of the reasons why apparently incorrigible sinners are so long spared and allowed to go on in their wickedness. "God is long-suffering, not willing that any should perish." He has not forgotten to be gracious, though in thus remembering mercy, it almost seems that he has forgotten that sin is guilty and must be punished. O, the wonders of God's grace and mercy to the children of men! Who can sing them, what poet can frame a song whereby to comprehend their length, and breadth, and depth, and height!

### III.—THE MEASURE OF GOD'S MERCY.

The psalmist now seeks to set forth, by a series of comparisons and contrasts, the measure of the divine goodness.

**1.—Heavenly greatness.**—"As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him." We only have to look out upon the heaven above and round about us and call to mind how great its limits above and beyond earth's remotest bounds, to catch the idea that, "So great" is his mercy. It is another way of putting Paul's statement, that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." (Rom. v, 20.) The heaven of his mercy which surrounds us, is as full of blessings as of stars; and as they shine down upon us, all reflecting the light which they get from the world's central sun, so the mercies of God ever come to us laden with the grace that is in Christ.

**2.—Infinite forgiveness.**—“As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.” That is only another way of saying that they are utterly blotted out and separated from us. For who can measure the distance from the east to the west? Our sins therefore will never return to plague us. All eternity will not be long enough for them to come back from the place whither God has removed them.

**3.—Fatherly pity.**—“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” God is not an awful, impassive Moral Governor, dealing with us according to hard and fast rules; but when once his fear is established in our hearts, he is like a tender-hearted father, pitying us in all our weakness, and treating us with reference to our many infirmities. “He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.” Matthew Henry says: “He considers the frailties of our bodies and the folly of our souls; he considers how little we can do, and expects accordingly from us; in all of which appears the tenderness of his compassion.” Blessed is the man who has found out in his communion and dealings with God that he is a Father unto us, as well as a God. Jesus came especially to introduce us to, and make us acquainted with, him as such. “He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father.” We have only to remember the unvarying pity and compassion of Jesus toward sinners, to understand what are God’s relations toward the children of men.

**4.—The shortness of man’s day and the eternity of God’s mercy.**—The consideration of man’s frame in weakness leads the psalmist to contrast the fading glory of this earthly life with the everlasting mercy of God. Like the grass of the field and the flowers that spring up among it, so is man’s life and all its glory in this world. Frail and short-lived as the grass is his life; fleeting as the wild flowers of the field are all his glories; wild flowers which wither under the blast of the passing wind. But in contrast with depressing weakness is set forth the everlasting mercy of God and his unchanging righteousness. In these we have not only the suggestion of the “life and immortality” which is brought to light in the Gospel, but of the better foundations on which that new life is founded. We need not then fear to die, we need not mourn over the loss of earthly glory or the fading away of the passing pleasures and delights of this world. God has something infinitely better in store for us, and once possessing these “benefits,” we shall never be deprived of them by death or hell.

**5.—A solemn reminder.**—These great things of God’s grace are not pearls to be cast before swine. They are free gifts to those,

and those only, who "fear him," "keep his covenant," and "remember his commandments to do them." This is no infringement of the principles of his grace. He does not give his benefits in return for a righteousness of our own, manifested in these ways, but his benefits of grace lead up to such a fear, such a remembrance, and such an obedient spirit. Where there is the absence of these, it is evident that the benefits of his grace have not been received. Any profession of faith in God, or claim of gracious relation to him, which is not confirmed by a filial spirit on the part of the professor, may be set down as a spurious and empty formalism of one who has a name to live, but is dead.

#### IV.—A UNIVERSAL CALL TO PRAISE.

Having set forth his own gratitude, the goodness of God to all people, and the boundless measure of grace in his dealings with men, the psalmist rises to a great height and calls on the whole universe of God to join him in a chorus of thanksgiving. He first declares that the sovereignty of God in grace is an established and fixed fact. It is in the heavens, and extends over all the works of his hands. It is the principle of his universal government. He therefore calls upon the angels, that excel in strength and that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word, to bless the Lord. Then, not content with having the chief angels to join him in his song of praise, he calls on the whole company of his hosts, those ministers of his that do his pleasure, to join in blessing the Lord. Then he closes his summons by calling upon the very inanimate works of God in all places throughout the universe to take up the chorus. The psalm concludes, as it began, with this splendid outburst of grateful thanksgiving: "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" Let us, who have been forgiven, renewed in the inner man, redeemed from destruction, made heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, whose lives have been crowned with loving-kindness and tender mercy, take up the song of thanksgiving, and praise him with our whole hearts, and so, perchance, extend his mercies to those who are yet strangers to it, by setting forth his benefits as we have come to know them in our own experience.

"The wondrous story of the Lamb  
Tell with that voice of thine,  
Till others with the glad new song,  
Go singing all the time."

## XXI.

## DANIEL AND HIS COMPANIONS.—Daniel i, 8-21.

(8) But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. (9) Now God had brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. (10) And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king. (11) Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, (12) Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. (13) Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. (14) So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. (15) And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. (16) Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse. (17) As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. (18) Now at the end of the days that the king had said that he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. (19) And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. (20) And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm. (21) And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.—Daniel i, 8-21.

Among the prophets of the Lord, Daniel is certainly one of the greatest, not simply because his prophecy is large, or because it deals with great and momentous events in history; but also because of his imposing personality and magnificent character. The great prophets of Israel beside him are somewhat shadowed by their times, and obscured by the very brilliancy of their messages. Elijah is the only one that stands out as conspicuously as Daniel. Perhaps this is because of the peculiarity of the circumstances under which Daniel wrought. He was not, in the strict sense, a prophet of Israel. His messages were not to his people then captive in Babylon, but rather to the great world-power under which he was living and in whose service he was. He had been all his lifetime separated from his peo-

ple, and even though he was in Babylon during their captivity, he was not a part of them, but was a great and high officer in the government of the king of Babylon. In this respect he differed in position from Ezekiel, who was the resident prophet of Israel while in captivity, a captive with them. Ezekiel was much older than Daniel, and, humanly speaking, might have been jealous of Daniel's position as a high and favorite official with the king, whose captives were the older prophet and all his people. Besides, he might have accused Daniel of fawning on the enemies of his people and being untrue to them, in that he took place and emoluments from their enemies while his brethren were suffering a bondage little better than that of Egypt. He might have said to him or of him: "Why do you not make your choice like Moses, and forsake the high place which you occupy in the palace of the king of Babylon, so as to identify yourself with the oppressed people of the Lord?" Yet he never did so reproach Daniel. On the other hand, he twice distinguishes Daniel as one of the greatest of men, classifying him with Noah and Job. (Ez. xiv, 14, 20.) This should teach us a lesson to the effect that we cannot always judge of one man's actions by that of another. In his place it would have been wrong for Moses to have remained the "son of Pharaoh's daughter," while in Daniel's place it would have been wrong for him to abandon his post in the government of the king of Babylon, merely for the sake of showing his abhorrence of the power which was oppressing his people on the one hand, and his sympathy and fellowship with his own brethren on the other. Nor, on the contrary, with the examples of Joseph and Daniel, occupying similar positions in Egypt and Babylon, must we be hasty in judging the possible rightness of taking and continuing in the employment of the enemies of God. The question really is not in whose employ we are engaged, but whether in that employment are we keeping a conscience void of offense, and are using our place, while faithful to our employer, for the glory of God. This certainly did both Daniel and Joseph.

The book of Daniel is differently constructed from that of any other of the prophets. In the first place, it is nearly equally divided between history and prophecy. In the second place, it is a book of revelation, almost of the same character as that of John,—beside which, indeed, it must be closely studied in order to understand it. It deals, as we have said, principally with the great world-powers and the course of human history outside that of Israel. Its messages are to these powers rather than to Israel. It is singularly free from those passages in which a prophet speaks a direct word to the people by a "Thus saith the Lord." As to its genuineness and authenticity,

there remains little doubt, for, like other of the great books of the Bible, it has come out of the fire of criticism like Daniel's own companions out of the furnace, with no further effects than to have burned off the cords with which critics had bound it.

Our study has to do directly with the person of Daniel and the circumstances under which he found himself when first taken away a captive to Babylon. The expression "the old prophets" is a very common one. We are accustomed to think of these great servants of God as old men, with gray locks and flowing beards,—and so indeed most of them were in the end; but here we are introduced to a prophet of the Lord in his tender youth, for it is evident that the spirit of prophecy was in him at the very beginning of his career, as recorded in this history. Daniel was probably a lad not yet beyond sixteen years of age when he is first introduced to us; yet all the signs of the prophet are present with him: piety, courage, and wisdom, together with the power of foretelling the events of the future. There is a striking comparison between the history of Daniel and Joseph, which we have already illustrated. Joseph was the first distinguished man of his house, and we may say that Daniel was the last man of great eminence. In their youth they were both captives, and both true to God and their consciences in circumstances that were very trying. Both obtained favor with their kings, and reached places of great honor and power in the kingdoms whither in the providence of God they had been sent as prisoners. It is surprising to note how often young men have played great parts in the world's history; and this is especially true of the history of God's kingdom on the earth. Moses and Joshua were comparatively young men for the age in which they lived; David and Solomon were young men when they were called to assume the greatest responsibilities. Joseph and Daniel were mere lads when God began to use them; John the Baptist and Jesus were young men when they began their ministry, Jesus himself being a mere child of twelve years when he first undertook his Father's business. Saul of Tarsus was a young man when Jesus met, converted, and commissioned him to be the great apostle to the Gentiles. Timothy was a mere lad when Paul chose him for his companion, and adopted him as his son. What encouragement is here for young men, and even lads, to enter at once on the work and into the personal service of God! Daniel was one of four young men, or lads, who were carried away by Nebuchadnezzar in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, before the final captivity of Judah and the whole nation. We do not know who were his father or mother, but we know that he was a prince royal. It



was the custom of Eastern monarchs to select from their captives the most noble, the fairest, and the cleverest, and train them up for their own service, often attaching them to their own persons, as Nehemiah was attached to his king. This was probably for the purpose of conciliating their enemies, as well as of availing themselves of the wisdom, traditions, and learning of the nations around them. In accordance with this custom, Daniel and his three friends—all princes—were selected to be specially trained for government service. They were placed under the particular care and instruction of the chief eunuch of the king's household, to be educated and fitted for their future duties. It is our duty to consider the history of Daniel under circumstances here detailed, and draw from that history such lessons as will be of help and profit for us.

### I.—DANIEL UNDER TEMPTATION.

Whether it was a part of the deliberate policy of the king of Babylon to corrupt these young men by feeding them from his own table with the meat and drink which had been offered to idols, and so to wean them away from the religion of their fathers, or whether this circumstance was the providential occasion of developing the faith and character of Daniel and his friends is not a question of great moment. It is certain that, amid all the idolatrous customs of his own country, Daniel had been trained carefully by godly parents, or perhaps by Jeremiah himself, and had escaped the prevailing unbelief and apostasy of his house. It is certain that, when he was called upon to eat meat and drink wine which had been offered to idols, he and his friends entered their protest and sought to be free from that compromise of their religious principles. Daniel was, from the very beginning of his career, a true witness for the truth. His temptation was all the more severe from the following circumstances:

1.—**Because of his youth.**—It would not have been so remarkable that he declined to compromise his conscience, had he been a full-grown man, with religious principles and character strong by reason of maturity and long habit of righteousness. Youth is, indeed, purer than manhood, but then, as a rule, it is weaker and more easily led by those under whose power and influence it is brought. Now, Daniel was but a lad, and yet he withstood the temptation in a very manly fashion. He demonstrated the possibility of standing by a purpose even for one so young; and the importance of doing so at the very outset. Had Daniel yielded here to the first temptation,

he would hardly have recovered his faith at a later time. If we win in the first fight with the tempter, we may assure ourselves of victory all through life.

**2.—Because he was away from home.**—One of the worst situations for a young man to find himself in, is to be away from home and home influences, in a strange city, especially when surrounded by those who have no sympathy with the religious training and principles of his home life. In this situation Daniel was placed. What had become of his father and mother, his brethren and kindred, we are not told. Possibly they had been killed in the siege or carried away captive to some other province. At any rate, it was an hour of weakness and desolation with the lad, and in such a time the tempter is sure to be present to spread his net and shoot his fiery darts. Daniel's courage and faith under these circumstances is all the more marked.

**3.—Because of his helplessness.**—He was not only in a strange land and among strangers, but he was a captive, and wholly at the mercy of the king and his servants. He might have said to himself, and not without some show of reason: "I am not responsible for the things which I do under the command of the king, whose prisoner I am." We have heard young men, who justified themselves for wrong-doing because they were only carrying out the orders of their employers. On the other hand, I once knew a lad of fourteen who threw up a position, which he had taken two years to attain in the establishment where he was employed, rather than make out a false shipping invoice at the command of his employer. Daniel was made of the same kind of stuff, and had the courage of older men who declared that they ought to serve God rather than men.

**4.—Because of the subtlety of the temptation.**—It was a matter of great self-gratulation to Daniel that he had been selected to fill a high place in the service of the king, and that the king had complimented him by directing that he should be fed with meat and drink from his own table. This high distinction would be recognized both by the other prisoners and by the king's officers themselves. To refuse this peculiar mark of the king's favor would have been both ungracious and impertinent on Daniel's part. There is no surer approach to the citadel of man's moral nature than by the gateway of vanity and with the instruments of flattery, especially if the agents be the rich and the great. What we might refuse from our inferiors, or even our equals, is not so easily declined if it is offered by our betters. But Daniel was proof here too, considering the favor of God as being of greater worth than the flattery of the king.

**5.—Because of the peril of his position.**—Sometimes we can brave the sneer of the ungodly and the arched eyebrows of the less conscientious, where we should not be willing to stand up under peril of life itself. Yet this was Daniel's danger. To have absolutely refused the king's appointment to the portion of meat would have been to imperil his life. Even the king's servant, who had charge of the matter, said that to concede to Daniel's protest and request would be to "endanger my head to the king." But Daniel counted not his life dear to himself in this matter. The favor of God was more to him than life. We do not wonder after this, that, at a later period of his life, he calmly went on praying with his face toward Jerusalem, even though the den of lions was to be his portion for so doing.

## II.—STANDING BY A PURPOSE TRUE.

In accounting for Daniel's firmness in this matter, it will be profitable for us to look under the surface and inquire into the secret of his strength.

**1.—He was true to a godly education.**—We do not know who his parents were, nor are we in possession of any of the details of his early education; but we are morally sure that this lad had been carefully trained in the fear of God by somebody. Perhaps the low state of religion in his own land had served to increase in him the sense of responsibility for an absolutely true course in the matter now before him. No lad would have stood this test if he had not been thoroughly well taught; not in the external virtues of religion, but in its very essence and power. In this there is a message both to parents and sons. If we parents wish to be absolutely sure of the course which our sons will take, when the time comes to send them forth into the world to fight life's battle for themselves, let us be sure that they go out from us rooted and grounded in the truth, and established in the faith of God and his Christ. Better sacrifice everything else than fail in sending forth our children thorough Christians, able to "work out their own salvation" in the face of a hostile world. And if boys expect to stand in the face of temptation when away from home, and to have the favor of God in all their undertakings, let them see to it that, like Daniel, they have a purpose true, not to defile themselves with the world's meat and drink, whether it come in the form of ungodly indulgences or unlawful profits and pleasures.

**2.—He was true to his conscience.**—It was not only loyalty to home-training, but loyalty to conscience, that stood Daniel in good

stead in the hour of trial. In leaving home we leave home influences, but if we have a conscience that has been trained in the fear of God, we shall always take that with us. Home-training will keep us a little while, but a sensitive conscience is a never-failing guide. Daniel dreaded defilement of conscience more than aught else that might befall him during his captivity; and his extreme sensitiveness in the matter of eating or not eating the portion from the king's table, shows how really he was a true child of God. To have eaten the food offered him, knowing that it had been offered to idols, would have been an act of sacrilege from which his conscience would scarcely have recovered. He is a happy boy or man, whether rich or poor, prince or peasant, who has a conscience like Daniel's. It will stand by and strengthen him in many an hour of trial.

**3.—He was true to the word of God.**—It was not only general training that he should not get involved with idols and their worship, and especially that he should not eat meat offered to them; but he evidently had in remembrance the special teaching of Lev. ii and Deut. xii, where such a course is strictly forbidden. By taking heed to the word of God, a young man will not only cleanse himself from evil ways, but will be able to do something better: even to keep himself safe from being defiled.

**4.—He was true to his brethren.**—Daniel seems to have been the spokesman for the other three young princes, as he was undoubtedly by nature, and perhaps by rank, their leader. Should he give way, his brethren would hardly stand, and so they would also be defiled. If he stood fast, they, encouraged by his example, would stand by his side. Moreover, there were many other captives who would naturally look up to these young princes, already marked out by the king's favor for examples to themselves. Daniel was therefore jealous of his influence as of his own soul's peace. He must be a true witness for the sake of others. We have not only our own souls to look after, but our influence upon others to keep untainted. Every one of us is made the keeper of his brother. It is this conviction which often serves to strengthen God's children when they would yield for themselves.

**5.—He was true to God.**—When Daniel requested permission to decline the king's meat and live upon a simple vegetable diet, such as was never used in offerings to the idols, and the king's eunuch protested that the result would be a spare and ill-liking physical result, unbecoming to a king's favorite, he appealed for a trial of results, knowing, or at least believing, that God, in whose honor he was acting, would not desert him, or allow his act of piety to go

unvouched for. A true Christian may always appeal to the results of a Christian walk for its justification. Daniel only asked a trial of ten days. He believed that God would vindicate his course, and show to the eunuch that in every way it was better to serve God than worship or be compromised with the worship of idols. Like Paul, he was ready, by an experimental test of the truth, to commend himself and his brethren to the consciences or judgment of men. In all this Daniel was not forward in professing great faith, or in arguing in favor of God, nor did he in anywise show a stubborn spirit, but was courteous throughout. Perhaps his gentle spirit and courtesy had as much to do with influencing the eunuch to trust him, as his firm purpose not to yield. It is always best to win a point by persuasion, if possible, before resorting to a declaration of war. We may always be sure that God will in the end honor those who honor him.

### III.—DANIEL VINDICATED AND REWARDED.

God stood by Daniel, his young servant, in this matter, as he had stood by Joseph in Egypt, and even more promptly vindicated his faith. God's favor was seen in three things.

**1.—In the favor he gave Daniel with the eunuch.**—He had already brought him “into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.” God does not wait till the end of our faith to come to our help, but, even if there be a purpose in our hearts to be true to him, he gives us preliminary vindication. There must have been something very charming and winning about Daniel from the very beginning. True faith does make a man or a woman attractive even in the eyes of unbelievers. Let us not be afraid of losing the best favor of men by being true to God. The early Christians being true to God, won for themselves favor with the people.

**2.—By giving them greater physical beauty.**—At the end of the ten days' trial, “their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.” No doubt there was a special interposition of God in this matter, but no doubt, on the other hand, the result was in part owing to the very fact that they abstained from the luxuries of the king's table and the deteriorating influences of the wine which was appointed for their drink. In the long run, the man who lives on simple fare will show more physical beauty than he who fares sumptuously every day on dainty food. Chrysostom says of these four young men who stood to their purpose, that “they had better health for their spare diet; and their good conscience and merry

heart were a continual feast unto them. They had also God's blessing on their coarser fare, which was the main matter that made the difference." It has been said of the Scotch that they owe their well-known superiority in many things to their training in the shorter catechism and their diet of oat-meal.

**3.—By their superior intellectual ability.**—At the end of the three years which had been assigned for their special education, they were brought before the king, and he found them "ten times better in all matters of wisdom and understanding than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm." There is hardly a doubt that, if the facts were known and could be tabulated, it would appear that the intellectual life of Christian people is far in advance of those men of the world who reject God and his counsels, both as to the spiritual life and the general state of the body, promoted by a temperate use of the good things of life. Certainly a wide generalization shows marked superiority in favor of those nations commonly known as Christian, over those which are guided by the superstitions and excesses of heathenism. In this great empire of India, where I am now preaching the Gospel, we see a little handful of Englishmen dominating 270,000,000 of people, in all that appertains to knowledge, and wisdom, both in politics and material science. The general and well-known superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race is due most of all, and first of all, to the influence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God has trained that race for the civilization and the evangelization of the whole world. Woe to them if they prove unfaithful to their trust. In like manner, let every one of us remember his responsibility in all matters of physical and intellectual powers, and use them only for the furtherance of the glory of his Maker, from whom he holds them as a sacred trust.

## XXII.

## NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM.—Daniel ii, 36–49.

(36) This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. (37) Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. (38) And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold. (39) And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. (40) And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise. (41) And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. (42) And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. (43) And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay. (44) And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. (45) Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure. (46) Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him. (47) The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldst reveal this secret. (48) Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon. (49) Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king.—Daniel ii, 36–49.

After the universal apostasy of the world from God, which headed itself up at the tower of Babel, God scattered the people and chose out a single man to be the father of a nation, with whom he should make a covenant to establish them in the earth forever. This Jewish nation became a kingdom under the direct government of God. In course of time this Theocratic Kingdom itself apostatized from God, was consequently by him rejected and driven away from its

proper territory, and its people became captive to the great world-powers which had been in process of formation, dissolution, and reformation during all the time of God's dealings with Israel. At last the great Babylonian power was raised up of God (v. 37), to be the instrument of chastising and breaking up the apostate Theocracy. But God had not forgotten his covenant with Israel, much less that with his Messiah, to whom throughout the whole history of Israel he had promised a universal dominion of the earth in connection with the Jewish people. The Jewish people and kingdom, to all human appearance and judgment, was, at the time of Nebuchadnezzar, hopelessly destroyed; for in the history of the world a nation which has been broken up as the Jewish nation then was, never reformed itself, its people becoming absorbed and incorporate with succeeding nations. But it was not to be so with this nation, apostate and broken though it was—and is. We see in the story of Daniel and his three friends, the germ out of which is to spring the nation's regeneration. In these young men the true principles of the Theocratic kingdom survived; faith, obedience, and the spirit of prophecy. The first chapter has to do with the fact of this remnant and God's special protection thrown around it. In the second chapter we begin to see the Spirit of God working in the heart of the ruler of the great world-power, disturbing it with dreams of things to come; and also we see the spirit of prophecy working in the head and heart of Daniel, to interpret the dream of the great heathen king, and to set forth the course of history among the nations until God should re-establish his own Theocratic Kingdom and give the world to the saints according to his original and eternal purpose. The prophecy of Daniel, as we have before said, is the type of that of John, and deals with the same subject. John gives us all the details of the working out of Daniel's prophecy, and incorporates in his vision what Daniel saw, if indeed at all, only in the dimmest gleam of light; namely, the connection of the Church of Christ with the Jewish nation. In his reply to Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel told him that God had "made known to the king what shall be in the latter days." (v. 28.) In like manner we read that John beheld "a door open in heaven and heard a voice as of a trumpet talking with him, which said: "Come hither and I will show thee the things which must be hereafter." (Rev. iv, 1.) Then follows the revelation. Daniel's prophecy is like an elevated sketch of a great building drawn by the Architect of nations; John's revelation is the working plan by which the new political structure of the world is to be wrought out. Daniel unveils the foreground of the history, in which we see the nations



turned and overturned until he comes whose right it is to reign; he shows the everlasting kingdom in distant perspective; but John shows us the Everlasting King coming in victorious majesty and taking to himself his great power and reigning on the earth. (Rev. xi, 15-17.) The former part of our chapter gives an account of the dream of the great king of Babylon and the trouble which it caused him in the night. On waking, the dream passed out of his memory, but yet left him so agitated that he could not sleep because of the haunting fear and awful sense of pending woe which was left on his mind. He called the next morning for the astrologers and wise men, demanding of them that they should interpret the dream to him. They in turn demanded that the king should tell them the dream; the king claimed that they should recall the dream, telling them that, if they failed, their boasted power of interpretation was a mere pretense; in which case he stated his intention of having them all put to death. On their failure to comply, the decree of death went forth. Daniel and his brethren belonged to the class of wise men, though they had probably kept themselves apart during the four years, or perhaps only the one year, since they were formally invested with official powers. The captain of the guard had either begun to execute the king's order, or was giving notice of it to all the wise men, when the first news of the dream and the failure of the heathen astrologers came to Daniel's ears. He asked an opportunity to interpret the king's dream, and in the meantime requested that the decree of death against the wise men should be suspended. The request was granted; and Daniel, whose faith in God enabled him to promise the interpretation, now resorted to prayer with his three friends, beseeching God to show him the dream and its interpretation; nor did God fail to answer his servant's faith. Going now with a heart full of praise to God into the presence of the king, he disclaimed all personal wisdom in the matter, but told his master that there was a God in heaven from whom no secrets were hid, and who had revealed the whole matter to him. Whereupon he correctly recalled the king's dream and then proceeded to its interpretation.

### I.—THE GREAT IMAGE.

In his dream the king had seen a colossal image with a head of gold, breasts and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet and toes part of iron and part of clay. This colossal image was finally smitten in its toes by a mysterious stone cut out of the mountain without hands, and utterly demolished from foot to

crown, its fragments being scattered like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor, and never gathered again. The mysterious stone, after it had destroyed the image, became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. The general meaning of this dream is perfectly clear. It represents the succession of great world-powers which should rise in the world, to whom God had given, directly or indirectly, the sovereignty of the earth, until Christ himself should come and completely overthrow them, once for all, and take possession of the whole earth, and reign upon it forever with and by his saints. (vii, 18-27; Rev. v, 9, 10; xi, 15-17; xix, 6; xx, 4-6; xxii, 5.) In this image two things are particularly set forth: that the world-power tends to division, as seen in the legs, feet, and toes; and that it gradually deteriorates from fine gold, down through silver, brass, and iron, to potter's clay. It is only when the world-power becomes a mixture of iron and clay, which cannot become permanently united, though having in it an element of strength, that it is finally overthrown. The whole dream and its interpretation ought to be carefully studied in connection with the further revelations granted to Daniel, and recorded in the seventh, eighth, eleventh, and twelfth chapters, where the same subject, with added details, is continued.

**1.—The head of fine gold.**—This without doubt represents the great Babylonian kingdom. It is likened unto fine gold because it was a power which was directly set up by God himself. "Thou, O king, art a king of kings; for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength and glory. Thou art this head of gold." (vs. 36, 37.) It will be seen from these verses that God was as really ruling in this Babylonian kingdom as he was in Israel, though with a different purpose and according to different principles. How vainly do the kings of the earth fancy that, by their own power and might, they exercise sovereignty! This great golden-headed power was the first of the so-called universal empires.

**2.—The breasts and arms of silver.**—(vs. 32, 39.)—"And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee." It is not said that God directly raised up this kingdom. It is clear, however, that he allowed it in his providence, and directed its course. All interpreters agree that this was the Medo-Persian empire. It was inferior to the former, both in the extent of its dominion and the unity of its power. The appearance of the arms here suggest a division of power which was true of that great dynasty. Cyrus was the great figure in this kingdom, who was succeeded by Cambyses, Smyrdis, Darius Hystaspis, and Xerxes.

**3.—The belly and thighs of brass.**—(vs. 32, 39.)—“And another kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.” This kingdom, it is universally agreed, was that of Alexander, the great Macedonian: the verse in question representing his rapid conquest of the whole known world. He is most accurately described by Daniel as “a leopard, which had on the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads, and dominion was given to it.” (vii, 6.) These four heads accurately describe the division of Alexander’s kingdom into four parts, under his four favorite lieutenants: Ptolemy, who received Egypt and the Mediterranean coast; Seleucas, who held sway in Asia; Lysimachus, who was appointed over Thrace, and Cassander, who ruled Greece.

**4.—The legs of iron and feet part of iron and part of clay.**—(vs. 33, 40.)—“And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron; forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things. And where thou sawest the feet and toes, part of iron and part of potter’s clay, the kingdom shall be divided.” It is further expounded that this kingdom, which began in such massive strength, shall be divided and become partly strong and partly weak, or what we call brittle. “They shall mingle themselves with the seed of men; but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.” The learned are divided in opinion as to what this fourth empire or kingdom represents. But, without going into any review of the various opinions, it is sufficient to say that the weight of evidence points clearly to the power of Rome. No other empire arose in the world after the dispersion of the Macedonian power which at all corresponds with that colossus of the West; for Rome was as iron in its rule, crushing and breaking all other powers to pieces, and subsequently divided itself into two parts, the Eastern and the Western, which are represented by the legs, finally became disintegrated into smaller kingdoms, partly weak and partly strong, having an element of iron—monarchical strength—mixed with much weakness. The endeavor of these kingdoms to strengthen themselves and maintain dominion over the people by “mixing the seed of men,” that is, by intermarriages (see Jer. xxxi, 27; Dan. xi, 6, 17), only partly accomplished their purpose. This process is going on in Europe now, which represents in its various monarchies the dismembered Roman Empire. The ten kingdoms, corresponding to the ten toes of the image and the ten horns of the beast described in chapter seven, at the seventh, twentieth, and twenty-fourth verses, have not as yet formed themselves. The process of dissolution and reformation is still going on, and is not yet finished. Therefore it is that no tabu-

lation of the kingdoms of the Western world can be made to correspond with these ten toes. However, in the continual changes that are taking place, these ten kingdoms will finally emerge and correspond to Daniel's prophecy. For the "dream is certain and the interpretation thereof is sure." (v. 45.) The attempt of Napoleon to establish a fifth universal monarchy was defeated and brought to naught by his two great reverses at Moscow and Waterloo. There shall be no other universal kingdom, that is, of a merely world-power. Man has come to the end of his strength in the matter of conquest. Russia may attempt to succeed to universal dominion, but will fail even as Napoleon. There will arise a power in this world presently, the little horn of Dan. vii, 8, 11, which will attempt the conquest of the world, and bid defiance to the power of God, but it will be overwhelmed in the universal destruction of world-powers by the coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven (vii, 13), which event corresponds with the appearance of the "stone cut out of the mountain." The children of God are now waiting patiently till this last problem of the world's history shall be worked out.

## II.—THE STONE CUT OUT OF THE MOUNTAIN.

The prophet having described to the king the progress of the successive world-powers, through four universal kingdoms, now takes up the interpretation of that mysterious event which he saw in his dream: A stone cut out of the mountain without hands, which first smote the colossal image on its feet of clay and brake it in pieces, alike the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold, and then itself increased more and more until it filled the whole earth. This he declares to be the establishment of a universal kingdom upon the ruins of the great world-powers. This kingdom, however, is not a successor to the former, in the sense in which the four kingdoms succeeded one another. This kingdom had no part in the image, but was different in its origin and in its method of power. "In the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." (v. 44.) This is not the kingdom of heaven, but the kingdom which the God of heaven will set up on the earth. It is that Messianic kingdom which is the theme of all the psalms and the prophets, of which the Jewish Theocratic kingdom was the prototype and prophecy. This is the kingdom which the

great Son of David is to inherit according to the covenant made with David, when God anointed him and set him over Israel. It is that kingdom about which the disciples were so anxious when they asked the risen Lord if he would "at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel." (Acts i, 6.) It is the Millennial kingdom toward which all the Scriptures point, and which is the theme of John's revelation. It is the kingdom for which the ancient people of God had been so miraculously preserved through all these long centuries, amid the rise and fall, the crash and ruin of world-powers, as they have succeeded each other in the course of time. We can only note some brief outlines of the course of events in connection with its establishment.

**1.—The stone cut out of the mountain without hands.**—This stone points clearly to Christ. "The Rock of Ages" (Is. xxvi, 4); "The precious corner-stone" (Is. xxviii, 16, 17); "The stone which the builders rejected" (Ps. cxviii, 22; Matt. xxi, 42; Acts iv, 11; Eph. ii, 20; I. Pet. ii, 4, 7.) Daniel identifies this mysterious stone with the Son of man, who takes possession of the kingdoms of the earth (vii, 13, 14); John does the same thing in his revelation. (Rev. v, 9, 10; xi, 15-17; xiv, 14-16; xvii, 13, 14; xx, 4.) Jesus clearly appropriated this prophecy to himself. (Matt. xxi, 44; Luke xx, 18.) The expression "cut out of the mountain without hands," clearly indicates the supernatural origin and character of this omnipotent power, which was to break in pieces all these world kingdoms, take possession of all things, and establish a kingdom for itself.

**2.—The universal and everlasting kingdom.**—The world-powers were never absolutely universal; but the kingdom of Christ shall include and fill the whole earth. "And the stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." (v. 35.) It is a kingdom which shall never have a successor. "It shall not be left to other people, and it shall stand forever." (v. 44.) "And there was given him (the Son of man) dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all people, and nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." (vii, 14.)

**3.—The suddenness of the advent of the stone.**—There is no preliminary movement ascribed to the stone. It seems suddenly to rise up and smite the image with one mighty blow that shatters it to pieces. It is not a gradual, but an immediate conquest. There is no struggle for supremacy; no long conflict ending in final victory

by the gradual rise of power and increase of might. This, therefore, cannot refer to the slow conquest of the world by the Gospel. The stone first smote the world-powers in pieces and scattered them like chaff from a summer threshing-floor; then it went on and grew and filled the whole earth, and there was found no power to oppose it. This must refer to the sudden coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of man, in the clouds of heaven. (Dan. vii, 13; Rev. i, 7, 13; xiv, 14; compare with Matt. xxiv, 30; xxv, 31; xxvi, 64.) When Jesus comes again in the clouds of heaven, he will destroy all the organized powers of this world, overthrow Antichrist, and usher in the glorious Millennial period, during which all the nations of the earth will be gathered under his rule, and the vast bulk of them be converted to him in a true and spiritual sense. But some will, at the end of that period, be led into rebellion under the lead of Satan, who will be loosed for a little season; and then will come the end, when the devil, the head of all world-powers, shall be finally cast out; the judgment shall be set, the new heavens and the new earth shall be finally inaugurated, and everlasting glory shall be upon heaven, earth, and the redeemed people of God.

### III.—THE EFFECT OF DANIEL'S INTERPRETATION.

When Daniel had finished his interpretation of his dream, the king was so profoundly moved by its majestic truth, that he fell upon his face, and having worshiped Daniel, caused that oblations should be offered to him. We have no record of what Daniel did when this act of worship was paid to him, but no doubt he rejected it, or at least fully understood that the act of worship was not meant for him, as it certainly was not, since he had already disclaimed any power of his own to interpret the dream or unfold the secrets of God. (vs. 27, 28.) Moreover, the words of the king clearly intimated that he meant the worship to be for the God of Daniel, and not Daniel himself. "Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings." This intimates a partial conversion of Nebuchadnezzar to the true God. The second result was that it brought to Daniel power and authority in the government of the kingdom, even as a similar revelation of secrets and interpretation of dreams brought to Joseph in Egypt great power, to be used in God's service. Thus do we see how God takes possession, even in their day of power, of the kingdoms of the earth; so far at least as is necessary to carry out his purposes. The third effect was to lift the three friends of Daniel also into places of great eminence and usefulness. What a lesson is

this for the encouragement of those who have purposed in their hearts to be true to God in the world where they are placed for a testimony! The fiery furnace and the den of lions may yet be in their path, but the foundation of God standeth sure; for he knoweth them that are his, and is able to deliver the godly out of trial and affliction.

## XXIII.

## THE FIERY FURNACE.—Daniel iii, 13-25.

(13) Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Then they brought these men before the king. (14) Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego? do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? (15) Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? (16) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. (17) If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. (18) But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. (19) Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. (20) And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. (21) Then these men were bound in their coats, their hozen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. (22) Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. (23) And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. (24) Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. (25) He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.—Daniel iii, 13-25.

In the first chapter we have seen the remnant of Israel faithful and obedient to God. In the second chapter we have seen the prophetic victory of that faith in the coming and establishment of the kingdom of Messiah after the final destruction of all the heathen world-powers. In this chapter we see the individual pathway of faith through a world alienated from God; we see the necessity of a good confession, the possibility of great trials in the service and king-



dom of God, and the final and glorious deliverance which God will accord to the faithful. How long after the events recorded in the last chapter the setting up of this great image took place, it is impossible to tell. The presumption is, however, that several years had elapsed. The building of this huge image to the favorite god of Nebuchadnezzar, probably the god of battles, was most likely to celebrate and commemorate, with suitable splendor, the final triumph of his arms over all the nations of the earth. (v. 4.) The profound impression, made upon his mind by the recalling and interpretation of his awful dream by Daniel, seems to have faded away, since we find him setting up an image of gold and requiring all his subjects to worship it. Possibly there was the lingering memory of that head of gold in his mind, so that he made this image of that precious metal; though it does not appear that he constructed the image after the pattern of his dream. It was probably an entire golden image of his god placed on the top of a column or obelisk, since the proportions given would not correspond with those of a single image of a man; namely, ninety feet high by nine feet broad. Having set up this image, he published a decree that throughout the empire, at the sound of the trumpet and the reading of the proclamation, every one who heard should bow down and worship the image of his god. The penalty for refusing this act of worship to the idol was to be cast alive into a furnace of fire, which seems to have been erected near to the image. This was a tyrannical act of uniformity, intended to consolidate the religion as well as the politics of the empire. We do not know where Daniel, Ezekiel, and other eminent Israelites were at this time, or how far the mass of captive Jews complied with this decree; but it seems that the three young princes, who with Daniel had been faithful in refusing to eat the king's meat, and who had been subsequently elevated to high political office in the province of Babylon, refused, or at least failed, to do homage to the idol. The Chaldeans, a class of wise men in the employ of the king, had never overcome their chagrin at the superior wisdom of Daniel, and their jealous hatred of these Jews who had been elevated above their heads in political power. They set a watch upon these young men, as they subsequently did upon Daniel, and were quick to report to the king their act of disobedience. This led to their arrest and examination; which was followed by their bold confession of faith, and their subsequent execution (?) by being cast alive into the furnace of fire.

### I.—THE RAGE OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

Nebuchadnezzar was at the summit of his power; he had introduced a great statue, in the form of an image of his god of battle, to celebrate his universal sovereignty; his decree of universal obedience to his god, which was also an act of homage to himself, seems to have been generally obeyed. The defection of these princes from obedience seems to have reminded him that, after all, there were those who looked beyond him and higher than his fancied god for a true king. Perhaps his conscience was aroused and stung by the sudden recurrence of his former dream and its interpretation, according to which he was to be succeeded in his kingdom by another. Eastern monarchs were not celebrated for their quiet spirits; especially on such an occasion as this he could brook no disobedience. There were but two courses open to him. He must either at once recognize the right of the Hebrews to their religious liberty or he must suppress them. To do the former would be to unsay and undo all that was involved in the great celebration now going on; whereas, by summarily enforcing the decree of uniformity, especially upon the persons of the high officers of state, he thought he might increase his power, and by one stroke of severity bring all his subjects unto submission. There are several points of evidence that his conscience was aroused as well as his anger. When we refuse to obey conscience, we are always apt to fly into a rage and do the thing forbidden by conscience with ten times more violence. But we see in the rage and fury of this king a fulfillment of the second psalm, which shows us the raging of the heathen, the vain imagination of the people, and the confederacy of counsel by kings and rulers to put down the worship and reign of the Lord and his Anointed. This king of Babylon is only the type of all the world-powers that have succeeded him, who have been enraged against the faith of God's elect, and have sought to destroy that faith by violence. The deliverance and victory of the children of faith in this incident is also the typical prophecy of the final triumph of Christ in the person of his saints over all the oppositions and persecutions of the ungodly world.

**1.—The arrest of the three princes.**—"Then they brought these men before the king." How often since have the children of faith been accused and brought before kings and their magistrates, to give an account of their faith and answer for their disobedience to some ungodly and tyrannical decree uttered for the purpose of destroying

the "faith once delivered to the saints." Since the time of these princes millions have followed in their footsteps, and have answered as boldly as they. Jesus warned his disciples that in the conflict of their faith with heathenism, they should "be brought before governors and kings for his sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles." (Matt. x, 18.) The very means of which heathen kings make use to suppress the faith, is made the instrument of God for its universal spread.

**2.—The fearful alternative.**—The king seems after all to have greatly respected these princes, and secretly desired to find a way of escape for them. The sight of them and the remembrance of their faithful service and of the peculiar marks of divine favor which had been bestowed upon them for a moment cooled down his rage. He asked them if their act was one of disobedience or a mere accident. "Was it of purpose? (margin) do not ye serve my gods?" "If ye will say that it was not of deliberate purpose that ye worshiped not the image I have set up, and will now do it, it shall be well with you; but if ye worship not, in the same hour ye shall be cast into the burning fiery furnace." Here was a fearful temptation, at least in its form. How many have faced it since; how many are even now ready to face it if the crisis should come to them? No doubt there are as many hidden heroes now as ever; it only needs the emergency to bring out the slumbering martyr faith of what seems now a sleeping Church. These young men probably had counted the cost, and were ready to accept the alternative. Deny God they could not, go into a fiery furnace they could, and were ready to do so. That could but destroy their bodies, whereas a deliberate act of apostasy would destroy their souls.

**3.—The vain boast of the king.**—"And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" This bit of vain boasting reminds us of the speech of Pharaoh to Moses: "Who is Jehovah that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not Jehovah, neither will I let Israel go." (Ex. v, 2.) Also of the defiant proclamation of Sennacherib to Hezekiah and Jerusalem: "Who are they among all the gods of the countries that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand?" (II. Kings, xviii, 35.) And yet God destroyed Pharaoh, and put a hook in Sennacherib's nose by which he led him in ignominy back to his own city, to perish miserably at the hands of his sons. How empty the boasts, how unbounded the folly of men who challenge Jehovah to conflict! The apostate Julien, when dying on the battle-field fighting against God and Christ, exclaimed truly: "O

Galilean, thou hast conquered!" So must every representative of powers arrayed against God and his Christ finally confess his supremacy.

## II.—THE DEFENSE OF THE PRINCES.

We are reminded at once of the various scenes of this kind that have been subsequently enacted in connection with this world-old battle between faith and the powers of the earth; of the apostles before the rulers of the Jews, Paul before Agrippa, and later before Nero; of hundreds and thousands of Christians, before all manner of princes and kings arraigned on account of their faith; not to speak of Jesus himself before the Sanhedrin and Pilate. The scene is thrillingly beautiful and suggestive.

**1.—Not careful to answer.**—"O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter." Had the Holy Spirit already whispered in their hearts the instruction which Jesus afterward gave his disciples? "When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you, in that same hour, what ye shall speak." (Matt x, 19.) How calmly these young men stood there before the king! "We have no defense to make other than that we have not bowed down to your image. God will answer for us when the emergency comes. We have committed our cause to him. Argument will not avail against your arbitrary power over us, or against the injustice of your tyrannical decree. We submit our case not to you, but to the God whom you have so boastfully challenged, and will abide the result of the trial." This was the spirit in which they met the king. They were not afraid of the king, because they had confidence in God.

**2.—Their confession of faith.**—"Our God whom we serve." In making their answer, they distinctly announced that they believed in the one only and true God, and him they served. This was their justification for not bowing down to the idol which the king had set up, nor worshiping any of his gods. Their faith was not speculative, but real. It dominated their lives, and secured their glad service. Their confession was like that of Paul before the centurion on his way to Rome at the time of the shipwreck: "Wherefore, sirs, I believe in God . . . whose I am and whom I serve." (Acts xxvii, 23-25.) The man who has a real faith will confess it under any circumstances if called upon to do so, and that without fear of consequences. The full power of faith does not always manifest itself until the time of need comes, but, when once the emergency arises, faith springs to the fore and asserts itself.

**3.—Their confidence in God.**—“If it be so, our God is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.” Notice this, that though their faith was absolute as to God himself and their relation to him, yet it was not absolute as to their deliverance out of the fiery furnace, only as to God’s ability to deliver them. Of that they were sure; and so were willing to leave the fact of their deliverance from the fire to God’s will. They were sure, however, that in any case God would deliver them out of the king’s hand. Even if they did not come out of the furnace alive, they would, through death, be delivered out of the hand of the tyrannical despot by his own action. They anticipated in their faith another saying of Jesus: “Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.” (Luke xii, 4.) It has been, and always must be, the weakness of the world-powers in their battle with God, that they cannot follow the saints into the other world, to continue their persecution. An old martyr once said, in the face of threatening persecutors: “You cannot confiscate my possessions, for I have laid up my treasure in heaven; you cannot banish me, for my Lord hath said, ‘Lo, I am with you always,’ and where he is with me, I am always at home; you cannot kill me, for I have been dead these forty years, and my life is hid with Christ in God.” Thus it is; in any case the true confessor of Christ is always sure of deliverance either in this world or of release out of the hands of enemies into God’s other world.

**4.—Ready to die.**—If the worst came to the worst, they were quite ready to die. If God did not deliver them out of the flame, they were ready to find in the flame a pathway to glory. It was not necessary for them to live; it is not necessary for any of us to live. It *is*, however, necessary for us to be true to God when we are called upon to witness for him. They therefore counted not their lives dear to themselves; and so laid their case to rest with this brave declaration: “We will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.” Let us take that stand, and we are always sure of victory. God will never desert the soul that thus honors him.

### III.—IN THE FURNACE AND OUT AGAIN.

God does not promise his saints immunity from suffering in this world; on the other hand, he tell us that he has chosen us in a furnace of affliction. Jesus told his disciples that they must expect the hatred of the world, and that bonds, imprisonment, and

death awaited them. They were in this life like sheep among wolves. But what God does promise is that, "in all their afflictions" he will be "afflicted"; that is, that he will not leave them to suffer alone, or without the help and presence of his sympathy and grace; and that no suffering which they may endure for his sake will be a final loss to them. "The light afflictions which endure for a moment, work out for them a far more exceeding abundant weight of glory."

**1.—The princes are cast into the furnace.**—Upon their noble answer, and their declaration that in no event would they obey the command of the king, he fell into another fury of wrath and rage, and ordered the three young men to be bound as they were, in their splendid official robes of state, and cast into the fiery furnace, which in the meantime was being replenished with fresh heat. They were beyond the help of earthly power. Three mighty men of strength lifted them bodily, carried them to the door of the furnace, and flung them in; so, bound as they were, "they fell down into the midst of the burning fiery furnace."

**2.—An awful warning.**—Now a strange thing happened. As the three men who bore these princes to the furnace approached the open door to cast down their helpless victims, a sudden draught of air sent out a volume of flame which slew them on the spot. God seemed to give warning then and there that it was a dangerous thing to touch his saints or do them harm. He does not always act so promptly, but God is certain to avenge his elect; for "it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you." (II. Thess. i, 4–11.) He has forbidden us to avenge ourselves because vengeance belongeth to him, and he is certain to repay. (Heb. x, 30, 31.)

**3.—The astonishment of the king.**—A while ago he was in a furious rage; now we see him trembling with astonished fear. Not only did the swift death that overtook his three mighty men startle him, but as he looked into the raging flames he saw a wondrous sight. Not only were the three princes walking about in the flame, as though the fire had been to them a congenial atmosphere, but there was a fourth form with them, of such splendid and glorious appearance, that he spake of him as being like the Son of God; that is, he was a god-like man, as it were, an angel. Here was a fact on which he had not counted. By some mysterious power the young men "had quenched the violence of the fire (Heb. xi, 34), and they were accompanied by the presence of another man, who seemed to have them under his protection. He called his counselors and declared

to them what he saw : "Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." It is not necessary for us to attempt any discussion of this marvelous miracle of deliverance. Whether there was an actual and objective fourth man in the furnace with the three princes, and whether that fourth one was the very Son of God come down in a temporary bodily form, as perhaps the angel of the Lord, or whether the king saw a vision, is of no material importance. That there was a miracle is clear from the fact of the safety of the princes in the flame. There is nothing antecedently impossible in the literal truth of the whole matter. The important thing for us, however, is to remember that God is present with his people either visible or invisible, in all their afflictions, and is able either to bring them safely out in this world or conduct them by the fire of trial to heaven. Two very precious Scriptures are suggested in connection with this event. "I, even I, am he that comforteth you; who art thou that shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens and hath laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?" "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire thou shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." (Is. xliii, 2; li, 12, 13.) Let me add one more assurance from God's word for encouragement and comfort to the tried. "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers, but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you if ye be followers of that which is good?" (I. Pet. iii, 12, 13.)

## XXIV.

## THE DEN OF LIONS.—Daniel vi, 16–28.

(16) Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee. (17) And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel. (18) Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of music brought before him: and his sleep went from him. (19) Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. (20) And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? (21) Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. (22) My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. (23) Then was the king exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God. (24) And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den. (25) Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. (26) I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. (27) He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. (28) So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.—Daniel vi, 16–28.

Many years had passed away since the three Hebrew princes had been cast into the furnace of fire. Several kings of the Babylonian dynasty had reigned in succession. Daniel had been in high favor with some and out of favor with others in the meantime. It appears from the last chapter (v) that he had been living in almost forgotten obscurity, until the fearful handwriting on the wall in Belshazzar's time had been the occasion of calling him back to court. Now the new dynasty of the Medes and Persians had come in. The head of fine gold had given place to the breasts and arms of silver.



A still despotic but somewhat less autocratic power had entered upon the stage of the world's empire. A strong and insolent aristocracy was practically associated with the king. When Darius the Mede entered Babylon and took possession of the empire, he soon found out Daniel and learned his history. We can easily imagine the long interviews the king must have had with this aged servant of God, the most accomplished statesman in the realm. That the king was profoundly impressed, both with the character and abilities of Daniel, is perfectly evident from the fact that he was made the chief of the three presidents who were set over the kingdom. "This Daniel was preferred above the presidents and the princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm. (vs. 2, 3.) The precedency given to Daniel did not suit the mind of the other presidents and princes for various reasons. They were still jealous of the power of this foreign worshiper of Jehovah, and doubtless they were well convinced that, so long as Daniel had the final authority over the treasury accounts, there would be small chance for them to enrich themselves at the expense of the king's exchequer. They therefore immediately formed a plot for Daniel's overthrow. They perfectly understood that they could not sustain any ordinary charge against this man of blameless character and spotless integrity. So they resorted to craft. They made a proposition to the king, blasphemous as it was, well calculated to flatter the vanity of the king. If Daniel was to be caught at all, it must be through his religious fidelity. They knew his history and habits. In securing the decree forbidding that any one should make any petition to God or man for the space of thirty days, save only to the king, they were perfectly certain that they excluded Daniel from obedience to the king. The king was carelessly tricked into signing the decree; and then the presidents and the princes made haste to set a watch upon Daniel. As usual, when the hours occurred at which he was accustomed to open his windows and pray with his face toward Jerusalem, Daniel was found at his devotions, as calmly and deliberately as though no such decree had ever been signed. It was in no spirit of defiance that he acted thus. He knew perfectly well that a trap had been set for him, and he knew that he would be taken, but he was too old a servant and too faithful a worshiper of Jehovah to be moved from his steadfastness. No thought of evading the decree by resorting to private prayer, or closing his windows and pretending to obey the decree of the king, ever entered his mind. The light that had shone so steadfastly and brilliantly in that great city for more than sixty years was not now to be hid-

den under a bushel. He disdained to condescend to unworthy compromises or cowardly evasions. This his enemies had counted upon, and as soon as they had proof of his faithfulness to his God, they rushed off in eager haste, and by a flattering speech to the king, in which they laid the facts of Daniel's disobedience to the royal decree before him, they added the charge of contemptuous motives to Daniel. "That Daniel which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day." Then it was that the king saw how he had been made a dupe and cat's-paw by his courtiers, was sore displeased with himself, and at once began to devise some plan by which he might deliver Daniel and yet preserve the letter of the unchangeable decree. All day long he labored at this problem, till the princes and presidents becoming alarmed, made another rush for the king and reminded him that the decree was absolute and could not be evaded. The king had to give in. Here indeed was a lamentable spectacle. A man who was nominally the autocrat of the world; who had but yesterday published a decree which shut up every temple in the land for thirty days, silenced every prayer, and dethroned all the gods in his own favor, now saw himself the dupe of wily politicians, a helpless victim and prisoner to his own decree. He was unable to deliver his most favored and trusted servants out of the hands of these wicked men, because he had himself first delivered himself to them.

### I.—DANIEL DELIVERED TO THE LIONS.

In the delivery of Daniel, to be cast into the den of lions, we are reminded at once of the similar fate which befell the three young princes, his early friends. Yet both the case and the circumstances were different. In the case of the three, the king was wroth himself and willingly cast them into the furnace. In Daniel's case, the king was wroth *with* himself, and would gladly have delivered Daniel out of the hands of his enemies. In the former case, the king was an absolute autocrat, even over his own laws, and could have set them aside at his will, had he chosen so to do; but in this case, the king, according to the custom of his dynasty, was bound by his own laws, and might not abolish or alter them. Darius had been more boastful in the decree which made him god for thirty days, than had Nebuchadnezzar, who only ordered that his god should be worshiped by everybody; yet he had less power than his more modest predecessor. We cannot but reflect on the latent sarcasm involved in the boasted

despotic power of earthly monarchs. Their power is always absolute to do evil, but limited to do good. Zedekiah could consent to the imprisonment of Jeremiah, but said he had not power to deliver him out of the hands of the nobles, his enemies. Herod had power to deliver John the Baptist to the executioner, but no power to save him from the result of his rash vow. Pilate seemed to have no power to save Jesus from his malicious enemies, but had power to deliver him to the cross. And so we might further illustrate this power for evil, this impotence for good, when it is vested in the hands of the kings of the earth; but these cases will suffice. It was thus that Darius exercised his power and exhibited his powerlessness, when he ordered Daniel to be cast to the lions.

**1.—The king's speech.**—"Thy God, whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee." Thus he shifted responsibility from his own hands upon the God of Daniel, whom he had denied. So perhaps Herod hoped that somehow John the Baptist might be delivered out of Herodias' hands. So perhaps Pilate may have thought. First he hoped that Herod might relieve him of responsibility, and when he was driven to decide, he decided to do wrong, trusting that God would rescue his victim out of the danger and death whereto he had consigned him. Darius seemed not only to desire that God would deliver Daniel, but had a strong hope that he would. Perhaps Daniel had told him how, forty or fifty years before, God had delivered his three friends out of the fiery furnace; for Darius seemed to know a good deal of Daniel and his God. But this good-will, and even this gleam of faith in the power of God to deliver his servant, did not excuse his own evil act in delivering the innocent to death. Suppose Daniel had violated his decree; he had no right to have made that decree; and it would have been no sin for him to have revoked it, any more than it would have been sin for Herod to have canceled his vow when he found that Herodias had challenged it for the purpose of wreaking vengeance on the innocent Baptist. We may not count on God's goodness and power to save us from the consequences of our own wickedness. If God does interpose to frustrate our evil doings or overrule them for good, that does not make our sin the less, though it brings equal glory to God.

**2.—The double sealing of the den.**—"And a stone was brought and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel." This reminds us very much of what the rulers of the Jews did when Jesus was buried. They required that a great stone should be rolled over the mouth of Joseph's

tomb, and that Pilate should seal it with his signet. They were afraid that he might rise again; though they pretended that they were only afraid that his disciples would steal his body and give out that he was raised again. Did these lords fear that somehow Daniel would come out of that den of lions? It would almost seem so. There is always a fear in the heart of those who fight against God that he will defeat them. They were afraid of the king, more afraid of Daniel, and yet more afraid of Daniel's God. Well they might be. How vain is the fight of the rulers, and the kings, and the people against the Lord and his Anointed! (Ps. ii.) There is in this incident one of those adumbrations of the resurrection so often found in the Scriptures. Abel was slain, but God took Enoch to heaven, showing that there was a power in God superior to death. Isaac was delivered to death, but God in a figure raised him from the dead. (Gen. xxii.) Joseph's brethren cast him into the pit; but God by his providence rescued him and set him on the throne of Egypt, to save his very murderers from famine. Moses was cast into the river to die, but God procured his rescue. Jonah was buried in the belly of the great fish, but he came forth alive again. All these hints and foreshadowings were wonderfully and naturally fulfilled when God raised up Jesus, whom the Jews crucified.

## II.—THE DISTRESS OF THE KING.

Having abdicated his autocratic power to his nobles, in order to carry out his ill-advised decree, and having refused to take the real power that he had to frustrate their evil and wicked purpose, by which he was used to destroy his friend and most faithful servant, the king, in great agony of mind, returned to the palace to spend a very bad night.

**1.—A troubled conscience.**—"The king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and his sleep went from him." It was well that he did so; though it had been better had he boldly delivered Daniel. How often, when we weakly yield to sin, and suffer the torture of an offended conscience, we try to compensate for our sin by some acts of self-denial. If the fasting was a sign of repentance, it was well; but if it was simply to ease the pain of conscience, and seek in that way to atone for the evil, it was a mere mockery. Let us hope, from the subsequent events, that during that night in which the sleep went from him, the king was coming to a better mind, and determined the next morning, at all hazards, to deliver Daniel, if haply he were yet alive; yet had that been his fixed purpose, why

did he delay till the morning? We are so often quick to sin and slow to repent; prompt in doing wrong, but dilatory in making reparation. We are not sorry that the king had a bad night of it. We have had bad nights ourselves, and know how he felt. On the other hand, we cannot but think how differently the night was spent by Daniel. His couch a lion's den, his companions the devouring beasts; yet that night was probably the happiest night he had ever spent. Perhaps he anticipated deliverance. At any rate, he took with him into the den of lions a sublime faith in God, a good conscience, and a memory that was busy with the recollections of many years in which he had proved the goodness of God. Beside all this, there came the angel of the Lord to be his companion, with messages from God of love and power to save. Peter slept quietly in his gaol while the angel was coming to deliver him; and Paul and Silas waked the prison's echoes with nightly song. Happy children and servants of God, who can be at peace, can sleep soundly or sing gleefully in lion's den or prison's dungeon, while the monarch persecutors spend nights with tortured consciences in their splendid palaces!

**2.—A morning drive.**—"The king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste to the den of lions." He could not spend the whole night in his bed. With the first suggestion of dawn he was up and his chariot was ordered, and he drove in haste to the place where Daniel was quietly reposing with the lions and God's angel. This indeed is a strange spectacle, for the monarch of the world thus to be attending upon a condemned servant of God. Yet the king never before appeared to such good advantage. He could not have been altogether bad, though he was certainly very weak. Paul required the magistrate who had unjustly imprisoned him and Silas to come to the prison and openly deliver them. The Spirit of God working in the conscience of Darius, compelled him to do the same thing; as once before the fear of Zedekiah brought him to the dungeon of Jeremiah, the imprisoned prophet. God knows how to bring down the head of the proud as well as how to lift up the humble. The king was happy in this, that his repentance came in time, and he was permitted to see his evil work undone. Happy we if we also may always repent in time.

**3.—The king's lamentable cry.**—"O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" The king was deeply distressed and in an agony of anxiety. He had half hoped that God would interpose, but was wofully afraid. So he cried out between hope and fear. The

king, as we have said, must have known much, both of Daniel's past history and much of Daniel's God, though until now he had not cared about him. He had admired Daniel, and had listened to the old prophet's teaching concerning Jehovah. It all came back to him now; and he was both ready to publicly confess the excellency of the believer's character, and the dignity and sovereignty of the believer's God. In this "lamentable cry" there was both penitence and acknowledgment. What a splendid character he gave to Daniel: "Servant of the living God, whom thou servest continually." He also confessed God in a wonderful way: "The Living God." Thus he brushed aside all the pretensions of the idol gods, and gave honor to Jehovah. Daniel's teachings had not been in vain. They were now bringing forth a good harvest in the heart and mind of this pagan king. "Is he able to deliver thee?" Perhaps it was an anxious question: "Has he been able to deliver thee? Has thy faith been justified; art thou yet alive?"

### III.—DANIEL'S TRIUMPH.

That must have been a welcome sound to the king's ear, when the voice of Daniel answered back in clear, calm, and humbly triumphant tone, "O king, live forever." It must have smitten him deeply also to hear this noble and generous wish of Daniel for him, who had but yesterday delivered him to the lions. The real servant of God does not cherish revengeful feelings against his enemies, nor does he use his triumphs to upbraid them. Human nature would have been inclined to have added: "But no thanks to you." However, Daniel was too full of praise and thanksgiving to think of humiliating the king, or casting his cruelty and injustice in his teeth.

**1.—Praise to God.**—"My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me." In this he takes pains to ascribe his deliverance to his God. Here is a strong emphasis upon the fact that the Living God is not to be confounded with the false gods of the heathen. He is a God of providence, who watches over his servants and keeps his promise with them. Daniel had trusted in him, and God had not disappointed him. Long ago David had sung: "But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord; he is their strength in time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them and deliver them; he shall deliver them from the wicked and save them, because they trust in him." (Ps. xxxvii, 39, 40.) He told the king how he had been spared. God had sent his angel to stop the mouths of the lions. Did ever one of the gods of the

heathen do such a thing? This must have impressed the king. More than six centuries later than this, an inspired writer refers to this miraculous deliverance of Daniel as one of the great achievements of faith (Heb. xi, 33; with v. 23); "because he believed in his God."

**2.—A defense of his innocency.**—"Forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, I have done no hurt." Daniel does not boast of his goodness, but would set before the king that the favor of God to his servants in such a case is not regardless of the law of righteousness. Daniel had honored God at a time when the world-power was denying and deriding him. He had not feared to confess him in the face of death, and he had lived also a life in accordance with his faith. God not only vindicated his servant and the law of righteousness, but his own name against the blasphemous pretensions of man, and against the claims of the false gods. The king had forbidden prayer to any god. Daniel had, in disregard of that impious decree, appealed to his God, and God was, in a sense, bound for his own honor, to work this miracle.

**3.—Daniel delivered out of the den.**—"Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel out of the den." Thus was Daniel delivered out of the den, and out of the hands of his enemies. His character was vindicated, and, better still, his God was magnified and honored. The terrible punishment which the king ordered to be inflicted upon the accusers of Daniel and the leaders of the conspiracy, as also upon their innocent families—if indeed they were innocent of participation in the sin—was the act of the king, and was not instigated by Daniel. Moreover, it was contrary to the law of God, which says: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin." (Deut. xxiv, 16; II. Kings xiv, 6; Jer. xxxi, 29, 30; Ez. ix, 10; xviii, 20.) Though acting on a righteous impulse so far as the conspirators were concerned, the wild-beast nature was not yet wholly out of the king, and he obeyed the savage impulse and cruel practice of his time and training.

#### IV.—THE EDICT OF THE KING.

The effect of the miracle of Daniel's deliverance on the mind of the king, in connection with all the teaching he had had from Daniel, led him to publish a decree throughout the whole world proclaiming

God to be the Living God and the Universal King, rehearsing at the same time the wonderful act which had inspired this decree. He did not command that Daniel's God should be universally worshiped, but that he should be universally regarded, and that men should fear before him. The proclamation of the king was issued at the time when Peisistratus was tyrant at Athens; Servius Tullius was reigning at Rome; the Carthaginians were in great power; the commerce of Tyre and Sidon still flourishing. Pythagoras was on his travels gathering material for his remarkable system of philosophy; the disciples of Buddha were spreading their master's doctrines in India; and Confucius was teaching in China. Thus, while the world-powers were reigning in both religion, philosophy, and politics, the God of heaven was causing his testimony to be spread abroad, that the nations might be without excuse. God has never left the world without a witness for him; and now the last witness is being given to the nations by the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When this testimony is complete he will take to himself his great power, and finish the work in righteousness; he will set up his King upon the double throne of heaven and earth, and reign therein world without end.



XXV.

REVIEW OR OPTIONAL LESSON.

## XXVI.

## MESSIAH'S REIGN—Psalm lxxii, 1-19

(1) Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son. (2) He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment. (3) The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness. (4) He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. (5) They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations. (6) He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth. (7) In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. (8) He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. (9) They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. (10) The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. (11) Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. (12) For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. (13) He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. (14) He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight. (15) And he shall live, and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba: prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised. (16) There shall be a handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. (17) His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed. (18) Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. (19) And blessed be his glorious name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and Amen.—Psalm lxxii, 1-19.

This psalm is that which closes what is called the "third book of Psalms," corresponding experimentally and prophetically to the historical book of Exodus, or Redemption, and shows the Lord triumphant over his enemies in the recovery of his people out of the bondage and death inflicted by the oppressor. It is an open question whether it was written by David and dedicated to Solomon for a coronation psalm, or whether it was written by Solomon himself, as an expression of his desire for his own reign and as a prophecy of the greater reign of David's greater Son. There can be no doubt that the first significance of the psalm is seen as an expression of prayerful wish for the righteous and prosperous reign of the king (Solomon), who was also the king's son; but it would pass all pos-

sibility of belief to consider this psalm as having no higher reference than to Solomon. There are expressions here which were never fulfilled in Solomon's glorious reign, and which could not, by any possibility, be fulfilled in the reign of any mere man, be he however great or good. For instance, no kingdom on earth ruled over by a man can continue as long as the moon endureth; no man could, by any possibility, so reign as to deliver the souls of his people from deceit; nor could any mere man, however great, command such universal dominion as is here prophesied. Here we see a golden age, indeed, set forth, and a reign that could only be possible to God himself. Solomon's glorious but brief reign came to an end in unrighteousness and disaster, and these high aspirations and prophetic expectations were far enough from being fulfilled. In the reigns succeeding that of Solomon, after the division of the kingdom under Jeroboam, the pious among the people who continued to sing this psalm (for it was set and arranged for the public worship of Jehovah) must have looked ahead, guided by its prophetic light, to the coming of that kingly king's son who should fulfill in himself the high character and in his kingdom the noble deeds and glorious triumphs here ascribed to him; who should for himself justly secure the full measure of the doxology with which the psalm closes.

### I.—CHARACTERISTICS OF MESSIAH'S REIGN.

The psalm opens with a prayer for the redemption of the former promises, made in covenant to David, that they may now be fulfilled to his son. "Give to the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son." The significance of these beautiful words may be seen by reference to the promises made to David by Jehovah: "And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee; thy throne shall be established forever." (II. Sam. vii, 13-16, 25-29.) This promise made to David at the beginning of his reign, and the following declaration of Jeremiah, long after David and Solomon had been gathered to their fathers, show that the magnificent forecasts of this psalm could not have been exclusively written in reference to Solomon. "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his day Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely, and this is the name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." (Jer. xxiii, 5, 6.) There can be no question that this Branch is the king referred to,

and of course there is no doubt that Jesus is the King. A part fulfillment of this prayer is seen potentially in the reign of Grace in these Gospel times, but the completion will not be until he come the second time without sin unto salvation, to take unto himself his great power, and overturn all the nations of the earth. This psalm in its fulfillment synchronizes with that of Daniel's interpretation of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, when he saw the stone cut out of the mountain without hands smite the great golden-headed image, on its toes of iron mixed with potter's clay, and after grinding it to powder and scattering it as the dust of the summer threshing-floor, increase to the size of a great mountain that filled all the earth. The opening prayer is for the final power to be bestowed upon the Messiah-King, to the end that he may fulfill all these prophecies. Then follow some illustrations of the characteristics of Messiah's reign.

**1.—Righteousness.**—"He shall judge thy people with righteousness and thy poor with judgment." This is everywhere predicted of the Messiah. "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth." (Is. xi, 1-5; xxxii, 1, 17.) Not till he comes whose right it is to reign will there be on earth a king whose breath shall be the fear of the Lord, whose judgments shall be based on an absolute knowledge of men, independent of the sensual judgment of sight and hearing. Then, and then only, will the people have righteousness meted out to them; then only will the poor be perfectly defended from the oppression of the rich. This government of righteousness shall spread abroad to the whole land, both to the mountains and the little hills; it shall penetrate to every obscure corner of the earth, as well as to the high places of the mighty.

**2.—Strength.**—Not only will the government be righteous, but also strong. The poor shall be protected from the oppression of the rich, the weak from the overbearing and selfish tyranny of the strong; and the children of the needy shall be rescued from all the consequences of the unequal and selfish supremacy of the mighty. But more than that, the oppressor, be he who he may, shall be broken in pieces. Earthly might and power, wealth and station, will no longer protect the oppressor of the poor and needy, the weak and obscure. Might will no longer be right; the right will be the might of this kingdom. But beside this there is no doubt also a

higher spiritual reference. The poor and needy among the ancient people were always spoken of in a prophetic or typical manner as pointing to those who were poor in spirit, and who, because of their righteousness, were persecuted by the wicked and ungodly. In the day of Christ's reign such oppression shall not only come to an end, but the saints shall inherit the kingdom and the oppressor shall be cast out of power. "And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God and the power of his Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down which accused them before our God, day and night." (Rev. xii, 10.) One of the most pitiful things in this world is to see the poor and the needy turning away from God and Christ; for though, for inscrutable reasons, God does seem to tarry long, yet he will surely avenge his trusting poor; and certainly there is no power on earth that will champion them. They may combine and rebel, but the oppressor must always win the fight against the poor, unless God's power be invoked and given. Even in this life and during the present time, it is rare that a man or woman, however poor, is not better cared for and more surely protected, by reason of a restful trust in his God.

**3.—Gentleness.**—This great king shall exercise his power in government by gentle and gracious means, rather than by force. "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, and like showers that water the earth." Not with the sword does Christ win his kingdom, nor by such means will he execute righteousness in the deliverance of his poor and in the breaking of the tyrant's power, but by the almighty strength of truth itself. The poor shall be taught to trust in him who becomes to them a Sun and a Shield, and who will withhold no good thing from them that walk uprightly; the oppressor shall learn to fear him and bow before his authority. If they are not converted by his word of grace, then they shall be destroyed and their power for evil broken in pieces by the "breath of his mouth." How often, in the course of this Gospel dispensation, has the power of the oppressor been broken by his own conversion! This work will be completed when he shall come to take the kingdom to himself.

**4.—Peace and prosperity.**—As a result of righteousness, power, and grace delivering the needy and overwhelming the oppressor, there will come upon the earth peace and prosperity. "The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills by righteousness." Men of all kinds, in reconciliation to God, will be reconciled to each other. Where righteousness reigns, where the poor are pro-

ted, the needy cared for, and the oppressor cast out, there is no room for strife and contention. This great king is the Prince of Peace. Solomon's peaceful reign was a forerunner of this government. And where there is peace there must ever be prosperity. The prosperity of Messiah's kingdom will be both temporal and spiritual. He shall spare the poor and needy, and save their souls from violence; their lives, also (their blood), shall be precious in his sight; the dwellers of the wilderness, who used to oppress the poor of God's flock, will come and bow to Jesus; and the earth shall share in this perpetual amnesty, and "there shall be a handful of corn on the top of the mountains: the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon; and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth." "The kings of Tarshish and the isles shall bring presents; and the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts." This can only indicate an abundance of every supply, both for the people in country and city, and for all purposes of state and kingdom. This glorious state in a small degree was seen during the reign of Solomon, and what could be desired more in any kingdom than that righteousness should be perfectly backed up by strength, that strength should work through grace and goodness, not by fire and sword, that the outcome should be peace and plenty. Such will be the blessings of Messiah's reign.

## II.—THE EXTENT OF MESSIAH'S REIGN.

After having celebrated in this hymn of prayer and prophecy the characteristics of Messiah's reign, the psalmist further sets forth its extent. No earthly kingdom has ever corresponded to it. None of the so-called world-powers have ever actually had universal, certainly none of them perpetual, dominion. But see what the prophet says of Christ's kingdom and reign.

1.—**As to duration.**—It shall be an everlasting reign. "And he shall live." (v. 15.) David did not live; neither did Solomon; nor any of the kings of the earth. All have died; they have indeed been succeeded on the thrones of their own kingdom, but their dynasties have never lived. But Jesus, as the Son of David, lives, and shall live. In vain the powers of earth and hell conspired to put him to death. "I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold, I am alive forever more." This expression, "He shall live," without doubt points to Christ's resurrection. Other expressions in the psalm point to the endless duration of his reign: "As long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations." "So long as the moon endureth." "His name shall endure forever; his name shall be continued

as long as the sun." All these expressions point to the fact that his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and his dominion from generation to generation. His Kingship, as well as his Priesthood, is in the power of an endless life: "He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days forever and ever." (Ps. xxi, 4.) "Thou wilt prolong the king's life and his years as many generations; he shall abide before God forever." (Ps. lxi, 6, 7.)

**2.—As to subjects.**—The subjects of the kingdom of Messiah shall be not only of all nations, but of every class of men in all nations. Of course, the poor and the needy whom he has delivered, and whom he helped when he called. It shall indeed be composed of the poor and needy, of all, that is, who, during the period of Gospel dispensation, called on him and were converted by his grace; but during the millennial reign he shall win to himself all the rest of mankind. "They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him, and his enemies shall lick the dust;" they shall at last bow impotent before him. His grace will at last subdue them. "The kings of Tarshish and the isles shall bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts." "Yea, all kings shall fall down before him, and all nations shall serve him." The wise men, supposed to be three kings, who came from the East at the time of Jesus' birth, and brought to him gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh, did but foreshadow the universal surrender of all earthly powers to his sovereignty, mild in grace, but strong in righteousness.

**3.—As to its territory.**—We have already remarked that none of the so-called universal empires covered all the territory of the earth. Neither did that of Solomon. Here, however, we have a statement which can mean nothing less than absolute and entire sovereignty over the whole earth: "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth." "And let the whole earth be filled with his glory." Elsewhere the Scriptures abundantly testify by the inspired word of prophecy to the universal dominion of Christ. Not only over the territory of the great world-powers, but over all the isles of the sea. Even Arabia, which has never been conquered by any of the great powers of earth, shall as the wilderness come in under his government. What a heaven this earth will be with the curse removed, all wickedness and evil taken out of the hearts and lives of all people, when the lands shall blossom and bloom as the rose; then the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for him; waters shall break out in the desert, and the very beasts of the field and the forest shall rest at peace each with the others.

### III.—UNIVERSAL ADORATION.

Messiah shall rule in righteousness, "and men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed." There never was such king on earth; it is only possible that One such king could be; and he must be the Messiah, the Anointed of Jehovah; who is Jesus the Christ. In whom else are men blessed as in Christ Jesus, who is God's gift to this world, "full of grace and truth." "In whom we have redemption, through his blood the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace, wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence." The adoration of the subjects of this great and blessed King of Righteousness and Peace, takes three forms.

1.—**Prayer.**—"Prayer shall be made to him continually." In him shall all people recognize their all-sufficient supply. Every want shall be presented to him, in the spirit of constant and humble, yet confident supplication, and no good thing will be withheld from those who pray. To earthly kings the poor and the needy, the distressed and the oppressed, make their prayers. But kings of the earth lack either the will or the resources out of which to grant the prayers of their subjects; but here is a king who knoweth all our needs, and who is able to supply them according to the riches of his glory, out of an unwasting fullness; with such discretion and love, too, that every gift shall be doubled because it shall bring to the petitioner the love of his sovereign and a guarantee in the thing granted that it is good for the asker to obtain his request. In that kingdom the subjects will be glad to be constantly dependent on their king, and will feel nothing but a sense of honor in receiving gifts at his hands.

2.—**Praise.**—"And daily shall he be praised." Not only prayer, but praise, shall be given him. Eternity will not be too long wherein to praise him who shall have delivered our souls from death, from the deceit and oppression of the wicked, especially from the power of our great enemy, the devil; to praise him for the unspeakable blessings of forgiveness, justification, regeneration, sanctification, and the glory that follows. Who shall be able to estimate the wealth of blessing in that glory where "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him." The earth shall be full of his glory and vocal with his praise. Angels sang together at creation, but in this glorious day of redemption and the full triumph of Mes-



siah, when the heavens and the earth shall be filled with the saints, then even angels must give place while the Redeemed of the Lord chant the praises of their great king, singing ever again the new song, saying, "Worthy art thou to take the book and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, and hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth." (Rev. v, 9, 10.) And then will go up a loud responsive hosannah and hallelujah chorus from the voices of ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, saying: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." And every creature which is in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, shall say: "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever." (Rev. v, 11-14.) Let us see that each of us fail not of our share in the song of the redeemed when our Saviour shall come the second time without sin unto salvation.

**3.—Gifts.**—"To him shall be given the gold of Sheba." This seems to signify, in connection with vs. 10 and 11, that the people will themselves be a free-will offering to their Lord and King; all that they are and have shall be laid at his feet as being worth nothing apart from him and his blessing. Who shall say that in the age of glory there shall not be vast fields and unknown opportunities for the employment of all the redeemed and sanctified powers of man? O that all his people now upon the earth who have tasted of his heavenly grace and have received in themselves the first-fruits of this day and age of glory, would with one accord begin to make prayer for the coming of that day, praise him for present and past mercies, and bring all their gifts to lay at his feet, and make of their very selves a free-will offering that they may serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind!

## XXVII.

## THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.—Acts i, 1-12.

(1) The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, (2) Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen. (3) To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: (4) And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. (5) For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. (6) When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? (7) And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. (8) But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (9) And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. (10) And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; (11) 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. (12) Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath day's journey.—Acts i, 1-12.

The book of the Acts of the Apostles is unique among the books of the New Testament, as being the only one which relates the doings and teaching of Christ subsequent to the completion of his earthly ministry. It has to do with the events succeeding the resurrection and ascension of Jesus up to about the year A.D. 64. It was probably written several years later than that date, about the year A.D. 80, in the opinion of most scholars. There is scarcely any question as to its genuineness and authenticity. Even so hostile a critic as Renan allows that it is the genuine work of Luke, the companion of Paul. Our business is not with questions of criticism, but of interpretation and teaching, so we pass by this point with the simple reference.

Luke was the companion of Paul in most of, if not all, his missionary journeys. We do not know when he joined him or how he

came to be so intimately connected with his work. He seems not to have taken a foremost part, so far as appears, in the public ministry of the word; but acted as a historian of the apostles, and especially of the work immediately under the direction of Paul. The Acts is therefore not a history of the work of all the apostles, or of all their work. John's work is scarcely mentioned, and that of Peter only in connection with his relation to Paul, except the few references at the opening of the book, where the first movements of the apostles and earliest disciples are mentioned. It seems to have been a treatise in continuation of a former one written privately to a personal friend, whom he was desirous of thoroughly informing concerning both the doings and teaching of Christ and the subsequent events in connection with the gift of the Holy Ghost, especially those seen in the ministry of Paul, who is rightly regarded as the chiefest of the apostles; though the writer in no way slights the great work of Peter up to the time when Paul took the lead in the mission to the Gentiles. Whether it was designed by Luke that his two great letters should come into general circulation among the churches seems doubtful; but it has been well remarked, that letters, whether written for public or private perusal, if they have in them great truths, real life, and power, are sure, sooner or later, to be used of God for the edification and comfort of the world. Certainly the marvelous use which God has made of the former and latter treatise of Luke, ought to encourage other earnest servants of God to make careful record of the work of God that comes under their observation. The reports of real work done and living words spoken, always bring blessing in their train. The world is richer and better off spiritually for such letters as those of the sainted Rutherford, and others like him, who wrote not for public, but private, instruction and comfort. When a Luke writes to a Theophilus, the words are certain to get abroad, and be used by the Holy Ghost. Dean Alford has called the Acts of the Apostles the Gospel of the Risen Jesus. That is, the record of what Jesus continued to do and teach after his resurrection and ascension. His reach was not shortened by the fact of his passing through the heavens back to the Father; his power was precisely the same, namely, that of the Holy Ghost. His method differed in this, that whereas, when he was on earth, he wrought and taught himself, and by means of his own hands and words, now he multiplies his agencies by bestowing the spirit of wisdom and power upon hundreds of his disciples. This he intimated in the preliminary commission and bestowal of power immediately after his resurrection and before his ascension. (John xx, 21, 22.)

## I.—CONCERNING JESUS AND HIS MINISTRY.

Luke briefly but graphically refers in this treatise to the whole work of Jesus, from the time of his appearance in this world to the time he was taken up after his resurrection. In the first four verses, he seems to connect this treatise on to his former, beginning one where he left the other, only lapping this over that sufficiently to make the two a connected whole concerning the work of our Lord among and for men.

**1.—Jesus as a doer and a teacher.**—Some one has said that “Christ preached his own life and lived his own doctrine.” For the first thirty years, Christ was a doer, rather than a teacher. As a little boy, we find him indeed in the temple, disputing with the doctors, but he then said of himself that his business in this world was to do his Father’s business. We next see him being subject to his parents at Nazareth, where for eighteen years he seems to have lived in almost total obscurity; but during this time, we are sure, though he was not a public teacher, he was pre-eminently a private doer. It is only when a man has himself become first a doer of God’s word, that he becomes a fit teacher of it. We may be sure that the superlative teachings of Jesus would not have had their marvelous influence over the world if he had not lived his sublime life. He came into this world “full of grace and truth.” He first exhibited this grace in his life, in what he was himself, in the acts of mercy and power which he wrought, and then he taught the truth. Words of good-will do not go far, unless they are preceded, or at least accompanied, by deeds of good-will. It is of no use to say to a starving man: “Be thou fed,” unless there is with that comfortable command a tender of food. No doubt Luke referred to the method of Jesus in his ministry. Most of his teachings were based upon or associated with the miracles of grace and power which he wrought among the people, and that in connection with a ministry which has been well described as “going about doing good.” If hearing the word of God is of no avail without doing it, certainly preaching and testifying to the word of God will influence nobody, unless it is preceded by consistent action. If it were not for the fact of a Christian life manifested in the holy lives of believers, Christian doctrine would command no attention beyond that of a speculative system. All the works and teachings of Jesus were but the “beginnings” of more works and more teaching. God begins, but never finishes. His works and his teachings are only movements in the march of infinite

advance. But one thing we know is finished, and that is the redemption work of Christ, which he declared accomplished when he bowed his head and gave up the ghost; but even this gives birth to a progressive work of salvation, based upon, and springing out of, that foundation. Jesus intimated to his disciples that, through them, he would do greater works after he went to the Father than while he was on the earth, and that, as they became able to bear them, he would give them other teachings. In the Acts of the Apostles we find both of these promises being literally fulfilled.

**2.—The passion of Jesus.**—This crowning work of the Lord is just mentioned by the historian. He has dealt with it fully in his former treatise; and yet it is in connection with the expiating passion of Christ that is seen the significance of his resurrection, his commandments to his apostles, his ascension, and his administration of power from on high. Not alone his works of love and mercy, his teachings of righteousness and holiness are to form the burden of his message to the world; "Christ and him crucified," is to be our theme. There may be times when one feature of our Lord's work and teachings must be emphasized to the apparent minimizing of others, but all must have their place in some proportion in every word and work of ours, whether expressed or implied.

**3.—The commandments of Christ.**—Jesus did not express opinions or give advice. He commanded. He is Lord as well as Saviour. Moses and the prophets spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and always, as being the mouth-pieces of Jehovah, used invariably the formula: "Thus saith the Lord." But Jesus, though he spoke as he wrought in fellowship with the Holy Ghost, nevertheless spoke and gave commandments out of his own authority. "Verily, verily, I say unto you." The commandment referred to here was the commission to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. In fact, to be his witnesses, "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (v. 8.) He did not advise them to this course, or discuss with them the probabilities of their success in attempting it. He simply commanded them to act thus, promising the gift of power for the work, and his own spiritual presence with them in execution of his orders. There is nothing in all history so sublimely—I may say, so divinely—audacious as this command of Jesus to his apostles and disciples. Nor is there anything in the history of the world so absolutely confirmatory of the truth of Christ's Gospel as the fact that, throughout these nineteen centuries, this command has been not only obeyed, but crowned with success, and that in

spite of all the forces of earth and hell arrayed and allied together to defeat and prevent its complete execution.

**4.—The resurrection of Jesus.**—“He showed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs.” Luke does not rehearse these proofs here, for he had already done it in the “former treatise” (Luke xxiv); but he refers to the fact of Christ’s manifestation of himself to his disciples, subsequently to his crucifixion, during a continuous period of forty days, accompanied with certain demonstrations that could leave them in no doubt as to the literal fact of his bodily resurrection from the dead. He ate with them, he spake with them, he showed them his hands and his feet pierced with the crucifixion nails, he showed them his side that had been riven by the spear of the Roman soldier. This he did, not in one day, at one time, and in one place, but throughout forty days, at divers times and places; to the eleven in different companies, to individuals, such as Peter and James alone, to the women, the Emmaus disciples, to five hundred brethren at once, and later on, to the apostle Paul himself. (See the closing chapters of Matt., Mark, Luke, John, and I. Cor. xv.) It was absolutely necessary that these witnesses should have infallible proof of his resurrection, in order to carry out his command to preach his Gospel to the ends of the earth. It is as absolutely certain that they never would have begun that work, or could have carried it forward, unless they had been convinced beyond the possibility of a doubt that Jesus, which was crucified, was alive again from the dead. The Gospel would never have been preached in Jerusalem, or in all Judea and Samaria, much less in Rome and in all the world, unless Jesus had shown himself alive in this unmistakable manner. Nor could it survive one day if these infallible proofs were broken down.

## II.—THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

During these forty days in which he was with them, after his passion and resurrection, he spoke “to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” We have not any account of these discourses, except that Luke has given us an explicit statement to the effect that he opened their understanding and expounded to them out of all the Scriptures, the law, and the prophets, and the Psalms, the things therein concerning himself, and also showed how his suffering and death were necessary before he could enter into his glory and fulfill the whole of the prophetic promises (Luke xxiv, 25–27, 44–48), and how the Gospel must be preached before these things

could come to pass. The first half of this volume of studies has been selected with special reference to the setting forth of the purpose and promises of God in reference to the coming Kingdom. Luke brings out the fact, that there was still considerable difficulty in the minds of the disciples in reference to the same.

**1.—Our Lord's idea and theirs.**—His thought and teaching concerning the kingdom was manifestly different from theirs. For at the very last interview he had with them, they still seemed to think that the time had now come to establish that kingdom. Jesus spoke to them of "the kingdom of God," as the universal reign of righteousness over the whole earth, set forth in our last study of the seventy-second psalm, and in previous lessons, while the disciples spoke of the "kingdom of Israel." Their idea was narrow, small, and limited to Israel after the flesh, while his idea was large, and universally included all peoples, nations, and languages. It is always difficult for us to rise out of our own narrow limitations, and take in God's great thoughts and purposes. This narrowness of mind on our part is always obtruding itself on God's great thoughts; indeed, they are higher than ours as the heavens are higher than the earth. God's thoughts and purposes of mercy have in them a wideness like the wideness of the sea, while ours are bounded by local surroundings. As we come into a closer and more intimate fellowship with Jesus, we shall also come into a larger and more godlike view of things, both in heaven and earth. Let us, then, make haste to learn his mind!

**2.—Times, seasons, and unrevealed secrets.**—To their eager and impatient curiosity concerning the time for the revelation and establishment of this kingdom, Jesus simply returned that it was not for them to know; that this was a matter which God had kept in his own power. As many of the prophets of old did not know the times and seasons of their own prophecies (I. Pet. i, 11), so now it is not given even to apostles to know times and seasons; nay, even Jesus himself, as the Servant of God, was content not to know this secret. (Mark 13, 32.) What folly, then, for men to be perplexing themselves in the vain endeavor to figure out the date of our Lord's second coming. Our business is to look for, wait for, and hasten his coming by the consecration of ourselves to his service. "Secret things belong to God." Let us be content that God should have some secrets that he has not yet seen good and fit to reveal to us. We can trust him. If we cannot, then he is not worthy to be our God, and it is not worth our while to be his children.

### III.—THE PROMISE OF THE FATHER.

Being assembled together, whether at this time of his ascension, or at an earlier period, he commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but “wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.” To what promises he referred we are not absolutely sure, but most likely to some which were given, though not recorded, in connection with things said to them at the time when the verses Luke xii, 11, 12 were spoken; or the general subject of discourse recorded in John xiv, xv, xvi. These various promises no doubt referred back also to such passages in the Old Testament as Isaiah lxiv, 3; Joel, ii, 28–31. At least Peter referred to this latter passage when the promise of the Father was fulfilled. (Acts ii, 16.) He compares and contrasts this blessing impending over them with John’s baptism by water. He spoke of it as the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and told them that they should receive it not many days hence. In the one case John baptized them, in the other case the Holy Ghost would baptize them; in the one case they were baptized in water, in the other case they were to be baptized with fire; in the one case they received a benefit in figure, in the other case they were to receive an actual incoming and abiding of actual power from on high. They were to wait for it. He did not tell that it would fall upon them after ten days of waiting, but simply bade them to wait for it. This is good discipline for us, as it was for them. We are eager and selfish, impatient and restless in our carnal minds, and it is good for us personally, absolutely needful for us as servants, to learn how to wait upon God until these earthy characteristics are chastened into obedience and broken into service. If God can afford to delay his work ten days or an hundred days, we can afford to delay our service. Better wait a lifetime for spiritual power than to spend it in trying to do God’s work without it. “They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.” Let us learn to wait, not carelessly or indifferently, but patiently and expectantly.

### IV.—THE ASCENSION AND PROMISED RETURN.

When he had spoken these things, and was still standing amongst them, there descended from above them a wondrous cloud, and it hovered about them. Suddenly Jesus rose from the earth, entered into the cloud, and disappeared from their sight. The words seem



to indicate "that just previous to this there came some kind of a change over the features of Jesus. "While they beheld." Something attracted their attention, and as they steadfastly gazed up into the heavens the ascension was accomplished.

**1.—Taken up out of their sight.**—Two things are affirmed in this brief statement. (i) "He was taken up." This indicates that the Father did something for him. It is not said that he ascended of himself, but was taken up, as though some power external to himself was exercised upon him. A new law of gravitation was put forth in respect of himself that drew him up toward and into heaven. It is said in a later part of this treatise, that God both raised him up from the dead and exalted him to be a Prince and a Saviour (ii, 32, 33; v, 30, 31), as though by this exaltation he had received some new power, or at least had, by the Father, been placed in position to use the power which had already been given him. (Matt. xxviii, 18.) (ii) "Out of their sight." We can imagine the sudden and overwhelming dismay that must have filled their hearts at this rapture of Jesus. They had but just gotten him alive from the dead, their carnal hopes were beginning to gather about him again which had been dispersed by his passion, and now they were dashed to the ground again, while he was taken away from them into heaven. How lonely they must have felt! He was really as far absent from them now as when he lay dead in Joseph's tomb. But it was not so. He was simply taken out of their sight; not—thanks be to God—out of the reach of their faith; not away from them in the sense that he could not help them further. Out of their sight, but not out of their hearing. Out of their sight, but not so far that he could not sympathize with them, or be touched with every feeling of their infirmities; not so far away but that Stephen, when he fell under the shower of stones, could see him standing at the right hand of God. O, surely, if only the heavens were opened over us we could see Jesus, and that not very far distant from us. Let us not think of him as being far away, though out of sight. Yea, though he is out of our sight, we are not out of his sight,—a matter of infinitely larger import.

**2.—He will come again.**—While they gazed, two angels dropped down from the heavenly convoy, and spoke to these bewildered disciples, comforting them concerning Jesus, with a promise that he would return again. (i) This same Jesus—not another Jesus, but the same Jesus, the risen and glorified Man Christ Jesus, shall come again. (ii) In like manner. It will not be a spiritual coming. That promise has not yet been fulfilled. The earth has not yet done

with Jesus. He is the Son of God, but he is the child, the man, and the King of the earth. Wretched and miserable they who are not his friends when he comes! Happy they who are his friends, and are found watching, waiting, working, and hastening his coming! That will be their day of triumph as well as his.

**3.—The return to Jerusalem.**—He had led them forth from Jerusalem to speak these parting words and take his leave of them. Now that they understood, they returned to Jerusalem, not depressed, but with great joy (Luke xxiv, 52), to wait for the promise, amid a time of praise and gladness.

## XXVIII.

## THE DESCENT OF THE SPIRIT.—Acts ii, 1-12.

(1) And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. (2) And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. (3) And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. (4) And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (5) And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. (6) Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. (7) And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? (8) And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? (9) Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia. (10) Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, (11) Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. (12) And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?—Acts ii, 1-12.

We last saw the disciples returning from the Mount of Ascension to Jerusalem, not depressed or discouraged by the departure of their Lord. The cheering words of the angels, who assured them that Jesus would come again, were still working faith and hope in their hearts. They did not know all that the promise meant then, even as we do not yet know, except that it means blessing now and blessing to come. He went away blessing them, and he will come again with larger blessings, no doubt,—“a second time without sin unto salvation.” Then the disciples took fresh hold on his word concerning the promise of the Father, which, he said, he would send upon them when they should go up to Jerusalem and wait. They did not then fully know what that blessing was, only by faith they took hold upon some great thing. Luke, in the conclusion of the last chapter of his Gospel, tells us that they went up with great joy. It is in the power of faith to put a great joy in our hearts, especially if we are acting in accordance with the word upon which our faith claims its warrant. Had they not gone up to Jerusalem, they would

have had no joy, just as men now have no joy who say they believe the word of Christ and do not do it. Yet there was a larger joy and mightier blessing in store for them, as there is for all disciples who go waiting and expecting the fulfillment of yet unfulfilled promises. These disciples were not disobedient to the heavenly vision. What a great thing it is to have an obedient faith! Many Christians mourn over their lack of faith, and are always lamenting that they have not stronger faith; when, in point of fact, it is not faith they lack so much as obedience. Faith is like a seed. If it abide alone it brings forth no fruit, but if it dies into obedience, then there is sure to be a harvest of joy and power, for faith, like other seeds, multiplies by such an use. For ten days they assembled together in that upper room, waiting and praying; one apparently foolish action they took, namely, the election of Matthias to fill up the place of the traitor Judas. This they seem to have done without warrant or authority. The Lord gave them no commandment to rectify that deficiency. Perhaps, if they had been still more obedient, and had left matters of Church government and questions of the ministry alone till the Spirit was poured out, they would not have had to wait so long for the promise of the Father to have come upon them. It is hard to keep the old energetic flesh still. Nothing so completely tends to empty us of self-sufficiency as to be compelled to wait. One reason, I think, of the lack in our day of mighty revivals, is that we have not the faith or the patience to wait. We fix days and hours, and practically say to the Lord that we are so busy and have so much to do that we cannot wait. We appoint a week of prayer and say, in effect, we can only come together and pray for one week. Indeed, we are so impatient that we cannot give even our one annual week of prayer up to that purpose, but must needs turn it into a preaching meeting, or a talking meeting, or almost any other kind rather than one of simple prayer and waiting. In our ordinary gatherings for prayer, if there come a pause, the minister or leader becomes impatient and sends forth his exhortation to "fill up the time," and the brethren and sisters begin to look about and get fidgety and nervous, just as if to be silent and wait upon the Lord for a few minutes were an offense against the Spirit. I sometimes think that the reason why we fail to get more direct spiritual blessings from Heaven is that we do not give the Spirit an opportunity to speak to us in our eagerness to speak to God and to one another. Jesus' orders were to tarry. It may be that we have something to learn in this line in our day. The subject is at least worthy our consideration.

We have come in our studies to the edge of a new dispensation in the progress of God's great purposes toward the world. Old things were passing away; indeed, the old dispensation had almost disappeared; it would entirely vanish the moment the Spirit was poured out. All things were to become new. The Jewish economy was waxing old like a garment and being rolled up as a scroll; the season of the Spirit was dawning even unto day. A new fire from Heaven was to be kindled on the altars of Christian hearts, and the whole world was about to be embraced in the arms of everlasting love. We do not know what the chief priests and the rulers were doing; they were doubtless busy about the feasts and ceremonies of this last pentecostal festival. It was now fifty days and more since Jesus had been crucified. At first they had been thrown into a flutter of fear by the report of the soldiers that he was risen from the dead; but the chief priests had quieted that rumor by bribing the soldiers to say that his disciples had come by night and stolen his body. Nothing more had been heard of Jesus and his disciples; and his enemies no doubt took heart of courage to think that it was all over with him whom they had crucified. Jesus himself did not appear in public again after his resurrection. He had practically left the world, and only remained on earth long enough to convince and thoroughly satisfy his disciples that he was alive, and to give them some last instructions as to their future mission. Henceforth the world was to know Jesus, not by the sight of eye and the hearing of ear, but by faith, based on the testimony of disciples who were eye-witnesses of his resurrection. The priests, scribes, and Pharisees, and Herodians little dreamed of what was going on in the region of Jerusalem and Galilee, between the risen Christ and his disciples; yet God was mightily working out his purposes in their very midst. How true is this of our day! The world sees little that is going on around it, and believes less, and yet every day hundreds of souls are being born again; thousands of disciples are meeting with their risen Lord through his word and ever-present Spirit.

### I.—THE FIRST ASSEMBLY.

The first verse in this chapter gives us a brief but graphic description of the first Christian assembly, or Church. These few words are full of great germinal truths, which we do well to plant again and again in our hearts and minds.

1.—**The place of meeting.**—It was in Jerusalem. Less than two months ago, Jesus had been led into that city, to be there con-

demned, led again outside the walls, and crucified as a common malefactor. On the very spot where he had been condemned, there he chose to demonstrate the fact of his resurrection by gathering together his scattered disciples, and, through the word of their testimony, accompanied by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, beginning to gather in the harvest of sinners for his kingdom. He will do nothing in a corner; he will not select Galilee as a place for his demonstration, but Jerusalem. The Jerusalem sinners crucified him; the Jerusalem sinners should be the first to recognize in him their Saviour and Lord. The gathering was in an upper room somewhere in Jerusalem, but not in the temple. Alas, from that temple Jesus had been led away, rejected, and condemned to death. The temple was now no more for Jesus and his people. The dispensation whereof it was the center was over and past. Jesus is henceforth himself the tabernacle of God and the meeting-place of his people. We may hereby learn that, with true worshipers, the question is not one of place, but of object. The recent practice of "consecrating" churches, in order to make them holy, is not in accordance with the spirit of Christianity, and savors of that which has passed away. Wherever two or three true believers are gathered and Christ meets with them by his Spirit, there is a true church; there is a true place of worship.

**2.—The time.**—It was well on into the day of Pentecost, the same as the great feast day of the Jews commemorating the two events of their deliverance from Egypt and the gathering in of harvest. It was fifty days after the date of the exodus from Egypt; fifty days, too, after the resurrection of Christ, who represents and guarantees the exodus of every believer from the bondage of sin and death. On this, the greatest of the three great feasts, all the offerings of the Levitical ceremonial law were made, with the addition of that of the two Wave loaves, testifying the ripened harvest and its gathering in. Surely there was typical propriety in selecting such a time for the outpouring of the Spirit. The whole law was now fulfilled in the accepted offering of Jesus Christ; while the descent of the Spirit, besides testifying to this fact, also made clear announcement that the harvest of souls had begun. The three thousand souls gathered in on that day were waved before the Lord as the first-fruits of the millions to follow in coming ages. The better was the season chosen, from the fact that not only were congregated there men of the nation from every part of Palestine, but strangers, "devout men," and foreign Jews from every part of the world; so that, in a sense, the whole world should witness the great

manifestation of the Spirit, and the truth of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Many a converted man would carry the news, nay, the testimony of Jesus and the resurrection, back with him to his home, till the seed of the kingdom should be scattered abroad, as would have been impossible by other means. God always chooses well for the development of his plans and purposes; not only in great matters, but in small, not only in connection with his Church as a whole, but with regard to the life of every individual believer. Could we only read backward in our lives' history, we would see that their marked events were all well timed for our good. The same would be true of the unremembered events, which, perhaps, have been of no less importance.

**3.—The company.**—We are told in the first chapter that the number of the disciples gathered there were about one hundred and twenty. Of these the eleven apostles are named; also Matthias and another who were the candidates for Judas' vacant place. These had been gathered together, no doubt, by the apostles after their return to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. Besides the one hundred and twenty who are spoken of as "brethren," there were the women, of whose number we are given no information. The important matter, however, is not their names or number, but their mind and spirit. "They were all with one accord in one place." Here we have the first statement of unity; a unity due not so much to the fact that they were all in one place, as that they were there "with one accord." It was no Church government, no doctrinal statement that bound them together. They were bound together from within, by a common faith in Christ's promise, a common personal confidence in himself, a common expectation which filled all their minds. If we are ever to realize Christian unity, it must be by reason of oneness of accord in reference to Jesus, his person, his promises, and his work. Neither distance nor forms of worship can break this unity; but when we try to realize this same oneness in such mere objectives to our Christian life as statements of doctrine, systems of Church government, and manners of administering ordinances and regulations for the conduct of worship, we must inevitably be defeated and fall into worse confusion. The apostle exhorts us to "keep the unity of the Spirit," not to invent and force a unity of doctrine or external rites. If we have lost the unity of the Spirit in eagerness to establish the truth of our sectarian positions, let us come back to first principles, and recover such a mind as we see in this, the first assembly of believers.

## II.—THE DESCENT OF THE SPIRIT.

Whilst the disciples were waiting together, sharing “the blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. i, 3), suddenly the Spirit came upon them. They had been looking for and were expecting the fulfillment of the promise, and yet, until it was upon them, there was no sign. Will it not be so when the Lord comes again? Suddenly as at midnight will be heard the cry: “Behold the bridegroom cometh.” Happy we if we are found waiting, ready for his appearing; before it is too late. Sad would it have been for any of these disciples to have been absent at that day and hour; and sad will it be for any believer to be “out of the Spirit,” not waiting and watching when he comes; for him it will be too late to recall his wandering and uncentered soul.

**1.—The forerunners of the Spirit’s ministry.**—The first of these forerunners, or outward signs, was “a sound as of a rushing mighty wind.” It was not a sudden tempest. There was no movement in the air, but just the sound as of a rushing wind. They *heard* that sound, but did not see or feel it. Then there appeared unto them cloven tongues “like as of fire.” They were not actual tongues of fire. They did not burn, in any physical sense. These tongues, “like as of fire,” sat one upon each of the disciples. These they *saw*. So that the descent of the Spirit was heralded by two sensible signs. Once afterward, when the disciples were gathered together, praying (Acts iv, 31), the place where they were was shaken. And even now the presence of the Spirit of God is manifested to us as it is not to the world. Yet the time for external signs soon passed away. It was necessary that the first disciples should have these signs, just as it was necessary for them, by many infallible proofs, to know that Jesus was alive from the dead. But now it is not the sign we want, but the substance, not the sound as of a rushing mighty wind, and the appearance of cloven tongues as of fire, but the presence and power of the Spirit himself.

**2.—The subjects of the Spirit’s ministry.**—We are told that these tongues of fire sat on each of them—the apostles, the disciples, and the women. There is no respect of persons with the Lord when his Church is concerned. The Spirit came as well to the common disciple as to the apostolic disciple; to the women disciples as to the men disciples. Has God no lesson for us in this, for our day, when men are arrogating to themselves peculiar powers because of their fancied succession to the apostolic office? There are orders



indeed in the ministry, but power belongs to no order. The whole history of the Church demonstrates this fact. When certain claim to be the successors of the apostles, and therefore claim exclusive right to powers which belong to the whole Church of God, we are inclined to ask them to point out in what particular they have succeeded to the apostles. Have they been eye-witnesses of the resurrection of the Lord; have they wrought miracles; have they alone preached the Gospel; has the Holy Spirit been given to them alone; has God confined his grace to the channels of their ministry? Wherein are they prepared to demonstrate that they have any apostolic gift or power not accorded to all the disciples? If the Church has set them apart to minister in the word, well; but has the Holy Spirit in any way distinguished them from other brethren and disciples in the matter of power? And verily such a claim must stand or fall as it is supported by the power of God.

### III.—THE EFFECT OF THE SPIRIT'S DESCENT.

It remains now but to briefly note the effect produced by the coming of the Spirit, directly upon the disciples, and indirectly upon the outside world.

1.—**Upon the disciples.**—We are told that they were all filled with the Spirit. Nor was this the first occasion of its outpouring on God's people, in a measure. In the old dispensation, the Spirit had come upon men to give them varied powers. Upon Moses, to give him wisdom to construct the tabernacle in the wilderness; upon Joshua, to enable him to fight the Lord's battles; upon the prophets, to enable them to deliver the word of the Lord. Jesus had already breathed on the apostles and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Now, however, for the first time had the Spirit been given, as it were, without measure; not for mere specific purposes in wisdom or prophecy, but for the entire service of God, inspiring energy for the preaching of the blessed Gospel of Christ. It elated them with a divine enthusiasm, deepened all their convictions, empowered them to see truth spiritually as never before, filled them with longing love for men, gave birth to a mighty patience and compassion, made them strong to do their work in the face of danger and death. In one particular, for a little time they were gifted with special power of speaking in other tongues. This peculiarity truly soon passed away, as did the phenomena of the noise of wind and tongues of fire; but the energetic power of that Spirit, however, has never changed. Often is it manifest in songs of holy joy and shining of faces in con-

gregations of God's people ; and such scenes have the same effect on unbelievers as had these peculiar attendant circumstances upon the multitude on the day of Pentecost.

**2.—The effect upon the multitude.**—It would seem from the sixth verse that the noise as of a rushing mighty wind reached beyond the walls of the house where the disciples were gathered, and spread abroad in the city like a mighty voice (see margin : “When this voice was made”), thus attracting the attention of the multitudes of people who were then in the streets ; notably of certain strangers and devout men who had come up from foreign countries to be present at the feast. These ran together to the place to ascertain the cause ; and, entering, they heard the disciples speaking, and marveled that they heard every man in the tongue wherein he was born. This miraculous phenomenon wrought trouble in their minds. They were confounded and amazed, discerning the superhuman element, and knowing instinctively that God was in their midst. Doubtless some of the most troubled were of the number of those who had taken part in the condemnation of Jesus. “They were all amazed and in doubt, saying one to another : What meaneth this ?” referring both to the miracle and the subject of discourse, which was as always when men speak by the Spirit, “The wonderful works of God.” We have space for just two suggestions. When the Spirit of God is poured out upon his people, and they begin to speak in “power and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance,” the multitude will always run together. The presence of the Spirit brings all men together, either to listen to the Gospel and live, or to conspire together to kill the preachers, as they did later with Stephen. Yet again, we see in the result or effect of the Spirit a prophecy of what the Gospel will yet do, and has already largely done. It will speak to every man in this world in his own tongue. Let the three hundred tongues in which the Gospel is now translated and printed testify to the continuation of the Pentecostal gift. Moreover, as rebellion against God, as at Babel, resulted in the confounding of the tongues, so the coming together to Jesus Christ, by the preaching of his Gospel, will result in unifying both tongues and people.

## XXIX.

## THE FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH.—Acts ii, 37-47.

(37) Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do ? (38) Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. (39) For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. (40) And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. (41) Then they that gladly received his word were baptized : and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. (42) And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. (43) And fear came upon every soul : and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. (44) And all that believed were together, and had all things common ; (45) And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. (46) And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, (47) Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.—Acts ii, 37-47.

The effect of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Peter personally, was of a most remarkable nature. All the disciples, indeed, spake with other tongues ; but Peter spake with a directness, an unction, and a power to the multitude, which culminated in profound conviction of sin in them and the immediate conversion of three thousand. The man who but a little while ago denied his Master through timid fear, now boldly confesses him, charging his murder upon the rulers of the people, at the same time expounding all the marvels of his life, death, and resurrection. Not only is he filled with boldness, but he is transformed from a rude fisherman into a great orator, gifted with potent eloquence, and characterized with singular powers of reasoning. It is not for a moment to be supposed that any new faculties were communicated to Peter by the descent of the Spirit, but the whole man within was suddenly wakened up ; all his latent gifts were roused into highest action ; his soul was set on fire with a holy enthusiasm ; the Scriptures of the Old Testament, with the letter of which he had been long familiar, suddenly glowed with a new light,

and stood forth before his mind pregnant with new meaning. His sermon is a standing model in every way. It is profoundly Scriptural; it is clear and simple in its statements; it appeals to many prophecies throughout the Old Testament which he shows to have been fulfilled both now, in the outpouring of the Spirit, and formerly, in the advent, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Wonderfully, too, does it set forth the person of Jesus Christ. He is none other than "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by wonders and miracles and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know; him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain; whom God hath raised up. . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." Looking over this remarkable sermon, we find the inspiration of the Scriptures demonstrated, the prophetic significance of David and his kingdom brought to light; the humanity of Jesus affirmed; his Godhead proved by the resurrection from the dead; the object of his sacrificial death set forth; the Divine sovereignty of God vindicated in appointing him to death as a sacrifice for our sins; and the freedom of the human will pointed out as exercised in his murder. Peter takes his stand squarely on the resurrection, and from that height declares the whole truth of God concerning his Son Jesus Christ. After this model will be all preaching whenever and wherever the Spirit rests upon men. The whole sermon is duly summed up in the thirty-sixth verse: "God hath made that same Jesus whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ."

### I.—FROM DEATH TO LIFE.

The effect of Peter's sermon upon the multitude was both startling and instantaneous. "Now when they heard this they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Paul tells us in his second letter to Timothy (iii, 16), that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof (conviction), for correction (conversion), for instruction in righteousness." We have a proof of that statement in the effects of Peter's sermon on the people. He certainly preached the inspired word of God; informing his hearers of the meaning of that word in respect of Jesus Christ; the effect was first conviction, then conversion, and afterward instruction in righteousness. Following the course of

events, we see what is God's method of grace in bringing men from darkness to light and from death to life.

1.—**Conviction.**—"They were pricked in their hearts." Notice that they were not moved by Peter's eloquence, nor filled with admiration at the masterly construction of his sermon; nor are we told that their *reason* was fully satisfied by his arguments. "They were pricked in their hearts." Quick and sharp conviction of their guilt in sentencing Jesus to death seized upon them; the fearful responsibility of having rejected their Messiah came before them, and entered their souls with a sudden piercing pain and agony. The sin and guilt of the deed filled them with dread and horror. This is the true work of the Spirit in connection with the preaching of the word of God. "When he is come he will convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. Of sin because they believe not on me." (John xvi, 8, 9.) Conviction is not a sensation of pain in the heart; it is not an emotional disturbance, caused by some magical influence of the Spirit. It is not "feeling bad." It is the intelligent persuasion of the mind and heart of the truth of God's word concerning Jesus Christ and of the sin of rejecting him. "Now, when they heard this they were pricked in their hearts." Conviction is knowledge, combined with recognition of the truth. The truth of God concerning Jesus Christ, while being reasonable truth, is directed more toward the religious than the intellectual nature of man. Many a man recognizes with the intellect the truth of the Gospel, whose heart is not moved by it, for the reason that he deals with the matter speculatively and not personally. But where the word is in power and the Holy Ghost, it takes hold of men's hearts either to convict or to enrage. (Compare Acts vii, 54.) The conviction of this multitude did not culminate in silent meditation or secret inquiry, but in an outcry of great and urgent importance. They sought Peter and the rest of the apostles and said: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" They saw themselves in a desperate position; they could not be satisfied till they should know the remedy—if there were any—of their sin. With them there was no disposition to compromise; they were not asking if it was necessary for them to give up this and forego that; if they might retain this and continue that; as indeed is the stand taken by many modern inquirers. With them it was unconditional surrender; absolute readiness to do the will of God in any way, if haply God had any will of grace toward them; which will they faintly gathered from the tone of Peter's address to them, who seemed all through to be arguing for their conversion as well as for their conviction. We may be sure

that there is no genuine conviction of sin, if it is not followed by an earnest cry for instruction in and an intent willingness to do the will of God.

**2.—Instruction in righteousness.**—Peter was as ready to give them instruction as they were to ask it. He was brief and to the point. He did not begin by giving them abstract theology, proving to them that sin was sinful, or that an atonement was necessary. They were too far convinced of their sin and need for such persuasion. They required practical instruction. “What shall we do?” indicated their readiness to obey God. He did not even tell them to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, for in a sense they had believed, in that they were fully persuaded that he was the Christ. They now wished to know what to do, in order that they might become fully reconciled to God, whose Son they had rejected. Peter bade them do two things. (i) “Repent.” What a short word; and yet what a volume of meaning! To repent is to change one’s mind. It is not to get into an agony of soul, but it is to give up a wrong position and take a right one. It is to come to God’s mind about things. These men had assumed that Jesus was an impostor and blasphemer, and so had rejected and crucified him; they now saw that he was the true Messiah, the Son of God, and that in their deed they had not only committed the most horrible crime into which sin had ever betrayed the world, but had cut themselves off from all salvation by their act. Now, Peter’s instruction was that they should heartily and frankly abandon their past attitude toward Jesus Christ, and accept the truth concerning him as he had but now set it forth. Thus repentance is, coming to a right mind concerning God and Jesus Christ, which act of course discloses and acknowledges the fact of our own sin; for all sin is the result of a wrong mind toward God. Repentance does not consist in sorrow for sin, neither in the forsaking of sin; but where true repentance is, there will be sorrow for sin, and there will be a forsaking of wicked ways as well as unrighteous thoughts. (Is. lv, 7.) (ii) After repentance came the command to be baptized: “Be baptized, every one of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus.” They were not put into a class, but commanded instantly to obey God. True repentance is followed by a true faith, and true faith is the readiness of mind and heart to obey God. Baptism was, and still is, that ordinance in which the penitent sinner confesses both his sin and his acceptance of Jesus Christ, professing identification with him as his Saviour, and promising him life-service as his Lord. When I truly repent of my sins, and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, am baptized into his name, I tes-

tify that he is my righteousness; that by dying he has put away my sin, and by rising again from the dead he has justified me before God. In baptism, by virtue of the death and resurrection of Jesus, I become joined in a living union with him. This I think is the key to the expression "for the remission of sins." We are not baptized in order to acquire the remission of sins, for "in him we have . . . the forgiveness of sins" (Eph. i, 7); but by baptism we acknowledge and declare that we take for our own that remission which Christ has purchased for us. When God raised up Jesus from the dead, it was as though he had given him receipt in full for the expiation of human sin, and when we are baptized, it is as though we give back to God the receipt for our personal remission. Therefore Peter says that baptism is the "answer of a good (or purged) conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (I. Pet. iii, 21.) We do not issue a receipt till we receive the money involved, and then it is given as an acknowledgment of debts paid. In like manner we are not baptized to get remission, but having received forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ, who is God's gift to us, we are baptized for "remission," that is, in acknowledgment of his gift and as a declaration that we receive it. Then follows a promise: "And ye shall receive the Holy Ghost." This is the gift of God to the obedient believer. The gift of the Holy Ghost is something other than the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing about our conviction and conversion. A peculiar presence of the Holy Ghost comes to obedient disciples which a man living in disobedience can never have. Baptism, then, is first an acknowledgment of sins forgiven in Christ; but also, being the sign of our obedience to God in the utter surrender of our lives to him, it becomes the condition upon which the gift of the Holy Ghost is vouchsafed.

**3.—The far-reaching promise.**—This promise of the Holy Ghost, which included all the blessings of the Gospel, had come down to this generation from the time of Joel and Isaiah, and was to be continued to all them that were afar off, both Jew and Gentile, even to as many as the Lord our God should call by the Gospel. It is, then, a promise to us and to our descendants. Let us put ourselves back into position with these first converts; let us receive Christ with a like simplicity and obedience; then shall we receive the Holy Ghost with a like copiousness. We talk about apostolic times, as though there was some peculiar advantage in having lived at that period. But it was not the presence or preaching of the apostles which marked that age; it was the presence and power of the Holy Ghost. That presence and power is for us as it was for them, if we will turn

our eyes and faith upward toward Jesus, and not back upon an historical memory.

**4.—Further instruction, separation, and obedience.**—Having thus answered the urgent cry of these convicted sinners, the apostles proceeded to give them further instruction confirmatory of their former teaching. “And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying: Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” The Jews as a people (generation or race) had denied and crucified Christ; their attitude was one of permanent opposition to him. If these convicted sinners were really anxious to make their peace with God by accepting Jesus Christ, then they were not only to confess their sins and Jesus in baptism, but to separate themselves from their generation. “Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” A real Christian life is a separated life. We cannot choose Christ and at the same time retain the fellowship of the world that hates and rejects him. In response to the instruction given by the apostle in answer to their question, “What shall we do?” they testified the sincerity of their repentance, and the genuineness of their faith, by submitting at once to the baptism which the apostles urged upon them: “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized.” Only glad converts should be baptized, and gladness can never come to any heart that does not receive the word of God. God’s word is full of good news to the sinner, and if received, it will awake gladness in the heart, and which is partly seen in joyful and prompt obedience. These men in their baptism accepted separation from the generation of them that hated Christ, as well as union with Christ. Baptism is a kind of Red Sea through which we pass out of Egypt up into the good land and large which God gives us. Baptism, rightly apprehended, should mark the line of separation between the believer and the world. Hence it ought never to be administered except where there is a lively faith and a voluntary consecration of soul to God.

## II.—CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

On that memorable day three thousand souls were converted, baptized, and added to the number of disciples which Jesus had left behind him, and upon whom the Holy Ghost was first poured out. It is interesting and instructive to note the chief characteristics of



that first company of believers; the prototype of all the subsequent Churches of Christ.

**1.—The basis of union.**—We do not read that there was any formal organization among these first disciples. They were bound together by a common life, and manifested that union through certain simple beliefs and practices, which are noted in the forty-second verse: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and in prayers.” Now, here we have the external basis of all true Christian union. “The apostles’ doctrine.” That was not a theological system, but simply that God had made Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Jews crucified, both Lord and Christ, by raising him from the dead. All who own and confess Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, ought to be received into the fellowship of the Christian Church. Fellowship is based on a common faith in Jesus Christ, which must be steadfastly maintained and ever strongly emphasized. Whosoever believes and accepts Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and is baptized in his name, is my brother, nor can anything separate him from me. “The breaking of bread” undoubtedly refers to the simple ordinance of memorial which Jesus gave to his disciples on the night before his crucifixion, and which we are commanded to celebrate in remembrance of him till he come again. Then we have “prayers.” No Church can live, no fellowship can be maintained, no ordinances will speak truth in power to us if we are not given to prayer, if we do not by its means keep up living and spiritual communion with God; and that, too, not private prayer alone, but associated and united.

**2.—Community and benevolence.**—“And all that believed were together and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men as every man had need.” The first effect of the Spirit in men is to bring them together. A new kinship is set up among men who are in Christ Jesus. The Spirit brings us to and unites us with Christ, and that which makes us kin to him makes us kin to each other. As there is a common possession among members of the same family on earth, so there is also in the spiritual family of God. Owing to the exigencies of the times at this period, when the confession of Christ involved the parting of the young converts in many cases from their own families according to the flesh, perhaps the separation of husbands from wives, and children from parents, it was meet that the first Christian Church should become for the time being an external community, and that the rich should share their possessions with the poor. Though the details of

this community of life, fellowship, and possession may not have been, and indeed was not long carried out in the first Church, the spirit of it always has continued, and does to this day, though not in such strength and power as might be. All Christians are brethren in one family. I belong to my brother in all that I am and have. Nothing that I have is my own; it is God's, and must be used for God. And if we see our brother have need and shut up our bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in us?

**3.—Continuing in fellowship.**—The proceedings of the Church were extraordinary. "For a time they continued daily with one accord, in the temple, and from house to house, breaking bread and eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." This was a time of refreshing, and for the time it was only natural that everything should give place to the religious enthusiasm and the joy of the new life that filled and swept every heart. By and by sterner times would come. Let them have this little time of triumphant gladness. The criticism so often flung at the excitement produced by revivals of religion is as puerile as it is unjust. The Church to-day is not suffering from excitement, but is in danger of dying from the effect of cold proprieties; lifeless as they are cold.

**4.—The results following.**—These were various. In the first place, "fear came upon every soul." That is, all the believers were filled with a holy and reverent fear of God. The awe of the Almighty was upon them. Then, under the tremendous pressure of spiritual power, "many wonders and signs were done by the apostles." We are never told that the power to work miracles was ever given to the ordinary disciples, but to them who were specially chosen to be the witnesses of Christ's resurrection. Yet there will always be miracles of grace present in the Church if the Spirit be poured out. Further, we are told that they had "favor with all people." God gives favor with people in times of refreshing such as this, that the final result may follow, as in this case: "And the Lord added to the Church daily such as were being saved." Happy and prosperous was the Church then; and how happy and prosperous might the Church now be if its whole life and action were directed wholly in such a simple spirit of dependence on the power of the Spirit!

## XXX.

## THE LAME MAN HEALED.—Acts iii, 1-16.

(1) Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. (2) And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them who entered into the temple; (3) Who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms. (4) And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. (5) And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. (6) Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. (7) And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. (8) And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. (9) And all the people saw him walking and praising God: (10) And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. (11) And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering. (12) And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? (13) The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. (14) But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; (15) And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. (16) And his name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.—Acts iii, 1-16.

We do not know how long after Pentecost had intervened before the event recorded in this chapter took place. Perhaps only some days, possibly several weeks. The first excitement and holy enthusiasm generated by the descent of the Spirit had somewhat subsided, at least in outward appearance, and the more practical and ordinary work of the Church and disciples had begun. For a season the disciples were all together, going about from house to house in the city, daily celebrating the Lord's Supper, singing and praying, while the apostles were doing signs and wonders. The Church was awed as well as exalted by such a season; the people were filled with fear; many were being convicted of their sins

and converted to Christ. It was a time of high privilege; a midsummer of light and life; but the manifestation of the Spirit was not to continue in such a manner forever. We could not bear such a high pitch of spiritual enthusiasm as that. After the thunder and the lightning and pour of rain, there comes the soft and clear shining of the sun; the rain dries up, the winds temper down to soft and warm air that gently fans the earth as if to coax the seed out of the ground. The rain has disappeared from the atmosphere; it has disappeared from the ground, inasmuch as it has sunken into the ground and is now working its silent but mighty ministry about the roots of the budding seeds of earth. So do signal times of refreshing act upon the people of God. Let us not despise or undervalue seasons of extraordinary religious enthusiasm, or even religious excitement; but let us not suppose that the Lord's work cannot go on without daily recurrence of such scenes as that of this day of Pentecost. We had the Pentecost at the beginning; but, so far as we know, it was never repeated, in form or manifestation, again, though the power then given was continued throughout the apostolic age, and, to a greater or less extent, has been ever since. When the estate of religion has fallen low and spiritual life has become powerless, it has pleased God again and again to give to the Church, in answer to the prayers of longing souls therein, fresh baptisms of the Spirit and demonstrations of divine power in great revivals. But in the meantime the quiet work of individual disciples is to go on in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Hitherto the Church had kept together; but now we see it separating or dividing itself up into working parties. The first chapter has shown us the Church waiting; the second, the Church worshiping; and the third, the Church working. And this working Church is set forth before us not as a mass of people together, but in the persons of two disciples, who had come together by natural affinity and were pursuing the work of God in fellowship. This does not imply that they were divided in heart, doctrine, or fellowship, from the rest of the brethren, but that they were working out their own individual responsibility. It will be a happy and glorious day for the Church when the disciples begin to go out by twos and threes, to do whatsoever their hands find to do.

### I.—TRUE YOKE-FELLOWS.

We have no account of what in the meantime the other disciples and apostles were doing. No doubt they also were at work

in the city on some such plan as is seen in connection with the account here given of Peter and John. The Acts only professes to give a sample of what the Holy Spirit did through the disciples, and not to be a complete record of all that Jesus continued to do from heaven; any more than the Gospel narratives pretend to give a complete record of all the sayings and doings of Jesus, but only enough to enable those who read the story to know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that we have sure warrant to believe on his name. But in the companionship and acts of Peter and John we have some suggestive hints.

**1.—A close personal friendship.**—Among the apostles there were two sets of brothers—John and James, and Peter and Andrew. Why the brothers did not pair off and go together according to the ties of flesh and nature, we do not know; only we know that John and Peter were, and had long been, closest of friends. There is a spiritual tie sometimes existing between Christians that is even closer and dearer than that existing between brothers after the flesh. We first see Peter and John together at the trial of Jesus (John xviii, 15); then again on the morning of the resurrection (John xx, 2-4); and again in strange juxtaposition (John xxi, 18-21), where the Master contrasted before them the different manners in which they should glorify him; and now here in Acts iii, and again in iv, 13, 19, viii, 14, 15. The common fellowship that all Christians have with each other in Christ does not prevent or impeach those special friendships which grow up between Christians in the course of life and work. Paul had his special companions and intimate friends in Luke, Barnabas, Silas, and Mark. Sometimes he was seen in intimate relationship with one and sometimes with another. Luke and Timothy always shared his deepest attachment. Paul was specially attached to Timothy, while Luke seemed to be especially attached to Paul. Sometimes the attachment is stronger on one side than on the other; and sometimes it is balanced by an even weight of love.

**2.—Unity in diversity.**—In such friendships we are struck with the diversity of gifts and temperaments seen in two closely attached Christian friends. Naturally Peter and John were almost direct opposites in nature—Peter more impulsive and John more steadfast; Peter of a quick and outspoken temperament, and John of the silent and meditative sort. Yet they complemented and supplemented each other. John was attracted by Peter's bold eagerness, while Peter was helped and toned down by John's quiet thoughtfulness. There was no jealousy between them. Peter is spokesman; John

seems content to stand silently by his side and back him up by his presence in all that he does and says. How delightful it is to be knit together in such a bond!

**3.—Yoked for service.**—We see these two apostles united in their spiritual lives and purposes. It is true that the Old Testament economy has ceased with the descent of the Spirit, and yet we find these two disciples going up to the temple at the hour of prayer. We may continue to pray even in a house where God has ceased to work. They probably wished to testify to their countrymen that, though they were the disciples of Jesus, they were also the worshipers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is not well too abruptly to abandon those from whom we have become separated by conversion to Christ; and it is certainly always right to pray. They went up to the temple to pray and to do any service for Christ that might come in their way. They did not have to wait long for an opportunity and an occasion to do something for Jesus, and to testify to him most powerfully by deed and speech. The disciples will ever find work if they will but put themselves in the way of it.

## II.—THE LAME MAN.

At the gate Beautiful, as they entered the temple, they encountered a lame man, who had been thus crippled from his birth. It was the habit of his friends to carry him daily and lay him at that gate, whereat probably most of the worshipers entered, that he might the more likely receive the benefits of the charity of the incomers. In considering him we may take two views of his case.

**1.—Consider the man simply as in physical need.**—Lame from his birth; a helpless and poor cripple. Nothing could possibly be more distressing or dispiriting. Perhaps that wretched man had spent the greater part of his life at the Beautiful gate asking and receiving alms. Afflictions such as his are not directly traceable either to his own or to his parents' sins (John ix, 3); but all such afflictions, and all afflictions, are traceable at last to sin. Sin has brought every disorder known to man into the world. Sometimes, in our folly, we ascribe such things to God, while in reality God has had nothing whatever to do with them. There is, however, a beautiful suggestion in this—that the Beautiful Gate of the house of God is the best place to bring our own afflictions, the best place whither to carry our afflicted friends. If the temple is the place where God meets his people, and if we may adopt the suggestion of some of the early Christians, that the Beautiful Gate was the type of Christ,

surely this was where such a man would most naturally find relief, both temporally and spiritually. He had a right to expect an alms of true worshipers if his was a case of real need. For how can a true worshiper go forward to pray, and at the same time shut up his bowels of compassion from his needy brother?

**2.—Consider the man as a type of spiritual helplessness.**—How fit he was to set forth man's helpless condition before God. Born to an inheritance of helplessness. Past and beyond all hope of help from human power. If God did not help him, he never could have help. How natural, then, for him to desire to be carried to the house of God and laid down at the gate of prayer. That was the best service his friends could do for him, to take him daily thither. In such a case it is not alms but prayers that are asked; in such a case it is not the dribblings of conventional charity, but the fervent effectual prayer of righteous men, that will bring help to the sick. There is a parable in this event presently worked out in fuller significance before the eyes of the people, in which God, his saints, and the afflicted man all unite for the healing miracle.

**3.—Helpless man and the helpful Gospel.**—In this incident we see one or two very practical lessons which we are always apt to overlook in the matter of alms-giving. It is significant that, on this first occasion when the disciples of Christ came into contact with confirmed poverty, of helpless physical need, they gave no money, but wonderfully and powerfully gave a better help. From which we gather that man's real need is much deeper than that which money can reach; that the Gospel has something infinitely better to give to man than money. Jesus, indeed, healed the sick, and cured the lepers, the blind, the deaf, the dumb, but when he said to the paralytic who was let down through the roof, "Son, be of good courage, thy sins are forgiven thee," he had bestowed a better gift than by the healing of his body. When Peter bade the man stand up and be whole, in the name of the Lord Jesus, he did for him a benefit far transcending any temporary help he might have brought by a gift of silver or gold. It is, in the long run, far better to put men in the way of helping themselves than to give them help for the moment. If the Gospel of Christ can, will, and does take men who are down in this world, lift them up and strengthen them to stand, to walk, and to leap with a new gladness of life and hope, that is better a thousand-fold than to feed and clothe them, for then they can feed and clothe themselves with the blessing of God by means of their own honest labor.

### III.—THE MIRACLE.

As Peter and John were about to pass into the temple, the lame man made his appeal to them, as he had done for years to every one that passed that way. We have no reason to believe that his appeal was directed to John and Peter with any special reference to their being disciples of Christ. He probably did not know them from any others in the passing throng. However, it is not necessary that we be known to the helpless in order to respond to their cry and give them help. The man did not cry in vain. A sudden impulse of the Spirit took possession of Peter, and he knew instantly what to do. In the miracle we see how the name of Jesus is made efficient by the use of means.

**1.—The name of Jesus.**—Whatever good we may be permitted to do in this world, if it is to be permanent, it must be done in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. "Without me," said Jesus, "ye can do nothing." Perhaps Peter remembered that saying in that critical moment. The name of Jesus stands for his authority and his power. It stands for his goodness and his grace. It stands for all his promises which he has made to saints and to sinners. Further on, when we come to the address of Peter, that name is lifted up and glorified, and the power of it is made manifest. Let us remember that it is only in this almighty name that we can do anything. If we go forth to work in our own name, or in the name of our Church, or our sect, or our party, we are not only doomed to failure, but will only make matters worse by adding distraction and confusion.

**2.—The agency of the apostles in the miracle.**—The name of Jesus is powerful, but it has pleased him to call his people into fellowship with himself in the blessed work of his grace. When Peter said to the man somewhat peremptorily, "Look on us," he did not mean to imply that they had any power in themselves; but they wished the man to concentrate his thoughts for a moment, lifting them above their habitual sluggishness. Certainly the man expected to receive some silver or gold; but this expectation was speedily dissipated by the declaration of Peter that he had none. He, however, before the man's disappointment had time to crystallize, made such an astonishing speech to him that he was thrilled through and through. "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." He then suited action to word, and took the man by the hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones



received strength. Jesus from above sent forth a divine energy that entered the man's body contemporaneously with the word and the helping hand of Peter.

**3.—The man's faith.**—It is not expressed in the story, but it is there by implication. He was commanded to rise up and walk, and with that command a helping hand went forth, and perhaps at the same moment a thrill of new life went coursing and burning through his feet and ankle bones. At any rate, the word was no sooner spoken than the man leaped up, and stood and walked, and went into the temple with the apostles. Divine strength and healing goes forth with the word of God, and acts instantly in those who immediately and heartily respond to it. So quickly may souls dead in trespasses and sins be quickened into life and delivered from the power of Satan unto God. They have but to believe, rise up, and walk. Let us remember, also, that while we preach the life-giving Gospel to others, we must also reach forth the sympathetic and helping hand. A little help given will encourage faith. We could not, by all our power, set life in motion, but we can lift a hesitating soul over the dead point of doubt, and so put him into the orbit of power.

**4.—The effect of the miracle.**—This is seen first upon the man himself. The movement of God's power was in perfect order; first the ankle bones received strength, then the man sprang to his feet, then he stood for a moment, then he walked, and then he began leaping about, rejoicing in the new-found strength to which he had all his life been a stranger. His soul was filled likewise with praise, whereto he was not slow to give expression. Alas, that in our day the cold proprieties of a conventional and custom-bound world have served an injunction for the suppression of all natural and spontaneous expressions of joy in the salvation of God when it comes to men. We are forever being exhorted to be decorous and proper; just as if it were not proper that a man healed from his infirmity should walk, and leap, and praise God. The effect was startling on the people who witnessed the miracle, who recognized the man walking about and leaping and praising God, who for years had sat begging at the Beautiful gate. They were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him; and as he stood holding fast to Peter and John, as a little child clings to his parents after his first essay at walking, the people outside the temple, hearing of the miracle, ran together to the inside. We only need such startling and evident miracles of grace to astonish and arouse the people again. Would to God that such power, not over bodies, but over souls, might come to men in our day!

**IV.—PETER'S ADDRESS.**

Peter now takes occasion to make an address to the people; for they were all filled with admiration and were looking from the healed cripple to the apostles, not knowing what to think. It has been said that this speech of Peter's was a greater miracle than the healing of the lame man. Certainly it was a marvel of composition, eloquence, boldness, directness, and power.

**1.—He disclaims all independent power in the matter.**—He had been God's instrument, but was not the power that wrought the miracle. No vanity had entered the mind of these two men. They were indeed filled with the Spirit, and conscious of divine virtue flowing into and through them, but not for an instant would they tolerate the thought working in the minds of the people, that they had cured the man. "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name be the glory," was the thought of their hearts. Like the great apostle to the Gentiles, they disclaimed even sufficiency to think as they ought to think, much more such power as this miracle indicated.

**2.—He boldly charges them with the crime of the murder of Jesus.**—The full measure of the guilt of the nation had not come home to the people, and Peter now takes this opportunity of telling them that the man whom they had crucified was none other than the Son of God; that, moreover, it was through his name that the man was healed. He specifies their guilt. They delivered him up to Pilate, then refused him when Pilate would have let him go; they desired a murderer to be released in his stead, and killed the Prince of Life. We can fancy these words piercing and cutting to the very hearts of the hearers. But is not the world doing the same with Jesus now? and will not the unbeliever be called on to answer at the bar of God for his rejection of Christ, no less than the Jew for the murder of the Prince of Life?

**3.—Jesus was the Son of God.**—For affirming this of himself the Jews crucified Jesus. Now Peter boldly tells them that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of their fathers, had glorified Jesus, whom they had slain, and had declared him to be the Son of God, by raising him from the dead. He gives him all the full titles of the Divine Messiah, Son of God, and Prince of Life. He declares again in their presence that they were the witnesses of the fact of the resurrection. He does not draw this fearful indictment in vengeance or wrath, but rather in order to move them to repentance, and to win them through faith back to their Lord. So should we

always do in charging home sin upon men; not to condemn, but to save them.

**4.—Power belongs still to Jesus.**—He now tells them that, though Jesus has gone up on high through the resurrection, he still has all power in heaven and earth at his disposal, and that he is no less able to carry forward his work on earth from the high vantage-point of heaven than when he was living and walking among men. The name of Jesus is full of power. That power is available for salvation through faith. Peter therefore begs them to repent of their sin and be converted, lest they should be found with their awful guilt upon them when Jesus shall come again to restore the kingdom of God and refresh the earth from the presence of the Lord. When that day shall come, may none of us be found with a like sin laid at our door, but rather waiting in glad expectation for our Redeemer.

## XXXI.

PETER AND JOHN BEFORE THE COUNCIL.—Acts  
iv, 1-18.

(1) And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, (2) Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. (3) And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day : for it was now even-tide. (4) Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed ; and the number of the men was about five thousand. (5) And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, (6) And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. (7) And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this ? (8) Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, (9) If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole ; (10) 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. (11) This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders which is become the head of the corner. (12) Neither is there salvation in any other : for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. (13) Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled ; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. (14) And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. (15) But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, (16) Saying, What shall we do to these men ? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem ; and we cannot deny it. (17) But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. (18) And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.—Acts iv, 1-18.

The healing of the lame man was, indeed, a notable miracle, but it sinks into insignificance beside the splendid sermon which it afforded Peter an occasion for preaching to the people ; nor any less splendid was Peter's conduct at his subsequent arrest and noble defense before the High Priest and rulers. In his oration before the people, recorded in the last chapter, we see every element of a great sermon. Apologetic in its demonstration of the fact of the true

Deity of our Lord; sharp as a two-edged sword in the consciences of the hearers upon whom it charged the guilt of the murder of Christ; and at the same time burdened with a great desire to bring these sinners to repentance, thus unfolding toward its end the great grace of God in the sending of Jesus into the world. "Unto you first, God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." In the meantime, while Peter was still preaching and pleading with the people, the report of the miracle of healing upon the lame man, and of the concourse of people gathered to listen to the preaching of Peter concerning Jesus Christ of Nazareth, had reached the ears of the priests, the captain of the temple and the leaders of the Sadducees, who hastily joined together and then came in a body upon the apostles and people. We are told that they were "grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead." Nothing is said of their being gratified that the poor man who had been a cripple all his life had been healed. The narrowness of religious intolerance often reaches such a pitch even now. Some bigoted sectarians would rather not have sinners saved at all than to have them saved by means other than their own, or at any place where the doctrine preached concerning Jesus is not stated according to their formulæ. Without argument or discussion, without even inquiry into any of the facts of the case beyond that they were preaching in the name of Jesus the resurrection from the dead, they at once arrested the apostles and cast them into the temple guard-house for the night. That is a favorite way with the world for answering the faith of Christians. Here we have the dawn of that era of persecution which raged over the Church for three centuries, which has broken out again and again with all the fury of the nether world, and which must once more rage against God's people when the reign of Antichrist shall begin.

### I.—THE ARREST OF THE APOSTLES.

Jesus had forewarned his disciples that they would have to encounter the enmity of the world, and be dragged before magistrates, kings, and governors. This experience was coming upon them quickly. It seemed a strange sequel to the ecstasies of Pentecost and the triumphs of the weeks following. For a while God put his fear upon all the people and gave his servants favor, in order that they might get established and accustomed to their new conditions. He began the battle with the world by giving his soldiers victory at

the outset, that they might be encouraged rather than receive the dismay of a first defeat. They were now better able to endure this first season of hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

**1.—The combination against them.**—The company that came down to arrest the apostles were the representatives of the different classes of men in power in the counsels of the nation. The priests had ever been the fanatical foes of Jesus, and had ever stirred up all the hatred and opposition to him. The captain of the temple guard, who is supposed to have been the son or nephew of the High Priest, was fearful lest his offices and emoluments might pass out of his hands if the sect of Jesus should prevail. Lastly, we have the Sadducees, including Annas, the present High Priest, and Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, three of his predecessors. This was a formidable array of earthly power and authority. How long would these fishermen apostles be able to contend against such a force?

**2.—The motive of the enemy.**—They could not have objected to the mere fact of the healing of the lame man. That was not their reason. It is said that they were "sore troubled (grieved) that they preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead." No wonder. They had a little while ago crucified Jesus, declaring him to be a blasphemer and an impostor. Now here were his disciples charging home his murder upon them and declaring that he was raised from the dead; that through him there was life and immortality by resurrection from the dead for all men. The Sadducees were especially troubled and grieved at this point of doctrine; for they held and taught that there was no future life. If the doctrine of these Nazarenes prevailed, they would not only be overthrown as a religious party, but would also lose their hold upon office. This, too, was a practical point, both to the High Priests and to the captain of the temple guard; besides, if the testimony of the apostles prevailed and the people came to believe, as they were now rapidly doing, that Jesus was indeed alive from the dead, then the nation would hold them responsible for the murder of their Messiah. Thus we may see how self-interest, conscience, and religious bigotry were all working together against the apostles of the Lord.

**3.—The argument of force.**—Their only answer to the apostles was to cast them into the guard-house. They had been in a greater hurry a few weeks ago, when they arrested Jesus at night, and kept him and themselves up all through the hours of darkness in their eagerness to condemn him. Perhaps they thought it would be better to use a little more deliberation in this case. Perhaps they were afraid to proceed to extremities; perhaps their consciences were

troubling them so that they could not think promptly and wisely as to the proper course to pursue; the result was that they resorted to the old argument of force and shut up the preachers. John the Baptist had sanctified a prison before them; Jeremiah had done so before John the Baptist, and Joseph before Jeremiah; and now these two apostles were to follow in their steps; for there was coming a long line of successors to this inheritance. But it mattered little to men who believed in the resurrection from the dead, that they were compelled to spend a night in a prison.

4.—God's "howbeit."—That is a most interesting little piece of information wedged in at the fourth verse. "Howbeit, many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men were about five thousand." Perhaps these were not all converted under the direct sound of Peter's voice; but when the Spirit of God is poured out abundantly, the word of God passes quickly from mouth to ear, and from hearing ear to believing heart. Then the word of God runs its course and is glorified. We are reminded here again of the second psalm. These rulers and leaders of a corrupt religion and a tyrannical world-power were again taking counsel together against God's servants; but God was laughing from the heavens. He had implanted his word in the hearts of five thousand more men, besides the three thousand of Peter's first sermon and the others who in the meantime had believed. Suppose they did shut up the apostles; suppose they did kill them. It was too late now. They could not stop the Gospel nor hinder the testimony. It is a large contract for the world to undertake to stop the mouths of millions of believers. How will they dam up the streams that are now flowing out of the hearts and lives of Christ's followers throughout the earth? Heaven and earth may pass away, but this word of God and the testimony of Jesus will never pass away till the last of the people of God are called out of the world of sin into the kingdom of their Lord.

## II.—THE INQUISITION.

The next day "the rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the High Priest, and Caiaphas, and John and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the High Priest, were gathered together." It was a fine family party. They held all the offices, all the emoluments, and all the influence, political and social. They had crucified Jesus, and now they had undertaken a still greater labor, and were about to prevent the risen Christ from exercising his power from

heaven. When they had formed themselves into a court, they sent for the two apostles and set them in the midst.

**1.—The trial by question.**—“By what power or by what name have ye done this?” They did not pretend to deny that the apostles had somehow effected the cure of the lame man. That fact should have been a sufficient answer in itself. But they were anxious to entangle these men with difficult and abstruse questions. They seemed to imply and insinuate that men such as they could not have done such a miracle by divine power; seeking by this means to throw upon them the odium of practicing magic, or working directly under the influence of Satan himself. They had not scrupled to accuse the Master of thus working; now they would stand by their position and carry the charge forward against his disciples. (Luke xi, 15; Acts xiii, 6; xix, 19.) So it is to-day. Men cannot deny the notable fact that conversion and regeneration follow on the preaching of the Gospel; but they seek to account for these miracles of grace in every way but the true way. It is mere religious reformation; it is excitement; it is magnetism; it is delusion; it is fanaticism. Then the unbelievers can get the disciples off on to some occult speculation as to how things are done, or the possibility of the operation of many powers; and they have gained a large point; for that is a region of speculation, and not of fact. Christianity is not a system or a speculation. It is a divine power of life exercised and manifested in connection with the sublime fact of the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. I suppose the world will continue to ask the question “how” until the end of time, with ears deaf to the world-wide sound of God’s wonders of grace, by which the Lord of nature ever manifests himself.

**2.—Peter’s answer.**—What a changed man is here! A few weeks ago he cowered before the voice of a servant-maid and trembled at the very look of a porter. How will he behave before this august assemblage of rulers, elders, scribes, and the High Priest? Will he tremble now? Never! Peter is a different man; and this is the difference. Then he was a man boasting in his own strength; now he is a man filled with the Holy Ghost. Look at him and listen to him. “Ye rulers of the people and elders of Israel.” He is as much at home with them as he was with the common people yesterday. He is courteous as he is courageous and dignified. “If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole.” Peter is not only bold and courteous, but he is adroit. He insists on the fact that the deed for which they are called in question was a good one. The concrete case of



benign power was before them. Could they fairly conclude that a good deed was done by an evil power? He moves up to his defense with wisdom from above. "Be it known unto you all and to all the people of Israel." Peter was not alone occupied with defense, but also with the business of propagation. He had a message for them all, and not for them only, but for all the people of Israel. His words ring out like the notes of a herald's trumpet. These prisoners had become herald of the King whom these rulers rejected. "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." What a sentence! How it leapt out of his mouth; how it must have smitten the hearers to the very soul! Jesus Christ of Nazareth—Peter gives his full title—announcing both his divine and his human nature. He identifies him with the Jesus whom they crucified; there must be no mistake; they have asked for the name and the power; here they are; they know them well: "Ye crucified him; but God raised him from the dead; ye sought to rid yourselves of him, to stop his power; but God has exalted him beyond your reach, and now he wields his power from heaven." Here is true boldness of preaching. We can fancy these rulers listening spell-bound and astonished at this fisherman's speech, as he charges upon them the murder of Jesus; declares him to be the Son of God; overthrows their cold anti-resurrection philosophy; and exalts Jesus, whom they degraded by a felon's death, to the very throne of power at the right hand of God. "This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner." He drives home his argument, or rather his proclamation, by quotation from the Scriptures which they all acknowledged, and shows them how, in their madness, they have at once been caught between the upper and nether millstone of wickedness and disaster. But Peter is merciful as he is bold. He has gone far enough. He does not abuse or denounce them. He vindicates the right of the disciples to work and to preach in the name of Jesus; he sets the rulers' sins before them plainly; he shows them the utter helplessness of their position, and the impotence of their power. He does not wait for their further question or any answer to his charges against them, or his declaration of facts concerning Jesus Christ, but moves on rapidly to his next thought.

**3.—Peter preaches the Gospel.**—It must have been a surprise to them that the apostle did not proceed to denounce against them the judgment of God for their sins. But Peter was filled with the love of Christ; he yearned over these his countrymen and rulers

with a longing which only those know who have caught the Master's spirit. Instead, therefore, of driving them into a position of despair, he speaks to them of Jesus as a Saviour. "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." Paul afterward declared the same truth to Timothy: "There is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." Though they were guilty of Christ's murder, yet he would have them to know that God did not lay it up against them, but longed that they should repent of their sin and accept his mercy. Peter remembered the last prayer of the Lord on the cross for his murderers. Yet he would have them, and all men, know that there was no other name or way whereby they must be saved. God stands ready to forgive all and every sin of all men; but forgiveness is only in Christ (Acts xiii, 39; Eph. i, 7), and therefore is given a solemn warning against rejecting him by any further acts of unbelief. It is a sweet but solemn message. Let all who hear it lay it to heart.

### III.—THE PERPLEXITY OF THE RULERS.

The speech of Peter confounded these rulers. They were at their wits' end. They had not counted on such a defense. Jesus had been silent before them, opening not his mouth. This very man had thrice denied his Master, but now he and his companion are as bold as lions. The tables were turned upon the assembled council. Vexation and anger had caused the apostles' arrest; now perplexity and amazement take their place. Their perplexity was threefold.

**1.—Concerning the Apostles.**—They could not understand the "boldness of Peter and John," their fluency of speech and their ability in presenting their case, especially as they were "unlearned and ignorant men," not of the class of educated and cultured men of the nation. Jesus before them had caused a like perplexity to his accusers. In addition to this difficulty, they recognized them as the two men who had followed Jesus to the council-house, when he had been arrested and brought before them. This tended to agitate them, and bring home to them their crime in the matter of condemning Christ. They could not deny the charge they had heard made against themselves; they were simply, for the time being, speechless with amazement. How often our sins have been suddenly brought before us, and witnesses have arisen to confront us whom we have forgotten or thought light of.

**2.—Concerning the man who had been healed.**—"And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say

nothing against it." Of course they could not. The best argument for Christianity is to be found in its miracles of grace. What can the worst enemies of Christ say against the drunkards that have been reclaimed, the liars that have been made truthful, the unclean who have been made chaste, the hard and grasping who have been made tender and benevolent; the depraved who have been lifted up and refined; the scoffing and profane who have been turned into praying men; the unregenerate who have shown every sign of becoming new creatures; the hateful and envious of becoming loving and contented. Let us keep our converts to the front of our work, let the converts stand by their spiritual fathers; and the world has an array of witnesses against whom they can say nothing.

**3.—Concerning the impression of the miracle upon the people.**—Adjourning to a private room, they took counsel together, and being perplexed, they said: "What shall we do to these men?" They were in pillory now. It was easier to arrest the apostles than to dispose of them. They could not deny that a notable miracle had been wrought, and that all Jerusalem knew and acknowledged it. They had denied the resurrection; but that denial had not prevented the power of Jesus from being manifested among the people. It would be useless to keep on denying undeniable facts.

**4.—Their decision.**—They must do something; and they felt that it must be done at once; yet they had not the boldness to adopt extreme measures. Perhaps the dread of their late action concerning Jesus was still upon them. Yet they were determined that the faith of the Nazarene must be suppressed. So they determined to threaten the apostles and command them to speak no more in the name of Jesus to the people. They were attempting an impossibility and adopting inadequate measures. First they could not stay the spread of faith among the people. The risen Christ and the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven to mark the testimony of apostles and disciples were powers with which the priests and Sadducees could not cope. Secondly, they were reckoning without their host when they supposed that threatenings would stop the mouths of men who were filled with the Holy Ghost. It took the world nearly or quite fifteen hundred years to understand that spiritual life and the testimony of men who have seen and heard things which "eye hath not seen nor ear heard," cannot be suppressed. They did not themselves know the power of God over the conscience for the reason that they had never submitted their consciences to God. They were not prepared for the answer of Peter to their threatenings, which will be discussed in our next study, namely, that "it is better to obey God than man."

## XXXII.

## THE APOSTLES' CONFIDENCE IN GOD.—Acts iv, 19-31.

(19) But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. (20) For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. (21) So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people : for all men glorified God for that which was done. (22) For the man was about forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed. (23) And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. (24) And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is ; (25) Who by the mouth of thy servant David hath said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things ? (26) The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. (27) For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, (28) For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. (29) And now, Lord, behold their threatenings : and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, (30) By stretching forth thine hand to heal ; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. (31) And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together ; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.—Acts iv, 19-31.

The perplexed rulers who had arrested the apostles, ostensibly for disturbing the people in connection with the miracle of healing on the lame man, but really in order to prevent them from preaching in the name of Jesus, were sorely troubled by the results of their examination on the next day. They had fondly hoped that the name of Jesus had been effectually blotted out by his crucifixion ; that no voice would come out of his grave to haunt their souls with fear ; but they now find that name more potent than ever, while Jesus himself is far beyond the reach of their power. They are perplexed because of what they are compelled to hear concerning Jesus as the Son of God and his resurrection. They are dumfounded at the boldness and power of these rude fishermen, who seem to have such a grasp on scriptural and prophetic truth. They are confounded by the fact that the miracle on the man is undoubted and beyond all

possibility of denial. They are thunder-struck seeing that five thousand more men have gone over to the faith of Christ; yet withal their hearts are not changed. They would have proceeded to severe measures with the apostles; but they feared the people and durst not what they would. They proceeded to threaten and to forbid them to preach any more in the Name; yet still were not out of their dilemma. These men, who before had cowered at the very suggestion of threatenings, were now as fearless as lions, and accepted their discharge with no meekness and cringing thankfulness. They entered a protest against the prohibition, declaring their intention to obey God in this matter, rather than their human rulers. Never had a court such a pair of recalcitrant prisoners on their hands. To discharge them without prohibition would be to concede the truth and righteousness of their cause; to punish them would be to bring themselves into conflict with the people. The rulers of this world have ever found, and ever will find, trouble in dealing with the Lord and his Anointed.

### I.—THE CHRISTIAN'S HIGHER LAW.

There is a general law laid down by God himself for us, to the effect that we must obey the powers that be (Rom. xiii, 1), but that law does not require that the servant of God should obey the powers appointed of God when that power transgresses the law of God, and requires us to do the thing which God has forbidden, or should neglect or cease from doing that which God has commanded. In like manner, children must obey their parents, "in the Lord." (Eph. vi, 1); but if a parent should command a child to do the evil, he is in nowise bound by this law.

**1.—Is it right?**—Peter and John boldly raise this question: "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God." They had been commanded by Jesus to preach the Gospel, and to begin their work at Jerusalem (Luke xxiv, 47); they were now forbidden by these rulers. What must they do? For themselves they had already decided what they both must and would do. But, first of all, they raise the question of RIGHT. This is a mighty word, which, when it gets possession of a man's conscience, leaves him no alternative. He must obey God though the heavens fall. Neither his comfort, his convenience, nor his life stand in the way. Neither rulers nor kings have any power over a man's actions when he has surrendered his conscience to the RIGHT. The Hebrew children would not worship the image which the king set up,

though the alternative was the fiery furnace, because such an action would be violation of the RIGHT; Daniel would not cease praying to his God, as was his wont, though the lion's den was waiting to receive him, because it would not have been RIGHT to thus deny his God. It is this mighty word, energized by the Holy Spirit, which has sustained all the martyrs of the Lord in all ages; it will be the same again if ever another time of persecution shall befall the Church.

**2.—Judge ye.**—They appeal to their judges, not for mercy, not for remission of penalties or annulment of their prohibition, but that themselves should decide a point of conscience. What answer could they give? They were the pretended custodians of God's law. They must, if they answer truly, decide that the first obedience was due to God; but they had determined to prohibit the preaching of the Gospel. Peter and John therefore put them in a terrible quandary. They had now to sit in judgment on themselves. This challenge reveals the true spirit of the martyr of Jesus. There is no railing; no bluster; no cringing to opposing authorities; but a simple and dignified appeal to the right. It must be that the Holy Spirit was fulfilling the promise of Jesus in giving them at that same hour the right word to say. So he will sustain us with courage and guide us with wisdom from above, if we put our trust in him.

**3.—Necessity laid upon them.**—Nevertheless, even after this, the apostles had one word more to say: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." In the first place, they affirm the truth of the Gospel which they were preaching. That Jesus was raised from the dead, they knew as a matter of fact, for they had seen him, and that repeatedly. They could not refrain from speaking the things which they had heard of and from him, since by his resurrection he was demonstrated to be the Son of God, and so the sovereign of the conscience. Both the knowledge of the truth and the command of God confirmed their course. Besides all this, the Gospel, which they were preaching in the name of the risen Christ, like the word of God in the heart of Jeremiah, was like "a fire shut up in their bones," and they could not refrain (Jer. xx, 9); like Paul at a later period, "necessity was laid upon" them so that they must preach the Gospel; when the Gospel comes in power, then it possesses men. Nothing can stop the progress of the good news when it takes fire in men's hearts, when the Holy Spirit is within groaning for utterance. Neither kings, rulers, persecutions, stripes, imprisonment, fire, nor sword, are potent against such a message. Have we seen and heard? Not, indeed, with our mortal eyes and

ears, yet surely we have seen the risen Lord by faith, and, in like manner, have heard his word in our own hearts. How, then, can we be silent? With the living Christian it is ever thus. "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." This principle of inward compulsion is the secret energy of the whole Christian life. St. Jerome said: "Though my mother should hang about my neck, and my father should lie across my pathway to keep me from Christ, if my Lord should call me, I would shake off my mother and walk over my father's body and go to him." Paul says of the motive of his service for men: "The love of Christ constraineth me." When Luther stood before the Diet of Worms and delivered his defense before the Emperor Charles V., he closed his address by saying: "Here I stand; I can do none else, God help me."

4.—**Discharged from custody.**—Having thus defended themselves, and at the very outset of their ministry having announced the principles by which they must be guided in doing the Lord's work, the apostles submitted their case. The rulers being afraid of the people who were glorifying God, and, not being able to find a pretext upon which they might punish the two disciples, the lame man also being a standing witness to the good deed done, they had to satisfy themselves by repeating their prohibition with a further threat. They had not relaxed their determination to use force against the apostles, although they had for the moment postponed its execution through fear. Their attitude, however, was sufficient to warn the apostles of the coming storm of persecution; hence the significance of their prayers when they reached their own company after their release.

## II.—THE ETERNAL GOD IS OUR REFUGE.

"And being let go, they went to their own company and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them." This is a very suggestive sentence. They had made their first sally out of the Christian camp; and though in one sense repulsed, they had yet won a most signal victory. How naturally men seek their own company. For the space of a day and night they had been forcibly detained, but as soon as outside pressure was removed they flew back to their own place. Every man has his company in this world, and in the next; every man makes his own company; and finally every man goes to his own company. When Judas died, he went to his own place; he had made it for himself. When the rich man died, he went to his own place, as Lazarus to his. How often we find young

men, at home, correct in their lives, and worshipful in their habits, who, being let go from home and bereft of Christian influences, go to an entirely different company; which is, after all, their own. Water always seeks its level; so men, when free to choose their company, always choose their own. Which is our company? The people of God or the people of this world? Which is our place? The assembly of the saints, the place of prayer, or the place of worldly pleasure, where God is not in all the people's thoughts? The apostles naturally rehearsed all the things that had befallen them. There were willing ears to hear, and sympathetic hearts to enter into their experiences. Such a gathering was after the Lord's own heart. "Then they that feared the Lord, spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard. (Mal. iii, 16.) Such a meeting, too, was suited to their wants, in order to unitedly lay the whole matter before the Lord for wisdom, guidance, and grace to help in this coming time of need.

**1.—A wonderful prayer.**—Their conference did not consist only in talking one to another, and taking mutual counsel. These Christians flocked together, not to fight, but to pray. It is as natural for a Christian to pray, when in trouble or perplexity, as it is for him to breathe. There was indeed a battle to be fought; but not with carnal weapons. These apostles and disciples had not the remotest idea of withdrawing from the conflict; only they determined to fight alone with the weapons ordained of God. Rulers of the world-powers may laugh at the weapons of prayer and the Word, but with these, God's people have thrown down the strongholds of many empires and the heathen world. Mary of Scotland was not half so afraid of the armies of her enemies as of the prayers of John Knox. Looking over this prayer, we are amazed at its compass and spirit. (i) "They lifted up their voice to God with one accord." They did not look about them for an earthly refuge, or for earthly allies. The Eternal God was their refuge; to him it was meet that they should lift up their voice. Would God we might learn this lesson and practice it as effectually as did these first Christians! (ii) They made their appeal to God as the universal Creator and Sovereign of the world. How safe were they if they might with right appeal to the Creator and identify their cause with him and his power! The Bible is replete through every page with the teaching that the Lord of our Salvation is the same as the Creator of all worlds. What can puny man do to stop the Gospel or hinder the progress of the kingdom of God, if that Gospel and that kingdom is identical with the will and purpose of him who created the world? (iii) They appeal



to the Scriptures (Psalm ii), and to the promise, rather indeed the decree therein recorded to the effect that Jesus should rise from the dead and triumph over all his foes. Then they point out that this exact combination of world-powers had taken place in the condemnation of Jesus, and thus claim their warrant for a plea that the power of God should be put forth to make good the whole promise. Jesus had been raised from the dead, and now his cause must be delivered out of the hands of the enemy, with view to his firm establishment on God's Holy Hill. Thus far they plead with their God and Father above; the combination had only resulted in accomplishing the determinate counsel of God. When we have learned such a use and application of Scripture in our supplication, we have learned the secret of prevailing prayer. God's word cannot be broken. All must be fulfilled. (iv) They commit their case to him. "And now, Lord, behold their threatening." They do not pray God to take vengeance upon their foes; they simply ask him to look at them. No doubt the spirit of Christ was in their hearts, and they were longing to see their enemies converted. At any rate, they were content to commit them into God's hands, whose will is that all men should be saved. (v) They were intent on their work and longing to see it prosper, and so they prayed that "with all boldness" they might speak his word. They did not pray for themselves except as the servants of God, and were anxious only for help that they might be faithful in proclaiming Jesus Christ to men as the only Saviour. They had need of courage, and therefore they prayed that they might not shrink through fear or fail through any weakness of their own. (vi) Together with this prayer for boldness they ask that the word may be confirmed by miracles wrought in the name of Jesus. In the beginning of every new dispensation God has been pleased to confirm his messages with signs and wonders. Peter and the rest now prayed that, as they preached, God would stretch forth his hand to heal, to the end that the people might know that the Gospel was not in word only, but also in power. So we, too, pray that the Gospel preached may be confirmed by the regeneration of men, the real healing of soul seen in new lives and holy, which are the strongest proofs of the Divine Spirit in the word. (vii) The all-prevailing name of Jesus. It is surprising how quickly these disciples came to recognize the true mediatorial character of Jesus. In the address before the rulers, Peter boldly declared this to be the only Name by which men could be saved; and now, in this remarkable prayer, they ask that signs and wonders may be done in the same all-prevailing name. Do we know its full value? and so knowing, are we pleading

it for all that it is worth? "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, it shall be done unto you."

**2.—A second Pentecost.**—Happy Church; blessed disciples. "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost; and they spake the word with boldness." We might have thought that such an outpouring as that of the day of Pentecost would have lasted them a full year, that the filling then received would have served for a life time; but here they are rocked with fresh power as by an earthquake, and filled again with the Holy Ghost. And yet we live on, content with a revival of religion once in a dozen years; we are happy, almost surprised, if now and then a sinner is converted. Has the Holy Ghost ceased to be the gift of God and the great power in the Church? or have we ceased to pray, being content to work on with exhausted power? We need such another fresh baptism, such another shaking up; and it is possible for us to re-enter upon such an era of power if we will but draw nigh to God; pleading his promises and the all-prevailing Name, that he, too, may draw nigh to us. No wonder that these disciples and apostles began again to preach with boldness, giving witness to the resurrection of Jesus; no wonder that great grace was upon them all.

### III.—AN INVINCIBLE CHURCH.

Its apostles being thus filled with the Holy Ghost and bold to preach and testify, we see further, in the following points, the characteristics of an invincible Church.

**1.—It was a perfectly united Church.**—"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul." No sectarian divisions, no doctrinal differences, had come in to rend that holy Church asunder; these men only knew Jesus and the resurrection, with salvation through his name; no party strife they knew, no contention as to who should be greatest. Alas, we have fallen on evil times. Will real unity ever come back to God's distracted and divided Church on earth? Certainly some of us will not cease to pray for such a day, and to labor for it by banishing from heart and practice all sectarian bigotry and bitterness, with all uncharitable condemnation of our brethren, and all pharisaical conceit of our own superiority.

**2.—It was a perfectly benevolent Church.**—"Neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." It was a time of wonderful love.

When these disciples gave themselves to the Lord, they gave also all that they had. A slave can own no property. It all belongs to the Master. These Christians were the "slaves" of Jesus Christ. All that they were, and had, belonged to him. It was a time, too, of trial. Many of the disciples had forsaken father, mother, brother, sister, husband, and wife. Need was upon them. Therefore the great grace that was upon them led such as had possessions to sell them and lay the price down at the apostles' feet, to be by them used for the benefit of the whole community. The Christian communism of that day was utterly unlike that which is preached to-day, when each man is clamoring that other people shall give up their possessions to him. These disciples were eager to share what they had with their less fortunate brethren. They were not demanding aught for themselves, but insisting upon sharing what was theirs with the brethren of Christ. In this case there was no lack. Would there be any lack among the people of God if we all carried out the spirit of this holy impulse that swept over the early Church, even though we did not literally sell all our property and lay the whole bulk down at the apostles' feet? The true Christian is a man of true love and true liberality; he is ever ready to communicate and to devise liberal plans for the help and relief of his less prosperous brethren. He will not encourage idleness, but he will never overlook want when he can help it.

**3.—A powerful ministry, and abounding grace.**—In this state of the Church we see a powerful ministry. Preaching with boldness and witnessing with power. If only we could be filled again and again with the Holy Ghost, we should see this condition of things revived in the Church. Great grace being upon us all, we would not be giving our time to sectarian strifes and questions of Church government; we should not be ever devising selfish accumulations of property for our own use, while the Lord and his people had need of it. Souls would be converted by thousands again, and the world would soon be filled with the glory of God; the name of Jesus then would be exalted above every name.

**4.—Fruit after its kind.**—Among the earliest of the apostolic converts was a man named Joses, whom the apostles afterward named Barnabas (a son of consolation) because of his sweet sympathetic spirit, and the gentleness and grace of his speech and ministry. He being led to cast in his lot with the disciples, became the first outside the original company to follow their example, and accordingly brought the price of his possessions, which he had sold, and laid it at the apostles' feet. This indeed was holy charity. The

example of Barnabas has been frightfully misused since; and we have had spurious successors of the apostles, and of Peter in particular, who have called upon spurious converts to do the same, with promises of salvation to be bought with money, while the gifts have been confiscated to pride, and not to poverty and need. Every Church, like every seed, brings forth after its kind. Like priest, like people; like Church, like converts. May God restore us again to the primitive and apostolic type of Christianity!

## XXXIII.

## ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA.—Acts v, 1-11.

(1) But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, (2) And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. (3) But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? (4) While it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. (5) And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. (6) And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. (7) And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. (8) And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. (9) Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. (10) Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. (11) And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.—Acts v, 1-11.

With the suddenness of a tropical storm, the calamity which is recorded in the first part of this chapter arose and burst over the head of the young Christian Church. The little taste of persecution which the apostles had suffered, instead of dispersing, seems to have united them, while their faith not only survived the shock, but lifted them into higher regions than before. Gladness, confidence, and great grace came upon them all; they seemed in every way to be strengthened by such a fire of trial. But now trouble comes from within. An enemy is in the camp. The birds of the air that hovered about the wayside to pluck up the scattered grain were not so formidable as this sudden development of rank tares in the midst of the field of ripening grain. Joy is suddenly turned into sorrow, and the happy fear of the Lord is for the moment converted into terror. When Barnabas, a man of wealth, brought the price of his possessions to lay at the apostles' feet, they never dreamt that the devil would so soon present for acceptance a counterfeit of that noble generosity. But the whole history of the Church is aptly epitomized by the parable of the tares. No sooner does God work a good work of

grace, and cast into the soil of human nature the good seed of the kingdom, than the devil comes by night and sows tares. The dark shadow of Satan casts its baleful influence on every spot where the work of grace is in progress; his trail passes over the path which the feet of Jesus have trod as if to defile the way and hinder others from following in the Master's footsteps. Cain counterfeited Abel's acceptable sacrifice; Jannes and Jambres counterfeited the miracles of Moses in the wilderness; Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire before the Lord; false prophets spoke smooth and deceiving words to the kings of Israel, causing them to err; the prophets of Baal and Ashtaroth turned the hearts of all Israel from the true worship of Jehovah, while as yet they were calling on his name; and now in the young Christian Church we have a spurious, lying, and false consecration which, if God had not forthwith stamped out, would have speedily brought the Church to ruin. Moses had his Korah, Joshua had his Achan, Elisha had his Gehazi, Jesus had his Judas, the apostles had their Ananias; Paul had Alexander, the coppersmith, and Demas, who loved this present world. So in all the ages since then the Church has had to contend with these devil's emissaries; sometimes they have crept in unawares, and sometimes are even nourished by the Church itself for gain. The danger of the Church has never been from without. The more she has been persecuted, the more she has prospered; but when those within turn traitors either in doctrine or life, then it is that her peace is assailed, her power paralyzed, and her victories turned into defeats. The case before us was most sad. The hypocrisy and falsehood of Ananias was a blow struck by Satan at the peace, the purity, and the power of the young Church. This should be an example to us all—leading every one of us into self-examination to see if in anywise we are being deceived by the enemy of our own souls and the Church of God into like sin.

### I.—THE AWFUL LIE.

The apparent facts in the case are very obvious. This man Ananias, with the consent and help of his wife, sold a certain possession, which was probably only a part of all their property, for a certain price. They probably meant to give the whole sum to the Church; but on getting the money into their hands, they were tempted through covetousness to keep back a part of the price; still, through fear of ridicule and criticism, they determined to act as though they were giving the whole sum; for the furtherance of which deception, they agreed between themselves to tell the same

story. In this they reckoned with Satan, but without the Holy Ghost, and met the same fate as all liars and hypocrites must at the end. Certain characters have come down to us through all ages as being the embodiments of certain vices. The same, indeed, is true of the representatives of virtues. We have already mentioned some of these notorious men and women. Yet the list is worth repeating with amendments. Cain represents the crime of murder, as well as that of a spurious religion, which substituted the wisdom of the natural man for the revelation of God; Jannes and Jambres represent the organized opposition of heathenism to the religion of Jehovah; Nadab and Abihu, the substitution of the energy of the flesh for the power of the Spirit; Korah and Dathan, the jealousy of men who desire to be leaders in the Church; Balaam is the false prophet who is willing for gold to falsify doctrine and use religion as a cloak for covetousness; Achan is another embodiment of covetousness, Gehazi also repeating this common sin; Manasseh is the cruel and persecuting king; Ahab, the weak instrument of a strong determined woman who hated God; Judas, the black-hearted traitor; Pilate, the perfidious betrayer of innocence to death for the sake of political power; and in this case we have Ananias, the monumental hypocrite and liar. The list might well be lengthened; but it is enough to suggest that in such characters we have concrete illustrations of the cardinal sins of human nature, all of which came to judgment in this life, that we might be forewarned against their entangling meshes. In the case of Ananias, we see a deliberate and needless sin, which led on first to others, and then to death. No sin stands alone; and the sin begotten of another will ever augment in wickedness till it reaches the worst heights of human iniquity.

**1.—The sin of covetousness.**—Though lying is the sin prominently singled out in this tragic record, covetousness was the root from whence it sprang. It is worthy of note that covetousness is the most common sin mentioned in the Bible,—the sin against which we read the most impressive warnings. The last compromise which Pharaoh proposed to Moses before leaving Egypt, was in respect of leaving flocks and herds behind. The first sin that confronted Israel after entering the Land of Promise, which turned victory into defeat, was that of covetousness in the family of Achan; and here we find the first great sin that threatened the peace and happiness of the infant Christian Church to be the same. Certainly it seems clear that the “love of money is the root of all evil”; and we are not surprised that the Apostle Paul classifies it with every worst sin, and brands it alone as being “idolatry”; so great a hold has it upon

the affections of men, that it even leads them to worship and put their trust in money. As we have already observed, it is probable • that the scheme to keep back part of the price did not arise in the mind of Ananias until after the possession was sold and the money was to hand. The sight, the feel, the tinkle of the gold was more than they could bear; the appeal which the actual quantity of money made to their covetousness was so irresistible, that they finally determined to perpetrate the fraud which well-nigh ruined the Church. Like blood to the sight and taste of the tiger, so was the sight of money to the greed of these avaricious professors.

**2.—The hypocrisy.**—Having determined to keep back part of the price, the next thing to be considered was how the act might be done, while themselves might be saved from censure, and at the same time get credit for liberality. Under the impulse of the Spirit, some of those who had possessions in the Church sold them (for it is not clear that all did so); notably Joses, this Cyprian stranger, to whom great praise had accrued for his noble generosity. This excited the desire of Ananias and Sapphira to be held in a like estimation. But now their avarice got the better of their ambition to be considered liberal, and they faltered. Still, after having sold the possession, they could scarcely draw back. To do so would have brought them into contempt; to have frankly owned that they only gave a part of the price, would have taken away from their benevolent act a large measure of its virtue by robbing it of the appearance of liberality. Desiring, therefore, to stand well with the Church, and at the same time to keep part of their money, they determined to act a lie, and to play the hypocrite. They would do that which would lead to a false conclusion on the part of the Church, and which would bring them praise. It is not likely that they said to themselves, “We will play the hypocrite.” Few men call their own sins by their true name; that would frighten them. They first deceive themselves, and then seek to deceive others. They thought simply to lay a certain portion of the money down at the apostles’ feet and say nothing, allowing them and the Church to reach the conclusion which they would naturally draw from the action, that it was the whole price of the possession which they had sold.

**3.—The awful lie.**—They did not intend to lie in words, and perhaps they did not admit to themselves that their circuitous action was a lie. They would reserve to themselves the right of saying, in answer to any question that might arise in the future, “We never *said* that we had given the whole price; if you came to any conclusion of that kind, it was the result of your own inference, and not of



our statement. You must not hold us accountable for your false inferences." Many a man has told an awful lie, by simply holding his tongue and saying nothing. Some people persuade themselves that a nod or a shake of the head, under certain circumstances is not "telling" lies. The awful character of this lie is seen in the fact that it was perpetrated by those who were part of a community born of the Holy Ghost, and therefore pledged to truth as no others in the world, inasmuch as a lie of this kind, and under such circumstances, would put a weapon in the hands of their enemies, which would be more powerful for their hurt, and for the discredit of the name of Jesus, than all the power of their very foes. It would set an example of meanness, deceit, and falsehood, which would speedily corrupt and destroy the whole community. It was an evil seed that would soon scatter itself over the whole field of Christianity, and spoil the entire harvest, as the thorns which sprang up and choked the good seed. One liar in the Church works more mischief than a whole regiment of slanderers outside. One hypocrite in the Church is a greater enemy to the cause of Christ than a whole army of persecutors arrayed against it.

## II.—THE LIE UNMASKED.

If men, whether professors of religion or not, would but remember that "all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him with whom we have to do," there would be more hesitancy before committing sin. Men forget that the eye of God is upon both the righteous and the wicked, that God knows even the secrets of our thoughts. Ananias imagined that their action would go no further than the men with whom they were dealing; that the outward aspect alone would be regarded; that at most their offense would be against men only, and not against God. So thought David; but he afterward learned to his sorrow his terrible mistake, and was constrained to burst out with this heart-breaking confession: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." How sudden and terrible was their awakening! No sooner had they brought their gift, than their hypocrisy was exposed; than the hidden lie budding in their hearts burst into full bloom. Peter was inspired of the Holy Ghost to see the whole transaction as by a single glance; just as Elisha saw the lie that was in the heart of Gehazi. In a single sentence Peter unmasked the whole wickedness of this man, and laid bare to his gaze, and that of all succeeding generations, the whole inner workings and mysteries of sin.

**1.—The agency of Satan in all human sin.**—“Why hath Satan filled thy heart?” The first thing noticeable here is, the clear and positive recognition of Satan as a person. Peter does not speak of him as an influence or a symbol of evil. The whole language is too simple, literal, and direct to admit of any other conclusion than that Peter believed him to be an intelligent, personal spirit, working against God, for the destruction of men. Again, if any one doubts the direct agency of Satan in the moral evil of the world, this passage ought to set the matter at rest. Who can read this incident, and that recorded in the third chapter of Genesis, without being struck with the unity of the doctrine of the Bible. In Genesis, Satan was the wicked and subtle spirit, tempting Adam and Eve to doubt God, and then to disobey him; here he is acting precisely in the same way. So also now there are cases where he seems to take entire possession of men. In this passage he is said to have filled the heart of Ananias, just as he had before filled the heart of Judas; it was not a simple suggestion to sin, but a bold entering into the heart and taking entire possession of it, and so leading it on, through pride and envy, to covetousness, hypocrisy, and falsehood. How terrible a thing to be thus possessed of the devil!

**2.—Human responsibility.**—It must be borne in mind that man is not the helpless victim of Satan. The question of Peter implies that it was with the full consent of Ananias that Satan filled his heart. “Why hast thou allowed Satan to do it?” is the true force of Peter’s question. “Why hast thou conceived this thing in thy heart?” Here is the secret way of access by which Satan enters our hearts. Ananias first conceived or gave entertainment to the idea; then Satan entered in and urged him on to its accomplishment. A wicked thought entertained is an open door to Satan. When Eve saw the tree and its fruit, and began to desire it and wonder about it, then Satan came upon the scene. The lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of the life, are all open doors. Ananias need not have done the thing. He was under no compulsion to sell the land, and when he had sold it, he was not compelled to give the money, in whole or in part, to the Church. Christian beneficence is always a voluntary matter.

**3.—The direction of the lie.**—“Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.” In the third verse, Peter says the lie was to the “Holy Ghost.” Here we have two important truths set before us. The Holy Ghost is a person, and not a mere influence; the Holy Ghost is God. No ingenuity of interpretation can escape the plain teaching of this passage. All sin is against God; in some of its

aspects, it is specially against the Holy Ghost. David said his sin was against God; against his holiness and majesty. Here the sin was against the Holy Ghost. The Church of Jesus Christ is the product of the Holy Ghost, and this act of Ananias was primarily against the Holy Ghost, because he is the Spirit of Truth, and any act committed by a man professing to have been born of the Spirit, which denies the character of the Holy Ghost, is against that Person of the Trinity. The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Holiness; the whole act of Ananias was a contradiction of that divine attribute. He came into the world to regenerate and sanctify men; but here was a man claiming to be a child of the Holy Spirit who, acting under the direction of the devil, was scandalizing the character of God, the Holy Ghost. Further, it was an act against the Holy Ghost, as it tended to destroy and compromise the character of the Church. The Church is supposed to be the reflector of the holiness of God; and if members of the Church give themselves over to sin, the whole Church is involved in the consequent scandal. Just as a whole human family suffers in the disgrace of one member, so the whole Church is besmirched by the sin of one professing Christian, and thus the Holy Spirit is grieved and wronged in the household of faith. Moreover, it was a blow to the work of the Holy Ghost. His work had brought peace, purity, and power to the Church; now all was for a moment disturbed; and unless the lie had been instantly checked, all would have been ruined. It is said that the sin against the Holy Ghost consists in ascribing the work of the Holy Ghost to the devil; here, however, is a clear case of the sin against the Holy Ghost; and it consists in surrendering the heart to Satan, to scandalize the character, and destroy the work of the Spirit of God. Satan's enmity is not simply against men; his purpose is not only to drag men down into the pit with himself; he is actuated by hatred against God, and a determination to defeat his purpose of grace in the world.

### III.—THE SWIFT AND AWFUL PUNISHMENT.

We are struck with the swift and awful punishment which followed upon the commission of this sin. The hypocritical lie of Ananias was instantly uncovered; before he had time to answer or make the least defense, he fell down dead at the apostles' feet. No doubt he was dumfounded and rendered speechless with amazement, at the sudden exposure of his sin. Some have thought that the nervous shock caused by this exposure in presence of the

whole Church, resulted in a sudden attack of heart disease ; but this theory can hardly hold good in presence of the fact that, within three hours, Sapphira, coming in, ignorant of what had befallen her husband, and in answer to Peter's question backing up the lie upon which they had agreed, suffered in like manner the swift penalty which overtook her husband. If the question is raised as to the unmercifulness of the punishment, and that it is contrary to the character of God to be so pitiless, we must refer our readers to the undoubted fact that, in certain crises of the Church's history, God has acted in this way, and that, as we must believe, in perfect accord with the principles of both righteousness and mercy. In the wilderness, the earth swallowed up Korah ; the fire flew forth, and destroyed Nadab and Abihu. (Num. xvi ; Lev. x, 2.) A similar judgment overtook Achan in the camp of Israel. What is the explanation of these severe and swift judgments? Moses asserts the principle in the case of Nadab and Abihu : "This is that that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified." Had the act of these two men, at the very inauguration of the worship of God in the wilderness, been overlooked, the distinction between the true and false in religion would have been lost. Had the sin of Achan been passed by, the conquest of the land would have been turned into a mere filibustering expedition for the sake of spoil. Had the sin of Ananias been passed by, hypocrisy and lying might have become an established and recognized characteristic of the Church. The Church was not old enough or strong enough, at that time, to survive such a triple sin. If God does not now instantly send swift vengeance upon all hypocrites and liars, it is not because he has altered his purpose toward them. He has given us a warning, and shown us in time what is reserved for all such in eternity. This is but a little scrap of the judgment enacted before our eyes. If Jesus has said to certain professors, who were tempted to look back : "Remember Lot's wife," he says no less to us also, who may be tempted by covetousness into hypocrisy and lying : "Remember Ananias and Sapphira." The lesson seems to have had a salutary effect, both upon the Church and upon the community without. The Church came to a sense of awe and reverence for the holiness and justice of God, such as they had not apprehended before ; and the outside world, hearing of these things, experienced a dread of God, that probably wrought much conviction of sin. "And great fear came upon all the Church ; and upon as many as heard these things." "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear."

## XXXIV.

## THE APOSTLES PERSECUTED.—Acts v, 25-41.

(25) Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. (26) Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. (27) And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, (28) Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. (29) Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than man. (30) The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. (31) Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. (32) And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. (33) When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them. (34) Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; (35) And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. (36) For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. (37) After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. (38) And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: (39) But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. (40) And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. (41) And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.—Acts v, 25-41.

This chapter opened with an account of a blow aimed at the young Church by a liar and a hypocrite, by which the very life of the Church was threatened. God met the insult and crime promptly, and the guilty pair were made to bite the dust in the very same hour with their sin. The immediate effect of the awful but just judgment that came upon Ananias and Sapphira was that the Church was solemnized and outsiders were filled with a wholesome fear. There were some ("the rest," v. 13) who seemed, like Ananias, to have contemplated uniting with the Church whose hearts were not given

to God; who looked upon it as a popular movement out of which they might gain some advantage; but the swift exposure of the hypocrisy of these two people suddenly deterred them from joining the Christian community. On the other hand, the apostles were greatly strengthened to do mighty signs and wonders among the people, especially miracles of healing. The streets of the city were filled with the sick folk who had been brought out by their friends, that they might be healed; so great was the power to heal that the people who could not get near enough to Peter for him to speak directly to their sick friends or lay his hands on them, laid them where the shadow of Peter might fall upon them as he passed by. The news of this new power in the apostles spread to the country, and from the villages all about the people came flocking in. Besides this, a multitude of men and women became true believers, and while the timid and false-hearted durst not join the company of disciples openly, yet many of them, too, were added to the Lord. This was a glorious revival, and types to us of what the Lord is waiting to do for his Church in any age and at any time, if his people will yield themselves as utterly as these first disciples did. The course of events, however, were not to run on so smoothly. Satan will not quietly stand by and see souls swept into the kingdom in this way. His agents are the same whom he had before used. The High Priest and his party (the Sadducees), seeing and hearing how the sect was spreading, and how their enthusiasm was rising every day, were "filled with indignation," that is, with envy. Angry that the sect which they had vainly tried to put down was growing, indignant that the men whom they had forbidden to preach were still boldly preaching, conscience-stricken that this Name of Jesus, whom they had crucified was on the lips of everybody as having been raised from the dead, and jealous that the people seemed to be siding with the apostles and utterly ignoring their authority, they determined to make one more effort to suppress what was to them a rising pest. They resorted to the only argument known to persecutors: Without attempting to confute their facts or their doctrines, they arbitrarily arrest and throw them into the "common prison." They treat them as common criminals. But the angel of the Lord promptly releases them, and bids them "go stand and speak in the temple to the people; all the words of this Life." Thus encouraged, the apostles go early in the morning back to their old place on Solomon's porch and again teach the people. Unaware of this morning episode, the High Priest and his party gather at his house and consult together what they shall do with the apostles whom they supposed to be

awaiting their will in the prison. They finally sent the officer of the guard to bring the prisoners before them, when, lo, the report comes back that the prison doors were duly shut, and the guard on the outside, but the apostles were not there. This information struck them with amazement. They could not understand this new development, and began to look into each other's faces and wonder what would happen next.

### I.—THE RE-ARREST OF THE APOSTLES.

However, they had gone too far to retreat. While they were consulting together, news came to them of the whereabouts of the missing apostles.

1.—**The information.**—"Then came one and told them, saying, Behold the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people." Certainly where else would *these* men be? Perhaps, if we had been there, with the fear of the prison before us, even though we had been miraculously delivered a while before, we should have counseled prudence, and gone at least into some back street and quietly gathered our followers together and reasoned with them that it was not best to give offense to the rulers, that in the long run we would gain more by a conservative than a radical course. At least many of us do so now. But these were men of conviction. They had seen and heard. They had fully adopted the principle that it was better to obey God than man; that if man put himself in God's way it was not their fault, but would be man's responsibility. They did not consider consequences, but simply did what they were bidden to do by the angel. Of what an offense they were guilty! "standing in the temple and teaching the people." Well, in all ages since they have had their successors, who also have been brought up by information before councils of kings and rulers, for "preaching the Gospel of the Son of God." May none of us ever be guilty of a worse offense!

2.—**The arrest.**—The question was now on the hands of the senate. What will they do? It would have been wise for them to have yielded to the logic of events. They should have learned by this time that these men would not heed their admonition; and if the very prison refused to keep them was not God, in some mysterious way, interposing on their behalf? But their foolish hearts were darkened, and passion and hatred had taken the place of reason and judgment. They must do something. So they determined upon a second arrest. The captain of the temple, with his officers, "went

and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned." Not a very dignified performance indeed, but there was a wholesome fear upon them. Had these men been real criminals, had there been real fault in them, they would have proceeded boldly to their work; but their hearts were weak through conscious fear and knowledge of wrong on their part. The apostles seem not to have resisted their arrest. They were warranted in refusing to obey the then powers when their commands contravened the commandments of God, but they were not warranted in resisting the arrest of the officers. Even their Master had taught them that lesson. They were ready to abide another trial, for they knew that God was with them, to deliver them as he saw fit. So they were brought and set before the council.

**3.—The examination.**—Having arraigned them, their examiners first put a question and then laid a double charge. "Did we not straightway command you, that ye should not teach in this name?" No doubt they had so commanded (iv, 18), but what of it? They had no authority. Nevertheless, when men begin to rely upon might for right, their own will answers all the purpose of law to them. And so disobedience to their command was the first charge, not disobedience to God's law. Then follow two charges which one would have thought they would have been slow to formulate: "And behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine." This was a great admission and a most gratifying confession. In spite of the fact that they had crucified the Lord and brought all their power to bear on the suppression of these apostles and the stamping out of the doctrine, all Jerusalem was filled with the doctrine of Jesus and the resurrection. Well could the apostles afford to stand the arrest and examination if their heavenly work had been so blessed of God. We should have thought that the High Priest would have paused before impressing such an evident seal of truth upon the apostles' work. Then the other charge came: "And intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Here is the voice of conscience. When they had insisted before Pilate upon the crucifixion of Jesus, they had boldly shouted: "His blood be upon us and our children." They had accepted the issue then, but they shrank from the consequences of their wicked challenge, now that it seemed likely to fall out against them. No doubt they had that very challenge in their minds, echoing through their memories and consciences with fearful and portentous voice. No doubt, also, Peter had given them some ground for this charge, for he had boldly reminded them of their crime, and charged it upon them in the several addresses which are recorded in the previous



chapters of this book. It is said by some that their thought and charge was that Peter was inciting the populace to rise up and mob them; but there is no ground for this. Peter, while charging upon them the crime of the murder of the Lord, had never uttered a syllable of revenge or desire to see them punished; on the other hand, he had exhorted them to repentance by accepting Jesus as the Saviour whom they had denied as the Messiah. No; it was the voice of their own consciences alone that caused them to speak this. The blood of Christ was on their hands and consciences, crying aloud, as the blood of Abel cried from the ground. The very name of Jesus seems to have been a terror to them, for in all their interviews with the apostles they never once name him. Perhaps, also, it was partly in a contemptuous hatred that they only allude to Jesus as "this name," and "this man." So, also, in speaking of the teaching of the apostles, they call it "your doctrine," whereas it was the doctrine of Jesus. But they could not get rid of the solemn facts in the case by refusing to call them by their proper names.

## II.—THE APOSTLES' ANSWER.

The apostles had no advocate to plead for them save the Holy Ghost, which was in them and with them to teach them what they should say in that hour. In Peter's answer we see the same holy boldness, the same heavenly wisdom, and the same lofty tone of compassion and longing desire for the salvation of souls as in his former address.

**1.—Concerning themselves.**—The High Priest had begun their examination by reminding them of a past command not to preach in the name of Jesus: "Did we not straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name?" To which Peter replies with admirable tact and skill: "And did we not then answer by implication that 'We ought to obey God rather than men.' Now we do not put it in the form of a question to you, but boldly affirm this as our principle: We ought to obey God rather than men, and so we will." This was not defiance, but a firm stand taken and held against all earthly rule and power. So may God strengthen us both to say and to do in all things.

**2.—Concerning Jesus.**—They did not waste many words in justifying themselves. They pass on at once to Jesus and his claims. The High Priest had studiously avoided mentioning the name of Jesus, but Peter boldly and lovingly brings that name forward, as being already above every name most dear to him and the disciples.

“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged upon a tree.” How that sentence must have pierced their hearts! It was not they who were bringing forward Jesus in their doctrine and teaching. It was “the God of our fathers.” “Bring not your accusations against us. We did not raise up Jesus from the dead, but the God of our fathers—your God and our God—raised him up.” The assertion of the resurrection of Jesus must have been bitter to the judges. They had supposed that by crucifying him they had gotten rid of a troublesome teacher who was undermining their power and exposing the hollow hypocrisy of their religious pretensions; but now everywhere the city is ringing with the declaration that Jesus is alive from the dead. “Whom ye slew and hanged upon a tree.” Dreadful thought! If Jesus was alive from the dead, then he was the Messiah, and these men were his murderers. Here was bold preaching and terrible indictment. Again the court finds itself on trial before its prisoners. The persecutors are prosecuted at the bar of conscience and God. But Peter is not so anxious to bring them in guilty as he is to lead them out of their position of sin. He says nothing to them of the vengeance of God coming upon them for their awful crime, but puts Jesus before them in a wonderful new light. They had indeed rejected him as their Messiah; but God had overruled their crime by raising up Jesus from the dead and exalting him to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. Here are three great things affirmed of Jesus in his exaltation. (i) He is a Prince in view of his Divine origin, in view of his testimonials while on earth, and now in view of his exaltation at the right hand of God. All power is his. Peter would call the attention of the Sanhedrin to this fact. They had denounced him as a blasphemer and a malefactor, and had insisted on his execution as such; but, as a matter of fact, he is the Prince of heaven and the Sovereign of the world. But (ii) he is a Saviour. His power as a Prince is to be used, not for revenge, but for salvation. All power is given unto him that he may grant eternal life. It is true that they crucified him, but God has overruled their crime to make him to be an almighty Saviour for all sinners, for his very murderers no less than all others. This is a gracious preaching. (iii) The method of salvation is twofold: (a) “To give repentance.” That is, to make a place or room for repentance. God does not give repentance as he does forgiveness, but he commands all men everywhere to repent. Yet how can a man repent, and what good is there in repentance under the law? The law knows no mercy and makes repentance of none avail; but Jesus, by dying and making atone-

ment, has made room for repentance. It is now possible for a man to repent with hope. (b) Then God has declared through Jesus the "forgiveness of sins." This is not a chance statement, but it is the cardinal doctrine of the Gospel. Paul took up this note and published it with great joy. "Be it known unto you, therefore, that through this man (Jesus) is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." (xiii, 38.) Thus Peter before the Sanhedrin, who sought his life, declared to them the Gospel, opened the door for them to enter by repentance, and proclaimed to them the forgiveness of sins.

**3.—Concerning their work.**—God had appointed them to be witnesses of these things. They could not therefore cease teaching and preaching to the people, and of this fact the council might take final notice. Moreover, God had not left them alone as to their testimony, for Peter adds, "So also is the Holy Ghost." The Mighty God, the Holy Spirit, was both with them and in them; he showed this by his descent upon them, by his strength given unto them in wisdom, understanding, courage, and tender love, in boldness and clearness of utterance. Such is ever the witness of the Spirit. The Gospel is not preached without the Holy Ghost being sent down from heaven. Moreover, Peter utters a truth which we should eagerly seize upon for ourselves. This partnership of the Holy Ghost is for "all them that obey him." The same power that made these apostles invincible is at our disposal if we will manifest the same obedience. When we adopt and act on the principle that "We must obey God rather than men," then the Holy Ghost will witness with us to the resurrection of Jesus.

**4.—The effect of the address.**—The members of the council, instead of entering through the open door of repentance, which Peter set before them, and accepting the forgiveness of sins from the exalted Prince and Saviour, were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay the apostles. When men are determined to fight against God and Christ, then the Gospel, which pricks the heart of the willing and penitent sinner and leads him to everlasting life, cuts the heart of the impenitent, and in fighting drives him to deeper and more desperate sins. The Gospel never fails in effect; it is life or death to souls accordingly as they receive or reject it.

### III.—THE COUNSEL OF GAMALIEL.

There was one man in the council who dissented from the voice of the majority, and set before them the wisdom of their course. He suggested and urged upon them moderation and prudence, say-

ing to them, "Take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do touching these men." He saw the force of the prisoners' statements and recognized the tremendous facts which supported them. He does not commit himself to the cause of Christ, but he will not for himself, nor does he wish his brethren to commit themselves against the Christ as at present set before them. His principle that, "if the work be of men it will come to naught, but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it," is not absolutely true, at least in the narrow range of human history, for sometimes the work of God seems at least to have been overthrown, as in the case of the churches in Asia; while that which is not of God, such as Mohammedanism, seems to stand. However, in the long run, Gamaliel was right. Certainly the doctrine of tolerance in all matters of religion, at least the doctrine of abstention from force, is the right one, and we have no doubt, if perfect tolerance were practiced the world over, the cause of Christ would speedily triumph. This, at any rate, is without doubt true, that it is a dreadful thing to "be found fighting against God." Many have been so found, and have perished miserably. Let the words of Saul, the king of Israel, be remembered: "Behold I have played the fool and have erred exceedingly." He had been fighting against God and his anointed king, David. Now he saw it, and confessed his folly. Gamaliel's advice was that they should avoid falling into a like fatal error. Is it not good advice for certain unbelievers of our day? We recommend it to them. They formally agreed to his advice, in that they refrained from taking action with a view toward their death, but in discharging them from custody, they could not surrender their malice, and so had them beaten, and reiterated their command that they should not preach in the name of Jesus. Vain command! How many thousand times it has been reiterated by the kings of the earth and the rulers of this world!

#### IV.—THE JOY OF THE APOSTLES.

Being let go, they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing, not that their lives had been spared, not that they were set at liberty, but that they had been counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. They probably remembered the words of the Lord Jesus, spoken to them early in his ministry: "Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." In later days the great apostle to the Gentiles rejoiced in like manner: "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in necessities, in reproaches, in persecutions,

in distresses, for Christ's sake : for when I am weak then am I strong." (II. Cor. xii, 10.) Like Moses, they "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" (Heb. xi, 26), and gladly went out bearing their reproach. We have fallen on softer times. We rejoice in the magnificence of our churches, in the applause of the people, in the bounty of our salaries, in the comfort of our houses, in the high place accorded to us by society, and in all manner of good things. Perhaps, if we had to learn to sing hymns in the prison, with our feet fast in the stocks, and our backs still bleeding from the lash, we should be better preachers and give a more powerful testimony to the resurrection.

## XXXV.

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR.—Acts vii, 54-60 ;  
viii, 1-4.

(54) When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they grashed on him with their teeth. (55) But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, (56) And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. (57) Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, (58) And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. (59) And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. (60) And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (1) And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. (2) And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. (3) As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. (4) Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.—Acts vii, 54-60; viii, 1-4.

The Church of Jesus, or, more properly, the number of disciples, had grown to a great multitude in Jerusalem. Every effort of the High Priest and his party to suppress the new community seemed only to add stimulus to the disciples and zeal to the apostles. The preaching, and teaching and testifying, went steadily on. A small cloud from within arose by reason of some dissatisfaction in connection with the distribution of the common funds to the poor widows. This matter was quickly and wisely settled by the election of seven deacons, whose duty it would be to look after this matter and relieve the apostles. Among these men was a young Hellenist Jew, Stephen by name, who suddenly developed into a mighty preacher, being full of faith and the Holy Ghost, endowed besides with the most extraordinary natural gifts and having a perfect mastery of the Scriptures. Some of the foreign Jews, recognizing in Stephen a man of parts, and seeing what power was given him both in speech and in working miracles, could not refrain from the attempt to argue him down; but "they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which

he spake." They therefore resorted to the old tactics used against Jesus; stirring up the people, the elders, and the scribes, they collected a mob, arrested him, and carried him before the council, where, with false and suborned witnesses, they charged him with blasphemy in connection with the temple, as Jesus, too, had been accused by his enemies. Astonishing powers belonged to and were given to this young deacon. The Joy of the Lord was so in his heart, and the Holy Spirit so abundantly present with him, that, as he sat before the council, his face shone as it had been the face of an angel. In answer to the High Priest's question as to whether the things testified against him were true, he delivered an address, the equal of which is not recorded in the Scriptures. He revived the whole history of Israel from the days of Abraham to the crucifixion of Jesus, and showed clearly that, in every age and every dispensation, the Jews had been an unbelieving and rebellious people. The closing sentence of his speech aroused them to a perfect pitch of frenzy: "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them, which have showed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have now become the betrayers and murderers; who have received the law by the dispensation of angels, and have not kept it." Here is bold and fearless preaching. It is not a marvel that men who were not ready to yield to the conviction, which must have been wrought by such a resistless tide of fact and truth, by such a pitiless summing up of the case against them, turned murderers in their hearts, and crimsoned their hands with the blood of this fearless young prosecutor. The controversy between the Church and the Jewish authorities had now reached a crisis. A new era was about to dawn; again the Church was to be victorious; again the Gospel was to be sent forward on its career with a bound, sanctified by the blood of the first martyr.

### I.—THE DEATH OF STEPHEN.

The effect of the address of Stephen upon the council, and upon his enemies, who had come near to accuse him and witness his condemnation, was what might have been anticipated. "When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart and gnashed on him with their teeth." The literal rendering is "their hearts were sawn asunder." And no wonder. They were compelled to look at such a picture of themselves as had never before been presented to their

gaze; they were smarting under a lash such as had never before been laid upon them. Peter's arraignment, too, had been sharp and severe; his words also had "cut them to the heart." (v. 33.) But the little finger of Stephen was greater than the loins of Peter in this respect. For a moment they were paralyzed as to action, except that they "gnashed their teeth," grinding them together with rage. The audacity of Stephen; the maddening testimony he brought against them; the apparently irresistible power that was carrying this new community along; the angelic face that was confronting them, all appalled and at the same time enraged them. But more was to come. The pent-up waters of their wrath were all to be let loose by a further statement of the audacious young deacon.

**1.—The vision of Stephen.**—While the priests and the rest of the Jews were dumb for very amazement, and silent with rage, Stephen, "being full of the Holy Ghost, looked steadfastly up into heaven, and saw the Glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." We need not limit ourselves to the understanding that this was a purely subjective vision. We are told that he looked steadfastly into heaven. To understand that this was a real sight, we have but to recall the fact that Ezekiel was permitted, in like manner, to see through the opened heavens his visions of God; even as John, on Patmos, saw into heaven as through an open door; Paul, too, being caught up into the third heaven, whether in the body or out of the body he did not know, saw things which it was not possible to describe. (Ez. i, 1; Rev. iv, 1; II. Cor. xii, 1-4.) This sight was not, indeed, vouchsafed to those standing by; even as when afterward Saul was converted and saw Jesus, those who stood by did not share the vision. (Acts ix, 3, 4, 7.) Before speaking more particularly of what Stephen saw, we cannot refrain from remarking, that the many testimonies in the Scripture to events of this kind give us assurance that the heavenly world is much nearer to this of ours than popular conception testifies. Heaven is not so very far away. Out of it, and down to the earth, have come many times angels of the Lord; out of it, and within the hearing of men, has come again and again the voice of God; into it these favored servants of God have been permitted to see; and into it Enoch, Elijah, and the Lord Jesus have gone as through a curtain of cloud and blue azure. Could we but apprehend this, it would make some difference in our earthly walk and conversation. It is true, there is left to us the power of faith, by which we can "see him who is invisible"; and it is also true that those who walk in the Spirit are always seeing real things, which others cannot see. With opened eyes, they see wonderful things



out of God's law (Ps. cxix, 18), they see the kingdom of God (John iii, 3), and the pure in heart even see God himself. (Matt. v, 8.) To some this may not seem so satisfactory as an open vision; but Jesus has told us that it is even more blessed to have this vision of faith than to have seen these things with our eyes. (John xx, 29.) It is doubtful if we could bear to have the open vision, and more doubtful still if such a vision would as much tend to strengthen us as the "good fight of faith." Coming now to what Stephen saw, we notice three things: (i) "Heaven opened." This is a most blessed vision. Alas for us if it were shut! By and by it will be shut, and those who come when once the door is shut, will have to go away wailing in their sin over the loss of their souls. Jesus Christ has opened the gates of heaven for us. He opened it for himself to come down to this world, to seek and find us; then he opened it for us when he went back again, having obtained our eternal redemption, and he now holds it open for all penitent believing sinners. (ii) He "saw the glory of God." The detail of this sight is not clear, but it was some refulgent glory which veiled from even his sight any appearance of God. It must have been like the glory of God which filled the temple in the days of Solomon, and which, withdrawing from the temple and the Holy City, went up into heaven (Ez. x, 4, 19; xi, 23); probably identical with the old Shekinah, which always signified the presence of God. (iii) He saw "Jesus standing on the right hand of God." Jesus had told the Jews that, after they had killed him, he would ascend to the right hand of power, as being the Son of the Blessed; and Mark tells us that when he ascended, "he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God." (Mark xiv, 61, 62; xvi, 19.) Peter had again and again testified to the fact of the resurrection, and that God had highly exalted Jesus, and made him a Prince and a Saviour. Stephen now sees this himself. He was not an eye-witness to the resurrection, but now he became an eye-witness of the exaltation to the right hand of God. God did not interpose to save Stephen from the cruel death that awaited him down here on the earth, but gave him instead a vision of the glory that awaited him in that near heavenly world which far more than compensated him for the pain of martyrdom, or for the loss sustained in this world by being so early cut off from work and usefulness. If only we could keep in mind that God has two worlds, whereof he has made us citizens through Jesus Christ, we should not make such one-sided interpretations of his providences down here; and many of the things we so bitterly complain of would to us, if only we could see through the

opened heavens, be matters of unspeakable joy to our souls. God does not, indeed, give us to see how he is managing all things for us; but he has assured us in his word, that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. viii, 28), and that should be sufficient for us.\* Ordinarily Jesus is represented as sitting down at the right hand of God, sitting being the normal position of him who had finished the work of redemption, and was now at rest. (Ps. cx, 1; Mark xvi, 19; Heb. x, 12; Rev. iii, 21; Col. iii, 1.) But now Stephen sees him standing up, as though he had risen in sympathy with his servant, to watch over him in this hour. The rest of Jesus from his redemptive work does not hinder him from being active in the administration of his grace and help in our every time of need. What comfortable lessons we have from this vision of Stephen! Let us take them, for they were given for our comfort as well as for his. No Scripture is for private appropriation; and we are partners in the grace of all saints.

**2.—The testimony of Stephen.**—Stephen was not content to see this vision for himself. He would give his testimony concerning it. The great matter of controversy between the Jews and the apostles was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. They who were eye-witnesses of that fact, persistently testified that "God had raised him up." Now comes Stephen, who was not an eye-witness of the resurrection; taking up the testimony of God against the Jews for murdering the Messiah, he affirms with equal persistency that God has exalted him. In confirmation of his testimony God gives him this vision, and now he speaks to the Jews as an eye-witness, and magnifies his opportunity. He says boldly, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." Nothing could have been more bitter to the ears of these Jews, who had condemned Jesus as a blasphemer, and had him crucified as such. The apostles had testified that God had raised him from the dead, and had filled all Jerusalem with the testimony and doctrine resting on the fact of his death and resurrection; in vain the Jews had tried to prevent this testimony from spreading; and now comes another, and in their very presence, with a face shining as with the glory of heaven, like Moses long before, testifies that he sees the Son of Man, the name by which Jesus loved most to speak of himself, standing on the right hand of God. "Whereunto would this thing grow?" What was to be done? If Jesus was standing at the right hand of God, then it was clear that this Son of Man, whom these Jews had hung on the tree, was verily none other than the Son of God.

**3.—The stifled conviction.**—What was the Council to do? How

could they answer? They could not resist the wisdom of Stephen. They could not deny the historical facts arrayed before them. They could not deny the Scriptures quoted. They could not deny that they had betrayed and crucified the Holy One and the Just. They could not confute the testimony of the apostles as to his resurrection from the dead. They could not deny the fact that multitudes in Jerusalem, now numbering probably twenty or thirty thousand souls, had accepted the testimony as true. Nor could they deny the vision of Stephen while his own shining face bore a visible testimony to its reality. What were they to do? They had determined they would not repent. They were resisting the Holy Ghost. So they "cried with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran on him with one accord." Stified conviction can do nothing but stop its ears and rush on to deeper and greater sin. The testimony of Stephen "let loose the tide of rage which awe had for a moment frozen, and with illegal tumult, councilors and by-standers turned, through sheer passion, into a mob, swept him from the chamber with a rush, and hurried him for execution beyond the northern city gate." The crisis had come. The crucial fact in controversy was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. They would have refuted it if they could, but they could not, and so there was nothing for them to do but to surrender in penitence to Jesus, or rush madly and blindly on to the doom of them that "do always resist the Holy Ghost."

**4.—The death of Stephen.**—Once more the Jewish Sanhedrin commits itself to murder. Jesus they crucified outside the city; now they stone Stephen, too, outside the gate. We will not dwell on the fact of the stoning, but rather on the beautiful and touching spirit in which Stephen met his death. (i) Calling on God. The petition he made was twofold,—one for himself and one for his murderers. For himself he cried, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Jesus had committed his spirit into the hands of his Father when he was dying (Luke xxiii, 46), and now Stephen commits his spirit into the hands of the Lord Jesus. Blessed assurance and privilege, to be able so to commit our spirits, and to know that the charge will not be declined. His other prayer was for his murderers. Who but a soul filled with the Holy Ghost, with the love and spirit of Jesus Christ himself, could make such a prayer as this? Socrates died without fear or bitterness, but not with a prayer on his lips for his murderers. In this, also, Stephen imitated his Lord, who, on the cross, prayed for his enemies. (ii) "And when he had said this he fell asleep." There seems to have been no conscious pain in his death. His exalted spirit triumphed over the weakness of the body;

the vision of glory which he had seen, the expectation of being speedily with his Lord, left no place in his soul for consciousness of pain.

“He fell asleep in Christ his Lord ; he gave to him to keep  
The soul his great love had redeemed, then calmly went to sleep.  
And as a tired bird folds its wings sure of the morning light,  
He laid him down in trusting faith and dreaded not the night.”

## II.—PERSECUTION AND DISPERSION OF BELIEVERS.

The Church has now entered upon a new era. A furious persecution broke out against the Church, which resulted in its dispersion from Jerusalem, except the apostles, who stayed and braved the storm, holding the ground for the testimony of Jesus and the resurrection. That point must not be given up in Jerusalem. In the story, there are four particulars which we may but briefly notice.

**1.—The persecution of the disciples.**—Jesus had warned his disciples of this. The persecution which now broke out was under the leadership of the young Pharisee Saul, who is thrice mentioned in this narrative. First, as standing by while the witnesses stoned Stephen, and suffering them to deposit their clothes at his feet; second, as giving his consent to his death; and, finally, making havoc of the Church, when he entered into every house, and hailing men and women, committed them to prison. He inaugurated the first St. Bartholomew's day in the Church.

**2.—The scattering of the Church.**—The very thing which the persecutors sought to accomplish by their persecution, was the thing wherein they utterly failed; in that the very thing which they wished to prevent they brought to pass. The persecution, instead of stamping out the Gospel, scattered it abroad. Stephen's death stopped his preaching in Jerusalem, but it was the means of multiplying preachers a thousand-fold. How little the persecutors imagined what would be the effect of their persecution! Perhaps they thought that the prompt stoning of Stephen would silence the voice of every believer in Jerusalem. We are sure that neither Peter nor John, nor the other apostles who remained in Jerusalem, were silent. We know that, instead of silencing the preachers of the word, Stephen's death awakened a multitude of new voices, and sent them broadcast over the world. Truly the word of God is not, and cannot, be bound. Again the echoes of the second psalm come to our ears: “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?” The kings of the earth themselves and the rulers take

counsel together, saying, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." Instead of hindering the witnesses for Jesus, this persecution really set them free, and started the Church on its grand missionary work. Again comes the sound of laughter from heaven: "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall have them in derision."

**3.—Everywhere preaching the word.**—The powerful voice of Stephen is hushed in death. It sank into a sweet prayer, whispered with his last breath, for his murderers. He was stoned to death for preaching the word of life, and now from heaven he looks down, and sees a thousand or more of his brethren rushing into the breach, and a thousand voices preaching instead of his one, and that not only in Jerusalem, but everywhere. How wonderful are the ways of God!

## XXXVI.

## PHILIP PREACHING AT SAMARIA.—Acts viii, 5–25.

(5) Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. (6) And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. (7) For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. (8) And there was great joy in that city. (9) But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: (10) To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. (11) And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. (12) But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. (13) Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. (14) Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: (15) Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (16) (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) (17) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. (18) And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, (19) Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. (20) But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. (21) Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. (22) Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. (23) For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. (24) Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me. (25) And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.—Acts viii, 5–25.

The fury of persecution was still at its height in Jerusalem, but, like the wind that scatters the seed, so had persecution scattered abroad the word of God. Among the scattered disciples was Philip, one of the seven deacons. Stephen had fallen, but his place was promptly taken by one of his brother deacons, who went forward and immediately filled the gap. This was good militant form; the ranks were broken but for a moment; they were not breached.

These deacons were chosen to administer the money of the common fund to the poor of the Church; but the Holy Spirit had higher work, at least for some of them, and sent them to administer that which was of more worth than money to the perishing souls about them. Philip was one of the distinguished men of the early Church. He was a great preacher, he was a faithful servant of the Holy Spirit, and his mantle fell upon his children, for he had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. (xxi, 9.) We do not know who took the places of Stephen and Philip in the diaconate, but we are certain that they were both called to higher service. Would God all the deacons we choose might be called to do such work! We might easily manage the temporal if the spiritual interests of the kingdom could be pushed forward with such power as they were in the hands of these two deacons. Perhaps, if our deacons were as well chosen as those first seven were, there might now and again appear among them a Stephen and a Philip.

### I.—PREACHING CHRIST IN SAMARIA.

Samaria was the old capital of the ten-tribe kingdom, the beautiful city of Ahab. After the return from the captivity, it had fallen into evil repute with the orthodox Jews, because in the meantime it had been peopled by a mixed race, half heathen and half Jew. They were not worshipers of idols, but of Jehovah, and clung to the law of Moses with the same tenacity as did the Jews, boasting also their descent from the father of the Jewish people. There was, however, bitter jealousy between them and the Jews, and the Jews refused to have any dealings with them on any account. During our Lord's ministry, he had occasion once to pass through Samaria, and there he spoke with one of the poorest, most destitute, and needy of their people (John iv), and surprised her by his courtesy and lack of sectarian prejudice, filling her with joy by the "gift of God," which was indeed "eternal life through Jesus Christ." Out of this mongrel community Christ obtained many disciples. When our Lord left commission to his disciples, he particularly commanded them to bear witness of him in Samaria next, after having preached the Gospel in Jerusalem (Acts i, 8), and from thence to proceed to the uttermost parts of the earth. Samaria was a sort of bridge over which the Gospel was to pass from Jew to Gentile.

1.—**The spiritual condition of the Samaritans.**—The nature of the miracles and the presence of the great sorcerer in that city gives us an allegorical insight into the spiritual condition of the people.

(i) They were diseased. Palsies and lameness, and no doubt all manner of diseases, afflicted the people. In this they were worse off than other people in degree alone, not in kind. Who is not diseased? What an awful disease is sin! It renders us blind in soul, lame in our walk, palsied in all our actions; it makes us to shake with uncertain purpose and tremble with fear. Certainly the miracles of healing, which marked the ministry of Jesus and confirmed that of the apostles, were well chosen in order to mirror forth the mightier work of the Spirit upon the souls of men. (ii) They were possessed with devils. In those days demons took possession of men and led them about at their will. It was a common form of evil. Speculation has always been rife as to what exactly was the nature of this "possession," and as to whether it continued after Christ's ministry on earth and his first great victory over the demons. It is certain that many are still "taken captive of the devil at his will" in our day, whether or not their souls are the actual dwelling-places of the demons. If anger, wrath, malice, envy, hypocrisy, the lusts of the flesh, and the love of money do not represent so many demons possessing the soul, they are at least passions smoldering in the sinful nature which the Evil Spirit fans into flames of consuming power, and uses to lead men down to destruction and perdition. (iii) Then they were a prey to the sorceries of men like Simon Magus, who gave himself out to be some great one and deceived many. If there be doubt as to the reality of demoniacal possession in our day, there is no doubt as to the multitude of delusions which possess the minds of men. Philosophies, falsely so called, by which men professing themselves to be wise become fools; superstitions of all kinds; spiritualistic and theosophic. So easily are men deluded and deceived, that almost any clever man can start a sect of religion and draw away followers after him. Men and women who find it impossible, and for them unreasonable, to believe in Jesus Christ, have not the least difficulty in taking up with many of the most absurd and extravagant philosophical theories in both science and religion. And into such a mass as this, disturbed and unclean, the Gospel ever precipitates itself.

**2.—Preaching Christ.**—Philip went down to Samaria and began his work. The name of Christ was not unfamiliar to them, for as a people they also were expecting the Messiah to come (John iv, 25); besides, as already mentioned, Jesus himself had been to Samaria, and a great many of the men of the city had accepted him as the Messiah; but now Philip preaches him, that is, sets him forth according to the Scriptures as the promised one, relates to them



how he was crucified according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God; how he was raised again; how now in heaven, at the right hand of God, he administers the grace of forgiveness and life. In a word, Philip repeats the same great truths with which Peter and Stephen awakened and aroused the Jews. He had the same message that Saul, after his conversion, had for the people of Damascus, to whom he showed that Jesus is the Son of God. (ix, 20.) He did not seem to concern himself much about their false doctrines and the various controversies with which their time was much taken up. He seems not to have noticed in any way either the presence or the teaching of Simon; but simply contented himself with preaching Christ. This is the true method. "I am determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified," said the great apostle, many years after this. Even he had to learn this lesson after suffering some humiliating defeats in controversy with the heathen over natural religion and vain philosophies. Let us also learn to adhere to this simple line of teaching and believing.

**3.—The effect of Philip's preaching.**—"And the people with one accord gave heed to those things which Philip spake." This is the first step toward conversion. If men will only hear and then give heed to the things of the Gospel, "concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ," it will not be long before they "believe the preaching" and submit to baptism, "both men and women." This was the course of things among the Samaritans. The word entered into their hearts, and they believed and were baptized, gladly declaring by that act that they received not only the word, but Jesus himself, as Saviour and Lord. We do not hear that any of them raised the question of baptism, as to whether it was essential to salvation or not, but at once and naturally submitted, not as a hardship or a cross, but as a privilege and a joy, thus to take upon themselves the name of Jesus.

**4.—The after-effect of the preaching and believing.**—"And there was great joy in that city." Ah, Samaria, your day of degradation is past. The Jews may have despised you, diseases may have wasted you, devils may have possessed you, and sorcerers may have bewitched you with all manner of delusions, but now Jesus the Christ has come among you and brought to you the good news of God's love and mercy, bestowing upon you forgiveness and the gift of life. Well might there be joy in that city. Joy is one of the striking characteristics of the new life which Jesus came into the world to give. At his birth we are told that the angels declared,

“Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.” (Luke ii, 10.) When Jesus was parted from his disciples and taken up into heaven, the disciples “returned to Jerusalem with great joy.” (Luke xxiv, 52.) When Peter healed the lame man at the temple gate, we are told that he “leaping up, stood and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God.” (iii, 8.) The Kingdom of Heaven is said to consist of “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. xiv, 17); and the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace. (Gal. v, 22.) Paul closes his prayer for the Romans with these words: “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy.” (Rom. xv, 13.) When David was recovered from his backsliding and sin, he besought the Lord to restore unto him the joy of his salvation” (Ps. li, 12), as if he could not live without that blessed fruit of the Spirit. Joy in the individual heart and in the Church is always a sign of the presence of the Spirit. I have noticed, throughout many years of evangelistic work, that wherever there is a great and glad spirit of song, there are sure to be many conversions, and where the people will not or do not sing there are few turned from darkness to light. It is not the singing that converts, but the singing, when it is hearty and glad, marks the presence of the Spirit. Now, in Samaria “there was great joy.” Joy in the hearts of individual believers, joy in many families whither the Gospel had come with saving power, and joy in the whole city when transformed by the gladdening presence of Jesus.

## II.—THE VISIT OF PETER AND JOHN.

By and by the news of this great revival in Samaria reached the ears of the apostles and brethren at Jerusalem. They at once took counsel together, and decided that some of them ought to go down and see the work, giving any needed help in the way of encouragement or further instruction. There is no evidence that they were moved by either doubt as to the genuineness of the work or by apostolic envy, as has been suggested. The apostles in that day were the natural leaders of the Church, the divinely appointed witnesses of the things concerning Jesus and the resurrection. Philip had not been set apart to preach, and the whole movement was new and unexpected. Their mission was one of inquiry and fellowship.

**1.—The selection of Peter and John.**—These two men seemed to be the leaders of the apostolic band. Peter in particular was the most prominent as a preacher. Through his word the first great in-gathering had taken place; he, with John, had been the first to suffer for

Christ. Yet it will be noted that there was no divinely ordered primacy; for these two men were selected by their brethren to go down to Samaria. They did not take it upon themselves to go, but were sent. Fancy the pope (who claims to be Peter's successor) thus being sent down to a neighboring city, to look into the work of God, and to bear the fraternal greetings of the brethren at Rome to a gathering of new converts!

**2.—What they did in Samaria.**—“When they were come down (they) prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost.” How beautiful this is! They did not begin by assuming authority over them, or putting on high ecclesiastical airs, but “prayed for them.” This is a true mark of an apostle. It is like the Master himself, who “prayed for his disciples,” and committed them to God. Paul prayed for the Colossians; he prayed for the Ephesians; he ceased not to pray for his converts day and night, even with tears; he prayed for the Romans without ceasing, though he had never seen them; and, moreover, he was not above asking the brethren to pray for him and the other brethren, who, with him, were doing missionary work among the heathen. In this case there was conspicuous cause for prayer.

**3.—They laid their hands on them.**—After which they received the Holy Ghost. We do not know why they had not received the Holy Ghost before. The Holy Ghost here spoken of certainly was that special and peculiar baptism of power and enthusiasm which came upon the Church in its first and earlier days. We are not to understand that these Samaritan disciples had not been regenerated, for with their faith came also the regeneration of the soul (John i, 11, 12); nor that the fruit of the Spirit was not with them and in them, for they were full of joy. They had not received that special gift which was to set them on fire with a holy zeal for God and Christ, and for the souls of men. Men may believe to the saving of their souls, and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and yet not receive the Holy Ghost, as a special gift of power for service. To be saved is one thing, and to be saved and baptized with the Holy Ghost is another thing. There is as much difference between the two conditions as there is between a grate full of coals and that same grate with those same coals set on fire. The great deficiency in the Church to-day is that we are not baptized with the Holy Ghost. We have received the word and we have been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus; we are saved, and our doctrine is all right; but it is not on fire in our hearts, and we therefore have no power over others. Would God some apostles might come and pray for us, and

lay their hands on us, that we might receive the Holy Ghost! But since there are no apostles still on earth, perhaps if we should get together and pray for ourselves and for each other, waiting on God and pleading the promise that is "for you and for your children," the Spirit might fall on us as on the disciples at the beginning. Is it not worth seeking after, this almost lost gift in the Church?

### III.—SIMON AND THE APOSTLES.

In this episode of Simon among the believers at Samaria, there is but another illustration of the presence and malicious meddling of Satan in the work of God. If possible, he will spoil the Church at Samaria with a Simon Magus, as he tried to spoil the Church at Jerusalem with an Ananias and a Sapphira.

**1.—Simon as a believer.**—This Simon was a very influential man in Samaria. He had aforetime bewitched the people with sorcery, and deceived many. When he saw the effect of Philip's preaching and noted the wonderful miracles which he wrought, not by sorcery, but by a power new and unknown to him, he was greatly impressed. He did not seek Christ as a Saviour, but rather joined himself to the believers as a matter of prudence and policy. The tide was running that way, and if he was to keep his hold on the people of Samaria, he must swim with this new current; so he also professed himself a believer and joined the disciples. Here is another case of tare-sowing. Will it corrupt the Church, or will God save the Church again, as he did at Jerusalem, from the baleful influence of this ambitious, scheming hypocrite? We shall see. But, in the meantime, we are sure that many a Simon has since then entered the Church through motives similar to those which moved this man. Trade, social position, the popular drift, professional advantage,—a score of other selfish motives, prompt men to identify themselves with the Church when it is in a position of favor and influence.

**2.—The cloven foot.**—"And when Simon saw that, through the laying on of the apostles' hands, the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money. What for? That he might also be able to communicate this great power. Here was the cloven foot. He did not pray that he might himself be baptized with the Holy Ghost, but that he might be empowered to use and control the gift. His idea was that anything might be had for money. This was his own master-passion, and he supposed that he might even buy God for money. At least he had no thought but that the apostles might be bribed into

the bestowal of this great gift of God for money. Of course there was much ignorance here, but there was more sordidness. However, when we remember that even Satan thought to bribe the Son of God himself into recognition of him by the gift of all the kingdoms of the world, we are not surprised that Simon should have thought that he might secure any benefit or advantage, which was to be derived from Christ, for money. Money is the god and power of this world; and men who do not know God have a hard time to learn that it is nothing; that as for any real or lasting power, there is none in it. "Riches profiteth not in the day of wrath."

**3.—The incorruptible apostles.**—Peter met the attempted bribery with indignation. "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money." In this reply there was more than indignation; there was a threat. As money would, in the final judgment of values in this world, perish, so would he too perish who had attempted to use it in bartering for God's gifts. God's gifts are not for sale, and he who would come by them otherwise than as God has offered them, will perish. Let all hypocrites take warning. Let men who have entered the Church, supposing that they have peculiar rights and privileges because of their money, take warning. Let churches who rely upon money instead of the Holy Ghost, take warning. There is danger ahead for all such.

**4.—The faithful minister.**—Peter's indignation was not of a personal nature. The insult offered to him he readily forgave. His indignation was against the man who had insulted God. Yet there was a sense of pity in his heart for this wretched man, which led him to say other things to him. (i) He exposed the vanity of his pretended faith. Simon had numbered himself with the believers, but he had neither part nor lot in the matter. His heart was not right in the sight of God, or he would never have thought of making such an offer as this to Peter. The apostle told him frankly that he was yet "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." As Peter had been gifted to see the hypocrisy of Ananias, so he instantly detected the falsity of Simon's profession. Yet no supernatural gift was required here. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Here was fruit which showed a heart yet corrupt, and not right with God. (ii) Still, he would have even this wretched sinner saved, so he adds a word of encouragement. "Repent, and pray, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." It may be that Peter saw that there was much ignorance mixed with this wickedness, and while he gave no space for Ananias in which to re-

pent, he did in this case hold out the hope of repentance and forgiveness. While there is life there is hope. Let every man therefore know, however wicked, that if God has still spared life, there is room for repentance.

**5.—The frightened sorcerer.**—There was that about the manner and the startling words of Peter that awakened in Simon's heart, if not repentance, at least terror. He besought Peter to pray for him, that none of the dreadful things which the apostle had spoken might come upon him. He was still impenitent, and only desired to escape the penalty of sin. This is a low form of repentance; it may lead up higher, but if it remains in such a state it will never lead to Christ. Repentance is toward God, and not toward punishment, and is always followed by faith in Jesus Christ. A true penitent may indeed ask another to pray for him, but he will, also, as did the publican, cry out to God on his own behalf, "Be merciful to me a sinner."

**6.—The return to Jerusalem.**—The apostles were greatly cheered by what they had seen in Samaria. After finishing their mission there they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the Gospel in many of the villages and towns in Samaria on their way back. Thus one good work leads on to more service. If Samaria had not received the word, these villages would never have had the benefit of the apostolic preaching which thus came into their midst.

## XXXVII.

## PHILIP AND THE EUNUCH.—Acts viii, 26-40.

(26) And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south, unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. (27) And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, (28) Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. (29) Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. (30) And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? (31) And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. (32) The place of the Scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: (33) In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. (34) And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? (35) Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. (36) And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? (37) And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. (38) And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. (39) And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. (40) But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cesarea.—Acts viii, 26-40.

How rapidly the word of God is spreading! The disciples are multiplying in Jerusalem by the thousand; even a great multitude of priests have become obedient unto the faith. Persecution has sent the Gospel forth into Samaria, which has now been thoroughly evangelized by Philip; the apostles have returned to Jerusalem, evangelizing the villages of Samaria by the way; and now the Gospel makes a great stride, coursing down toward Africa by way of the desert, and there finding lodgment in the heart of a man who will carry it with him into Ethiopia, whence it will spread until Africa shall become a chief seat of the word of God. We find ourselves still under the influence of the extraordinary ministrations of the unseen world. It was the angel of the Lord that spake unto Philip

and bade him go down to the desert. It was the Spirit of the Lord that bade him go near and join himself to the chariot when he had gone there; and it was the Spirit of the Lord that caught Philip away to Azotus when he had finished his work with the eunuch. These are some advantages which we do not possess now, but then we have others which the early disciples did not possess. The angel of the Lord and the Spirit of the Lord taught and directed them in some more immediate and direct way, it is true, but we have now a full and complete record of all their acts, and of the will of God in respect of men; and so, by patient loving and obedient study of the word of God we may be sufficiently guided in our work to dispense with the ministry of angels. The method of God from the beginning has been to withdraw from our sight the supernatural helpers and leave us to the guidance of the word, as it is illuminated by the Spirit's enlightening aid. It must be remembered, however, that no essential element of power has been changed since those days. It was not the angel of the Lord nor the Spirit of the Lord acting independently on the eunuch's mind that led him to Christ, or that gave Philip his message. The whole process in the conversion of this man was just the same as that which operates to-day. Reading the Scriptures, being taught by some one who has gone before in knowledge; question and answer; glad confession; prompt obedience and going on his way rejoicing; all this is the familiar method and movement of the Spirit of God in the conversion of men to-day. In reading the Scriptures, let us always seek for that which remains of the supernatural after divesting the story of outward miraculous manifestations. It is not the sound as of a rushing, mighty wind, or the cloven tongues as of fire which we want; but the power of the Spirit. It is not the shaking of the house, but the moving of our hearts. It is not the opening of the heavens and a visible sight of Jesus standing at the right hand of God, but the power to make that unseen fact a substantial reality to our souls. We do not need an angel to come down from heaven to open our prison doors, but we do need to know that there are angels sent forth to minister to us, and the power given to abide in prison cheerfully, if needs be, for Christ's sake. We do not need an angel to come in person to direct us to the desert or to the city, but a willing and ready heart and mind to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, according to the last command of Jesus.



### I.—THE EARNEST INQUIRER.

This eunuch always recalls to my mind a picture of Nathaniel sitting under his fig-tree searching the Scriptures. (John i, 50.) They were men of the same type; both earnest inquirers, searching after the truth in the only place where truth is to be found. We may be sure that such men, in all countries and of every race and condition, are directly under the eye of God, who is seeking such to worship him.

**1.—Who he was.**—The record tells us, in a very brief biography, who this man was. (i) “A man of Ethiopia.” Here, then, is the first Gentile convert. Cornelius is usually spoken of as being the first convert from the Gentile world to Christ. But the conversion of this man preceded that of the noble Roman by the length of two chapters. The Scriptures have prepared us for the entrance of this eunuch into the kingdom. “Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands to God.” (Ps. lxxviii, 31.) Here, indeed, is the Romance of Grace. Egypt had been the land of oppression wherein God’s ancient people had been made to serve with rigor; Egypt had been ruled over by that haughty king who said, “I know not Jehovah, neither will I let Israel go.” Now God returns good for all this evil, and gathers the first sheaf in the harvest of the Gentile world from that land. This is like all God’s gracious doings. Among the first Christian disciples was a man who could not tolerate the idea that Jesus was the Christ because he came from Nazareth, a despised town of a despised province; the first convert to Christ after his condemnation, even while he was being crucified, was a malefactor; a fitting reply to the rulers who had numbered their Messiah with the transgressors. The greatest convert Jesus ever had was Saul of Tarsus, who, as leader of the persecuting party, stood by consenting to the death of Stephen. The records of grace abound with such romantic touches as this. (ii) He was an eunuch of great authority. For the most part the early disciples of Jesus were men and women of obscure position in the world. Not many mighty or noble were called in those days, and not many now; but here we see among the very first a man of great authority, the treasurer of the Queen of Ethiopia. The kings of the earth and the rulers set themselves together against Christ, but he wins his disciples from among these very ranks of the highest. The mightiest in the land are made to bow themselves humbly before Jesus, not by a bitter and forced constraint, but by a sweet, gentle, and glad willingness under such grace as his. (iii) He was a proselyte (some

say of the gate). He had, like many other devout men at this time, turned with loathing and disgust away from the corruptions and gross superstitions of heathenism, and naturally had turned to Jerusalem as the place of hope. He had been up to Jerusalem to worship, and was now on his way home. In his hand he carried a copy of the Jewish Scriptures, and was reading. Here we have another bridge from Judaism to the Gentile world. We have seen the gulf spanned once by the Samaritans; here we see it spanned at a longer reach by a Gentile proselyte. God had in wonderful fashion prepared the way for the Gospel to flow out from Jerusalem to the far-off world of the heathen. The Jews were already scattered over the whole earth; their synagogues were in every city; Roman governors and centurions were located in Palestine and quartered in Jerusalem, just where they might come to know by eye-witness the facts concerning Jesus; proselytes were coming up to all the feasts at a time when the activity of the apostles and the early Church was at boiling-point. Most probably this man had heard much of the Christians while he was in Jerusalem, and, knowing that they founded their faith on the testimony of the Scriptures, was reading them the more diligently. (iv) He was now on his way home, traveling, as he supposed, alone; but he was under escort of God, who would not suffer him to remain in ignorance and confusion, even though for that purpose he had to take his principal evangelist away from a populous city and crowded audiences, to teach him and lead him into the way of life.

**2.—What he was doing.**—To an ordinary mind, the most noticeable thing in connection with this eunuch would have been his magnificent chariot, the fine appointments of his camels, and the splendors of his retinue. That he was reading a piece of brown and soiled parchment would not have excited any special interest. But, as a matter of fact, his chariot and retinue were of insignificant concern in comparison with those leaves of papyrus. "And sitting in his chariot he read Esaias the prophet." He was in the way to Christ, for the prophet was one of the chief witnesses of Christ. (John i, 55; v, 39; Luke xxiv, 27, 44.) Blessed are they that read the words of this prophecy. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. This inquirer was both reading and hearing the word, for, according to Oriental custom, he was reading aloud to himself. Thus he was applying two of his physical senses to the word. It was this that enabled Philip to know what he was reading. I think it is perfectly safe to say that no man ever earnestly and sincerely set himself to read the word of God, with a view not to establish his own

notions or to find errors and flaws therein, but to find out what God meant, who did not in the end find him of whom and to whom all the Scriptures give testimony. (John v, 39; I. Pet. i, 10, 11; Rev. xix, 10.)

**3.—His character as an inquirer.**—Several beautiful touches of character are brought out in this brief biography. (i) He was an humble-minded man. When the stranger came near, and running along beside his chariot, courteously asked him if he understood what he was reading, he did not look down with scorn and contempt, and bid his interrogator to mind his own business, and not to ask such questions of his betters; but humbly and simply replied: "How can I, except some man should guide me?" He was not afraid to confess his ignorance. The natural man understandeth not the things of the Spirit of God, and usually is not willing to understand them; but when a man is already under the power of the Spirit, as was this man, he is not ashamed of his ignorance, nor is he offended when a Christian, be he who he may, offers courteously to help him. I once ventured to speak to a very great man on religious matters, and asked him if he were a Christian. I did so with some trepidation. He, however, very courteously allowed me to lead him on in the conversation. At the close of the talk I expressed the hope that he had not considered me impertinent in so abruptly approaching him on the subject. He grasped me by the hand, with tears standing in his eyes, and said: "Don't ever hesitate to speak to any man about his soul. I have been longing for twenty years to have some Christian speak to me. I believe there are thousands of men in this city who are in the same condition that I am; carrying an uneasy conscience and a great burden on their souls; not courageous enough to seek instruction, yet who would willingly receive it." (ii) We are prepared to find the second characteristic. He was teachable. "And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him." Here was a man in earnest. The only reason why he should desire company on that occasion was that he might be helped. There was that tone in Philip's question which led the eunuch to believe that he could help him. The place in the Scriptures where he was reading was of all places therein the very heart and core of Old Testament prophecy concerning the atoning work of Christ; the wonderful fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. Having pointed out to Philip what he had been reading, he puts a question to him: "Of whom spake the prophet? of himself or of some other man?" This reveals that he was both very ignorant of the Scriptures, and at the same time in great mental confusion, as most men are when first awak-

ened; for such are like blind men who have suddenly received their sight. They see men as trees walking. Everything is new and strange to them. The Scriptures suddenly take on them new meaning; or at least they seem suddenly filled with a new light which the freshly awakened reader cannot understand. In such case there is no better way than to ask questions of some man who does understand what is written. I shall always remember with grateful joy when, under deepest conviction of sin, I was joined by a man of God, who opened up to me this very Scripture and showed me how Jesus was "wounded for my transgressions and bruised for my iniquities." Here again we see the true humility of this man, together with his real earnestness. (iii) He was a man of decision of character. After Philip had expounded the Scripture to him, and he saw clearly its bearing upon Jesus as the Saviour, and what, too, was his own duty as well as privilege, he took advantage of the first opportunity to confess Christ. "See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" As baptism was a form of confession, the evangelist was not willing to administer that rite until he was satisfied that his inquirer was intelligent. Hence his question to him concerning the nature of his faith. The answer came quick and intelligent: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." This was crucial. This was intelligent. This was to the point. He did not say, "I will continue my journey and think over what you have told me"; then and there he confessed Jesus Christ, and declared himself a believer. (iv) But he was also an obedient disciple. He was not content with mere lip confession, but he desired simply and promptly to confess Christ, in Christ's own appointed way. He did not say, "I will defer my baptism to a more convenient season," but then and there, at the first sight of water, he wished to discharge this commandment and put all questions of discipleship behind his back. So he commanded the chariot to come to a stop, stepped down with Philip into the water, and was baptized. This promptness of decision and readiness to obedience is in sharp contrast with the action of many would-be disciples now. They wish to "think it over," and inquire if "baptism is essential to salvation," and whether "it is not possible to be a Christian without making an open confession"; in short, to have recourse to every kind of device in order to secure to themselves the maximum of benefit from Christ with the minimum of obedience and honor on their part. Our souls grow weary of the shifts which certain modern inquirers make in order to avoid open confession and prompt and simple obedience.

**4.—A happy convert.**—"And he went on his way rejoicing." As

soon as he had been baptized the Spirit caught away Philip, and the eunuch was left alone, so far as an earthly teacher was concerned. But he was not alone. He had the Scriptures in his hand, the Spirit of God in his heart, and the invisible presence of Jesus with him. Moreover, he had the happy consciousness that the whole matter between himself and the Lord was settled; settled in the Lord's way and according to his word. Happy convert! Happy disciple! He went on his way rejoicing. God gave him this seal of the Spirit that should accompany every warrant of conversion, even joy in the Holy Ghost, which is the portion of a true confessor and an obedient disciple.

## II.—A FAITHFUL MINISTER.

It probably cost Philip a little struggle to give up his most prosperous work in Samaria, to be sent out into a desert place on an errand, particular in direction, but vague and undefined as to purpose. He was, in fact, sent forth with sealed orders. It was not till he reached the desert and overtook the eunuch in his chariot, that he knew for what intent he had been taken away from his great labors. How many of God's servants have since then been sent off into far countries, not knowing whither they went or why, but only conscious that they were pressed by the Spirit to go. One and another has said: "I must go to India"; "I must go to Africa"; "I must go to China"; and so has God been sending his messengers forth till the whole world is covered with missionaries of the cross. These have found their work when they have come to their appointed place. The faithful servant does not wait till he knows all the purpose of God, but is content simply to know what he is to do, without asking why.

**1.—Preaching Jesus.**—After Philip had joined himself to the chariot, had been invited to sit with the eunuch, and had learned the particular Scripture which was engaging his thoughts, he "began at that same Scripture and preached unto him Jesus." This is the old story of apostolic ministry—preaching Jesus. How the expressions setting forth this fact run through the Acts: "preaching the Word"; "preaching the Gospel"; "preaching peace by Jesus Christ"; "preached Jesus unto him"; "ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ"; "preached the Lord Jesus"; "Jesus whom Paul preached"; "according to the preaching of Jesus." Philip had a grand text in the fifty-third of Isaiah. He could not have had a better or a fuller. The written word in this case prepared the way for the preached word, as it does even now. He is but a sorry

preacher who does not draw his sermon from the written word. I once heard of a great preacher who apologized for omitting to read the Scriptures, on the ground that his sermon was rather long, and that he had "to leave something out." To which the worthy old-fashioned deacon, to whom the remark was made, replied: "Well, Doctor, the next time you preach for us and have to leave something out, give us the word of God and leave out some of your own stuff." We have not the sermon of Philip, but it is not difficult to follow his lines of thought and teaching from the occasional hints here and there throughout this story. First he must have told the eunuch of whom the prophet spake, even of Jesus, and then proceeded to show him that this Jesus was none other than the Son of God; for the eunuch afterward confessed that he believed Jesus to be in very truth the Son of God. Second, we may be sure that he made good use of Isaiah's word to open up to him God's method of salvation through the sacrificial sufferings of Jesus, who died for us, according to the Scriptures, and was buried and raised again. All apostolic preaching included this, for Paul tells us distinctly that this was the Gospel which he received, and which he preached. (I. Cor. xv, 1-4.) Third, naturally he detailed to him all the leading facts in the life of Jesus: what he taught, what he did, and how marvelously he lived in this world; how he was "cut off from the land of the living," by the Jews, and left without a generation according to the flesh. No doubt he further set forth how God was even now raising up a spiritual generation, numbering already many thousands of souls. Fourth, he told how that, after the Jews had crucified Jesus, God had raised him from the dead and exalted him at his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins. Fifth, then he must have instructed him in the nature of faith, repentance, and baptism, and shown him how this latter ordinance was the divinely appointed method of declaring his faith and setting forth his union with Christ in death and resurrection. The Gospel is very simple; but very full. Happy is the man who has learned to preach it effectively as Philip.

**2.—A careful minister.**—The eunuch was an apt and eager disciple. He was ready at once to accept the Gospel, and desired to be baptized as soon as he saw water. Yet Philip was not willing to baptize him until he was sure of both his sincerity and intelligence. Therefore, he interposed with a condition as to the depth of his faith. When the answer came back, clear, ringing, and certain, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," there was no more doubt in the evangelist's mind. He was then as prompt to baptize as he was a

moment before reluctant. Our zeal for converts ought not to run away with our caution; nor should our caution be so excessive as to prevent real believers from promptly going forward in the pathway of obedience.

**3.—Away to other fields.**—Immediately on the eunuch's baptism, the Spirit caught Philip away. Perhaps this was by a kind of rapture of the body, as in the case of Enoch and Elijah, though we may not be certain of this; at any rate, his work with the eunuch was done, and God removed his servant to another field of usefulness. It might have been a temptation to him to have stayed too long in the company of a great and rich man, who would no doubt have invited him down to Egypt and offered to bestow great benefits upon him; so God took Philip out of the way of this temptation and set him down at Azotus. He did not tarry there, but, "passing through, he preached in all the cities until he came to Cæsarea." Thus did the busy and untiring evangelist go on his way; from Samaria to the desert; from the desert to Azotus; and on his return journey preached in all the cities. Let us, too, follow in his footsteps, so far at least as simple obedience, faithful preaching, and tireless zeal for God is concerned.

XXXVIII.

REVIEW OR OPTIONAL LESSON.



## XXXIX.

## THE LORD'S SUPPER PROFANED.—I. Cor. xi, 20-34.

(20) When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. (21) For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. (22) What! have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not. (23) For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread: (24) And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. (25) After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. (26) For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. (27) Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. (28) But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. (29) For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. (30) For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. (31) For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. (32) But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. (33) Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. (34) And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.—I. Cor. xi, 20-34.

Corinth was a wealthy city; in fact, the commercial metropolis of Greece. Like other cities of great wealth, there were in it a large number of extremely poor people. The habits of the wealthy were luxurious and excessive in every way. They were particularly given to feasting and the gratification of bodily appetites. There was a custom, however, in Greece, and particularly in this city, of forming guilds, or clubs, in which the rich and the poor were alike members. These clubs dined together daily, each member contributing his portion of food and wine to the common meal. The rich would send more, and of course the poor would send less; but a common distribution was made, so that all fared alike at the meal. This was one of the forms which charity took in those days. It was a community of food, if not of goods. The Church at Corinth was made up of all classes of people, the rich and poor, the high and low, the clean and

unclean. The Gospel had been preached to all, and received by members out of every class. Saved, these Corinthians may have been, in the sense of being accepted of God and justified by the Spirit on the ground of the atonement (vi, 11), but sanctified they certainly were not, in the sense of having been purged from all their old sins. Much of their heathen life and habits clung to them even after they were converted. The two epistles of Paul to this Church show how far short they were from being what they ought to have been. Yet it is not fair to visit them with too harsh a judgment, especially as we ourselves, in this nineteenth century, live in houses composed very largely of glass. The moderation, wisdom, firmness, and love of the apostle in dealing with this Church, is most beautiful, and should be a lesson to us all on the point of our Church relations. He does not hesitate to remind them that some of them have been liars, adulterers, covetous, extortioners, revilers, and all of them idolaters; not a few of them even guilty of worse and more degrading sins. Some of these sins were still practiced by some of their number. One man, at least, was so notorious that he had been judged and cast out of the fellowship of the Church; yet even in this case Paul's hope was that he might be recovered. There were strifes, divisions, parties, heresies, and all sorts of contentions in the Church. These things rose to the surface as dross rises to the surface of a smelting-pot. Among the gravest and most unchristlike abuses that had crept in, was that which gathered about the Lord's Supper. The Corinthian guild fashion had been adapted by the Church to its new conditions and relations, and thus the whole Church became a club for the purpose of eating together daily, according to the fashion of the community. This feast was known in the early Church (for it seems to have spread among all the churches), as the Agapè, or Love Feast (Jude 12); and such it was at the beginning. The Church came together once a day, each member bringing food as they had it, and a common table was spread; the rich bringing more, the poor less, or none at all. Sometimes at the beginning and sometimes at the close of this feast the ordinance of the Lord's Supper was celebrated.

### I.—THE ABUSE OF THE FEAST.

It was in connection with this feast of charity that the Lord's Supper became profaned and lost its significance.

1.—**The Supper turned into a carnal feast.**—The Agapè was not the Lord's Supper, but was celebrated in such close connection

therewith, that the two finally merged into one. Instead of a brief separate eating of a piece of bread and drinking of a sip of wine at the close of the feast, as our Lord had done with his disciples at the time of its institution at the close of the Paschal Feast, they combined the two, and finally made no distinction. They simply came together to eat. "What! have ye not houses to eat and drink in?" This was the indignant question of the apostle, by which he characterized their feasting. Instead of remembering the Lord, they were simply using the Church as a kind of refectory or club-house, where they resorted daily to satisfy their hunger and please their palates. To such an excess was this eating and drinking carried, that not a few of them left the table "drunken" with both food and drink.

**2.—The Church divided into social cliques.**—The worst forms of selfishness were being developed in the Church. In Jerusalem, James tells us in his epistle that the rich seated themselves in the best places, and the poor were relegated to the lowest; that when a rich man came in, having on gay apparel and a gold ring, all honor was paid to him, but the poor man was despised. We think we can detect some faint traces of this abuse even in our modern churches. In Corinth the distinction between rich and poor took on another form. The Agapè was no longer a common meal. The rich would now come in with their own basket of food and wine, and set it down before themselves, and, without waiting for others, or distributing their supplies, would begin at once to eat. Small parties, or groups of twos or threes, or even more, would collect together for the purpose of eating; whereas many of the poor, who had been wont to share the common meal with their richer brethren, were left without anything at all, and went away hungry. Thus two great offenses were committed: Selfishness of the worst kind was exercised, in which there was left no place for charity; and the Church as such was despised as not being recognized in its poor members.

**3.—The significance of the Lord's Supper was entirely lost.**—It does not need more than a single thought, to see how utterly in this state of affairs, the whole meaning of the Lord's Supper vanished. Indeed, these men had deliberately abandoned the spiritual rite, and given themselves up to mere carnal eating and drinking. Instead of taking bread, reverently giving thanks, breaking it, and parting it among themselves, and likewise distributing the wine out of a common cup, to offer all upon the altar of loving remembrance of Christ, they made a god of their belly (Phil. iii, 19), and gloried in their shame. It was such things as this that made the apostle

weep. It is quite possible, though no such abuse as this exists in connection with the administration of the Lord's Supper among us, that we may have in many cases lost the simple and primary significance of the sacrament, by turning it into an idol, as does the Romanist, or into an instrument of spiritual self-torture, as many Protestants; or, at least, by using it as a kind of fetish, supposing that in some way our salvation is guaranteed by partaking of the elements.

## II.—THE LORD'S SUPPER EXPOUNDED.

Having pointed out some of the abuses and the general profanation of the Supper, the apostle proceeds to re-expound its significance to the Corinthians, with a view of correcting the abuse. He, in the end, insisted that it should no longer be celebrated in connection with the Agapè, telling them, if they wanted simply to eat, to do so in their own houses. He sets forth to them in order the history of the institution of the Supper and the proper manner of its celebration. The apostle was not one of the original twelve who were present when the Lord first took bread and brake it, but he had received of the Lord, by a special communication, the whole story, and had so delivered it to them, just as he had received of the Lord the Gospel and delivered it to them. (Compare v. 23 with xv, 1-3.) The importance of this institution over and above that of baptism, is seen in that, while the Lord had specially revealed to Saint Paul the details of the Supper and charged him with the delivery of these details to the Gentile Churches, he had given him no command whatever in respect of baptism.

**1.—When it was instituted.**—"The same night in which he was betrayed he took bread, and when he had given thanks he brake it." The account of the institution is particularly detailed by Matthew. (xxvi, 26-30; also Mark iv, 22-26; Luke xxii, 14-20.) The fact that at that time the hand of the traitor was lifted against the Master, that the shadow of the cross was already flung over him, in short, that all the surroundings had been so solemn and tender, ought to cause the passions of human nature, the selfishness and greed of the flesh, to submit themselves to this sublime ordinance in loving, unselfish, and grateful adoration. Our very heart should tremble lest in any way we should profane it by unworthily using or wickedly abusing the occasion.

**2.—Its elements.**—The elements for the use and celebration of the Lord's Supper were bread and wine. These two things made up the principal diet of the people in the Oriental world. Bread was

the very staff of life, and wine "the fruit of the vine," was the people's drink. In speaking of the wine, it is suggestive that the word "wine" is never used in connection with the Lord's Supper, but the terms "cup," and our Lord's own designation, "the fruit of the vine." It is not our purpose to go into the question of "fermented" and "unfermented" wine; but we give it as our judgment that the wine used at the table was the ordinary pure juice of the grape. That it was wholly unfermented we do not believe; but, on the other hand, we neither believe that it was the highly fermented wine even then in use, "that giveth its color in the cup," that "biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder," or anything like our common wine of commerce, in which the alcoholic basis is so largely present. I am decidedly of opinion, however, that too much is made of this controversy over the question of the kind of wine to be used, and that many persons are more intent on the quality of the elements than upon the significance of the ordinance itself.

**3.—The manner of celebrating the Supper.**—This is very simple. First the bread is taken in hand and a brief prayer of thanksgiving is offered. The Supper is called the Eucharist, from the Greek word which signifies to give thanks. There is no hint that there was in the early Church any ceremony of consecration. Of course, the doctrine of transubstantiation, or even consubstantiation, is absolutely foreign from the teaching of Scripture. The bread and the wine are the body and blood of Christ in the same sense in which Paul, speaking of the rock in the wilderness out of which water was stricken, said: "And that rock was Christ." After thanks were given, the bread was broken and parted among the disciples (Matt. xxvi, 26), and they did eat it. In the same manner the cup was "blessed" and parted among the disciples; and they did drink of it, not the whole flagon each, any more than each ate the whole loaf, but each took a small bit of the bread and each a sip out of the cup. This was the whole ceremony. It was celebrated without any of the cumbersome formalities of modern times.

**4.—Its significance.**—Five principal things enter into the significance of the Lord's Supper. (i) It was a memorial supper. "Do this in remembrance of me." It was a parting gift from the Lord to his disciples by which, throughout the time of his absence, they might bring him and all the love he bore them, and the promises he had made them, to their remembrance; and that not so much for his sake as for theirs. The remembrance that he was alive and caring for them would be a strength to them in times of distress and trouble. (ii) It was a perpetual testimony to them of the meaning and power

of his death. "This is my body, broken for you." "This is the New Testament in my blood." Our Lord had himself explained the significance of this when he instituted the Supper, saying, "This is the blood of my new covenant, shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matt. xxvi, 28.) So that on every celebration of the Supper we are reminded that Christ's death expiated our sins and proclaimed our forgiveness. What a precious preacher is the Lord's Supper! (iii) It testified to the disciples their oneness in Christ, and expressed their fellowship and communion with each other in him. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one loaf." (x, 16, 17.) (iv) The same Scripture testifies that we not only live by Christ, but that our spiritual life is sustained by a constant communion with him. It is not the Lord's Supper that sustains our spiritual life, any more than it is that which first communicated life; but the Supper both testifies to the fact that we live by his voluntary death for us, and that our life is sustained by our communion with him now that he is alive from the dead. (v) It is a pledge to us that, however long he may be absent from the world, he will come again, and it is also our testimony to the world of this our hope. "For, as oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." Such are the main features of the teaching and significance of this sacrament.

### III.—ITS PROFANATION REBUKED.

The apostle had been sadly grieved by the reports which had come to him concerning the divisions, contentions, and sins in the Church; but especially of the abuses which had sprung up in connection with the Supper. He sets these abuses in order and then proceeds to rebuke the Corinthians for them.

**1.—The abuses set forth.**—For these abuses he says he cannot praise them; that is, he condemns them. What were they? Three in number. (i) They despised the Church of God. Instead of making it a place and an assembly for the worship of God, and the edification of each other in love and good works, they had turned it into a place for a carnal feast, and split it up into factions, determined by the wealth of the members. Their Agapè had lost its holy character, and was, as now celebrated, nothing more than a disgrace to the house of God. It was in the church that the money-changers

and the sellers of doves had made their unholy traffic in the temple, which Jesus had purged with a whip of small cords. (ii) Their selfish and exclusive habit of not tarrying for each other and dividing their food without respect of persons had put the poor to shame; they thus had scandalized the doctrine of brotherly love, and given the lie to the proverb that had already become current in the community where those Christian churches existed. "Behold, how these Christians love one another." And besides all this, God re- sents any offense or slight put upon the poor simply because they are poor. (iii) But chiefly their carnal practices had rendered them "guilty of the body and blood of Christ." This is a peculiar expression, and roughly represents that their practices turned a spiritual ordinance, which signified life and salvation through Christ, into a carnal meal for the gratification of merely carnal appetite. The full deep meaning of it is too awful to put into words; a kind of spiritual cannibalism, of which the Jews had some gross idea when Jesus spoke to them of his body and blood being the meat and drink of the soul. (John vi, 52-58.)

**2.—The consequences of profaning the Supper.**—These were two. (i) *A spiritual consequence.* "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." This word "damnation" does not signify eternal damnation, but simply "condemnation." It shows that such are certainly condemned in the thing whereof the apostle has been speaking, namely, the grave abuse and misconception of the whole ordinance. It shows that they have lost their spirituality and faith. The word "unworthily" does not mean personal unworthiness, for who is not personally unworthy? but it signifies a misconception of the ordinance of things and the putting of the Lord's Supper to an unworthy use. It is explained by the clause "not discerning the Lord's body." Had they so discerned the Lord's body, they could not have turned the Supper into a carnal feast; but not discerning the Lord's body, they made an unworthy use of the Supper, and so condemned themselves in their own action. (ii) *A physical consequence.* "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and some sleep." As God sent sickness upon the Jewish people as a punishment for their apostasies (Deut. xxix, 22, 25), so he chastised these Corinthians by sending sickness upon them, and even death. There is some close connection between spiritual and physical health, especially among those who profess the Christian faith. (III. John 2.) Some strange malady seems to have been present in the Church at Corinth of which the apostle had heard, and from the effects of

which some had died. He explains the nature of that malady, and points out its cause or occasion. It is by some able interpreters supposed that it was sickness of this kind which was healed by the laying on of hands by the elders, as spoken of by James. There is not a little warrant for such a conclusion.

#### IV.—HOW TO REMEDY MATTERS.

“Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” (II. Tim. iii, 16.) We have seen the doctrine of the Supper, and have noted the apostolic rebuke of the evils connected therewith; we have remarked some of the calamities attending these irregularities; we turn now to consider the apostolic instruction for the correction of the abuses and the purging away of the sin from the life.

**1.—Self-examination.**—“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat.” This is not, as is too commonly supposed, an injunction to that morbid self-examination which so many people indulge in just before the Supper, to find out if they are fit or worthy to come to the table. Who is fit and who is worthy? Besides this, our business at the Lord’s Supper is not self-contemplation, but the remembrance of our Master, the showing forth of his death and looking for his second coming. It is an utter perversion of the Supper’s use to spend the time before and during the service upon ourselves. We are sinners, of course, and utterly unworthy to eat the bread and drink the cup; but we remember that our Lord has died, and so we come, rejoicing and grateful that he has atoned for our sins and secured to us the forgiveness of our sins. The injunction is to examine ourselves on the point of whether or not we discern the Lord’s body; and “whether we be in the faith” (II. Cor. xiii, 5); whether, when gathered to the Supper, we are there as carnal or converted men; whether we have come to satisfy our hunger or to show forth the Lord’s death. If we have come in the latter spirit, then let us eat.

**2.—Self-judgment.**—This looks to the past. God has judged some of them by sickness and death. It was better that, as God’s children, however erring, they should thus be chastened than be left to the condemnation that belongs to the world. But now, in the meantime, if they shall acknowledge their fault and judge themselves, God will have no further occasion to afflict or chasten them. “For if we judge ourselves, we shall not be judged.”

**3.—Exercise of charity and courtesy.**—“When ye come together



to eat, tarry one for another." No longer let each man eat for and by himself ; but eat together and tarry till all be assembled, the rich and the poor alike, and let there be real communion. Do not longer prostitute the Supper to the end of merely gratifying hunger. If any man hunger, let him go to his own house and there eat for the body's sake, and reserve the eating of the Lord's Supper for the soul. Let us not think that these reproofs were alone fit for the Corinthian Church, but rather let us each search the passage with care and humility, examining if there be no rebuke which we may fit to ourselves on this matter of so great importance.

## XL.

## SAUL OF TARSUS CONVERTED.—Acts ix, 1–20.

(1) And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, (2) And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. (3) And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: (4) And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? (5) And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. (6) And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. (7) And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. (8) And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. (9) And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. (10) And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. (11) And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, (12) And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. (13) Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: (14) And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. (15) But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: (16) For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. (17) And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. (18) And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. (19) And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. (20) And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.—Acts ix, 1–20.

It is not too much to say that the conversion of Saul of Tarsus was the most important event in connection with the founding of the Christian Religion, after the resurrection of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Historically, there is not the shadow of a doubt as to the personality of Paul. He lived and moved and had his being in the midst of unquestioned historical time

and circumstances. There is also no doubt that he was suddenly converted to the faith of Christ and became the chiefest and greatest apostle of the crucified and Risen Lord. Through the preaching of the faith he once sought to destroy, he founded churches and labored among them for a period of thirty years. His letters to these churches are still extant, and are among the unquestioned treasures of literature. Whatever else may be said of Paul, it is not claimed that he was either a fool or a fanatic. His intellectual strength and culture are placed beyond question by his writings; the intensity and the reality of his convictions are set forth with equal distinctness in those letters; his sincerity and enthusiasm for the cause he devoted himself to with such unparalleled consecration are testified to by thirty years of unremitting service and suffering, which closed with the joyous surrender of his own life as his final testimony to the truth of the Gospel. The story of his conversion and his subsequent career certify beyond question three things: That there was a growing and increasing company of men and women in and about Jerusalem who believed that Jesus Christ, whom the Jews crucified, was the Messiah of God; that this Jesus was alive from the dead; and that from his place in glory he calls upon men to cease their opposition to God and become his disciples. These things Paul believed on the testimony of his own consciousness. That his consciousness did not deceive him is evidenced by the fact of the marvelous change which his interview with Jesus recorded in this chapter wrought in him. Moreover, he not only believed it himself, but he was able so effectually to demonstrate the truth that Jesus was alive from the dead, that scores of churches were gathered in the faith of that resurrection. To account for Saul's conversion, his subsequent life and labor, and the fruit of that labor, on any other hypothesis than that which is recorded in the incident which we are studying to-day, is to contradict and deny every canon of historical criticism. The materials for suggestion and instruction are so great in the facts set forth before us, that we must content ourselves with glancing at a few of them only; suggesting that our readers study it in connection with the two other accounts which Paul himself gives of this remarkable meeting with the Lord Jesus, as also his several other references to it, as in I. Cor. xv, 8, 9; Gal. i, 11-19; I. Tim. i, 12-17.

### I.—THE PERSECUTOR.

We last saw the young Saul standing by and encouraging the infuriated mob who stoned Stephen. What the final impressions of

that scene, in which he played so conspicuous a part, were upon the mind and heart of Saul, we have no definite means of knowing; yet it is easily inferable that he was not altogether at ease concerning the affair. The saintly bearing of Stephen, his shining face, his declaration concerning the opened heavens and his sight of Jesus at the right hand of God, seem to have moved him. But like others, both before and since, his response to the beginnings of conviction in his own soul, was only the more furiously to pursue the way which was now doubtful to him. Men often try to drown conviction in deeper excesses of sin. It is not maintained here that Saul was deliberately fighting against clear and certain conviction. He was too honest a soul for that; but that he was prosecuting his hatred of Jesus and his disciples against, and in the face of, disturbing doubts and questions.

1.—“**Breathing out threatening and slaughter.**”—These remarkable words give us some idea of the rage and hate that possessed the heart and mind of this furious young man. His heart was a furnace of fiery hatred, so that his very breath, as it were, was charged with threatening and slaughter. He had already been busy in his persecution of the saints remaining at Jerusalem. His threats were loud and deep. He was a very Claverhouse for fierceness. The prisons were full of his victims; and now he secures a commission from the chief priests, and an escort from the temple guard, and proceeds to Damascus, where there seems to have been already a considerable company of believers. His intentions had already preceded him thither, for he had made no concealment of his purpose to harry the young Church to death. It is difficult for us to imagine that the gentle and saintly apostle to the Gentiles, who “counted not his life dear” to himself in the service of his Master and the very least of the disciples, could have ever been this blood-thirsty tiger of persecution, blaspheming that Name which he afterward so loved, and causing others to do so. Truly God had changed the Ethiopian’s skin, and the very nature, as well as the spots, of the fierce blood-loving leopard.

2.—**The arrest.**—His journey was almost finished. He, with his party, was already in the very suburbs of Damascus. We fancy Saul riding at the head of his small troop, silent and thoughtful. The scenes enacted at the death of Stephen are before his eyes; the words of Stephen are flowing through his mind. That masterly review of Jewish history is again passing before his thought. The death of the Martyr and his manifest sight of Jesus in heaven are again before him, his soul is already shaken with conviction, or at

least with doubt. While thus absorbed in thought, yet following his purpose, suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven; a voice spoke to him in solemn remonstrance and warning, and he trembling, already half persuaded in his mind that Jesus was alive from the dead, fell to the ground in an amazement of wonder, conviction, and holy fear. Thus was Saul arrested by the Lord Jesus himself. Are we not to learn from this that the eyes of the Lord are upon us all, and that his presence is not far from any one of us? He may not, he does not, approach men in this way now, for there is not the same need, but it is certain that, in some way or other, at some time or other, Jesus Christ does, either by Word, or Spirit, or Providence, administered by minister, parent, friend, or stranger, on a journey or at home, in the daytime or during the night watches, by blessing or adversity, meet every man with this solemn word of arrest, and call upon him for a reason why he should continue his opposition to Jesus who died for him and rose again? It is noticeable that this appearance of Jesus to Saul was personal. The men who were journeying with him heard the voice, but saw not Jesus; they saw the light, but heard not the words that were spoken to him (xii, 9); but Saul saw the light and heard the voice; he saw Jesus and heard his words clearly and distinctly spoken to him. God's call to us is individual. A multitude may sit in some church and hear the sound of the words and get some glimpse of the light of the truth, but they hear not the very voice of Jesus speaking to them, nor do they see the glorified Saviour standing before them; yet one or two in that whole audience may both see and hear as Saul did, so far as their individual apprehension is concerned. That turn comes to all men sooner or later. Happy the man or woman who is not disobedient to the heavenly vision.

**3.—The indictment.**—"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" This was the indictment which was spoken to him. Only when God speaks to us out of heaven do we come to know that heaven and earth are not divorced in their relations. What we do on earth is, in a sense, done in heaven. Saul was persecuting the saints on earth; he was now to learn that he was in fact persecuting the Risen Christ in Glory. David cruelly entreated his friend and shamefully dishonored his friend's wife; he had subsequently to learn that it was against God, and God only, that he was sinning and doing this evil. (Ps. li, 4.) The attitude of men toward the people of God—toward the Word of God—is their attitude toward God himself. The invisible world of Jesus Christ penetrates this at every point, and we are dealing with God always when we are dealing with men

and things down here. This is seriously worth our laying deeply to heart.

**4.—The entreaty.**—"It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." These words were spoken by Jesus to Saul in the spirit of entreaty as well as of warning. Men *can* fight against God; they *can* resist his goodness, his grace, and his mercy. Men *can* become infidels, agnostics, and atheists; but it is hard for them to do so. They have to study and work, to attain such unfaith. Men *can* resist the convictions of truth which God sends forth by the preaching of his word, but it is no easy matter to smother conviction and harden the heart against God. Yet it can be done; it has been done, and is being done every day. On the other hand, when one has succeeded in kicking against God's mercy and goodness, the task is not finished. Then the soul must stand against his justice and judgment. Jesus is offered to men in two characters: that of Saviour and that of Judge. If men refuse him as a Saviour, then they must deal with him as a Judge. It is impossible (though hard) to resist him as Saviour. It is absolutely impossible (not only hard) to resist him as Judge. Why shall we not be wise, all of us, and "Kiss the Son," lest the anger of God be kindled against us while we are in the way of sin and disobedience?

**5.—The surrender.**—"What wilt thou have me to do?" This came after the preceding question: "Who art thou, Lord?" and the answer: "I am Jesus, whom thou persecuteth." Saul was already shaken in his soul. The words and testimony of Stephen had made a powerful impression upon him. He was subjectively in a condition to receive this revelation of Jesus. In an instant his convictions came to a head and he knew that Jesus, whom he was blaspheming, and persecuting in the persons of his saints, was indeed alive from the dead; and was standing before him and speaking to him. His decision was taken in an instant. "What wilt thou have me to do?" was the cry and the question of a soul already surrendered. As soon as Saul was convinced that Jesus was the Christ and that he was confronting him, so soon did he unconditionally surrender to him. This is the very secret of conversion; it *is* conversion. The whole secret of the Christian life is in this attitude of unconditional surrender to Jesus Christ. It is more than surrender—it is submission; it is more than submission—it is acquiescence; it is more than acquiescence—it is the union of the will of the surrendered soul with the will of the conquering Saviour. "Henceforth it shall be, Thy will and not mine that I will seek to do." No doubt, as we have already intimated, mental convictions and external circumstances had been

leading Saul up to this point; but his final conversion was instantaneous. In a moment he experiences a complete change of mind; a change of heart; and a change of purpose which was potentially a change of conduct. In these changes we see repentance, the new birth, and conversion. What will you do who have not yet surrendered to Christ? Why: "Repent, believe the gospel;" surrender instantly to Jesus and give yourselves up to God in an entire, and irrevocable, consecration to his service and glory. This is Christianity, or rather, Christ in the soul and life.

## II.—THE CONVERT.

It is true that the work of conversion was complete; but it is not all of grace to be converted. A boy may matriculate for the University, and yet he has all his studies before him; or, better still, for illustration. Lazarus was fully alive and raised from the dead by the word of Jesus, yet he was bound about with grave-clothes. Saul was converted, and yet there was still much for him to learn and further experiences to go through with.

**1.—Led into Damascus.**—How different was his entrance into the city from that which he had planned when he started from Jerusalem! He had purposed going in like a lion, and behold, he is led in like a lamb. The wolf's nature was changed. The persecutor was a young convert. He was a masterful man in himself, yet now he was a little child who needed to be led. The light that had converted him had also blinded him. We can understand in what a state of mental confusion as well as physical disability he was. The transition from darkness to light was no greater than the sudden revolution that had taken place in his whole mental and spiritual nature. It is supposed by some that the flash of glory, in which the Lord Jesus appeared to him, had in a measure sealed his eyes as with a sudden flame of fire, and that he never entirely recovered the effects of it; that this physical result of his sight of Jesus in Glory was that brand in his body which he subsequently so gloried in. For three days and nights he was without sight, neither did he eat or drink. These were days of revelation and power to him. In them he was found praying, and though without sight, he yet saw visions. What things it is possible for a man to see in three days! What light may have been poured into his soul! The whole truth concerning Jesus came to him out of the Scriptures—the whole plan of salvation. Perhaps it was during those three days that he received that Gospel which he preached to the Gentiles, and which he

declared was shown to him directly by the Lord Jesus Christ, and not by the apostles or brethren at Jerusalem. It was then that he got the first intimation of his ultimate work among the people—not Jews—among whom he spent almost the whole of his life.

2.—**The ministry of Ananias.**—In Damascus there was a disciple, —not an apostle, not a “Bishop,” nor even so much as a deacon,—named Ananias; to whom the Lord communicated in a vision, telling him of Saul and the condition he was in, and that he had appointed him to go and lay his hands on him, that he might receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Now, it is a notable fact that this man, Saul, who became the greatest of the apostles, received his “fullness” ministerially, not from a bishop, or from one of the apostles, but from a simple disciple concerning whom we only know the name. The apostles attempted to fill the vacancy of Judas in their way, but it was a dismal failure. Here was the first man in the apostolic succession who received his ordination from a layman. But then, perhaps, some will say that Paul was not in the “historical succession.” For our part, we are content to take our succession as Paul got his, by the hands of any disciple whom the Lord appoints. Ananias was loath to go to Saul, for he already knew of him by reputation, and was well aware of his purpose in coming to Damascus. The Lord, however, showed to him that all was changed, for “behold he prayeth.” He need not be afraid of a man that prayeth, especially when he has been just converted to Jesus. Besides, the Lord pointed out to Ananias the fact that he was a chosen vessel for a special mission, far hence to the Gentiles. This incident should lead us to hope and pray for the worst enemies of Christ. Perhaps, if we should pray for great persecutors more and fear them less, we would have more Pauls in the ranks of the ministry. Being thus assured, Ananias went to Saul, nothing doubting and fearing, with no resentment in his heart for his past wickednesses, with no coldness or spirit of patronage, but lovingly, with a welcome in his heart as in his words: “Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost.” We do not know the exact relationship between human ministry and spiritual gifts. Saul was converted and fully received of the Lord Jesus, and yet it is evident that he had to receive other and more gifts at the hands of a human ministry. God and the Lord Jesus are undoubtedly able to do without us, but it is equally certain that they have chosen not to do so. There are men and women younger and older all around us who have been smitten down by the word and Spirit of God, who yet await our com-



ing to them, that they may receive their sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. We learn also that the filling of the Holy Spirit is a blessing which is, or at least may be, subsequent to conversion, and may not come upon us until days after we have been in entire surrender. "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?"

**3.—A chosen vessel.**—All God's converts are chosen vessels, though not all are chosen to such high and suffering work as Saul was destined to. He was not only chosen, but he was a "choice" vessel unto God. Never had he such another servant. None have risen since Paul who have so completely and grandly served Christ. No prejudice hindered him as it did Peter; no sufferings daunted him; no danger held him back; no coldness on the part of his brethren, or ingratitude on the part of his spiritual children, checked his enthusiasm, or dampened his zeal. His life and work is, next to that of Christ's, the greatest source of inspiration and the best guide to service. It ought to be noted that, in choosing him to bear his name before Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel, Jesus also showed him how great things he must suffer for his name's sake. Now all service entails suffering, but, as a rule, those who are chosen to high service are also fitted for that high service by suffering, either before or in the work. Many of us would like to have the high service, but shrink from the suffering; but Paul seemed to glory in his sufferings for Christ's sake as much as he did in his service. The ministry of Ananias ended with the baptism of Saul. Baptism did not make Saul a child of God, nor did it communicate any grace to him, so far as the record shows, but it did declare on his part that he had received the forgiveness of sins, and that henceforth he belonged to Jesus Christ.

### III.—THE PREACHER.

After tarrying in quietness and in fellowship for several days with the disciples which were at Damascus, he boldly began his work by entering into the synagogues and "preaching Christ that he is the Son of God." This was the great foundation truth of the Gospel. It was the truth which God announced concerning Jesus even before he was born. It was reaffirmed at his baptism; it was challenged by the devil in the wilderness; it was demonstrated by Jesus in his mighty works, especially at the raising of Lazarus. It was for so declaring himself that he was indicted for blasphemy, and because he would not deny it, but affirmed it under oath, he was put to death. On the cross he was taunted with being the "Son of God."

For a little while the grave seemed to demonstrate him either an impostor or a self-deceived man; but his resurrection from the dead "declared him to be the Son of God with power." (Rom. i, 4.) It was this truth seen by Nathaniel, by Martha, by Peter, which led them to confess Christ; it was this truth that constituted the burden of the preaching of Peter and Stephen; it was this that Philip preached to the eunuch; it was this truth that now fired the heart of Saul and made the Old Testament Scriptures glow and shine with meaning; and it was this that ever enabled him to do and dare for Christ. In the absence of this sublime truth the Gospel can only be a pleasant tale, a passing delusion, without power either in word or for life to the soul. Not until we can say with Martha and with Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," can we truly say that we are his disciples. Not until we fully preach and teach this sublime and blessed truth do we preach the "good news of God concerning his Son Jesus Christ, who was born after the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God, with power according to the Spirit of Holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." (Rom. i, 4.)

## XLI.

## DORCAS RAISED TO LIFE.—Acts ix, 32-43.

(32) And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. (33) And there he found a certain man named Eneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. (34) And Peter said unto him, Eneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately. (35) And all that dwelt in Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord. (36) Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. (37) And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died; whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. (38) And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. (39) Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all of the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. (40) But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. (41) And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. (42) And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. (43) And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.—Acts ix, 32-43.

After the conversion of Saul the hot spirit of persecution cooled off, and gradually ceased altogether. The churches throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had rest, and were built up in the faith. No doubt the apostles and brethren who had been gifted to teach went from place to place, visiting the believers, instructing, and comforting them with the word of God, and helping to consolidate their young societies. It was at this time that the churches began to take on form. Hitherto the believers had come together, drawn by a common affinity; but now these unorganized companies took shape and form, each one becoming the center of Christian activity in the town, or village or city where it was. Though we hear of no pastors or teachers, yet no doubt there were brethren in every place who, by natural gift and special spiritual endowment, took the lead of things and became, if not in form, at least in fact, pastors. This period may be reckoned as the beginning of the second epoch in the history of the Church. Hitherto there had been a storm

of persecution, which culminated in the martyrdom of Stephen. Now came rest and a breathing spell. God often carries his Church and people through a storm of trial, but he does not forget them, and will not suffer them to be tried beyond that which they are able to bear. He deals with churches and individuals much in the same way. After the storm comes the calm. We shall be wise if we know how to use the calm for edification and consolidation.

### I.—PETER ON TOUR.

No doubt the other apostles were busy in their sphere as well as was Peter; but for some reason their activity does not come under the notice, certainly not under the recording eye and hand of Luke, who practically confines his record to the doings of Paul and Peter, and those brethren who were immediately associated with them. That which is recorded of Peter just here, is preliminary to that which will be specially recorded of Paul. In fact, this record relates to the work of the Holy Spirit among the Gentiles; and in this field the other apostles seemed not to have wrought, at least not at this time. We have seen Peter hitherto in the fore front of the work of the Lord. First preaching the word at Pentecost; then healing the lame man; defending his action before the Jews and exalting the name of Jesus, whom they crucified, while boldly charging his murder upon them; accepting rebuke, but refusing to be silent in the matter of that they had seen and heard; choosing to obey God rather than man; taking punishment even with stripes and imprisonment gladly; and promptly resuming work as soon as delivered again. Now we see him turning away from Jerusalem to go on tour among the small churches in the smaller cities and villages of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. In the course of this visitation he comes down to the sea-coast, some thirty miles away from Jerusalem, and visits these three towns: Lydda, Saron, and Joppa. The Gospel of Jesus had made its way into the villages and taken root among the humble folk there. It is worth while remembering that the roots of the Christian religion have always been among the common, if not always the very poor, people, and in the villages. It is one of our modern mistakes that we neglect village work. Here are the people, especially the young people, who are to become the future ministers, elders, deacons, and other office-bearers of the city churches. It is a fatal mistake to wait till the country lads and lassies come to the cities before endeavoring to save them to God and train them for service. Peter was wise in visiting the country towns.

**1.—The saints which dwelt at Lydda.**—This is the title by which the Holy Ghost designates the believers in these towns, and indeed all over the country wherever the disciples dwelt. The “saints” is the common designation of God’s people. Not that they were absolutely perfect or sinless, but that they had been separated by the Gospel from the great mass of sinners, and were in a peculiar sense God’s people, sanctified or separated unto him. Then they were saints in character, as compared with the unbelieving world about them; and they were saints potentially, for God will not leave the least and most unpromising one of his people, in whom he has begun a good work, until he set him down perfect and without spot before him in that day of revelation and glory. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews addresses them as “Holy Brethren,” while the very occasion for his epistle was that they were all on the very verge of apostasy. The fact is, that “saints” is the proper name for Christian men and women. We all hesitate and shrink from being called saints, for most of us know that we have not saintly characters, and feel as though the name were out of place as applied to us. We hesitate either to call ourselves saints, or to allow other people to do so, because we know there is that in our lives which is unsaintly, and we are not courageous enough to put the evil thing away, and then think it a mark of humility that we refuse the name of saint. “I am no saint,” said a church member in my presence one day, “and don’t pretend to be one of these sanctified ones”; and then he began to swear, just as though, because he was not a “saint,” he was justified in blaspheming God’s name. There are those who assume that there is no obligation upon them to live holy lives unless they assume the name of saints. God gives us that name because he has called us to holiness, and shows us in Jesus what he means by holiness and saintliness. It is not so much that we should live up to the name as that we should allow the name and the power of God through it to lift us into holiness. The world needs a Church of saints to-day more than it ever needed it before. Whenever we shall have the courage boldly to take the name again, and let that name shine out and through us in true holiness, we shall have again the great power of God among us.

**2.—A certain man named Æneas.**—We do not know anything about this man except that he lived at Lydda, and had been confined to his bed by palsy for eight years. Whether he was one of the saints, or an unbeliever, we do not know. He is not spoken of as a disciple, and yet it seems most likely that he was one. We do not know whether he sought the healing, or whether it was a case in

which Peter, moved by the Holy Ghost, suggested and wrought the healing as an unasked gift of Christ. In any case, Peter was moved by the Holy Ghost to work this miracle for the happiness of the poor man himself; for the strengthening of the faith of the saints; for the conversion of many unbelievers, and for the glory of God. This was not the first miracle Peter had wrought, as we know from the earlier record in this book; yet we see the same absence of self in it and the same reference of all power to Jesus Christ. "Æneas, *Jesus Christ maketh thee whole; arise and make thy bed.*" He would have the man to know at once that it was Jesus Christ, and not himself, who wrought the miracle. He would have him know that the work was not one of promise, but of immediate accomplishment. He would have him demonstrate the reality of the miracle himself by arising and making his bed. That the man had faith to believe the word which Peter spoke to him is seen in the fact that he immediately arose in obedience to Peter's word. The great probability is that there was still a strong current of denial as to the truth of Christ's resurrection in these Jewish villages, and it was still necessary for some strong and irresistible demonstration of the present and living power of Christ to be made. The opposition to the Gospel was still strongly entrenched behind custom and prejudice, and it was thus to be removed. In our time, with nineteen hundred years of demonstrated spiritual and moral power, we do not need such demonstrations. Christianity is its own demonstration. As the Bible is a more sure word of prophecy than the audible word of God from heaven, so is the life of Christ in believers a greater miracle than the healing of the sick would be.

**3.—The effect of the miracle.**—This miracle went beyond the man himself who was healed. "All that dwelt in Lydda and Saron saw him and turned to the Lord." Not every man and woman, literally considered, but a vast number of the inhabitants. God's good works never terminate with themselves. No man was ever yet truly converted but that his conversion affected some one else. So in this case. No doubt a multitude of people in these two villages were halting between two opinions. When they saw the man Æneas, whom they all knew, well of that eight years' palsy, and knew that the cure was instantly wrought without human means by the Lord Jesus Christ, their hesitancy yielded to faith, and they turned to the Lord. This miracle was as powerful a sermon in its way as Peter's sermon on Pentecost. The name of Jesus was proclaimed and the power of the Holy Ghost was present to heal.

**II.—THE RAISING OF DORCAS TO LIFE.**

Joppa was about eight miles off from the village of Lydda. Here also was a young church. In that church was a woman whose name was Tabitha, which being interpreted was called Dorcas, which means Gazelle. The name was doubtless given to this woman on account of some peculiarity of character. Perhaps her grace of person and beauty of face or eyes. At any rate, she was a disciple of Christ and had found her place in the Church, and filled it wonderfully well.

**1.—Full of good works and alms-deeds.**—There was in those early days great need and destitution among the disciples. In the first place, the multitude of the disciples were from among the poor; and then again there is scarcely a doubt but that their attachment to Christ increased for the time being their poverty, by arraying against them the more well-to-do and influential class. No doubt many of them were cast out of their homes for their faith. From the beginning there seem to have been many widows in the Church. These were peculiarly poor, having no natural supporters and protectors, and probably were among the first to be cast off by their relatives on account of their faith. At any rate, among this class of needy women, this good woman found her occupation and ministry. She does not seem to have been a woman of wealth, and yet she had some resources, for she seems to have supplied the material, as well as the work, which went to clothe the poor widows. It is remarkable of her that she is the first person named in the history of the Church who turned her hand to this kind of practical charity. It is also remarkable that in this we have a demonstration of that spirit of love and unity that sprang up with the first outpouring of the Spirit. The men at Jerusalem sold their possessions, and brought them and laid them at the apostles' feet, that the price of them might be distributed among the more needy of the disciples. Here the spirit of self-sacrifice seems to have taken on a different form, and Dorcas became the administrator of her own charity. She is said to have been "full of good works and alms-deeds, which she did." Now God has called us unto good works, not as a meritorious condition of acceptance with him, but as an exhibition of his life in us to the world. The spirit of good works seems to have filled the heart of this good woman, as some of the apostles were said to have been full of faith and the Holy Spirit. Before a good work can be done with the hands it must be formed in the heart. A mere formal

act of beneficence is not a good work. Good works come from the heart and pass through the hand. We must look at the roots of so-called charitable actions before we can judge of their quality. It was in the heart of this woman to "do good"; and not only a little good, but she was "full of good works." The Spirit of God had made her "perfect unto every good work to do his will" (Heb. xiii, 21); and therefore she was "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." (I. Cor. xv, 58.) Notice the word: "*alms-deeds.*" There are a great many good people who are willing to give *alms* who are never ready to do *alms-deeds*. Half the beauty and power of Christian charity is in the personality of its administration. To administer your own charity is to make it go twice as far in the way of blessing at least. To give money to feed the hungry and clothe the naked is good, but to carry the food with your own hand and give it with loving words, and manifest Christian fellowship, is infinitely better; to give money to buy clothes is good, but for Christian women, who have both means and leisure, to cut out and make and then bestow, with their own hands and with loving words of fellowship, the garments so made, is infinitely better. To give money to send the Gospel to the heathen is good, but to go to the heathen one's self when it is possible is better. We cannot always administer our own charity, but when we can, let us do it. It is certain that we can *do* our alms much oftener than we do.

**2.—The sickness and death of Dorcas.**—It was a strange Providence that took away this good woman from the Church, and especially from these poor women. We are often sorely perplexed and tried because sickness and death come to those who, humanly speaking, can least be spared. The righteous often die, while the wicked are spared to cumber the ground. Those who support the weak are often taken away, while the weak and useless are left. We cannot know the ways of God now, but we shall know hereafter. Perhaps the taking away of such an eminent woman as Dorcas made the way, or at least made an occasion for the development of other women like her in the Church. "Who will take Dorcas' place?" may have become a very practical question. When one eminent saint takes upon himself much of the needed work in a church, others are apt to stand by idle and leave him the work to do; but when he is suddenly taken away it often arouses some dormant gifts to supply the lack so occasioned. Perhaps it might have been of use to the widows to have lost their human benefactor for a while, that they might turn their faith to God. We often get to depending on the help of human friends, and so forget dependence upon God.



There are many possible ways by which these apparently incomprehensible providences of God may be explained.

**3.—Peter sent for.**—The disciples at Joppa knew that Peter was at Lydda. Their action in this case shows how highly Dorcas was esteemed by the whole Church. It was not the widows only, but the disciples, the men of the Church, who were deeply distressed at the affliction which had fallen on the Church. They therefore sent two of the brethren to Peter, asking him to come at once to them. What they expected Peter to do is not clear. They simply laid the fact before him and bade him make haste and come. Perhaps the fact that he had healed Æneas may have stirred in their hearts an unspoken faith that he might call back this most loved and respected woman from the dead. Since Peter was gifted with working miracles, why might he not be able to do even as his Lord had done; or since he wrought miracles in the name of Jesus, why might not Jesus from heaven do even so great a miracle as this, even as he had done while on earth? However, Peter came at their bidding.

**4.—The testimony of the widows to Dorcas.**—When Peter came they took him to the chamber where they had laid her body; and around him gathered all the widows, with their coats and garments which Dorcas had made for them, and they wept as they told the story of her goodness to them, while she was with them. This is a beautiful testimony. I remember a comparatively poor woman who was always helping the poor out of her slender means, and she was constantly visiting the sick and forsaken. She also was full of good works and alms-deeds which she did. Not many people knew how much or even a tittle of her good works. Her own children did not know it until she died. When she died a hundred poor people missed her, and when she was buried they swarmed into the house to look at her face once more, and weeping, they told of how she had helped and befriended them. Only one or two carriages followed that good woman's body to the grave, but the lame and the halt and the sick and the poor were her mourners. No tomb marks her grave as yet, but her real monument is seen in the tears of poor widows and the sorrow of scores of afflicted ones, whose hard lot in life was made more tolerable because of her loving heart and open hands. "While she was with them." Dorcas was one of those saints who understood the force of that word of the wise man who had wasted opportunities during life, and left this exhortation to those who should follow him: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest." Let us remember this, and if we

have work to do, alms-deeds to bestow, let us do it while we are with the poor who need it. The charity of the dead hand is at best a cold and dead charity. That is not a wise man who waits till he dies to do his good deeds by will and testament.

**5.—Tabitha raised from the dead.**—There are those critics who deny the genuineness and authenticity of this miracle. They say it is but a corruption of the traditions of the miracles of Jesus in connection with the daughter of Jairus. This because Peter did as his Master did in turning out the people and speaking to the dead woman by name, and taking her by the hand. These similar details rather suggest to my mind the genuineness of the miracle. Peter was present when his Lord raised that little girl. What so natural as that he should have imitated his Master as far and as nearly as he could. In one thing he did not do as his Master did. Peter kneeled down and prayed. Jesus did not do this, for he had the power in himself. Peter had not. Perhaps he did not know whether it was the will of God that this woman should live. So he asked God for revelation of his will, and no doubt got it. Then he acted. He does not here use the formula "in the name of Jesus of Nazareth"; but that he wrought this miracle, as the others ascribed to him, by that almighty name, there is not the least doubt.

**6.—Dorcas restored to the saints and widows.**—When she was fully alive again, Peter called the saints and widows who had been for the time being put out of the room, and presented their sister and friend to them. We are irresistibly reminded of Elisha giving back her dead son, alive, to the Shunamite. (I. Kings xvii, 23.) We can fancy Peter holding Dorcas by the hand and addressing the saints and widows, saying: "See thy sister and friend liveth." What a happy time there must have been; what rejoicing; what praising of God for his power to save and to make alive! But are not scenes of equal, and even more, joy being enacted every day in the world because of the power of Jesus to make dead sinners live? I have seen mothers, sisters, brothers, husbands, and wives overwhelmed with unspeakable joy when I have taken a dear one by the hand whom Jesus has saved by his word and Spirit and said to them: "See thy brother liveth." I can fancy a scene in heaven when one comes up from earth to be with Jesus, and Jesus calls to the gate of that happy place those who have gone before, and presents the new-comer to them, saying: "See thy beloved one has come from earth to heaven." O, the works of Jesus' power and grace are filling the earth with joy, and will one day fill all the universe.

**7.—The effect of the miracle.**—Again we are told that throughout Joppa many believed on the Lord. And to whom shall men turn but to the Lord, who only can forgive sinners and bring them from death to life? The wonder is that there lives a man or woman on the earth who does not believe on the Lord.

**8.—Peter in the house of Simon.**—For many days Peter tarried in Joppa. He did not live with any of the great merchants or princes of Joppa. Perhaps there were none of these classes among the saints. He lived at the house of Simon the tanner—a common working man whose business was considered of the lowest. But no man's house is low in which a saint lives, and no honest occupation is low when carried on by a child of God. At any rate, to this house angels came, and from the roof of it God sent Peter to bring in the first convert from among the Gentiles.

## XLII.

## PETER'S VISION.—Acts x, 1-20.

(1) There was a certain man in Cesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, (2) A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always. (3) He saw in a vision evidently, about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. (4) And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. (5) And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: (6) He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. (7) And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them which waited on him continually; (8) And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa. (9) On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: (10) And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, (11) And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: (12) Wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. (13) And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. (14) But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. (15) And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. (16) This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. (17) Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, (18) And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. (19) While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. (20) Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent thee.—Acts x, 1-20.

Undoubtedly the main object for which Luke wrote the Acts was to show forth the grace of God toward the Gentiles. The previous chapters all lead up to this point. Especially in the preceding chapter we see the reason for the record concerning the healing of Æneas and the raising to life again of Dorcas. Peter was on his way, unconsciously to himself, to the Gentiles with the Gospel. God had by his leading brought him down as far as to Joppa, which was near to Cesarea, where dwelt Cornelius, the first Gentile to whom the Gospel was distinctly preached. God had from all eternity purposed grace

to the race which he made in his own image. The revelation of that grace for the past fifteen hundred years had been confined to one family on the earth, though an hundred prophecies indicated that in the fullness of time the Gentiles should also enter into the benefits of his mercy. Now the time had come to fulfill that grace. The Jews as a people were most averse to sharing their blessings with the rest of the world, whom they believed to be outside the pale of mercy. But now the time had come to break down the middle wall of partition and bring in the other sheep which the Great Shepherd had in the world. It was the intimation of this fact in the various early apostolic addresses that aroused the antagonism of the conservative Jews. God had prepared the way for the Gospel to be given to the Gentiles by means of the large dispersion of the Jews over the Greek and Roman world; as also by bringing the Gentiles into the very land of the Jews. Among these Gentiles whom God had prepared for the Gospel, was this noble Roman centurion, who, though he seems not to have been a proselyte to the Jewish faith, had yet been so profoundly impressed with the knowledge of the true God, which he had acquired while dwelling in the land of the Bible, that he had become a sincere worshiper. Whether, and to what extent, he had heard of Jesus and his crucifixion and resurrection does not appear; but it seems almost certain that he had heard of these things (x, 37), and that they had still further prepared his mind for the marvelous revelation of grace that was about to come to him. The harmony of Divine Providence, in bringing the apostle into the neighborhood of this prepared Gentile, the concurrent testimony of the Spirit of God both to Cornelius and Peter, are remarkable as illustrating, in concrete example, the ways of God in the salvation of men. Angels do not now appear to men and give them specific directions as to what they shall do; men do not sleep and see visions such as Peter saw and have them expounded to them; but it would be rash to say that God is not now, and every day, ordering the movements of men, both those servants of his whom he has appointed to preach the Gospel, and those persons for whom the special grace of life has been prepared. As the Spirit prepared the heart and mind of the eunuch for the ministry of Philip, and sent Philip away from Samaria to the desert to instruct him, so now the Spirit had prepared the centurion for the Gospel, and also led the Apostle Peter to the very neighborhood where this inquirer was unconsciously awaiting his coming. Who shall say that the same careful and minute Providence is not present in the case of every man and woman who is finally converted to God? We do not now perceive

the hand of God actually directing, nor discern the various links in the chain of his Providence; but is not that Providence as present in the human affairs as the main-spring and the wheels are present in the watch that move the hands over the dial, though we only see the hands and not the hidden works enclosed within the watch.

### I.—THE DEVOUT CENTURION.

Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, has come down through all the ages as an example of pre-eminent piety. It is true that he was a heathen by birth and training, but he was a man of serious and reverent spirit, a type of many such, doubtless, to be found in every nation under the sun. The Providence that had placed him in the land of the Jews was the opportunity which enabled him to become acquainted with the true God, who, as soon as he was discovered, became the object of his reverent worship. During our Lord's earthly ministry, he came across such an one in the person of that other centurion of whom he said that in him he found a faith greater than in all Israel. (Matt. viii, 10.) Though a heathen by birth, and a Roman soldier by profession, he belonged to the same class of men as Nathaniel and Nicodemus: sincere and earnest inquirers after the truth, and ready to confess it when found. Such, wherever they are found, even though they have never been brought face to face with the revelation of God in the Gospel, are accepted with God. (Acts x, 34, 35; xiii, 7; xv, 7, 9; Rom. x, 12, 14.)

**1.—A devout man.**—Thus Cornelius is described. By a devout man, is meant a man with a serious and reverent spirit. Ananias, to whom Jesus directed Saul in Damascus, is so described (Acts xxii, 12), so that it is a term which may be applied to one not a Christian. It refers to the spiritual attitude of the man rather than to his faith. But in this case there are certain features by which the devout spirit may be recognized. (i) *He feared God.* That is, he recognized God as his Creator and Judge, and as such gave him reverence. It is not that he was afraid of God, but that he revered him and acknowledged his obligations and responsibility to him. It has in it more the element of love than of dread. He gave him honor as a son gives honor to his father, recognizing his goodness and the natural and rightful claim that he has upon him to respect and obedience. Not only did he fear God himself, but he taught all his military household to fear and honor God also. A truly devout man will seek to command his household in the same path of reverence. It was said of Abraham: "For I know him, that

he will command his household and his children after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment." (Gen. xviii, 19.) Cornelius was of the same spirit with Abraham; and as Abraham was said to be the father of the faithful in the old dispensation, so Cornelius might be said (without violence to the spirit of that supreme commendation) to be the father of the Gentile Church. He was a man whom all succeeding generations have delighted to honor. (ii) *He gave much alms to the people.* His piety did not consist in sentiment only. We have seen that he trained his household to fear the Lord. His fear of God led him also to have a tender compassion and pity upon the people around him, not so well favored as himself in this world's goods. Both in spirit and in act, he sought to fulfill the whole law. That is, he loved God and worshiped him, and he loved his neighbor and sought to do him good. He combined in himself the character of Nathaniel, the guileless seeker after God, and the good works of the Samaritan, who went out of his way to lend a helping hand to his neighbor. (iii) *He prayed to God always.* His was not a fitful piety or a religion of fear. He prayed to God always. God was his daily dependence as well as the object of his constant homage. "Behold he prayeth," said the Lord to Ananias concerning Saul. This was a sure sign that his heart was right with God. Here is another man of whom it is also said "He prayeth." The Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world had shined into his heart and had transformed him, even before he knew Christ intelligently. May we not hope and believe that there are many such in all nations, to whom the words of the Gospel have not yet come, but whom God knows as his own. We could not find a better pattern of a truly God-fearing man than is here presented to us, even before his conversion, as we use that word in its technical meaning.

**2.—He sees a vision.**—It was about the ninth hour, or three o'clock in the afternoon, that Cornelius, perhaps while at prayer, saw in a vision an angel of God coming to him. This was not a dream, but an actual appearance to Cornelius while he was fully awake. Such a vision as the disciples saw when they were with Jesus on the mount, with Moses and Elias standing with him. Such visions are not now vouchsafed to men, because we have now the completed revelation of God and the messengers of the Gospel sent everywhere to preach the Gospel. But in the opening of the Gospel dispensation to the Gentiles, it was necessary that the Jewish disciples should be instructed in some such way, in the fact that God had also chosen the Gentiles to salvation, and had broken down the

middle wall of partition between the Jews and the Gentiles. Just as, at a later period, even Paul was directed to cross the frontier of Asia into Europe by the appearance to him of that mysterious man of Macedonia who came to him and said, "Come over and help us." But there is this other lesson in it for us, and for all men. God will not leave the truly devout man without the means of fuller light. He sent Philip to find out Nathaniel; he sent another Philip to instruct the inquiring eunuch; and now he sends an angel to Cornelius to direct him into the way of obtaining the knowledge that in his heart he was thirsting for. There is no true inquirer in this world upon whom the eye of the Lord does not rest with care, and to whom the arm of the Lord will not be revealed. As to how God may bring all the men in every nation who fear him into the knowledge of the truth, we do not know, and are not curious to inquire, but that he will do so, we have not the slightest doubt, for God has said that they are accepted with him. All of God's ways are not made known to us, and we must not deny their existence because some of them are past our finding out.

**3.—He is directed what to do.**—Peter was unknown to Cornelius, as Cornelius was unknown to Peter, and yet God had a way by which to bring this inquirer and his apostle together. So God has a way of bringing the unconverted heathen and the preachers of his Gospel together. Sometimes he sends his evangelists unsought to the inquirer, as in the case of Philip and the eunuch, and sometimes he sends the inquirer to the teacher, as in this case. "And now send men to Joppa, and call for Peter." How differently God leads men to the light and brings about his gracious purposes! No doubt the main end of Providence, in sending Peter on that tour among the villages and outlying districts, was that he might finally be brought up to Cæserea, to the house of this devout centurion. Yet there was work for him to do on the way. God can make all his ways fit naturally one into another. His Providences are wrought out in a chain of events. Sometimes all the links are visible, and sometimes the most, if not all of them, are hidden from our view. It does not matter.

**4.—Not disobedient to the heavenly vision.**—As soon as the angel which spoke to him was departed, Cornelius called his household together, and told them all that had happened. He was not ashamed to declare his faith before his household; it was not a matter to be hidden, but to be proclaimed. He then selected two men and a trusted servant, who was as devout as himself, and one who was his personal attendant, and sent them forthwith to Joppa to do



as the angel had bidden him. Here is another example of prompt and implicit obedience. He did not doubt, he did not question; but obeyed at once. No doubt many a man has lost a blessing, which has come to his very door, because he has hesitated to obey. Conviction wrought by the Spirit of God is no less distinct and clear to the consciousness than if an angel had appeared to us. It is to be obeyed as promptly and as implicitly. To stifle a conviction or to delay in acting upon it is as fatal as it would have been for Cornelius to have deferred obedience to the command of this heavenly messenger.

## II.—A RELUCTANT APOSTLE.

The next day after the angel had appeared to Cornelius, and while his messengers were on their way to Peter, and were drawing nigh to Joppa, Peter went up on the housetop to pray. He little knew or dreamed of the approach of those messengers, or of the purpose of God; and yet he was unconsciously falling into God's plan for the help of the devout centurion. It was early in the morning, about six o'clock. Peter had not broken his fast, and was an hungered. Breakfast was delayed, but in course of preparation. In the meantime, Peter fell into a trance. Just what the nature of this trance was, it is difficult to say. Perhaps it was primarily natural sleep, to which was superadded some supernatural influence of the Spirit of God. It is not unlikely that it was similar in kind to that deep sleep which fell upon Abraham, the record of which we have in Gen. xv, 12; or that which came upon Job (iv, 13), in which these patriarchs were instructed by the visions which they saw while in that peculiar condition. The vision which Peter saw was different from the vision of the angel which appeared to Cornelius. In this case, it was an actual appearance to the waking consciousness of the centurion. In Peter's case it was an unreal appearance. That is, there was no sheet actually let down from heaven filled with all manner of four-footed beasts; but there was a vision like a dream, in which this thing seemed to occur. For the time being, and so far as the final impression upon his mind was concerned, the vision was real, though it was an impression made on his imagination only. God has again and again taught his people in this subjective way. The most notable case was that in which Jacob slept and saw, as it were, a ladder set up from earth to heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon it.

1.—**The vision.**—What Peter saw was a great sheet, knit at the four corners and containing all manner of four-footed beasts, and

wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air, let down from heaven to the earth. This vision of itself might have meant nothing, and would have passed away as the mere distortion of the mental operation during sleep, superinduced by the previous physical condition of hunger; but while he gazed in the state of trance upon this remarkable vision, a voice said to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." He was hungry, and would fain have eaten, but the creatures before him, either all of them or some of them, were to him, as an orthodox Jew, unclean beasts, and so, by the law of God, forbidden to him. Still all this might have been but a troubled dream. Nevertheless, it was so real and carried out in such fullness of detail, that the matter did not end here.

**2.—The controversy.**—Peter, in his vision, seems to have recognized the voice that spake to him as being the voice of the Lord, and so, Peter-like, he at once and promptly enters his protest: "*Not so, Lord.*" We should almost know this was Peter; the reply is so prompt and characteristic. Peter always had his own opinions, and he believed in them thoroughly, and was never backward in declaring them; he even did not hesitate to combat the Lord himself. Compare this part of his reply with his remonstrance, almost in the same words with Jesus, in Matt. xvi, 22. So, also, of the concluding words of his remonstrance: "For I have *never* eaten anything common or unclean." We are again reminded of this quick, self-confident, impulsive, hearty, and honest-hearted apostle: "Thou shalt *never* wash my feet." "I will *never* deny thee." Now, here it is again: "I have *never*." As though this settled the matter. What had been his habit must be right, and even the Divine command must not interfere. Yet this mind of Peter's was not altogether without warrant; for his invariable habit in this matter was based on the ordinance of God himself, by which the clean and the unclean animals were separated. Peter was so far right, that he would not violate a command of God at the sound or command of any voice until he had sufficient reason from God himself. Now he is met by the voice saying to him, "What God hath cleansed, that call thou not common." Here was a new principle, or the setting forth of a new procedure on God's part. The distinction between the clean and the unclean was not inherent, but ceremonial, and therefore temporary. God declared to Peter now that that ceremonial is done away with, or, in other words, the unclean is now clean; that is, it ceases to be unlawful to eat of animals before unclean, because God has removed the prohibition. This was done thrice, and then the vessel was taken up into heaven. Old prejudices and old habits of thought

are not easily removed; and entirely new teaching needs to be carefully and even oftentimes repeated.

**3.—Peter in doubt.**—In the light of the subsequent history, we can readily understand the meaning of the vision. Peter himself understood it at last. (vs. 45-47; xi, 15-18.) Now, however, he doubted. "What can this vision mean?" we can fancy him saying to himself. He had been hungry, and in vision food had come to him with a command to eat; but the food was unclean, according to God's own command, and yet God had declared that he had cleansed it. There was a deeper hunger in Peter's heart—his longing desire to see men saved through Jesus Christ. No doubt he had pondered the question of the salvation of the Gentiles; he had himself declared God's purpose of grace toward them in his great sermon on the day of Pentecost; but that they were to be received on the same terms, and in the same way, as the Jews were received, he did not believe. He supposed they would come in as proselytes, and not as equals. He had not arisen to the truth "that God is no respecter of persons," and that "there is no difference between man and man before God, either as to his sin or the free grace which God has revealed to all men through Christ. This vision was intended to set this at rest, and the spiritual hunger of Peter after souls was to be satisfied both in the conversion of Jews and Gentiles. There was now to be no more clean or unclean among men whom the Gospel cleansed. The sheet coming down from heaven and going back whence it came, showed that this was God's purpose; in itself as remarkable teaching as that seen in the ark of Noah, which included in its saving walls all manner of beasts and creeping things and fowls of the air. Thus long ago God foreshadowed the universality of his grace and the scope of the Gospel. A capital missionary sermon is suggested by this incident. "I. The heavenly origin of foreign missions. II. The vast extent of the field. III. The great labor involved. IV. The doubts and difficulties connected with the missionary problem. V. The Divine promise bestowed on them."

**4.—Peter's doubts resolved.**—God does not always leave us in doubt. Time was given to Peter to think over these things, as to what God may have meant. While he was still in doubt, the corresponding and confirming events which God had set in motion were at hand. Just then the messengers of Cornelius arrived, and inquired for Peter. Still thinking upon the vision, the "Spirit said to him, Behold! three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing, for I have sent them." Here we have vision and voice, together with messengers sent from

Cornelius, and also the distinct command of the Holy Spirit. If God sometimes leaves us to doubt and wonder what certain things mean, we may be sure that, with an honest and open heart of obedience toward him, he will, by combination of providences and convictions from the Spirit, ultimately make the way plain. We may remark in this connection that inward convictions, with regard to things doubtful, should never be acted upon unless there are external and real confirmatory circumstances accompanying them. It is a great lesson to learn: how to interpret convictions in the light of external facts. The whole lesson is most beautiful, as showing how proud and haughty heathenism is seen knocking at the gate of the Gospel, and suing for mercy; and how proud and haughty Jewish caste and prejudice yields to the teachings of the Gospel.

## XLIII.

## PETER AT CÆSAREA.—Acts x, 30-48.

(30) And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, (31) And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. (32) Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side; who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. (33) Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God. (34) Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: (35) But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. (36) The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all :) (37) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; (38) How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. (39) And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: (40) Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; (41) Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. (42) And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. (43) To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. (44) While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. (45) And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. (46) For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, (47) Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? (48) And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.—Acts x, 30-48.

After the vision which Peter had on the housetop, and his subsequent reception of the messengers from Cornelius, he proceeded the next day, with a number of brethren from Joppa, to Cæsarea to see what the meaning of it all was. As yet the matter was not fully understood. The whole purpose of God had not been revealed to Peter in the vision; but enough light had come to him to guide him so far on the way. He was like a sailor who leaves port with sealed

orders, which are to be broken from port to port as he proceeds on his voyage. On the way he met Cornelius, with a goodly company of friends and kinsmen, who, when he saw Peter, fell at his feet and worshiped him; which act Peter immediately repudiated, and bade him stand on his feet before him, because he also was but a man, and not God. Here we see the lingering power of heathen education and training in Cornelius, and the effect of a knowledge of the true God in the act of Peter. Entering the house, Peter found a goodly company assembled. He felt himself in a peculiar position for a Jew, it not being lawful for a Jew to enter into the house of a Gentile, or have any voluntary intercourse with one. This Peter frankly stated, but also informed them that God had shown him that this old caste feeling and prejudice was wrong, and that he was henceforth to call no man common or unclean. An immense truth, the greatness of which ever Peter had not fully learned, and a truth the breadth and length and depth of which we, after nearly two thousand years, have not yet fully measured. But God, who, for wise purposes, and for the time being, had made the ceremonial law, had now, for equally wise as well as gracious reasons, abrogated that law, and Peter was ready to obey the changed law without gainsaying.

### I.—A DEVOUT AND EXPECTANT INQUIRER.

The first meeting between Peter and Cornelius being over, and a proper footing for them both established by Peter's brief address, Cornelius proceeded to rehearse to Peter himself the visitation he had received from the angel, the personal circumstances under which that angelic visit was made, and the fact of his sending for Peter in obedience to the angel's command. He then expresses his gratification at the fact of Peter's visit, and his readiness of mind to hear what the apostle had to say.

1.—**The company of inquirers.**—Cornelius was not content to have the instruction which had been promised of the angel all to himself. He had kindred at his command, and intimate personal friends. While the messengers were absent in Joppa communicating with Peter, Cornelius had communicated with these friends and kinsmen and invited them to his house to share with him the coming instruction. "Now therefore, we are all here present." The earnestness, frankness, and sincerity of the centurion's heart and mind are seen in this action. To him a knowledge of God and his word was so important that he desired that others should share with him the

benefits he himself expected to receive. He was not like some modern inquirers, who are constantly telling us that religion is too sacred a matter to be spoken about; and being between the individual soul and God, is not to be talked about even to most intimate friends. If there were more such men in our armies, and in every station of life, as Cornelius, there would be vastly more Christians in the world, both in high and low positions. If God has given us a good thing, let us share it with others; if we have found out the most excellent way, let us help others into it.

**2.—Present before God.**—When Cornelius declared to Peter that he and his friends were there “before God,” he revealed both his faith and his reverence. God was not visible to any of them, yet he believed that God was present with them, and indeed he reckoned that he was in God’s presence rather than in man’s. If, when we assemble ourselves together in church, chapel, prayer-room, or Sunday-school, we could all come as Cornelius and his friends did, “before God,” how different might the effect of his word be! Some people go to the “church” as though *it* were a holy place, while others go to hear some great preacher; but this devout man came into the presence of God. That was the main fact with him. The place was nothing; the presence of God, and his presence before God, was the great thing with him. “God is a spirit,” and “he seeketh such to worship him.” Not in Jerusalem, not in this place or that, but anywhere and everywhere, “in spirit and in truth.”

**3.—To hear what God had to say.**—Cornelius did not say to Peter, “We are all gathered here to hear what *you* may have to say to us.” He and his friends quite understood that it would be through the lips of Peter that God would speak, but they counted on the message being from God. They were ready to hear not only some things, but “*all things*.” They wanted a full message, and had come with hearts to receive everything which God had commanded the apostle to say. This also is a mark of the true inquirer. Too many of us are willing to hear in part, rather than in whole, the message of God. We are willing to hear how we may be justified, and yet do not care to hear how we are to be sanctified. They wanted to know “all the counsel of God.” Nothing short of this will fully meet the spiritual necessities of any man. An inquirer who is not ready to hear all that God has to say will probably fail in hearing, “in the power of the spirit,” anything that God has to say.

**4.—To do whatsoever God may command.**—This is not affirmed in so many words, but it is implied in the word “to hear.” God recognizes no hearing of his word which is not followed by doing it.

We might put two Scriptures together and get a good interpretation of this matter: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that *heareth* my word and believeth . . . hath everlasting life." "If any man willeth to *do his will*, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." (John v, 24; vii, 17.) That is not hearing which does not lead to faith, and that is not faith which does not start the whole man to doing the will of God. Cornelius was no curious inquirer, but a sincere one, who desired to *know* the will of God only that he might *do* it.

## II.—A REVELATION TO PETER.

God had made it plain to Peter that he was to go down to the Gentile centurion at Cæsarea, but he had not fully informed him of all that was implied in that double and corresponding revelation given to Cornelius and himself. He had, indeed, told him that no man was unclean in his sight; that is, in the sense of being excluded from his mercy. This revelation comprehended two truths.

**1.—God is no respecter of persons.**—In nature there is no difference between man and man. All men are made of one blood. Originally all sprang from the one pair. Differences and distinctions are artificial, accidental, ceremonial, and unreal. There is no difference in the moral standing of men, "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." There is no difference in their relation to God in respect of his purpose of grace. "God has included all, both Jew and Greek, in unbelief, that he might include all in his mercy." "He will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." Therefore he has given Jesus to be a ransom for all. (I. Tim. ii, 4.) The rich and the poor, the king and the peasant, are alike to him. Naked we all came into the world, and naked shall we all go out of it. In the resurrection the only difference will be on the ground of previous relation to Christ. This is a great truth. It was a new revelation to Peter; it ought to be a new one to us every day.

**2.—There are accepted souls in every nation.**—The Jews were wont to think that, because God had chosen them to be the channels of his revelation and the custodians of his ceremonial witness, he had therefore chosen them, and them alone, to salvation. Peter frankly acknowledges that now, at last, he sees that salvation is not a matter which is limited by race or condition, but is the gift of God to all men, in every nation, who "fear God and work righteousness." Of this, the history of the Old Testament gave at least abundant



prophetic evidence. The Gospel came to Abram before he was a Jew, and its blessings were bestowed upon him, or at least confirmed unto him, by Melchisedec, who, though a Hebrew, was yet "the priest of the Most High God." Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, was an accepted man with God, and yet he was not, so far as we know, even a proselyte to the Jewish religion. The knowledge of God was present with Balaam, whatever we may judge of his character and final estate. Naaman was a converted man and accepted with God, though he did not become incorporated with the Jewish theocracy; the widow of Zerapath was a heathen of a most heathen nation, and yet God accepted her; and God certainly sent his message of grace and mercy to the Ninevites, who by the preaching of Jonah were led to repentance. These cases were but hints of God's larger purpose. Now Peter perceived that his purpose was a universal one, and that henceforth even the former ceremonial distinctions were done away, and all men stood before God equal in their privileges.

### III.—PETER'S ADDRESS.

The observation which Peter has just made as to what he perceived to be God's purpose, now passes over into a more formal address to the waiting inquirers. It is marked by the same general characteristics which we have observed in his former addresses, though it is not so full. Perhaps he saw that it was irrelevant to go into all the details of Jewish history in preaching the glad tidings to these Gentiles.

1.—**The exordium.**—Peter begins his address by a preparatory remark in which he sounds the note of the whole Gospel: "The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all.)" He thus at once intimates that he has no other Gospel for Cornelius than that which God had sent to the children of Israel by Jesus Christ,—a word and message of peace; and he hastens to add that Jesus is Lord of all, not of the Jews only, but of all men. This seems to have been a new conclusion which Peter reached suddenly, as he was speaking. This had been the message to Israel; this was henceforth to be the message to the Gentiles. Thus Peter opened his address. It is a good plan, when speaking to inquirers, either in private or addressing them in class or mass, to give them a hint of the whole message before going into the details.

2.—**The historical basis of the Gospel.**—Peter now sets forth before Cornelius the leading facts in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

He has assumed in his exordium that Cornelius was not altogether ignorant of the facts, nor even of the doctrine in the case, since he was living in such close neighborhood to where Jesus had lived and wrought and died. Nevertheless, he rehearses the main features of the historic Gospel. (i) *Jesus of Nazareth.* This is the first fact in the Gospel. Peter did not begin his sermon with an exposition of natural religion or with a system of ethical philosophy; but by calling the attention of his hearers to the Person Who is the substance of the Gospel, "Jesus of Nazareth." He points out the significant fact that he appeared in his public ministry "anointed by the Holy Ghost," and accompanied all through it by God himself. Here at least we have the intimation both of his human and divine character. Here we have mention, not in theological precision or terms, of the three persons in the Godhead. Jesus the Son of God, the Holy Ghost, and God the Father, who was with him. (ii) *His ministry of mercy among men.* "He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil." This human ministry among men was the sign that Jesus was the Messiah of God, and intimated what the mind of God was toward men. It was good-will. The acts of mercy and compassion bestowed upon both the bodies of afflicted men, and upon the souls of devil-possessed and oppressed men, was an intimation that Jesus had come into the world to destroy the works of the devil and to rescue men from all the ills and sorrows which sin had entailed. Jesus was the friend, and not the censor or enemy of men. (iii) *The death of Jesus.* "Whom they (the Jews) slew and hanged upon a tree." This is indeed but a brief statement. We can well suppose that the record here given by Luke contains only the merest outline of Peter's address. But the fact of the sacrificial death is here. Christ and him crucified, was a part of the theme, nay, the very essence of the theme, of this first sermon to the Gentiles. (iv) *The glorious fact of his resurrection.* "Him God raised the third day, and showed him openly." (v) *The certainty of these things.* The Gospel which Peter was preaching was not based on a myth or an imaginary history; it was veritable fact. As to the earthly ministry of Jesus: "We are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem." Moreover, the most important fact—his resurrection—was established beyond question, because, though he was not shown openly after his resurrection, to all the people, he was shown to "witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead." Here is simple historical truth. How blessed and comforting it is to know that our faith rests not upon myths or speculation, but on solid

facts concerning which there can be no doubt! (vi) *Prophetic witness*. The truth of the testimony of these witnesses to Jesus is further strengthened by the fact that our Lord's appearance in the world, his human ministry, his sacrifice, and his resurrection from the dead, were all the subjects of prophetic witness long ages ago. This fact is constantly relied upon by the apostles in their preaching, as when Paul says of Jesus—"He came and lived, and died, and rose again, according to the Scriptures." (Rom. i, 2; I. Cor. xv, 3, 4.)

**3.—The preaching of the Gospel.**—Peter refers to the fact that, after the resurrection, the apostles and witnesses were commanded to preach unto the people the two following great truths, as the outcome of the appearance, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus:—(i) *That God had ordained Jesus "to be Judge of quick and dead."* That is to say, into the hands of Jesus all authority in heaven and earth had been given, to dispose of the destinies of men, both those who are now living and those who are dead. This is a most solemn truth, and one which Jesus fully expounded himself. (Matt. xxviii, 18; John v, 20–24.) It is then to Jesus we must look for whatever destiny we may inherit. There is no other final authority. What madness to ignore or neglect the message of the Son of God! (ii) *The remission of sins*. When we think or speak of judgment, and Jesus as the Judge, we are apt to think only of that which is associated with punishment and final banishment from God. But we must not forget that it is as much the province of the Judge to set free the man against whom no offense is found as it is to punish the man who is guilty. Therefore we have the blessed doctrine of remission of sins, and justification through the name of Jesus on the basis of his sacrificial death. "Through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive the remission of sins." (v. 43.) This is the constant doctrine of the apostles. Peter preached it in his first, and in all his subsequent sermons, as we have seen all through this history of apostolic activity and ministry; Paul preached it in his great sermon (Acts xiii, 39), and it was the theme of all the prophets of the Old Testament. If we accept Jesus as Saviour and Lord, and remission of sins through him, we shall not have occasion to come before him as the Judge sitting on the great white throne; "there is therefore now no judgment to them that are in Christ Jesus." This must have been most joyful news to these earnest and honest inquirers. It is most joyful news to us. This is that "word of peace, by Jesus Christ," of which Peter spoke in the exordium of his address.

#### IV.—THE DESCENT OF THE SPIRIT.

While Peter was preaching we must assume that his hearers were believing, for we are told that “the Holy Ghost fell on them which heard the word.” This is an illustration also of the deeper meaning of “hearing the word.” Such hearing is receiving and believing.

**1.—The Spirit and the Word.**—We learn from this that the Holy Spirit is to be received in connection with preaching and believing the word. Peter says the Gospel was preached with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. (I. Pet. i, 12.) If we would receive the Holy Ghost, let us give believing attention both to the hearing and the reading of the word. The descent of the Spirit in this case was not accompanied with any visible sign, as on the day of Pentecost. There were no tongues of fire, no sound as of a rushing mighty wind. The believers who were present recognized the fact that the Holy Spirit had fallen on them when they—that is, Cornelius and his friends—began to “speak with tongues and magnify God.” God has no stereotyped way of bestowing his blessings. It may not, and does not, follow that those on whom the Holy Ghost falls will speak with tongues; but it invariably follows that those on whom the Holy Ghost falls bring forth the fruits of the Spirit. A spiritual and holy life is the evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Where this fruit is not seen we may be sure the Spirit has not been received.

**2.—The astonishment of the Jewish believers.**—Hitherto these Jewish brethren had supposed that this great and peculiar gift was for them, and them only. Although Joel had distinctly foretold that God would pour out his Spirit on *all* flesh, and Peter had preached that this “promise was to *all* them that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call,” they did not enter fully into the meaning of the Scriptures and doctrines which they believed and preached. It is doubtful if we Christians have entered fully into the wideness of God’s mercy toward this lost world. The constant tendency is to restrict the mercy of God and to limit his grace and power. If long ago one of our Puritan Fathers said, “There is yet much more light to break out of God’s word,” may we not hope and believe that there is much more mercy to flow from the atoning work of Jesus Christ than we are in the habit of believing? Are there not in every nation those who, without the knowledge of Christ, are yet subjects of God’s mercy, since they are honestly “feeling after him,” “fearing him,” and “working righteousness”?

**3.—Peter’s decision.**—Witnessing the seal of the Spirit upon

these Gentile believers, Peter does not hesitate a moment, but comes to the right conclusion, and commands "them to be baptized in the Name of the Lord." (v. 48.) And as if to anticipate any objection from his conservative brethren, he challenges them thus: "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, seeing they have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" (v. 47.) Here, in the gift of the Holy Ghost is the great test of fellowship and spiritual equality. Whom the Holy Ghost receives, we must receive. Whom the Holy Ghost seals, we must not dare refuse. There was no church in Cæsarea; yet these Gentile disciples were true believers, and truly saved, without the interposition, or even the ministration, of a church. It was not baptism by an apostle that saved them, for they were sealed by the Holy Ghost before they were baptized. It was not the word at the mouth of an apostle that saved them, but the word of God, heard and received. How beautiful and simple is the Gospel of Christ! What a caricature some of his disciples, claiming special and peculiar descent from the apostles, have made of it! God guide us into all truth!

## XLIV.

## THE GOSPEL PREACHED AT ANTIOCH.—Acts xi, 19—30.

(19) Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. (20) And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. (21) And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. (22) Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. (23) Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. (24) For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. (25) Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: (26) And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. (27) And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. (28) And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cesar. (29) Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea: (30) Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.—Acts xi, 19—30.

The report of Peter's visit to the house of Cornelius, that he had preached the word to him, baptized him, and also partaken of his hospitality and eaten with him, preceded the return of the apostle to Jerusalem. This transgression of Jewish caste stirred up a fierce storm against him on the part of "them of the circumcision." Peter vigorously defended himself by a simple appeal to the fact that he had acted according to Divine instructions, which he detailed, and further on his own deep conviction of what was right in view of the fact, that "the Holy Ghost fell on them as on us at the beginning." "Forasmuch, then, as God gave them the like gifts as he did unto us who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I that I could withstand God?" "When they heard these things, they held their peace and glorified God, saying, Then hath God to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." There are those in our day who assume to be the only legitimate successors of the apostles, who do not recognize the fact that those to whom the Holy Ghost is given, as well as to

them, are worthy of being recognized by the Church of Christ, and to be received into fellowship and communion. It is better to have the fellowship of God than of men; and he who has received the Holy Ghost and been granted "repentance unto life," can well afford to do without the ecclesiastical fellowship of any man, though he might desire it for Christ's sake. "They of the circumcision" have a large following yet, and a very clear succession.

The evident object of Luke in making this record of the apostolic ministry, was to show us how the Gospel spread from the Jews to the Gentiles, how the purpose of God includes all who believe under grace, and how the Gospel was preached to the uttermost parts of the earth, and to all people, without respect of persons. Cornelius was the first illustrious convert from the Gentiles. From henceforward, among Greeks and Romans, the Gospel went forth accompanied by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. We have, in the portion of the record that we are examining to-day, a detailed account of the providential means which God took to bring about his purpose. We see how one event leads up to another; how a great variety of agencies were used to accomplish his grace; how the ministry of the word was committed to many different hands; how the Church, both at Jerusalem and Antioch, came gradually into the exercise of the nascent powers and functions of organized life; and how brotherly love and Church fellowship were manifested. It would be impossible to follow out all these and various other lines of thought suggested by this very full record concerning the gathering of the first Gentile Church. We must content ourselves with a few of the most prominent outlines.

### I.—THE CHURCH GATHERED.

About ten years had elapsed since the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The work of the apostles had hitherto been confined to Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. The Jews only had been preached to. The conversion of Cornelius, up to this time, was the single exception, unless the case of the eunuch was one, and he probably was a proselyte, which Cornelius was not. The conversion of Cornelius and the discussion following it at Jerusalem, are events which naturally prepare the way for this account of the first Gentile Church at Antioch. "Antioch was the capital of the Greek kingdom of Syria, on the river Orontes, built by the first king, Seleucus Nicator, in honor of his father Antiochus, who was one of Alexander the Great's generals. It lay about one hundred and eighty miles north

of the northern frontier of Phœnicia. There was a large population of Jews, whom Selucus attracted to his new city by granting them equal privileges with the Greeks." It had a population of about 500,000, and was reckoned to be the third city of importance in the whole Roman Empire, Rome and Alexandria being the two first. It was in this great center of Greek and Jewish population where we see the middle wall of partition between Jews and Greeks first broken down, and the disciples of Christ, of both parties, becoming one in Christ Jesus.

**1.—How the Church was gathered.**—It is most interesting to note how God overrules the work of evil men, and causes it to minister to his purpose, and "work together for good." Upon the persecution which arose about the death of Stephen, the disciples, which were scattered abroad, went as far as Phœnicia. This territory comprehended a strip of coast on the Mediterranean about one hundred and twenty miles long, by about twelve broad, including Tyre and Sidon, but excluding Cæsarea, to the island of Cyprus, which lay off the Phœnician coast, and to Antioch, the city we have before indicated. To the people of these three districts, these disciples went preaching the Gospel, and testifying the grace of God. "Preaching the word." It is worthy of observation, that the instruments of God's grace in this case were not apostles, or deacons, or even persons sent forth by the Church at Jerusalem. They were simple disciples, what we could call laymen; were acting entirely on their own account, doing only what every Christian is naturally constrained to do, telling to others what they themselves have heard and believed concerning Jesus. These disciples preached the word, and the word was owned and blessed of God. It does not matter who scatters the seed; the life is in the seed, and not in the hand of him that sows it. It is of little consequence *who* preaches, but it is of vast consequence *what* is preached. What nonsense it is, and what an insult to the word and Spirit of God, for any class of men to arrogate to themselves the sole right to preach God's blessed Gospel, and "repentance unto life" through Jesus Christ!

**2.—The Jew first.**—These scattered disciples were mostly, if not all, Jews, either home-born or Hellenists. They were filled with the same prejudice as that which caused Peter to remonstrate with God, when he first showed him the vision of the beasts, which had been cleansed. So we read that they went forth preaching the word "to none but Jews only." Well, this is Divine order. It was meet that this ancient people, to whom for centuries had been committed the oracles of God, and from whom, "as concerning the flesh, Christ



came," should have the first offer of the Gospel; but though they had much profit and advantage every way, in respect of their education and training, over the Greeks, it was for them now to learn what God had already taught Peter, that he was no "respector of persons," and that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," of every race and condition, giving himself "a ransom for all,"—tasting death for all." (Heb. ii, 9; I. Tim. ii, 6.)

**3.—And also the Greeks.**—"And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come unto Antioch, spake unto the Grecians." God showed Peter his purpose toward the Gentiles by a special revelation; he confirmed that purpose to the sight of other Jewish brethren by bestowing upon Cornelius and his household the gift of the Holy Ghost in their presence. But now he works the same truth out in the hearts of some private men of Cyrene and Cyprus, who had been present on the day of Pentecost, by the power of the Spirit working in their minds in connection with the truth concerning Jesus and the Gentile world. These men of Cyprus and Cyrene were probably Hellenist Jews, but it is perfectly sure that the Grecians to whom they preached the Lord Jesus were not Hellenist, but Greeks. The peculiar expression, "And some of them spake unto the Grecians," is in evident contrast with what was said in the previous verse, that the disciples "preached the word to none save Jews only." Thus does God gradually bring to pass his purposes, and unfold his truth by easy and natural methods, as the work of the Gospel went on, rather than by supernatural and extraordinary means, as at the beginning. What we have learned in the beginning by the aid of miracle is afterward taught us without such extraordinary aid. This is consistent with all the unfolding and progress of revelation.

**4.—The success of this lay preaching.**—"And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord." By "the hand of the Lord" is meant that the power of God accompanied the preaching of the Gospel to the people. This gracious power of God was present with the brethren who preached to the Jews only, and it was present with those who preached to the Grecians. The great number that believed were evidently from both Jews and Greeks, and they alike turned to the Lord through repentance unto life. Thus God is with all who, in sincerity, preach the Gospel, even though they do not see eye to eye in everything. What folly it is for us to make hard and fast lines and withdraw from each other because, in all things, we have not attained to the same truth! When we see God recognizing servants of various convictions and

honoring them with the accompanying power of the Holy Ghost, we should, like Peter, recognize the Hand of God. The reason God could do this is that, in this and like cases, both parties "preached the word" and set forth the Gospel concerning Jesus Christ. It is the word concerning his Son Jesus Christ which he honors, and not our prejudices and narrownesses.

## II.—THE CHURCH INSPECTED AND EDIFIED.

The news of this wonderful work among the Gentiles, as well as the Jews in Antioch, soon reached the brethren at Jerusalem. The work, as we have seen, was altogether apart from any apostolic agency or mission of the mother Church. Those who had brought a storm about the ears of Peter for preaching to and fellowshiping with Gentiles, were surprised to hear that a similar work was going on, on a larger scale, in a Gentile city, and that a great company of both Jews and Greeks were brought into fellowship by the Gospel. Their attitude toward this new movement was somewhat different from that assumed on the former occasion. They took the matter up, and determined to send a representative to Antioch, visiting the other places on his way. In what capacity Barnabas came to Antioch does not appear. Whether he was sent with authority from the Church or apostles, or to inquire and report, or simply to bear the fellowship of the mother Church, is not expressed. There is a suggestion in the incident, that the Church at Jerusalem, where the apostles resided, was feeling to some extent its responsibility, and perhaps authority, in and over other Churches, but it is by no means clear that any such authority was exercised. Inquiry and fellowship, at the most, seems to have been their purpose.

**1.—The messenger.**—"They sent forth Barnabas." We know of this good man. He was among the first-fruits of the Gospel. Originally a man of wealth, he had sold all his possessions, and laid them at the apostles' feet. He was subsequently the friend of Saul, or Paul, and was the one to take him by the hand and vouch for him to the brethren at Jerusalem, who distrusted him. (Acts iv, 36, 37; ix, 27.) We have a further description of his character in the twenty-fourth verse: "He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." It would be impossible to bestow higher praise. It is singularly suggestive of the kindly and changed temper of the brethren at Jerusalem, who were so angry at Peter, that they should select this man, who was the friend of Saul, and probably somewhat predisposed toward the broader view of the Gospel in respect of the

Gentiles. At any rate, it was a wise and gracious thing for them to send Barnabas, who was at least no partisan of the narrow view, being himself a resident of Cyprus, and so a Hellenist. Such delegations are too often partisans, and so are not qualified to make a fair inquiry and an unprejudiced report. Besides this, his character for integrity was well known, his kindly disposition, and the fact that he was a man of pre-eminent spiritual life and of great faith, made him in every way best qualified to undertake the mission.

**2.—Rejoicing at the good work.**—“Who, when he came, and had *seen* the grace of God, was glad.” Two things are here suggested: First, that the grace of God is a thing to be seen. When grace comes to a man, it makes itself manifest in life and character. We are told, when the four men let down their paralyzed friend through the roof at the feet of Jesus, that Jesus “*saw* their faith.” So, in like manner, Barnabas saw the grace of God: saw that the Holy Ghost had come upon these Gentiles at Antioch as well as upon the Jews at Jerusalem, and that they were standing forth in the power of a new life. Second, the sight of this new departure in the work of the Gospel made him glad. He was no jealous workman, either for himself or for the regular ministry. He rejoiced that the lay brethren had been, by the blessing of God, enabled to do so good and so great a work; he was glad that the Gentiles were also declared by this grace of God to be fellow-heirs with the Jews in the privileges of the Gospel. He was glad that this wide and large purpose of God was being manifested. This is as it should be. That is but a poor mean spirit which cannot rejoice in the grace of God, wherever and by whomsoever wrought.

**3.—Strengthening the work.**—Barnabas was called the “Son of Consolation.” He had special gifts for the encouragement of believers. In all the subsequent history of the “Acts of the Apostles,” we do not hear a great deal of the personal work of Barnabas, but we are sure that he took his share of the work, and did it well, though it was not of that brilliant and initial kind which characterized his great friend’s. Coming in among these young converts at Antioch, he no doubt gave them the greeting of the brethren and apostles at Jerusalem, and then exhorted them all, both Jews and Greeks, “that, with purpose of heart, they would cleave unto the Lord.” From which we may learn that the Christian life is not lived carelessly. It requires “purpose of heart,” and it involves “cleaving to the Lord.” The Lord indeed is our keeper, but he keeps those who, with purpose of heart, cleave unto him, as Ruth did to Naomi. He no doubt warned them of the natural deceitfulness and treachery of

their own hearts, of the temptations which would come upon them, of the persecution which they might well expect from the world, and the especial enemies of Christ, and therefore of the necessity, at the very outset, of taking a strong position and putting their whole heart and strength into their new life. There is no part of the work of the ministry more important than that of training and teaching young converts. Everything in after Christian life depends upon a right start. Barnabas gave them this right start.

**4.—The effect of Barnabas' ministry.**—"And much people were added to the Lord." Barnabas seems to have addressed himself mainly to the believers at Antioch, but so powerful were his addresses, so full and rich his Scriptural instruction, so clearly did he set forth the great fact that Jesus was the Son of God, that the good work which he found in progress increased and grew until "much (more) people were added to the Lord." We do not read in figures how many converts were gathered under the preaching of Barnabas, but we are left to believe that there was a large number. Sometimes the preaching and exhorting of the *teacher* is as powerful to win men to Christ as the more direct work of an *evangelist*. It seems to have been so in this case.

### III.—THE NEW CHURCH AT WORK.

Barnabas had not been long in Antioch before he perceived that more workmen were needed, men who could instruct and direct the Church. The work was growing on his hands out of proportion to his ability to keep pace with it and overtake it.

**1.—Barnabas seeks Paul.**—Casting about in his mind for a helper, his thoughts turn to his friend Saul, or Paul. It is remarkable that he did not send to Jerusalem for help. Perhaps he knew the brethren there well enough to fear that their prejudices would hinder rather than help the good work. He remembered Saul and his great knowledge of the Scriptures, his broad views and sympathies with and for the Gentiles. Perhaps he remembered the commission which Jesus had given him at the time of his conversion. Saul had not as yet entered upon his work. Though well known to the Church at Jerusalem, they had offered him to abide in obscurity at Tarsus. More than three years, perhaps five, had elapsed since his conversion. He had spent three years of that in Arabia, and since then he had been in retirement in his own home in Tarsus. Barnabas determined to go and find him. Here was no narrow or selfish jealousy. Barnabas probably knew that Saul would quickly take

the lead in this new work, if he were brought into it; but he was a "good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith," and with him it was no question of *who* should take the lead or be the more conspicuous instrument in the work; his only thought was, *how* shall the work be conserved, and who can best help in it? That being determined in his own mind, he promptly took the journey to Tarsus to find Saul. The journey would be about ten or twelve hours, perhaps a whole day by sea, or about eighty miles by land. However, he went and succeeded in finding his friend and bringing him to Antioch. Here we have our first introduction to Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles, and see him formally and regularly entering upon that great work which continued for thirty years and filled all Asia with Churches of Jesus Christ.

**2.—A whole year's work.**—"And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves in the Church, and taught much people." Two things are observable here. First, that the work of evangelizing went on steadily for a whole year. Our mistake in these modern times is that we do not lay siege to cities; we are content with a few days of special evangelistic work, or a few weeks at most; we have not the courage or the faith or the consecration to "stick" to the work. Second, it is to be observed that this work was done in or with the Church. We can understand that the whole Church was equally interested with Paul and Barnabas in doing this work, and cordially and heartily co-operated with them. All Christians cannot be preachers or teachers, but all may be helpers in the work. When this is the case, and the Church works together with the evangelists and teachers, steadily and continuously, the result here mentioned is sure to take place. Much people will come for teaching and be converted to God.

**3.—A new name.**—"And the disciples were called Christians, first at Antioch." Much discussion has been indulged in as to the origin of this name. It is agreed that it was not taken by the disciples themselves, for they were content to call themselves "brethren," "disciples," "friends," and other similar names. It was not given by the unbelieving Jews, for that would have been a confession on their part that Jesus was the Messiah. It was probably given to them by the Greeks, who, noticing the great growth of the sect, observing the prominence given in all their teaching to Christ, and seeing their faith was more in *Him the person* than in any mere doctrine, simply designated them by the name of their Master. There is no evidence that it was given in derision. It is certain that the disciples afterward accepted and adopted it as their own. Let us be

proud of the name, as was Polycarp, who said before his martyrdom, "I die a Christian." And let us bear that honored and holy name worthily.

#### IV.—THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SAINTS.

The progress of the Church at Antioch attracted to that city one Agabus, a prophet, who, when he came, prophesied of the great famine which afterward took place in the days of Claudius Cæsar. This warning of coming distress was not unheeded by the disciples in Antioch. It was well known that the great mass of believers in Jerusalem were very poor, and that, if the famine came, it would fall heavily upon them. The result was that an immediate movement was set on foot to raise a fund for the relief of the poor brethren in Judea. By whom the movement was suggested or originated, does not appear; but the whole Church entered into it heartily, and a fund was dispatched by the hands of Barnabas and Saul, and turned over to the elders of the Church at Jerusalem. This was a most beautiful and fitting act on the part of this Gentile Church, and no doubt did much toward cementing the bonds of fellowship between them and the Judean Churches. Paul ever fostered this good work and encouraged the rich Gentile Churches to divide their abundance with the poorer Jewish Churches. Where there is true life, there will always be true fellowship, and fellowship which will not expend itself in words only, or in the exercise of fine sentiments, but in substantial deeds. (I. Cor. xvi, 1-3; II. Cor. viii and ix; Gal. ii, 10.)

## XLV.

## PETER DELIVERED FROM PRISON.—Acts xii, 1-17.

(1) Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hand to vex certain of the church. (2) And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. (3) And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) (4) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. (5) Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. (6) And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. (7) And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. (8) And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals: and so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. (9) And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. (10) When they were past the first and second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. (11) And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. (12) And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. (13) And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. (14) And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. (15) And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. (16) But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. (17) But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.—Acts xii, 1-17.

Once more the storm of persecution broke upon the Church at Jerusalem. "About that time,"—that is, about the time that Barnabas and Paul went up to Jerusalem with the benefaction of the Church at Antioch,—the company of the Lord's people seems to have been in double distress. Not only were they suffering from famine, but now the cruel and bloody Herod had taken in hand the inhuman work of persecution. The story here narrated with such graphic

circumstance and detail presents to us a vivid picture of that conflict which from the beginning has been going on between the world-powers, on the one hand, and the Church of Jesus Christ, guided and protected by the supernatural power of God, on the other. While Herod, the almost despotic king of all Palestine, was planning to make a great holiday, with the trial and execution of Peter for the chief spectacular amusement, God was planning and executing his discomfiture in the deliverance of his servant out of his hands. Great preparations were going on under the orders of the king for the "show," to which all the Jews were to be bidden, for it was to be a popular spectacle; on the other hand, the Church was assembled in prayer to God for Peter, and an angel was on his way from heaven to open the prison door and set the apostle free. Soldiers were closely guarding Peter; but prayers were stronger than prison guards, and one touch of the angel's hand was sufficient to unloose the shackles from Peter's hands and feet. Again we see how varied is the providential dealing of God in different cases, and with different individuals. He suffered James, one of the favored three apostles, to be beheaded without the slightest interposition to save him, while he set the Church praying and sent an angel from heaven to rescue Peter from prison, and from a fate similar to that which befell James. Why he spared Peter and allowed James to be killed is a question which belongs to his secret counsel. We may be sure, however, that James was as dear to God as was Peter; and we must just be content to conclude that, in all the circumstances, Peter was more needful to the Church than James was, and that the martyrdom of James would be overruled for more good to the Church than if his life had been spared.

### I.—THE HERODIAN PERSECUTION.

The account of this persecution of the Church by Herod is very briefly recorded by Luke. It is one of the great advantages which Christianity enjoys over other religions, that its beginnings were so closely interlaced with Roman history that what details are left out of the inspired record are easily supplied by the secular history of the times.

**1.—Herod the king.**—This Herod we know to have been the third of that name who had reigned in Palestine. He was the grandson of Herod the Great, who had slain the innocents at the time of the birth of Jesus. He was the nephew of that Herod who beheaded John the Baptist. He belonged to a bloody and persecut-



ing house, and well kept up its reputation. He was at this time reigning over all Palestine, having been promoted from a more limited kingdom to the entire dominion originally accorded to his grandfather. He was a Roman courtier, but at the same time he was intensely devoted to the manners and customs of his nation, and in order to strengthen himself with the Jews and assuage their prejudices against himself for reigning under Roman rule, was punctilious in the observances of all their religious rites. He now sought to court their further favor by taking strong sides with them against the Christians, whom he stretched out his hand to vex in many ways. This course greatly pleased the rulers of the Jews and the mass of the people who took their cue from their priests.

**2.—The death of James.**—This James was James, the son of Zebedee, the brother of John, the beloved disciple, and must be distinguished from James, the son of Alphæus, who is known as James the Less; and also from James, the brother of our Lord, who at this time was the chief pastor of the church at Jerusalem, and the author of the epistle that goes by his name. Why Luke is so laconic in his account of the martyrdom of this beloved servant of God, it is impossible to say. He gives us a detailed account of the martyrdom of Stephen, who was but a deacon in the Church, while James was not only an apostle, but one of the three favorite apostles who had enjoyed the especial intimacy of Jesus, and was the first of the apostolic band to suffer death for Christ. Perhaps it may be accounted for on the simple ground that it had no direct bearing on the particular course of history which he had taken in hand to write; that is, the development of the Gospel in connection with the Gentiles. The life of this apostle, and his death, is suggestive of how little may be known of the whole history of God's servants. The real record is on high. We may be sure that James had been active in the service of his Master, and so had provoked the wrath of the Jews, who pointed him out to Herod as one of the chief offenders. He and Peter had been specially marked as the most active men in the Church. James had been killed before the Passover, and Peter was reserved for a great show at the close, for Herod was too good a Jew to cause Peter to be murdered during the holy festival; just as the high priests were too punctilious to set their feet inside the unholy court-room of Pilate while they were forcing the murder of the Son of God upon that Roman Governor. James was at least privileged to drink the cup and be baptized with the baptism which was given to his Master, according to the prompt declaration of his ability to do so on a certain occasion. (Matt. xx, 20.)

**3.—Peter taken also.**—The killing of James had greatly pleased the people; that is, the Jews, who hated Christ and his disciples. In this Herod saw an opportunity of further conciliating them, and so he proceeded to arrest Peter, intending to bring him forth after Easter (the Passover) to the people. Herod was very fond of games and public spectacular occasions; and having been educated in Rome, was familiar with the gladiatorial sports of that cruel city. His intention, doubtless, was to make it a great occasion, and publicly to try Peter on some trumped-up charge, condemn him, and have him publicly executed. In pursuance of this plan, Peter was arrested, thrown into prison, and doubly guarded. The enemies of Christ always seem to have a peculiar fear or misgiving that their victims will escape. Perhaps it was remembered that Peter had once before been delivered from prison in a mysterious way. (Ch. v, 19.) He was therefore guarded by four quaternions of soldiers; that is, by four relief guards, each guard having four soldiers. The further details show that he was doubly chained to his guards; that is, by both hands and both feet, whereas it was customary only to chain one hand and one foot to the guard. Pilate's seal on the grave of Jesus was as futile to hold him in the grave as these shackles and this special guard were to keep Peter in prison, when God had determined to set him free. This whole persecution of Herod was characterized by wantonness, for there was no charge against the Christians, they having been specially peaceful and quiet at this time, giving themselves more to edification than evangelization of late; by brutality, as seen in the cruel beheading of James and the vindictive imprisonment of Peter, with the ultimate intention of putting him to death for a mere show to the people; and finally, by meanness, since Herod only did it because he saw that it pleased the people, and by so doing he could win a little political popularity. Such is the world and its ways.

## II.—THE DELIVERANCE OF PETER.

Peter had been in prison for a number of days, at least seven, from the beginning, or just before the beginning, of the passover feast until the last day of it. It was intended on the next day to bring him forth to the people and sacrifice him to their hatred and Herod's ambition.

**1.—But prayer was made for him.**—Thus matters stood. All things were ready for Peter's martyrdom the next day. What could possibly save him? It was impossible for him to effect his escape

from prison. The Church had no power, and there was no power in the State that could be appealed to for help. The king was determined to sacrifice him, and the people were all pleased at the prospect. Yet there was a power at work which neither king nor people had taken into account. "Prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him." While the amphitheater was being prepared, or one extemporized for his execution, this little and feeble body of famine-stricken believers were calling upon God. This has ever been the resource of the Church. What vanity it would have been to have circulated and presented a petition to Herod! He would have laughed at them, and probably put the bearers of the petition into prison with Peter, and increased his delight by adding them to the black list. The kings of the earth and the rulers forget God, but the Church remembers him; and as David looked to the hills for his help, so these believers looked to God to deliver their beloved brother and chief minister. Let the Church ever remember this, that "unceasing," "fervent prayer" is "effectual" with God.

2.—**Peter sleeping.**—What a picture is presented! All is excitement, bustle, and expectation without among the people, who were eagerly waiting for the day to dawn when Herod would order Peter forth. Within the prison, that same night, Peter is quietly sleeping. He no doubt fully expected to die the next day, but this last night is not spent in nervous fear or agonized distress. He was in the hand of God, to live or to die. It is true that we often read of condemned criminals sleeping the night before their execution, just as we often hear of the wicked dying without "bands in their death"; but here was the peaceful sleep of a believer who had no dread of the morrow. He was not as agitated as the people and the king were. We can fancy him even dreaming of his home by the lake of Galilee, or of some bright scene in his childhood. Perhaps in anticipation of his coming death, he may have dreamed of heaven and his meeting, in the presence of his beloved Lord, of his friend and brother James, who had but a few days ago gone up on high to join Stephen in heaven, where Jesus was at the right hand of God. Who knows what Peter may have been dreaming? The two chains with which he was bound to the soldiers who guarded him, and the keepers before the door of the prison, could not fetter his free spirit, or keep his dreams within those four prison walls. So neither were they able to keep him there when God's time to set him free had come.

3.—**"Behold an angel of the Lord."**—Herod was actively engaged in preparing for Peter's execution. The people were eagerly

and impatiently awaiting for him to be brought out, that they might quench the thirst of their hatred in the sight of his blood. On the other hand, the Church was praying, perhaps a little discouraged, as the hour drew near for Peter to be brought out and there was no sign from God of coming deliverance. God had seen his servant, and knew all the machinations of his enemies; he saw his Church on their knees, had heard their prayers, and had dispatched an angel to the prison; perhaps it was Peter's former angelic friend (ch. v, 19); perhaps it was his guardian angel. (Heb. i, 14.) There is more said about angels in this chapter than in any chapter of this book, or any other book of the Bible. Here an angel comes to open a prison door; a little further on we hear the believers talking of Peter's angel, as though the fact of every man's guardian angel was familiar to believers; and still further on we read of an angel from God smiting the murderous and blasphemous Herod dead who had wrought so much wickedness. Well, let us rejoice that there are angels, that they are God's servants and our ministering spirits. Who knows how near and how many of them are engaged on our behalf all the time! How the angel of the Lord "came upon him" we do not know; he evidently entered independently of bolts and bars. With the angel's advent there was a supernatural light shining in the prison, perhaps just the radiance from the face of the angel, or from his raiment. (Matt. xxviii, 3; Acts viii, 15; Rev. xviii, 1.) The various stages of Peter's awaking and deliverance are minutely told.

(i) *The angel smote him on the side.* Peter was sleeping heavily, and had to be roughly wakened, even as God has sometimes to roughly wake us out of sleep. (ii) *He raised him up.* Perhaps took hold of his hand to lift him, as we often do heavy sleepers and children. (iii) *He spoke to him.* "Arise up quickly." Even when God takes us by the hand and raises us up, he bids us put our own will and strength into the work too. So Peter had taken the lame man by the hand when he commanded him to rise up and walk. God always gives strength to fulfill his commands; at the same time he calls upon us to work together with him, or to work out what he works in us to will and to do. He was bidden to rise up quickly; for though it was not possible to frustrate the work of the angel, yet God conforms his work to human circumstances, and wishes us to understand that instant and prompt obedience to his word is the way of blessing. (iv) *The falling off of his chains.* All this time the soldiers were fast sleeping, knowing, as they supposed, that it would be impossible for their prisoner to stir without arousing them, seeing he was chained with two chains, one to either of them. But God, no doubt, caused

them to sleep heavily, and the touch of the angel's hand released Peter from his chains without disturbing the guards; even as the heavenly light did not penetrate their sleeping eyes. (v) "*Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals.*" Peter was going out; he must be prepared for the journey before him. His under garments were loosely fastened while he slept, and his sandals lying by. We may fancy this glorious angel, while Peter was girding his loins, handing him his sandals. The Master had done more than that for Peter once; he had washed his feet. Why, then, should not an angel hand him his shoes? (vi) "*Cast thy garment about thee and follow me.*" This garment was the outer garment which he had laid off that he might the more comfortably sleep. He will have need of it now, for he is going out into the night and on a journey. The angel will lead the way; Peter had but to follow. God might dispense with our few things in the way of clothes and sandals, but he will not have us careless about these things; nor would he have those soldiers, and them who would come to inquire of Peter's escape, think that it had been done in hasty stealth or fear. When Jesus rose from the dead, the face napkin was found carefully folded up and laid aside on a shelf.

**4.—Peter out of the prison.**—Obeying the angel, Peter went out of the prison, following the angel, "and he wist not that it was true which was done by the angel, but thought he saw a vision." This is not surprising. Peter was amazed by what was happening so quickly and so silently. It was all so strange and unlooked-for. It was so surprisingly delightful to be thus delivered, and especially to be thus visited by God's angel, that he could not believe it to be true, but thought it must be a dream. He was in a state of mind similar to that of the Jews when they were suddenly delivered from their long captivity. "When the Lord turned against the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream." (Ps. cxxvi, 1.) I have often heard men say, who have been suddenly converted, that it was difficult to realize their own identity. I knew one man who was converted one night in an evangelistic meeting, who asked his wife to pinch him or strike him when he awoke in the morning, because, he said, "I am not sure that I am I." On past the keepers, out of the first door, and past the keepers of the second ward, to the outer door (these barriers opening of themselves, noiselessly but surely), these two went, Peter and his angel, until they were at last clear of the prison altogether and in a certain street. What a lesson is this for us! There are no obstacles, human or material, that can stand in God's way when he has a work to do or a mercy to accomplish. Let

us thank God that our spirits, souls, and bodies are committed to his hands for time and for eternity.

**5.—Peter left alone.**—After they were well out of the prison and away from its precincts, “forthwith the angel departed from him.” I have no doubt this sudden desertion by the angel was a grief to Peter at first; but indeed it served to awaken him out of the semi-dazed state in which he had been moving ever since the angel appeared for his relief. Two good things resulted from the departure of the angel. (i) It brought Peter to a full consciousness of his deliverance. Being left alone, he began to look about him and determine, by the ordinary tests of waking consciousness, that he was really delivered. Presently, as it were, coming to himself, he said: “Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent his angel and hath delivered me.” This is a great blessing, when we know in ourselves and by our surroundings that God has wrought a good work in us and for us. Christians, and especially young converts, long for sensible evidences of the presence of God’s Spirit, and sometimes refuse to believe that they have been delivered unless they have these sensible evidences; but, upon the whole, it is better to find ourselves delivered from old sins, in new spiritual surroundings, free from bondage and chains of bad habit, than to have mere emotional joys. It is on the ground of actual deliverance that we know that God has set us free from the power of Satan and brought us into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. (ii) It is needful that we should, sooner or later, be left alone to “work out our own salvation.” Such responsibility may involve some “fear and trembling” at first, but it is good for us to be left to decide and choose our own course of action. The child would scarce learn to walk if the mother never withdrew her hand and left it to “walk alone,” and yet not entirely alone, for she is always by to reach out her strong hand if there is danger of falling, or to lift up again if a tumble does come. Thus also God deals with us, that we may know and learn to quit ourselves like men. How blessed it is to know that God is always near at hand, even if we cannot see him, and that angels are at hand to minister, if needs be, and deliver us! And if we are not always delivered out of our trouble, but are sometimes left to suffer for Christ, as was James, we may still be sure that it is not because God’s ear is heavy that he cannot hear us when we cry, or his arm shortened that it cannot help.

### III.—PETER AND THE CHURCH.

Standing for a few moments in the street where the angel left him, considering these things, Peter did the most natural thing in the world for him to do. He went straight to the house of Mary, the sister of Barnabas and the mother of Mark, to report to them his deliverance. This house was one of the various meeting-places of the Church in Jerusalem, and perhaps the one where Peter was the most intimate. He knew they would be anxious on his account, and his thought was to relieve their mind. The church is the proper place for every delivered soul to go to first. It is the natural place. On another occasion, when Peter and John were set free, we read, "and being let go, they went to their own company."

But a strange thing happened now. When Peter came and knocked at the door, which was fastened, a damsel named Rhoda came to respond to the knock and to inquire who was there. When she recognized the voice of Peter, for gladness and joy, she forgot to open the door, but ran in and reported to those inside. They received the report with incredulity, and said to the damsel, "Thou art mad." But she affirmed that it was "even so." Others felt confident that she was right in recognizing the voice, but said it must have been his angel. What just is meant by this it is impossible to tell. Whatever they may have meant by "his angel," the point of interest and instruction is that the Church, which was so earnest and continuous in prayer for his deliverance, when God answered their prayers should have been so utterly unbelieving. They evidently did not look for his deliverance, though they were praying for it. On the other hand, we learn how good God is to answer even our unbelieving prayers. He recognizes the faith that exists, in spite of unbelief, or alongside of it.

Peter continues knocking until they came and opened the door; they saw him and were astonished. He did not give them much time to talk or to congratulate him. It was getting toward morning; his escape would presently be discovered and search made for him, and probably at that very house. So he hastily told them all that God had done for him, and how an angel had come from heaven and delivered him, and then bade them tell James, the chief pastor, and the brethren, for their comfort and information.

Having thus set the Church at rest as to his safety and given them grounds for thanksgiving, as he had before been a source of anxiety to them, he quietly departed and went into another place—

that is, into another city. Peter was no coward that he did not remain. What good would come of his falling again into the hands of the bloody Herod? In this case he simply obeyed the injunction of Christ to the effect: "If they persecute you in one city, flee ye into another." It was worth while being put in prison to have such a deliverance; and so are all our trials and afflictions worth while in view of the grace given to bear them and the glorious deliverances which God so often works for us.



## XLVI.

## THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES.—Acts xiii, 1-13.

(1) Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. (2) As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. (3) And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. (4) So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. (5) And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister. (6) And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus: (7) Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. (8) But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turu away the deputy from the faith. (9) Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, (10) And said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? (11) And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. (12) Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. (13) Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.—Acts xiii, 1-13.

With the opening of this chapter the second half of the Acts of the Apostles begins. Hitherto Luke had been detailing the history preliminary to the great missionary work, which carried the Gospel over the entire Roman world, under the leadership of Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles. Hitherto Jerusalem had been the center of the new Christian movement and activity. The scene changes now to the Gentile world; and Antioch becomes the center of the Church's activity and enterprise. Hitherto Peter and John and James were the principal actors; now it is Paul and Barnabas. The eunuch and Cornelius were in a sense the first-fruits of the Gospel among the Gentiles, but these two were closely allied to the movement in Judea, the one by being a proselyte and the other by being a long resident in the land. From them the Gospel does not spread forth into a

general movement among Gentiles. But here the case is different. In Antioch the Gospel took root on purely Gentile ground, and the movement from that center was like the growth of a banyan tree, reaching forth and dropping new branches into heathen soil, until all Asia and Italy were covered with churches, largely made up of Gentile believers. Luke, from this point, gives us an account of that great missionary movement, from its proper beginning until the end of Paul's ministry. As at Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost, we saw how the Spirit inaugurated his mighty work, so now here at Antioch we see how he prosecutes that work among the Gentiles, and may learn something of the development of Church organization and the methods of the Spirit's work among men. It is refreshing to turn away from the elaborate and cumbersome methods devised by men, which seem rather to have hindered the work of the Lord, to the simple methods of the Spirit under which such marvelous progress was made in the apostolic age. It might be of incalculable benefit to the Church and to the world, if we could and would have the courage to return to these primitive methods. We see no reason why they are not as good for our time as for the times of Paul and Barnabas.

### I.—THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH.

In a previous study we noticed how the Church was gathered at Antioch, by means of some of the disciples who had been scattered abroad in the persecution which arose in connection with the stoning of Stephen. We saw how several of these disciples were led to go beyond the limited field of the Jews, and preach the Gospel to the Greeks, and how God blessed their message, and gathered in great numbers of these Gentiles, until they became the dominating number of believers; we saw how Barnabas was sent down by the Church at Jerusalem to inquire into this new movement, and how he rejoiced when he saw that the grace of God had come to the Gentiles; we saw that he remained with them, exhorting and preaching the word, until the work becoming too great for him, he fetched Saul—whom the Church at Jerusalem had failed to call into their fellowship and labor,—finally, we saw how Saul at once took his place beside Barnabas in the work of the ministry, and shared in the growing prosperity of that prosperous Church. A further step in advance is now seen.

**1.—A great Church.**—We have no enumeration of its membership, though we know it was large. A Church not great or small

according to its numerical strength, but according to its gifts. Bethlehem was the smallest of the cities of Judea, but it was greater than Jerusalem, because it was the birthplace of Christ. Bethany was a small village, but it became great, and is remembered because of Mary and Martha and Lazarus, and because of the oft visits and the great miracles of Jesus. Nazareth was a mean and a despised town, but it became more famous than Rome, as the home of Jesus, where he spent his boyhood, and from which he went forth on his Divine mission to the world. In the same way this little planet of ours, a mere speck in the universe, is the most distinguished of them all, because it is the home of man, created in the image of God, and the theater on which God has worked out his great scheme of redemption, by the Incarnation, Sacrifice, and Resurrection of our Lord. Now Antioch was a great Church, because in that Church dwelt the Holy Spirit, and to that Church was given extraordinary gifts in the persons and spiritual endowments of a company of remarkable men. It may have been, and probably was, a rich Church, though no mention is made of its wealth, beyond a certain sum of money contributed to the relief of the poor saints at Jerusalem. The only money that is of any account or power in the Church, is that which is freely given to the work of the Lord. A Church may have a dozen millionaires in it, and may still be a poor Church, both in gifts and beneficence. This was a Church of much prayer, of fasting, and of intense activity; and all because the Holy Spirit was honored and welcomed among its members.

**2.—Its prophets and teachers.**—It does not appear that there was any one man in the Church who was pastor or chief shepherd. There is no mention of elders or deacons; but only of prophets and teachers. We may gather from this that the Spirit of God had no regular method of organizing Churches, but gave them gifts according to their need, and the work they were chosen to do. It is especially noticeable that no apostle ever visited this Church, at least not up to this time, nor did it wait for apostolic direction or sanction before entering upon its great missionary enterprise. If we may have the presence of the Spirit with us to endow us and direct our Church work, we may well dispense with great Church dignitaries as being necessary to the progress of the Gospel or the legitimacy of its work. We are told in Eph. iv, 11-13, that in the distribution of gifts Jesus 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, and for the edifying of the body of Christ; but we are not told that he gave to each Church all these

gifts, or that the presence in the Church of all these orders in the ministry were necessary to its proper organization. And yet good men will insist on a cut-and-dried method of organization, and insist that the Holy Spirit must conform to their organization, and that all the Churches of Christ must be organized according to a four-square rule. On the contrary, from such Churches it is generally seen that the Holy Spirit withdraws himself, and leaves them to their own devices, to be overlaid and killed with the dry rot of formalism. Here is the group of eminent men who wrought, as they were endowed, in the Church at Antioch. "Barnabas, and Simon, that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul." We do not know which were prophets, and which teachers. It is most likely that Barnabas and Saul were teachers particularly, for the reason that they were not their own nominees to the new missionary work, but were probably indicated by the prophets, those peculiarly gifted men to whom the Spirit made special revelation of his will. It looks peculiar to us, who are so accustomed to think of Paul as being the very chiefest of all the apostles and servants of Jesus Christ, to find him last in this list. But Saul was not yet fully inducted into his great office; and is not this a revelation of his modesty in the Church of Antioch? He was not a worldly, ambitious man, and had not asserted himself, by claiming any precedency over these other brethren. But "the last shall be first," and "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

**3.—Its great missionary enterprise.**—It is true that the sending forth of Barnabas and Saul was not at the original instigation of the Church itself, as a mere human device or the result of mere human wisdom and foresight; but it was the result of a direct revelation of the will of God by the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, it is a sign of the greatness of this Church, that they were so in communion with the Holy Spirit, that they could receive this revelation and act upon it promptly and heartily. Under God they inaugurated a missionary enterprise which overturned the then heathen world, planted the standard of the Cross in every chief city of the Roman Empire, and overthrew the paganism of centuries.

## II.—THE FIRST MISSIONARIES.

There are some very deep and fundamental principles opened up to our study in the very brief account of the sending forth of these two men upon this mighty enterprise.

**1.—There is a union of human and Divine agencies.**—We are

told that God called them to the work. The ministry, then, is not primarily a human, but a Divine, calling. All the Churches in the world may send forth men into the ministry; if God has not called them, it will be in vain that they minister. Any ambitious man may, of his own motion, "choose" the ministry as his vocation; if God has not called him, he is but a man who has taken this honor to himself, and is an intruder in the vineyard of the Lord, at least in that capacity. Would God we might recover a profound conviction that the ministry of the word is a calling of God, and not of self-choice, or of the appointment of men. We might have fewer ministers, but we should have God-sent ministers, and the word would be "in power and the Holy Ghost," and not, as it is so often now, "in word only." "Separate me Barnabas and Saul, for the work whereunto I have called them." But we are told, also, that "they laid their hands on them and sent them away." That is, obeying the command of the Holy Ghost, the Church, through their prophets and teachers, formally carried out that command by a solemn ordination of these two men. It has pleased God to call us into fellowship with himself in the great work of evangelizing the world. Happy are those missionaries who have been called by God to the work, and then formally and prayerfully set apart by ordination of his Church to carry out that work! God has put honor on his Church, by asking them to confirm, by their solemn act, that which he has first inaugurated. But let not any Church suppose that they have any original power to make ministers; or any company of ministers, or any bishops, suppose that they have any power to confer spiritual gifts, by ordination, upon any man. On the other hand, let no man suppose that he may go forth without God's call to the work, whether he have or have not the formal sanction of the Church. It is true that the Church at Antioch, by her ministers, "separated" Barnabas and Saul to this special work; but in after years, Paul distinctly declared that his real separation to the ministry was before that, "even from his mother's womb." (Gal. i, 15.) Moreover, he is careful to affirm, that his authority as an apostle was not received from man, nor was it in any sense by man, but directly from God. What becomes, then, of the claim to apostolic succession made by some, and the prohibition laid on all men, that they shall not preach Christ's Gospel unless they have been ordained of man. The facts mentioned here are not for hard and fast rules, but only to indicate the Holy Spirit's methods in certain cases, as founded upon certain great principles of co-operation between God and his people. The claim, that this ordination by the prophets and teachers at Antioch was

Paul's formal induction into the apostolate, Paul himself repudiates. It was simply a confirmation, by the Church, of the choice of God for these two men to do certain work.

**2.—They ministered and fasted.**—Here we have a hint as to the circumstances under which we may expect direct communications and direction from the Holy Ghost. Service and personal consecration is the way to the secrets of God. Men and women who are so serving him will not lack for communications and direction from the Holy Ghost.

**3.—They sent them away.**—What an appalling task was assigned to them! It is hardly possible for us to conceive the superhuman difficulties that these two men were sent away to confront. The taking of the land of Canaan from the giant sons of Anak, and the capture of Jericho, in spite of its great walls, were child's play to the task to which Barnabas and Saul were sent. They had to confront the combined powers of the world, the flesh, and the devil; yet they went forth, and triumphed. They did not stop either to consider difficulties or to count the cost; God had separated them to that work, and their brethren had sent them to it, cheered no doubt by the thought that the Holy Ghost had called them; and refreshed by the memory of those days of solemn fasting and prayer which preceded their ordination, they went forth boldly. Not until the writer came to India, and had spent months in the very midst of heathenism, did he have any just conception of the enormous and, humanly speaking, impossible task which God and the Church laid upon these two brethren. If God has sent, and the Church follows that sending with fasting and prayer, all the powers of earth, the carnal mind, and hell itself, cannot withstand the Gospel. Praise God for his presence with every missionary, divinely called, and prayerfully backed up by the Church.

### III.—FIRST MISSIONARY WORK.

“So they being sent forth by the Holy Ghost.” What a suggestive word is this! So soon as they left the Church and their brethren behind them, their stay and strength was the Holy Ghost only. He it was who had sent them forth, and he it was to whom they were to look for help and for power. We cannot take the Church with us, though the Church may follow us with her prayers, but we may always have the Blessed Holy Spirit.

**1.—From Antioch to Cyprus.**—What missionary does not remember his first voyage to the missionary field? They first went

down to Selucia, which was the seaport of Antioch, and there they took ship to the island of Cyprus, about one hundred miles southwest from the main coast. They first landed at Salamis, a convenient port on the eastern end of the island, a city of great population, in which there were many Jews. The Gospel had already been preached on this island by some of the Pentecost converts. (Acts xi, 19.) This fact probably determined them to go there first, as being likely to find a little fellowship and support. At Salamis they entered the synagogue of the Jews and preached the word of God. What result came from this first essay at missionary work, we are not informed. It is likely they made no converts. At any rate, Luke makes no record of any such results. From Salamis they seem to have gone overland to Paphos, at the opposite end of the island; it was the city of the Cyprian Venus, and apparently the residence of the Proconsul Sergius-Paulus.

**2.—Sergius-Paulus.**—This was the name of the deputy of Rome, the Viceroy of the island. How long Barnabas and Saul had been in Paphos preaching, we do not know, but after a certain time, the news of them and their doctrine came to the ears of the deputy, and he sent for them and desired to hear the word of God. This was certainly an encouragement to the missionaries. What might have been the original motive of the Proconsul, is not stated; but we may infer that it was a sincere desire to hear the new doctrine, for we are told that he was a “prudent man,” which probably means a man of knowledge and of a candid mind, open to hear and learn wherever he could. We know from Roman history that he was a thoughtful and studious person, who left books behind him, and was considered an authority on astronomical subjects. It is not often that the chief ruler of a province takes much interest in the word of God, and still less often does he voluntarily send for the preachers to come and unfold their doctrine to him.

**3.—Elymas the sorcerer.**—This man was an apostate Jew, who had turned his attention to magic and astrology. He was no doubt a clever and well-informed man. Perhaps it was his knowledge of the particular branches of study that were of interest to the Proconsul which had enabled him to fasten himself as a parasite on to the governor. At any rate, he saw that, if Sergius listened to the word of God, and heeded that word, his occupation was gone. His place as magician or astrologer to the deputy was one of honor, and of course of emolument, and the Gospel was likely to interfere with his craft. So he withstood Barnabas and Saul. That is, while they were preaching to the governor, he put in “his oar” and sought to turn

away the deputy from the faith; for it is evident that he was being profoundly impressed. We may be sure that, wherever the Gospel is being faithfully and successfully preached, the devil, by some means or other, will seek to turn away men from the faith. Sometimes it will be by men of the baser sort, sometimes by violent haters of the Gospel, who pose as learned and scientific men, and sometimes it is by narrow-minded and sectarian ministers of the Gospel (?) who are jealous of the work of other servants of God, and raise the cry against those whom they suppose are "drawing away" from their temple. But it is a good sign that effective work is being done when these opponents arise. The devil makes no attack when ministers and missionaries are making no converts.

**4.—The judgment of God on the false prophet.**—For the first time we see Saul (now called Paul) standing forth in the first place. He was suddenly filled with the Holy Ghost; that is, there came upon him a sudden and overwhelming impulse from the Holy Spirit, and, instead of seeking by argument to answer the sorcerer, he fastened his eyes upon him, and with a few scathing words tore the mask from him, and revealed him in his true character. Then by a word of great severity, yet tempered with mercy, pronounced the doom of temporary blindness upon him. "O, full of all subtlety and mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" This was a severe speech, but merited. "And now behold the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind for a season." "For a season." This implies that there was to be space given him for repentance. Paul's words immediately took effect, and a "mist and a darkness fell upon him; and he went about seeking for some one to lead him by the hand." God's miracles are all said to be on the principle of quickening natural processes. Here was a judgment in the flesh, which points to a more severe judgment that will fall upon men who pervert the ways of truth and righteousness. God will give them over to their own ways, their foolish hearts will become darkened, and in vain will they seek a way out of that darkness. Persistent unbelief, and determined opposition to the Gospel will certainly so end with men who give themselves to that course.

**5.—A distinguished convert.**—When the deputy, who had been almost persuaded before by the doctrine of the missionaries, saw that God was present with them in such power to back up the truth, he at once surrendered, and himself became a believer—let us hope, an open and honest follower of Jesus Christ. On this point, how-



ever, we know nothing, any more than we know whether there were others in the city who believed or not. Paul not only won a convert, but he also won a distinguished friend. It is singular that from this time he changes his name to Paul, or Paulus. Perhaps it was in honor of Sergius Paulus, the first great trophy of his preaching.

**6.—John (Mark) leaves the company.**—We are told that John-Mark had accompanied the party. (v. 5.) For some reason he takes his departure, and returns to Jerusalem. John was the nephew of Barnabas. Perhaps, now that he saw Paul becoming head of the party, he did not feel so ready to be their minister as when his uncle Barnabas was head. This sudden promotion of Paul over his head did not affect the good Barnabas. Barnabas was the discoverer of Paul in a very real sense. He was not jealous of his superior abilities and endowments, but rejoiced in them, and was willing to be second to Paul, as he had been willing at first to head the missionary party. We shall hear of John-Mark again, and how he made trouble between Barnabas and Saul.

## XLVII.

## PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY SERMON.—Acts xiii, 26-43.

(26) Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. (27) For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him. (28) And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. (29) And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre. (30) But God raised him from the dead: (31) And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people. (32) And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, (33) God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. (34) And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. (35) Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. (36) For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: (37) But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption. (38) Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: (39) And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. (40) Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; (41) Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you. (42) And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. (43) Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas; who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.—Acts xiii, 26-43.

Having finished their mission to the inhabitants of Cyprus, Paul and his party sailed from Paphos to Perga, in Pamphylia, a province in Asia Minor. It was here that John (Mark) left the party and returned to Jerusalem, as mentioned in our last study. Henceforth it is Paul and his company, and not Barnabas and Paul as heretofore. No doubt Paul had spoken and preached before; indeed, we know that he preached the word to the Proconsul at Paphos; but we have no recorded address of his until he came to Antioch, in Pisidia. We must not confound this Antioch with the Antioch where the first Gentile Church was formed, and which sent Barnabas and Paul

forth on their missionary journey. There was a synagogue in this Antioch also. The fact that there were Jews and a synagogue in any city seemed to be the guiding reason for visiting such a center. It was no doubt the settled policy of these missionaries to give the Gospel or the offer of life in Jesus to the ancient people first, and they were also sure to find in the congregations gathered in these synagogues certain Greeks who, having become dissatisfied with heathenism, were attracted to the teachings of the Jews in respect of the God of the Bible. In this dispersion of the Jews over the then known world, the providence of God was seen; for by it the heathen were prepared to receive the Gospel. In this respect the first missionaries had a great advantage over modern missionaries. The providence of God to-day in this respect is seen in the dispersion of the Anglo-Saxon race over the whole face of the earth. Alas! that in so many cases they should give such a false testimony to the God of the Bible and to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is generally the case now that the missionaries themselves have to break ground and establish a testimony distinct from that of the so-called Christian foreigners in heathen lands. This may in part account for the comparatively slow progress that is seen in such countries as India and China. It is very noticeable, however, that the heathen are beginning, though slowly, to discriminate between real Christians and those who are but nominally so. Paul and Barnabas, with their company, went into the synagogue, and sitting down waited till the regular service of reading the Scriptures was over. The ruler of the synagogue noticing these stranger Jews in the congregation, following the usual custom of inviting strangers to speak to the people if they were so inclined, sent to ask if they had any message to give. What a beautiful custom it was! It testified to the fact that the Jews were not ashamed of their doctrine, and could, as a rule, count on every Jew, whether he had ever been seen by them or not, as a man who was not ashamed of his religion. Paul, responding to this invitation, stood up, and beckoning with his hand, courteously addressed the congregation. This marked a further stage of that conflict between Christianity, Judaism, and heathenism that thenceforward went on. How we need men of like mind in our day who are ready, under all circumstances, "to stand up for Jesus." It is remarkable, in this first recorded address of Paul, to notice how closely he follows the method of both Peter and Stephen, though there is a marked difference in the composition of his address from those of either of his predecessors in this great work of defense and propagation. It was a sure way of gaining the attention of the Jews to

review their history, of which they were proud, and justly so. In preaching to the educated natives of India I have found this method also the surest way of gaining their attention, and securing their interest in the message of God to them, by basing it on the history connected with the coming of Christ into the world. Passing down the stream of history to the advent of John the Baptist, Paul points out that this last and greatest of the Jewish prophets gladly disclaimed for himself any importance beyond that of a witness to the claims of Jesus to be the Messiah, the shoes of whose feet he declared he was not worthy to unloose. At this point Paul concluded the first part of his address, and begins the second part by addressing the whole congregation, tenderly speaking to the Jews as "men and brethren, children of Abraham, and to the Gentiles assembled with them, by adding this word, "and whosoever among you, feareth God." To them, both Jews and Greeks, he declares, "is the word of this salvation sent." By this declaration he at once throws down the middle wall of partition which had hitherto separated them, and preaches Jesus as the common Saviour of them both. A beautiful, masterful, and adroit introduction to what he had further to say to them!

### I.—THE HISTORICAL BASIS OF THE GOSPEL.

The religion of the Jews is undoubtedly based on historical revelation. This also is the evidential strength of Christianity, which is not a new religion, but the perfected flower and fruit of the old Jewish faith. St. Paul now proceeds to show this, before delivering to them his great and glowing message of forgiveness and justification.

**1.—Ignorant students of the Scriptures.**—It does not follow that because men read, or even study, the Scriptures, they are either wise unto salvation or godly in their life. This fact is abundantly proved in the case of the Jews, both people and rulers. How is this proved? He states the case simply. When Jesus came they knew him not, nor did they understand the prophets which were read and expounded every Sabbath day throughout all their land, but unconsciously fulfilled them in condemning him whom they should have received as their Messiah. John sets this forth in the first chapter of his Gospel, saying: "He came to his own and his own received him not." Jesus stated the same thing to the people, and the rulers themselves, when he said to them: "Ye search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life. But they are they that testify of me, and ye will not come unto me that ye might have life. (John

v, 39, 40.) What a melancholy fact is this, that with the Scriptures in our hands and heard every Sabbath day from the pulpit, still they are not understood, still Jesus is rejected by the multitude. Is this because of the obscurity of the Scriptures, or the lack of ability in men to understand them? Is it not rather, as Jesus said: Because "Ye have not the love of God in you." (John v, 42.) How pertinent and solemn the warning and exhortation of Jesus to "take heed how ye hear." Yet neither the carelessness nor the ignorance of men will prevent God from fulfilling his promises to the world and carrying out his gracious and loving purposes toward this lost world. The scoffers who have arisen in this day concerning Jesus and his Gospel, are as surely fulfilling the Scriptures in the rejection of Christ as the Jews were of old in failing to recognize in him the promised Messiah. (II. Pet. iii, 3, 4.)

**2.—The death of Jesus.**—Paul now goes a step further. It is bad enough not to recognize in Jesus the promised Saviour, but it is infinitely worse to deliberately reject him when he comes. This the Jews did. They were not content with simply taking the position that he was not the Messiah, but, though they found no fault in him, and vainly tried to convict him of blasphemy, so bitter were they against him, so incensed at his unanswerable teaching and exposition of the Scriptures, that they falsely accused him before the Roman Governor as being a political revolutionist. They did not cease their evil work until they had secured his execution, and saw him taken down from the cross and buried. This is the usual course of unbelief. It is not content to reject Jesus, but it must turn men into haters of him, and stir them up to persecution, even though they find no fault in him. Paul refers in these two verses to the progress of events as detailed in Luke's Gospel (ch. xxiii). In this he points out again how literally they fulfill the Scriptures even down to the very minutest details, such as crucifying him between two thieves, parting his garments among the soldiers, and offering him vinegar while on the cross. (Luke xxiii, 32-34.) In all this Paul appeals to the Scriptures in connection with the incidents in the life, death, and burial of Christ, to show that he could be none other than that One of whom "Moses in the law and all the prophets did write."

**3.—The resurrection of Jesus from the dead.**—"But God raised him from the dead." How contentious is this simple declaration! The people that dwelt in Jerusalem and their rulers, ignorant of the Scriptures, and moved by a bitter and unreasoning enmity, rested not day or night until they had slain Jesus. His two friends, Joseph and Nicodemus, buried him in the grave, but this was not the end.

It was the end of man's work with Jesus, both in hatred and love; but now God moves his hand and undoes their work by raising him from the dead. In the early part of Paul's speech he ascribes all the great events in the history of the Israelites to the doing of God. Seven times in his brief review he reminds his hearers that it was God who had wrought in all these great epochs of their history. What a grip Paul had on God! Now he returns to this central theme and tells them that God, who had in the beginning chosen them as a nation, delivered them out of Egypt, led them about in the wilderness, driven out the inhabitants of their land to make room for them, who had given them Judges, raised up Samuel, Saul, and David, and given them great promises concerning the Coming One, had now raised up Jesus from the dead. Jesus was then a part of their history, and was to be received from God just as they accepted everything else God had done for them. As concerning his resurrection, he is careful to remind them that it was no idle tale, but a veritable fact, testified to by those witnesses who had been with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and who were now testifying this great fact to the people. He does not speak of himself as being an eye-witness of the resurrection, but appeals to those witnesses who were. Thank God the coming of Jesus, his death, burial, and resurrection, is no idle dream or mythical fable of men, but a solid historical fact, based on historical testimony and the eye-witness of many men who were with him from the beginning, and whose testimony can no more be impeached on the point of the resurrection than it can on the point of his crucifixion.

## II.—THE TESTIMONY OF PROPHECY.

The glad tidings of salvation which they came to declare to the people not only rested on the fact of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, but also upon the fact that the resurrection was the outcome of God's purpose, testified to the holy nation by a long series of prophecies which could possibly have no meaning or fulfilment except as seen in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. There are those who tell us that the story of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was the invention of his disciples to prop up and revive their cause, which collapsed on the death of their Master. This is utter foolishness, because the apostles not only testified of the resurrection as a fact immediately after it occurred, and in the very city where he had been crucified, and to the very people who had slain him; but they constantly appealed to the Scriptures to show that

this very event as well as his crucifixion had been foretold. Paul in particular rings the changes on this fact: "According to the Scriptures." "Which God afore promised in the Scriptures." He proceeds now to call their attention to these Scriptural prophecies concerning the resurrection: "And we declare glad tidings unto you, how that the promises which were made unto our fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us, their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus from the dead." He then proceeds to point out a few from among these promises.

**1.—The promises to David.**—David was the central figure in the Old Testament history around whom all the Messianic promises gathered. Paul selects three promises to which he appeals to show that, while they were given primarily to David as the great prototype of Messiah, they could not have been possibly fulfilled except in the person of David's greater Son, the true Messiah; and that Jesus was this promised Messiah, was surely seen in the fact that those promises were fulfilled to the very letter in him. (i) The promise in the second psalm: "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." The promise here given referred indeed in a minor sense to David, but we have only to read that psalm to see that it was never fulfilled, in any sense commensurate with its largeness, in David or in his time, or in the time or reign of any of his successors. He couples this promise with the fact of the resurrection of Christ from the dead, to see corruption no more; that is, to be eternally free from the power of death; to show how it was only in such a fact that the "sure mercies of David" (Is. lv, 3; II. Sam. vii, 12, 13, 18, 19) could be secured to the people, for that covenant was not to David finally, but David's son. For he said: "When thy days be fulfilled and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever." Therefore Paul appeals finally to a saying of David in the sixteenth psalm: "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (the grave); neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."

**2.—These promises fulfilled in Christ.**—Paul now shows how that promise was not fulfilled in David, for, as a matter of fact, "David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep and was laid unto his fathers and saw corruption." It is clear from this that fulfillment was to be looked for elsewhere. Now, as a matter of fact, he says once more: "He whom God raised again, saw no corruption." This was Jesus. Peter, in his great ad-

dress, appeals to these two psalms, the second and sixteenth, to show that, as they had no fulfillment in David, but were prophecies of the Christ who should come, the "fruit of his loins," Jesus must be that Christ. (Acts iii, 29-35.) The point of view of these two great addresses is a little different, but the point of sight is the same. Paul at a later time fully expounds this glorious mystery, wrought out in historical fact when he declared concerning Jesus, that he was "made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and demonstrated to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of Holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." (Rom. i, 3, 4.) David had no endless life, so he died and saw corruption, but Christ came in the power of an endless life, so that, when he was put to death and buried, death could not hold his soul in the grave or the under world, nor could it work corruption in his body. The conclusion is this: "Christ, who was begotten of the Father before all worlds, was declared before men and angels to be the Son of God, when he was raised from the dead in the power of an endless life." The Scriptures contain promises which in their very nature required such an One who should rise from the dead in order to their fulfillment. As a matter of fact, such an one appeared in the person of Christ, who was put to death in the flesh, but saw no corruption, and did rise again from the dead. This is an irresistible argument and must carry conviction to every one who is not willfully determined to reject both the prophetic Scriptures and the testimony of history.

### III.—THE GREAT PROCLAMATION.

Having demonstrated Jesus to be the Christ of the Old Testament Scriptures, Paul now proceeds to the conclusion of his address by a great proclamation of the grace of God to men through "this man." "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached (proclaimed) unto you"—

1.—**The forgiveness of sins.**—Now this is not the first time that forgiveness of sins had been proclaimed to the people, for the Old Testament is full of the promises of forgiveness; but the apostle shows that all those Old Testament proclamations of forgiveness of sins were based on the person and work of Messiah, and that Messiah as a Saviour had now come to them, and therefore this great blessing was fully offered. The forgiveness of sins is obviously the first great necessity of sinful man. That forgiveness is with God, and is handed down and proclaimed to us through Jesus Christ. The forgiveness of sins is the declaration of the permanent attitude of



God's mind to a sinful world. It is not primarily the remission of penalties, but only that God puts out of his mind and heart all feeling of injury or ill-will toward us on account of our sins, which are a grievous wrong done to him. It is the open door of his heart, whereby he seeks to reconcile us to himself, through which he comes out to us in grace and bids us come unto him in reconciliation. It is not "justification" which is spoken of by the apostle in the next verse. It is a great confusion of thought and teaching to confound these two great blessings. Forgiveness is universal, and applies to all men, whether they accept it or not. How could God so love the world as to give his only begotten Son to die for us if he held our sins against us in his heart? Forgiveness is not something done to man, but it is the state of God's mind toward us, and that mind openly proclaimed.

**2.—Justification.**—Here we have a different matter altogether. Sin is a personal wrong done to God, which he freely forgives; but sin is a crime against the moral government of God which he cannot pass by. Sin is guilty, and must be punished. God has by his wisdom and grace, because he loves us and forgives us, given his Son to die for us, and thus become the propitiation of our sins. Justification is the clearing us of the guilt of sin and setting us right under law, as forgiveness sets us right with God personally. Forgiveness is universal, but justification is limited to them who accept the settlement which God has made for sin by the sacrifice which Jesus made when he offered himself up through the Eternal Spirit to God. It will be seen, therefore, that the apostle speaks of it in a different way from that which he does concerning forgiveness: "And by him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." Personal faith in and a cordial acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord are essential to justification.

**3.—A solemn warning.**—The apostle closes his address by a solemn warning: "Beware lest that come upon you which is spoken by the prophets. (Is. xxix, 14; Hab. i, 5.) There were signs of opposition and resistance to his speech in the congregation, and he warns them. The people and rulers at Jerusalem had rejected Christ and crucified him; he would warn them not to walk in their footsteps. The course of unbelief is first to despise God's mercy and then wonder at his power, and finally to perish. This comes upon men who will not believe, though God has wrought so plainly that there is no mistake, and his doings are as plainly declared to them. It is an awfully solemn thing to have the Gospel preached to one,

and for that one, in the face of all evidence and testimony, to make light of it or despise it.

**4.—The result of the preaching.**—The Jews left the synagogue, most likely in anger, but the Gentiles tarried behind and besought Paul to repeat his discourse to them on the next Sabbath. Some hearts were pricked and some anxious souls were found in that congregation. Moreover, there were some among the Jews and religious proselytes, who followed Paul and Barnabas, presumably to their lodgings. They seem to have believed his word, for we read that these two missionaries talked with and persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. These are the usual results of all earnest and spiritual preaching. Some reject with haughty and angry contempt, some are awakened and are anxious to hear more, while others are convinced and enter into God's gracious mercy.

## XLVIII.

## THE APOSTLES TURNING TO THE GENTILES.—Acts

xiii, 44-52; xiv, 1-7.

(41) And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. (45) But when the Jews saw the multitude, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. (46) Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. (47) For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldst be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. (48) And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. (49) And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. (50) But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. (51) But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. (52) And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost. (1) And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. (2) But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. (3) Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. (4) But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. (5) And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, (6) They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: (7) And there they preached the gospel.—Acts xiii, 44-52; xiv, 1-7.

The first congregation which Paul addressed in this Pisidian Antioch broke up in comparative quietness, though there were not lacking signs of a storm brewing, in the sullen withdrawal of the greater part of the Jews, while certain of the Gentiles requested that these words might be repeated to them the next Sabbath, and not a few of the Jews and proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, and declared their acceptance of the word of the Gospel. All that week the discussions which arose out of the apostle's address went on. A new current of life went through the thought of the city. Perhaps never before had a single sermon produced so marked an

effect on a whole community. There was no outward sign of the Holy Spirit accompanying the word as on the day of Pentecost, but the Spirit was mightily present in energizing the word preached, for "the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together, to hear the word of God." John the Baptist was a preacher of this kind, who could draw a whole city to hear the message he had to deliver. It is most cheering to read that this vast multitude came together to hear not an eloquent preacher, or some new and strange doctrine, as they of Athens did when Paul preached on Mars Hill, but to "hear the word of God." The place of preaching was the synagogue, but it must have been altogether inadequate to contain the people. Never had such crowds been gathered there before. We shall see what was the result of this second address of Paul upon the multitude.

### I.—THE GOSPEL A SAVOR OF DEATH AND LIFE.

The word of God, as preached by Paul on that first Sabbath in the synagogue, and more privately throughout the week, entered that city like a plowshare does the soil, dividing and throwing a furrow on either side. From the first, some believed and others rejected the word. This is, and must always be, the effect of the Gospel when preached in the power of the Spirit. The unbelieving Jews made no demonstration of hostility at the time, perhaps not thinking that the address of the apostle would have much or any effect on the people, but would pass off and over them as a summer breeze. The vast multitude which gathered to hear Paul on the next Sabbath had their eyes opened, however, to a new fact.

1.—**The envy of the Jews.**—When they saw this vast throng about the synagogue, and perhaps heard the eager and anxious words of the people discussing the new doctrine, and debating over again the facts upon which Paul had based his sermon, their envy—that is, their jealousy—broke out. "When they saw the multitude, they were filled with envy." This is an old development of the human heart against Christ and his message. It was "for envy" that they delivered Jesus up to Pilate. They used to say that, if the popularity of Jesus were not somehow checked, he would draw away all the people from them. So felt these Jews; no doubt the reference is to the leaders. They would not accept the conclusions to which Paul's address clearly pointed, nor the testimony which he clearly gave to the fact that Jesus was the Messiah. They were angry because the message interested the Gentiles, and won not a few of their brethren and the religious proselytes to Jesus as the

Messiah. This anger at what they might have sincerely believed to be a false doctrine might not have gone further than their own breasts, or than to have led one of their rulers to "preach a sermon against" Paul and his doctrine; but when they saw what a vast hold these new preachers had already gotten on the people—so much so that the whole city was stirred and were coming out to hear—then their anger became envious and jealous. They saw how hopeless they were in the face of that multitude. They at once proceeded to interrupt Paul and Barnabas and contradict them, and even went so far as to blaspheme. They were angry that Gentiles should be treated with the same interest as they were, and that a Jew should so entirely "unchurch" himself as to address a Gentile as his equal in the matter of the good news of God. They were angry because they saw in this new doctrine the destruction of their exclusive and distinguished claim to the peculiar favor of God, and that Gentiles were henceforth to be admitted to God's kingdom, not as proselytes, but as equals.

**2.—The boldness of the apostles.**—"Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold." This seems to imply that a sudden exaltation of feeling and boldness of spirit came upon these men. In the fourth of Acts we see the disciples gathered together after the whipping of John and Peter, and praying that with "all boldness they might preach the word." Now, without retiring to pray, but in spirit waiting on God while they were being thus contradicted and reviled, and while the blaspheming words of the rulers against Christ were sounding in their ears, a spirit of fearlessness and boldness fell upon them. They were neither afraid, ashamed, nor daunted by this opposition. Much less did they feel that they must, out of courtesy, withdraw from the debate, for fear of making a disturbance, or "creating bad feeling," as it is sometimes said evangelists do when they come into a town or city and preach the Gospel and draw the city away from the churches to hear the word. This sometimes excites envy and jealousy and brings forth hard words; so that some timid souls urge that there had better be no revival of religion in a town than that bad feelings should be created. But Paul and Silas waxed bold, not for themselves, but for Christ, and because of their desire to see the people won to Jesus and saved.

**3.—The self-condemnation of the Jews.**—The apostles do not debate the question with the rulers; they do not refute their personal slanders and misrepresentations; they do not answer their blasphemies, but discerning that their envy, their contradictions, and their blasphemies are the sure signs of a purposed and determined

unbelief, they say a single word in justification of their course in coming to them first with the message of life, and then abandon them to their own choice. "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you." (Matt. x, 6; Luke xxiv, 47; Rom. i, 16.) Necessary because this was the natural order, and because the terms of our Lord's commission bound them to give the first offer of life to the Jews, to whom pertained the promises, and to whom the covenants had first come. But, continued the apostles, "Seeing ye put it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." They will not contend, nor, on the other hand, will they continue to "cast their pearls before swine." This also was according to the command of Christ. In this declaration of the apostles there is a solemn and awful truth. God causes his Gospel to be preached to men, freely offering forgiveness and justification through Jesus Christ, and then he leaves men to make their own judgment. In the judgment they pass upon Jesus Christ they pass judgment upon themselves. They who accept Jesus Christ adjudge themselves to life through him; while those who reject him adjudge themselves unto death. The phrase "unworthy of everlasting life," is not a judgment of humility, to the effect that they were not worthy of so great grace as is offered in Christ, and therefore decline it out of this feeling of humility. It was rather a statement of their haughty rejection of Christ. They adjudged themselves as not needing any favor from Christ, and so rejected him. This self-judgment made it evident that their attitude made it impossible for Christ to give them life. They in effect had said: "We will not have this man Christ Jesus to rule over us." Then they must take their own judgment. Let not those hearers or readers of the word of God who pass judgment of rejection upon it think that they have thereby condemned the word of Jesus; they have but condemned themselves, and consigned themselves to that death on account of sin which Jesus Christ came to save them from.

## II.—TURNING TO THE GENTILES.

"Lo, we turn to the Gentiles." From the days of Moses, God had told the Jewish people that he had purposes of grace toward and for the Gentile world. "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities; and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish people." (Deut. xxxii, 21.) Here again we see how the Jews were ignorant of their

Scriptures, and were yet fulfilling them by their attitude toward Jesus Christ, whom, though they were expecting and looking for, they rejected when he came.

**1.—The commandment of God.**—Lest any should say that the apostles had turned to the Gentiles in pique or anger, or as a revenge, they quote the commandment of God to show that they are in the way of literal obedience. They do not quote the commission of Jesus, whom the Jews had rejected, but the word of God out of the Scriptures which the Jews accepted. “I have set thee to be a light to the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation to the ends of the earth.” (Is. xlix, 6.) The rejecting Jews could not deny this command, and that it referred to Messiah when he should come, and so the apostles, by quoting it, show that Messiah was for the ends of the earth, and that in turning to the Gentiles they were literally obeying the commandment of God.

**2.—The gladness of the Gentiles.**—“When they heard this—that is, the word of God concerning them and his purpose of grace and life in Christ, and that the apostles were not only obeying God’s command in preaching the glad tidings to them—they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord.” How did they glorify the word of the Lord? Why, by believing it to be true, receiving it as the word of God, and accepting the everlasting life which was preached to them in the name of Jesus. The best and only way to glorify God’s word is to believe it and do it.

**3.—The believing Gentiles.**—“And as many as were ordained unto eternal life believed.” This passage has been a stumbling-block to many. What does it mean? Does it mean that God has selected a certain number of persons, whom he has designated from all eternity to salvation, and that to them only he has and does come with efficient grace to enable them to believe, and these only believe and are saved? Certainly not. Was God mocking the Jews who believed not, with an offer of the Gospel which he never meant them to believe, and would not enable them to believe? Does it mean that the Gospel which is to be preached to all men is a solemn mockery except to a certain number whom God has, by an act of sovereignty, selected and determined to salvation? Certainly not. Does it mean that God is not sincere when he causes it to be recorded “that God will have all men to be saved”? does it mean that John iii, 16, is not a sincere declaration of God’s love and will? Perish this lie out of the minds of God’s people, and deliver all such as have been tormented with this blasphemy. It means just the same exactly as that passage means which we find in Acts ii, 47: “And

the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved." That is, "those who put themselves in the way of salvation," by hearing and believing the truth concerning Jesus. God has chosen men to salvation in Christ Jesus, through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth, and has ordained that every man that sets himself in order by putting himself in the way of the truth shall believe and be saved. God in his providence has ordained that the winds shall blow the ships of men across the sea, and those who set their sails to catch the breeze will make the voyage, but those who refuse to set their sails will go adrift. God has ordained that if men plant they shall reap; but if men will not plant they shall not reap. God had ordained that "whosoever believeth in Jesus shall not perish, but have eternal life." This is the ordination of God in respect to sinners—this, and nothing but this. So as many as set themselves in the way of eternal life believed and were saved out of that heathen population.

### III.—PERSECUTION.

The good work seems to have gone on for some time, for "the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region." This still further angered the Jews, who were now bent on taking active and vigorous measures to stop the spread of the Gospel.

1.—**The agents in the persecution.**—"The Jews stirred up devout and honorable women and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them out of their coasts." These "devout and honorable women" were most probably zealous proselytes from among the upper classes of society in Antioch, the wives of the chief men, who the Jews with great cunning set to work on their husbands, and succeeded in persuading them that these apostles were disturbers of the peace, and ought to be expelled. Women who are "devout" and "honorable," of good position, can be of great hurt or help to the Gospel, as they are disposed. These were disposed against Christ and his servants, and so they were used by the crafty priests to oppose the truth. For a good ally give me a devout woman; for an enemy whom I fear more than all men, save me from such an one.

2.—**Shaking the dust off their feet.**—To what extent violence was used does not appear. Probably the apostles seeing the storm coming, and knowing that it would be useless to withstand the angry mob which was being gathered, heeded another command of Christ and "shook off the dust of their feet against them." (Matt. vi, 11.) This was not cowardice, but wisdom. They had left their testi-



mony, they had done their work, they had planted the Gospel; now they would at once save themselves and break up new ground, and so they proceeded to Iconium.

**3.—The Antiochian disciples.**—The Jews, with the aid of the “devout and honorable women and the chief men of the city, could and did succeed in expelling the apostles, but they failed to expel the Gospel. For the glad tidings had sunk into the hearts of a great many, both of Jews, proselytes, and Gentiles in the city, and while the Jews were filled with envy, those who had received the word of God were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.” Thus does God sow his seed of life, and thus does it find a field for itself, and grows in spite of the animosity and hatred of men. Here the Gospel became, as everywhere, a savor of death to those who believed not, and of life to those who believed.

#### IV.—THE APOSTLES IN ICONIUM, LYSTRA, AND DERBE.

Having escaped from Antioch, these two brave and bold missionaries had no intention of returning to Jerusalem or to Antioch, from whence they came out, and giving up the mission on account of its difficulties and dangers; but proceeding to the next city of importance where there was a large colony of Jews, they resumed their work.

**1.—In the synagogue at Iconium.**—“They went both together.” This is a good plan. Two can often go better than one, especially when the work is dangerous. Paul was by nature bolder than Barnabas, but Barnabas had a wonderful gift of exhortation, and so with Barnabas to exhort Paul, and Paul to lead Barnabas in the way of bold action, they made a gallant company, though it was only a company of two. They went into the synagogue because that is where they would get the ear of the people. They spake the word of God in such a way that a great multitude, both of Jews and Greeks, believed. They neither departed from their method nor their message, and God honored their ministry and gave them to see the work of their hand prosper, as he will give us to see it if we are alike straightforward and faithful.

**2.—More persecution.**—By this time these men were getting used to the effects of the Gospel. Verily, they were finding out that Christ came to send a sword, to divide by his word men and women from each other, to disturb the quiet of cities, to separate brethren from brethren. For a while the opposition was not violent, but con-

fined itself to words, frowns, and black looks. In the meantime they went on with their good work, "speaking boldly in the Lord," which the Lord honored by "giving testimony to the word of his grace" in the conversion of many, and by granting signs and wonders to be done by the hands of the apostles. The conflict went on until there was a clean division in the city, and the whole multitude took sides. "Part held with the Jews and part with the apostles." This was a sign of power. It is a poor augury of the success of the Gospel when it is preached and it makes no stir in a city, and does not develop opposition as well as win converts. By and by the storm broke, and there was an assault made by the combined party of unbelieving Gentiles and Jews. Herod and Pilate are made friends again. The Jews who hated the Gentiles fraternized with them now in a scheme of persecution against the servants of Christ, whom they hated worse than all. Becoming aware of the violence intended, and again heeding their Lord's command to "flee to another" city, they fled to Lystra and Derbe, and to the regions lying around them. These cities were far enough away, in an obscure and remote part of Lycaonia, and north of Mt. Taurus. Here they might hope to be free from the persecution of the Jews in the more influential cities from which they had fled.

**3.—And there they preached the Gospel.**—They had just escaped a terrible persecution. They were mere fugitives and wanderers, going farther and farther away from Syrian Antioch and Jerusalem, but they had no idea of giving up their work. They go at it again just as deliberately as if nothing but sunshine and favor had fallen upon them. It is this spirit which has sent the Gospel over all the earth, in spite of the rage and opposition of men. Preaching and teaching that Jesus is the Christ, and that through his death and resurrection forgiveness of sins and justification is to be had, the world has heard and believed—not all the world, but some in every place, who have retained the Gospel in their hearts and become the centers of further propagation and increase of the glory of the word of God and of Christ.

## XLIX.

## WORK AMONG THE GENTILES.—Acts xiv, 8–22.

(8) And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: (9) The same heard Paul speak: who steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, (10) Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. (11) And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. (12) And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. (13) Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. (14) Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, (15) And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: (16) Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. (17) Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. (18) And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them. (19) And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. (20) Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. (21) And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they turned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch. (22) Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.—Acts xiv, 8–22.

Paul and Barnabas had now come to the end of their first missionary journey. If we consult the map, we may see that the distance traveled was not very great, a few hundred miles at most, and the time consumed in the whole enterprise was perhaps within, or at least but little more than, a year. As compared with some of our modern missionary journeys, it was but a little one; yet how mightily these two men of God broke up the heathen ground and prepared the way for other such missions, not only to be undertaken by themselves and their contemporaries, but their successors in all ages since! This missionary journey is full of interest as a study of *beginnings*, and as presenting in its details those features which have been found in all the succeeding enterprises of this kind. The

preaching of the word as the true and only instrument for the conversion of the heathen; the readiness of some to hear and the forwardness of others to oppose; the encouragements and discouragements which met the missionaries; the moderation and, at the same time, the intensifying of enthusiasm by persecution, and not its extinction; the growth of purpose with the increase of experience, and the presence and power of grace to sustain his servants under the most adverse circumstances. Writing, as the author is, in a heathen land, surrounded by pagans on every hand, these experiences of Paul and Barnabas seem very real, for they are being repeated every day in all their essential points before our very eyes.

### I.—THE MIRACLE AT LYSTRA.

The record of this miracle is undoubtedly introduced here in order to lead up to the extraordinary events which followed; and yet it is full of interest in itself, and well worth study. In some of its details, it is strikingly like the miracle wrought by Peter and John on the crippled beggar whom they met at the gate of the temple; and yet there is not the least warrant for supposing that it was either a copy of it in method, or that this record is a plagiarism of that great work of Peter, introduced here, and ascribed to Paul, as some of the critics would have us believe. The conversion of every sinner has in it the same general points of similarity, such as conviction, repentance, and faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord; and yet each conversion is marked by peculiarities all its own. There is not the least hint as to who this poor man was. Undoubtedly a heathen; but one of those characters whom we meet with in every community, who are the first to come to any gathering such as surrounded the apostles, and would be sure to be one of the most eager hearers. What would we do for eager hearers if it were not for the spiritually lame, halt, blind, and miserable, who throng the congregations of Christianity? It is among these that the grace of God, as a rule, finds its first welcome. It is an ill day for the Church when it becomes too respectable and select to allow the free access of such poor cripples in its congregations, and does not give them a hearty welcome, and make a place for them in the very front seats, where they are always so anxious to come. It is a sure sign of apostasy and death in the Church when we say to such, "Sit thou there under my footstool." The inhospitality shown to the poor and wretched sinners who would gladly come to our churches if they were only made welcome, and to little children, has undoubtedly cut off from the

Church the opportunities which the Spirit of God would otherwise avail of to begin and continue to do mighty works.

**1.—The cripple.**—We are told that he was “impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother’s womb, who had never walked.” What a picture this is of the spiritual condition of all men until the grace and healing power of God comes to man! One of the first acts of David, after he came into his kingdom, was to call for Mephibosheth, the crippled son of Jonathan, and bring him into his own house and cause him to sit at his table; and “he was lame on both his feet.” (II. Sam. xi, 13.) So the first act of God’s grace, at the hands of the apostles, was to heal such cripples. Our Lord’s ministry was distinguished by his tender sympathy with all such. Why do we not see into the depth of these lessons and learn that the more terrible the work of sin, the more are sinners, even the very worst and most repulsive of them, recommended to our sympathy; and why do we not see that beneath bodies that are whole, and circumstances that are fair to the outward eye, there are crippled souls, who are impotent from their very birth, and utterly helpless to stand up before God and walk in his ways. (i) This cripple had put himself in the way of salvation, since he had come to hear the word of God; for we read in the seventh verse that there in Lystra “they preached the word.” The reason so many souls are lost is not because they are born sinners, and are spiritually cripples, but because, being so, they will not put themselves in the way of salvation by hearing what God has done for them in Christ, and what he is ready to do for them in their own bodies and souls. (ii) He had faith to be healed. No doubt, in the course of Paul’s preaching, he had rehearsed how the Lord Jesus had gone about doing good, healing all that had need of healing, the lepers, the blind, the lame, and the halt. Perhaps he had told them how the apostolic ministry had been inaugurated by Peter, in the healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple. The story of the grace of God and his power to heal had awakened in the heart of this poor man a desire and a belief that he also might be healed; and with these thoughts burning in his soul, and his eyes fixed with eager longing on the apostle’s face, Paul’s attention was attracted toward him, and he “perceived that he had faith to be healed.” How Paul could thus see into his heart, it does not matter. The human countenance is a great index to the soul, and a minister of experience and spiritual perception soon learns to read the hearts of his hearers very well. Many a preacher since Paul has had his attention drawn to some one face in his audience, and has directed his whole sermon to the soul behind

the eager, hungry, and longing eyes that has won his attention, because he has seen in such an one the dawning of that faith that saves. Faith is a something in the soul that is to be *seen*, and so is grace. (Mark iii, 5; Acts xi, 23.) The salvation of the soul has oftentimes begun in the salvation of the body. The writer has in mind the case of a man who was an awful drunkard, who, while he would not call on Jesus Christ to save his soul from sin, did cry out to God to save him from drunkenness. God heard his prayer, and the man in a few days came weeping and crying at the feet of Christ for forgiveness and regeneration. Faith sometimes begins its work in the body and sinks down into the soul, though the more normal way is for it to begin in the soul and work out through the body. God is the Saviour of spirit, soul, and body.

**2.—The cripple healed.**—So soon as Paul perceived the faith that was in him, while “steadfastly beholding him,” with a sea of love in his eyes, he cried out in “a loud voice,” that all the people might hear, and commanded the cripple, “Stand upright on thy feet.” Paul did not use the formula, “in the name of Jesus,” or “Jesus Christ hath made thee whole,” but we know well enough that Paul spoke and commanded in the name of Jesus. Immediately the faith that had secretly taken hold of Jesus for healing, now that it had a clear command to act upon, wrought in the man, and he instantly leaped to his feet and began to walk. In this we see what faith is, and how it should work in men. It is not merely believing abstract propositions, but is acting upon the word of God. This man not only obeyed, but he obeyed with alacrity and enthusiasm. Many people who hear the word and believe, instead of acting at once, “go home to think it all over,” while others, if they act at all, act so languidly that they fail to catch hold of the joy which comes with an enthusiastic obedience. “Wilt thou be made whole?” Then take up thy bed and walk. “Wilt thou be forgiven?” Then believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, “go thy way and sin no more.” This is faith: to take God at his word and instantly act upon it, “nothing doubting.”

## II.—CHRISTIANITY IN CONFLICT WITH HEATHENISM.

The effect of this miracle upon the multitude who saw it was most remarkable. Instead of praising God and believing on Jesus Christ, whom Paul preached, and in whose name he had wrought this wonderful cure on the lame man, they obeyed their heathen instincts and superstitions, and began to cry out: “The gods are come

down to us in the likeness of men," and took steps at once to pay divine honors to Paul and Barnabas, calling Barnabas Jupiter, and Paul Mercurius. The priests of Jupiter, which was the god chiefly worshiped there, took up the cry and proceeded at once to prepare to offer sacrifice to these missionaries.

**1.—The blindness of heathenism.**—In the light of this incident, and the knowledge that we have of heathenism to-day, which is not different in its beliefs and practices from what it was then, we may know something of the spirit that is in it. (i) The blindness of heathenism is not total, but, as it were, the blindness caused by a partial cataract. It believes in God. It has an insatiable longing for the manifestation of God in some form by which they may approach unto him. There is in heathenism the remnants of some Divine teaching respecting incarnation. In all heathenism there is the belief in incarnation, and all idols are the result of that belief, based either on some tradition of the "gods come down in the likeness of men," or in a belief that, in the fullness of time, God will so incarnate himself. (ii) But this truth concerning incarnation which they so dimly perceived had been grossly abused, and has led them into the worship of sinful men, because of some remarkable deed, reported to have been done by them, or some imagined excellency which has gone beyond that which is ordinarily seen in man. The result is that heathenism has ceased to worship God at all, and has attached its worship to fancied incarnation, either in men or in mere idols of stone and wood. So have the heathen lost all conception of the infinite perfections of God, and have sunken into the lowest and most debasing beliefs concerning him. The dissatisfaction which the longing and hungering soul of sinful man has felt with one fancied incarnation, had led on to other endless fancied incarnations, until heathenism to-day is crowded with millions of fancied gods, who have utterly effaced from their thoughts and hearts any and all knowledge of the true God. In India alone, it is estimated that there are more than 3,000,000 of gods who receive worship from the inhabitants of this land.

**2.—The protest of Christianity and its teachings.**—It would appear that, as soon as the miracle had been completed, the apostles left the place of assembly, and were not aware of the effect of the miracle on the people until they were informed of the preparations which were being made to pay them Divine honors. As soon as they learned this, full of horror, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people and uttered their determined protest at the sinful proceedings. The points of their protest and teaching are full of inter-

est. (i) The humble confession of their own humanity. "We also are men of like passions (frailties) with you." Therefore we are not the objects of worship. Contrast their conduct with that of Herod. (Acts xii, 22, 23.) (ii) Their mission was not to increase idolatry or multiply incarnations, but to preach to them that they should turn from these vanities (empty fables). (I. Thess. i, 9, 10.) Christianity is opposed to idolatry in any and every form. The repudiation of the offered worship of these heathen by the apostles is in striking contrast with that acceptance of the worship of saints, and the introduction of idols and all manner of heathen superstitions which the false Church of Rome has encouraged and introduced, and a strong tendency to which is seen in one branch of the Protestant Church of to-day. (iii) Turning from idols, they are taught to worship "the living God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all things that are therein." (iv) In times past, God "suffered the nations to walk in their own ways," perhaps as a punishment for their deliberate rejection of the early revelation which God had given them: "But now he commands all men everywhere to repent." (Acts xvii, 30.) (v) During this time of abandonment, God had not left himself without witness; not indeed by direct revelation, but he continued to give, in the order of his providence, "rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." These gifts of God in nature were a testimony to his being and beneficence, and should have saved even the heathen from confounding the Creator with the creature. This whole passage has been admirably summed up by Langbein, as follows: 1. "Christianity contends against the deification of men, while it proclaims the incarnation of God. 2. It contends against the worship of nature, while it proclaims the Living God the Lord of creation. 3. It contends against man's inclination to walk in his own way, while it commands him to walk in the way of God's commandments." Notwithstanding their earnest remonstrance, it was with the utmost difficulty that Paul and Barnabas restrained the heathen from carrying out their purpose to sacrifice to them.

### III.—PAUL IS STONED.

The troubles of the apostles were not ended with this sudden outbreak of heathenism. While they were still in Lystra, there came certain Jews over from Iconium and Antioch to do them mischief. The hatred of the Jews was very intense; so intense, indeed, that a party of them at Antioch, from whom Paul had turned on their re-



jection of Christ to preach to the Gentiles, traveled as far as Iconium, where there were other angry Jews, and recruiting their party, followed Paul and Barnabas to this remote region, where they were preaching to the heathen. The journey was at least an hundred and twenty miles, but these haters of God and his servants were willing to take it, if only they might succeed in stopping the testimony of these fearless men, whose message they saw, if believed, would inevitably overthrow their own proud religious supremacy.

**1.—A fickle multitude.**—These Jews seem to have succeeded, by false report and slander, in raising a great prejudice against the apostles, and finally stirred them up to such a pitch that they sought to kill them. How characteristic is this proceeding! The people, and the priests especially, were angry with Paul and Barnabas because they not only refused their proffer of worship, but rebuked their superstition and idolatry, and warned them of the danger and sin of it, and exhorted them to turn to the Living God. With their wounded pride still smarting under the apostolic rebuke, they were quite ready to lend themselves to the evil design of the apostate Jews. So it happened with these servants as it had occurred with their Master. To-day it is "Hosannah to him that cometh in the name of the Lord," and to-morrow it is, "Away with him, crucify him, crucify him." Yesterday these heathen would have done sacrifice to the apostles and worshiped them as gods; to-day they will stone them to death in their streets.

**2.—"Once I was stoned."**—In enumerating the things he had suffered for Christ, in after years, Paul very pathetically alluded to this experience in Lystra, where he was stoned and dragged out of the city for dead. How vividly it must have come before the mind of Paul, while the shower of stones was falling upon him and he felt himself sinking beneath their cruel blows, that a few years before he was standing by, consenting to the same kind of proceeding, which indeed he himself had incited against Stephen. Our sins often come back to us in fruit after their own kind. It did so in this case. Yet Paul does not speak of it except in terms of gladness, that he should have thus been permitted to suffer for Christ, whom he had once persecuted in the persons of his disciples.

**3.—Fellowship in suffering.**—Bitter as was this experience, there was comfort in the midst of it. His enemies having stoned him, dragged him out of the city, and left him for dead; but loving disciples came also and stood about him. These were some of the heathen who had received the Gospel and turned from idols to serve the living and true God. There is no compensation for sufferings

and sacrifices made in the service of Christ equal to that of knowing that sinners have been converted and souls have been saved. A fruitful ministry, with suffering and persecution, is infinitely preferable to a ministry popular with the world, but barren of fruit unto God. When Paul revived out of his swoon, or from death, if he were really dead, he did not at once flee to another city, as in other instances, but went back into the city; perhaps he was not able that day to travel, and was taken to the house of some of the disciples to be dressed of his wounds. Perhaps the populace was satisfied with what they had done, and did not care further to persecute.

#### IV.—ON THE RETURN JOURNEY.

The next day, with Barnabas, Paul went to Derbe. Derbe was the objective point of this missionary journey. Paul will finish the work he had undertaken, notwithstanding what had occurred. Entering Derbe, they began their work just as if nothing had happened, and having successfully preached the Gospel there—for they taught many, that is, made many disciples—they returned to Lystra. Why did he not take another way back to Syrian Antioch, where they were now minded to return, in order to give a report of their journeyings. This might have been safer, and certainly such a course would have been more prudent. But these apostles were made of other stuff. If *they* had been persecuted by the Jews, surely they could not forget those young converts whom they had left behind in all the places where they had preached, and the care they had for their souls was greater than the fear they had for their own lives. Barnabas was of the same mind. It was well for them that John-Mark had already departed for Jerusalem, or he might have made trouble in trying to dissuade them from their self-sacrificing and heroic course.

1.—**Back to Iconium and Antioch.**—It was from Antioch and Iconium that the persecuting Jews had come who had stirred up the people of Lystra to stone Paul. Back to those cities these men went with their hearts full of love and anxiety for the disciples there. They would be discouraged, and perhaps believe the evil reports already in circulation against their “fathers in the Gospel.” Had Paul and Barnabas passed them by on their way to the mother Church, they might have had reason to believe the reports. So their return was necessary to clear their own characters, as well as for the strengthening of the faith of the young believers. Insincere men would not so put their heads in the lion’s mouth, and a false religion would not give evidence of such disinterested love of the brethren.

**2.—Confirming the souls of the disciples.**—Every young convert needs to be confirmed in his faith by further instruction, and much care and nurture. To this task the apostles gave themselves. Two matters entered into this further teaching. (i) Exhortation. They were exhorted to continue steadfast in the faith which they had embraced, and no doubt taught further as to the sure grounds and foundations of it, out of the Scriptures. (ii) Warning. The apostles told them frankly that their faith would probably cost them something by way of suffering, but they explained to them, that it is only with much tribulation that believing souls enter into the kingdom of God. Not that tribulation and suffering are prices to be paid for the privilege of being accepted of God, but that all true faith in Christ will stir up the hatred of the world, and all life that is godly in Christ Jesus will bring down persecution. So they must not be surprised if they, too, had to suffer something. This exhortation and teaching came well from men who had themselves been mobbed, and from one who had been stoned and left for dead, for Christ's sake. They are the best teachers who have had the deepest experience, and they are the best leaders who have themselves gone over the road. Let us remember that it is given us, not only to believe on the Lord Jesus, but to suffer for him also.

## L.

## THE APOSTOLIC COUNCIL.—Acts xv, 12–29.

(12) Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. (13) And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: (14) Simeon has declared how God at first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. (15) And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, (16) After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: (17) That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. (18) Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. (19) Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: (20) But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. (21) For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. (22) Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: (23) And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: (24) Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law; to whom we gave no such commandment: (25) It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, (26) Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (27) We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. (28) For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; (29) That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.—Acts xv, 12–29.

In this portion of Luke's record a new chapter in the history of the Christian Church is opened. Hitherto he had devoted himself to the task of recording the acts of the apostles in connection with the gathering of the Church, especially with the bringing in of the Gentiles. Now a serious question had arisen in that gathered Church on a point of doctrine so vital that everything else, preaching, exhorting, and prophesying, gives way to it, and is put aside till this question is settled and the Church comes to rest within itself and is firmly

re-established on principles of sound doctrine. In the Church at Antioch there was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. Those who had been originally converted in the city, and formed into one Church, had had no trouble. It was only when some outside brethren from Jerusalem came down and undertook to meddle with their affairs that the trouble began. These Jews assumed to speak in the name of the Church at Jerusalem, and said: "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." What business had these self-constituted teachers to come down from Judea and take upon themselves to teach these brethren, whom the Holy Ghost had already led so much farther in the way of life than themselves? It is a great pity that Churches of our Lord Jesus Christ cannot be left alone to manage their own affairs, without being intruded upon by those from without. We cannot but notice the fact that Luke speaks of these outsiders as "certain men," while he speaks of the members of the Church at Antioch as "brethren." There must have been intention in this. The mischievous work of these men brought on no small dissension and disputation. This is a matter always to be deprecated when it can be avoided, but if men come in "to spy out our liberties," then, even though discussion and dissension for the time being stop the legitimate work of the Church, it must be had if the faith of the Church of Christ is at stake. The liberty of the Church and the spiritual and individual freedom of believers must be maintained at all hazards. It was fortunate not only for the Church at Antioch, but for all the Churches of our Lord Jesus Christ since that time, that Paul had come back from his missionary journey, and was present to defend them from the mischief of these Judaizers. Here we find Paul in a new rôle. First he was a teacher, then he became a missionary, and now he steps forth and begins to give to the Church her theology, and to define clearly what is and what is not the very essence of the Gospel. The question at issue was: "What is essential to salvation?" The Judaizers had undoubtedly carried the Jewish brethren with them, and perhaps had gained some of the Gentile converts over as well. Finally a proposition was made, perhaps by the Judaizers, but more likely by Paul himself, who perceived that it was a question that must needs be settled at the very center of Christianity, which was still at Jerusalem, to carry the question up there and debate it with the apostles and elders. These men professed to come from the mother Church, and to speak in their name (v. 24); so Paul would meet the question at the fountain-head, not of authority, but of suggestion. No doubt the matter might have been settled for the Church of Antioch on the

spot, but perhaps at the expense of a split. It is better, when it is possible, to appeal to a friendly and fraternal council of brethren, who are equally interested in principle with ourselves. A deputation was therefore sent to Jerusalem, consisting of Paul, Barnabas, and certain other brethren. On their way they visited some of the churches in Phenice and Samaria, and told them of the great things God had wrought among the Gentiles during their missionary tour, to their great joy. When they reached Jerusalem they were cordially received by the Church, the apostles, and the elders, and to them they also rehearsed what God had done for the Gentiles. Here they were met by that small party of Pharisees who had been converted at Jerusalem, who insisted that these Gentiles should have been, and ought still to have been, circumcised and made to keep the law of Moses,—that is, the ceremonial law. This brought on the whole question, and the discussion went on for days, both in the public assembly of the Church and in private; for Paul tells us (Gal. ii) that he had much private conference with the leading men of the Church. Among the number of them that went up was Titus, who was a Greek, and Paul tells us that he was not required by the leaders of the Church at Jerusalem to be circumcised. Finally, after much private discussion, the apostles and elders came together, apart from the Church, to consider the matter, and afterward report their conclusion to the whole assembly. (v. 22.) In studying the proceedings of this council, we cannot but be struck with the absence of all those claims which some moderns set up for the authority of councils, apart from the whole body of the Church. Churches are not the subjects of councils or ministers; but councils, ministers, and elders are the servants of the Church, to whom they are bound to report their work, and have it ratified or rejected.

### I.—THE COUNCIL AND ITS PROCEEDINGS.

As we have here the account of the only council, so far as we know, ever held in apostolic times over any question of vital importance arising in the Church, it is not only interesting, but of vital importance, that we should study it carefully. Of course, in the space allotted to our brief studies, we can but glance at its salient points, which may act as hints to further and more thorough study.

1.—**The composition of the council.**—We are not at sea here, for the record is explicit. It was composed of “the apostles and elders.” Not apostles alone, but apostles and elders. The matter was not referred to Peter alone as primate, it was not re-

ferred to apostles alone, as though they, and they only, had exclusive authority; but to the apostles and elders, of whom James, the Lord's brother, was one, then acting as the chief pastor of the Church at Jerusalem. There were also among this number, without doubt, Judas-Barsabas, Silas, and other chief brethren. (v. 22.) Chief brethren, not because of some magical chrism received by the touch of the apostles' hands in ordination, but because of chief abilities and distinguished piety and service. These are the only chief brethren that have any right to conspicuous place or authority in the Church of Christ. It is not the office that dignifies the man and gives him authority, but the man who dignifies the office and gives weight to his opinions and ministrations. In the modern Church, people are taught to bow to some fancied magical authority which is supposed to belong to certain (often very small) men, who claim the right to wear certain kinds of clothes, and attach a certain official title to their names, claiming to be successors of the apostles; but in the ancient Church it was the men who, by their weight of character and abilities, were chosen to represent and administer the authority of the Church. This is all the difference between popery and modern Churchianity and the Church of Christ.

2.—**The subject under discussion.**—Here, also, we are on ground of the most vital and utmost consequence to the Church of to-day, as it was to the Church then. The question was, whether Jesus Christ and faith in him alone was the all-sufficient ground and condition of salvation; or whether it was Christ, together with some ceremonial added to his finished work and all-saving grace, which guaranteed to the believer eternal life, and all the rights and privileges of fellowship and communion. The Judaizers contended that faith in Christ and circumcision, together with other ceremonials, were essential: while Paul and his party contended that "faith in Christ only" was the all-sufficient ground of salvation. It may be said that the questions of circumcision and the ceremonial law of Moses have long since passed out of question in the Church of to-day. But this is not true. The details of the controversy have shifted, and instead, the Judaizers of to-day have substituted baptism for circumcision (or some form of baptism), "confirmation" by some so-called bishop, and membership in some so-called historical or apostolic Church, for the law of Moses. On this ground they are proceeding to deny fellowship to all believers who do not conform to their "ritual," and even to exclude them from salvation, declaring that salvation is to be found only within their "Church" and through the ministry of their clergy. It is well that Paul fought out this controversy,

and it would be well if we of to-day would see the importance of "standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free," that we "be not again entangled in this (new) yoke of bondage."

3.—**The proceedings of the council.**—There had been much desultory discussion which Luke does not record. After a time, when the others had said out all they had to say, Peter first, then Paul and Barnabas, and afterward James, delivered themselves of various addresses. Perhaps we may regard the address of James as the summing up of the argument, as he most probably acted as chairman of the council, in virtue of his pastorate, or because of that honor which the Church delighted to confer upon him because of his near kinship to the Lord, being his half-brother.

(i) *The speech of Peter.* Peter's address does not come strictly within the limits of our study, and yet it is so essentially a part of it, that we may not leave it out. His speech was a brief rehearsal of the fact that previously God had made choice of him to give the Gospel to the Gentiles, referring to that special commission received on the house-top. In obedience to that command, he preached the Gospel to Cornelius, and it was there proved that the saving grace of God came to that Gentile household in precisely the same manner that it had been bestowed upon themselves, bearing this witness that God was no respecter of persons, and had purified their hearts by faith. Neither as a matter of fact were they afterward required to be circumcised. This was conclusive of the mind of the Holy Spirit in the matter. Having reached this conclusion from what the Holy Ghost had wrought, he proceeds to warn the brethren, in the form of a question, against going beyond what God himself had required, in their demands upon the Gentile converts. As for circumcision and the minute details of the Mosaic ritual, Peter declares that it had been an "intolerable yoke" to them, without bringing them life, being in fact but a "school-master to keep them in hand till Christ came"; why then "tempt God" by imposing this needless and useless yoke upon the Gentiles? We are struck with the clear trumpet tone of Peter's speech, all the more because he was naturally inclined to the other side of the question; and we must conclude that he had been greatly influenced by his contact with Paul during the days of private conference. His speech was essentially Pauline. The whole argument is: "Whom God receives we dare not reject, and to impose ceremonials and forms where God has not done it is to tempt God." This is Christianity versus Churchianity.

(ii) *The speeches of Barnabas and Paul.* Peter's speech produced so marked an effect that no one arose to answer it, but all kept



silence. Then Barnabas arose and spoke. Perhaps he took the floor first instead of Paul, because he had originally been sent down to Antioch by the Church at Jerusalem, and because he was better known to the brethren than was Paul, and there were no prejudices against him. After Barnabas had finished, Paul spoke. We have no account of these two speeches, except the merest statement that they related how God had wrought wonders of grace and power among the Gentiles during their missionary journey, as well as during the year they spent together in Antioch. We wonder that Luke, the special friend of Paul, should give in such full outline Peter's address and dismiss Paul's with a mere reference. There may have been two reasons. First, it is better to have a point established by the testimony of one not supposed to be so deeply interested in the decision; and, second, Paul's argument had already been fully written out by himself in burning words, in his epistle to the Galatians, where our readers may study it in detail, especially the second chapter of that epistle, in which the apostle gives a minute account of this debate. We may be sure that Paul followed closely in the line of Peter in the matter of reviewing the work of God, the Holy Spirit, in connection with the conversion of the Gentiles.

(iii) *The speech of James.* At the conclusion of Paul's address, silence ensued in the council. No one seemed to want to say more. The Judaizers were silenced, if not convinced. Then it was that James took up the matter, and asked the attention of the council to what he was about to say. James was notably devoted to the old Mosaic order, and his name had been freely used by the Judaizing party to back up their teaching. (Gal. ii, 12.) His address was all the more notable from this circumstance. Indeed, we cannot resist the conviction that the views of James himself had undergone a great change, and that he had come around to Paul's view of the matter. What a great thing it is to have a man like Paul in the Church at such a time as this—a man who has the clear perception of truth, and the fearless courage to advocate it and stand by it in the face of all opposition! James begins his address by referring to the undeniable facts which Peter had brought before them, and which Barnabas and Paul had confirmed by a larger testimony in the same direction. James had the advantage of traveling over a road already macadamized by hard facts,—facts which could not be gainsaid or overthrown by any possible theory, however ingeniously put. When certain Judaizers of to-day tell us that we have no authority or right to preach the Gospel, and that men cannot be saved unless through their ministry and by means of their ceremonies, we have only to

appeal to the indisputable fact that the Holy Ghost puts his seal to the word preached by others than themselves, and that men and women by the thousands and hundreds of thousands are being annually converted to God, and their hearts purified by the power of faith in Jesus Christ without either baptism, confirmation, or membership in the so-called "only true Church," and are living "holily, godlily, and righteously in this present evil world," serving God acceptably, and being honored by the Lord in their work. It is better to have this testimony of God than a thousand cart-loads of Church and ecclesiastical theories. As James listened to the rehearsal of the works of God, he seems suddenly to have had a fresh conception of the teaching of the word of God, and while he does not appeal from the *work* of God to the *word* of God, he did wisely in showing how all that Peter had said and testified to was in literal accord with the teaching of the word of God. After all, it is to the *word* of God that we must make our final appeal. If any *work*, however wonderful it may be, does not agree with the *word* of God, we are safe in denying to it the authority of God. For the *Spirit*, the *work*, and the *word* of God must agree. "Simon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets, as it is written." He then proceeds to quote one specific prophecy, uttered by Amos ix, 11, 12, and strengthens that statement by reference to very many others, which he does not give in detail. The gist of them all was that, from the beginning, it has been God's purpose to rebuild his Church, which had fallen into decay under the Mosaic dispensation, by introducing into it a vast multitude of Gentiles, which he was now doing. He would not discredit Moses and the prophets, but declared that, though they had for many years been read regularly in the synagogues in the Gentile world on every Sabbath day, they had not effected this purpose of God. Whereas the preaching of Jesus without the law had brought in the Gentiles. It was therefore clear that God did not mean that the Gentiles should come under this Mosaic rule. Here again we have clear reasoning, in which we see that the word and the works of God are in agreement. James concluded his address by announcing his sentence: "That we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned unto God, but that we write unto them that they abstain from pollution of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood." In the former two things we see offenses against God and the moral law, while in the latter we see offenses against the prejudices and former religious training of their Jewish brethren.

(iv) *The decision of the council ratified by the Church.* This conclusion of the council, with its recommendation, was afterward submitted to the whole Church, which in turn ratified it, and proceeded at once to carry it out. In this action, we see how different the council of the ancient Church was from all those modern caricatures which assume to speak for God without the concurrence of the Church itself. After all, the Church is a more weighty body than that of any number of apostles and elders, and her authority is the final one in all matters of practice, so far as it is in accord with the work of the Spirit and the word of God. For it must be noticed again that this decision was only the voice of the Church consenting and submitting to the voice of God in his work and word.

## II.—THE LETTER OF THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM TO THEIR GENTILE BRETHREN.

After the council had concluded its labors and the Church had approved their decision as to the matters in controversy, and their determination to communicate that decision by letter to the Gentiles, they selected "chosen men of their own company," namely, Judas-Barsabas and Silas, to accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch, and with them to deliver the letter. It was wise, in the first place, to commit the decision of the council to writing, lest there be any mistake or dispute arising from a merely verbal report; and it was wise to send two of the brethren of the Church at Jerusalem with Paul and Silas, that they might the more thoroughly confirm the tidings they brought. We can only note the outline of this letter.

1.—**The salutation.**—Notice that it is the apostles and elders *and brethren*. Not the apostles alone, nor the apostles and elders. It was the salutation of the *whole* Church, and not a part of it. Also note the tender fellowship conveyed in the address: "Send greeting to the *brethren* which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia." No tone of superiority or patronage here, but just a loving fellowship. This testifies how hearty and genuine the feeling was toward them, and how sincerely they had reached a decision favorable to them, even against their own strong natural and educational prejudices. This was because their decision was reached, not by the counsel of flesh and blood, but by the aid and under the direction of the Holy Ghost. (v. 28.)

2.—**The Judaizers repudiated.**—Verse twenty-four suggests deep regret for the "trouble" which had been caused to them by men

from their own company, who had "subverted their souls" by their impositions; and the repudiation of them, denying that they had received any such commandment from the Church at Jerusalem.

**3.—The messengers.**—In sending their letter to them, they had entrusted it into the hands of two of their chosen brethren, who, with Paul and Barnabas, would deliver it. This letter also takes occasion to speak in most loving terms of the Antiochan messengers, Paul and Barnabas, "men that have hazarded their lives for our Lord Jesus Christ." What greater praise than this! No doubt this was spoken that the Gentile brethren might understand how truly they loved and how highly they honored these particular brethren, who were their own chosen and trusted teachers.

**4.—The judgment.**—This letter conveying their decision was not in the form of a command, as though they had authority over their consciences, but a brotherly statement of the conclusions they had reached in the matter that had been referred to them for judgment.

It is not surprising that, when this letter was read to these Gentile believers who had been harried by the Judaizers, "they rejoiced at the consolation."

LI.

REVIEW OR OPTIONAL LESSON.

## LII.

## I.—THE BIRTH OF CHRIST: A CHRISTMAS LESSON.

—Luke ii, 8–20.

(8) And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. (9) And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. (10) And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. (11) For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. (12) And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. (13) And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, (14) Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. (15) And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. (16) And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. (17) And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. (18) And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. (19) But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. (20) And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.—Luke ii, 8–20.

The exquisite simplicity of Luke's story of the nativity of our Lord is one of the strongest proofs of the authenticity and genuineness of the Gospel. Says Canon Farrar, in his delightful *Life of Christ*: "There is no more decisive criterion of their [the Gospel records] absolute credibility as simple histories than the marked and violent contrast which they offer to all the spurious gospels of the early centuries, and all the imaginative legends which have clustered about them." In these accounts, "there is nothing of the exuberance of marvel, and mystery, and miracle which appear alike in the Jewish imaginations about their coming Messiah, and in the apocryphal narratives about the Infant Christ." "Had our Gospels been unauthentic, they too must inevitably have partaken of the characteristics which mark, without exception, every early fiction about the Saviour's life." This exceptional simplicity, then, can only be accounted for on the ground of the supernatural guidance which

was given to Luke as he recorded this matchlessly beautiful story, the facts of which he probably obtained from the lips of the mother of Jesus herself. It would not have been in the power of man, unless he had been supernaturally restrained, to have written this story of stories in so few words, so delicately, and in so simple a style. The story of our Lord's nativity has never ceased to exercise a fascinating power over the hearts of both old and young. It has been, throughout the centuries since, the theme of poet, sage, and artist. In vain has one artist after another sought to realize, in his own creation, what has been unsatisfactory to him in the creations of the one, and all others who have preceded in the same field of effort. The same is true of poets and sages who have tried to tell this story in fuller detail. Our hymnals are crowded with songs of praise, which are founded on this transcendent event, in all of which the worshiping souls of the writers have tried to portray, in their song, the exceeding glory of our Lord's birth. Among all the festivals of the Christian Church, there is no one that brings with it so much of joy and gladness as that one which we call Christmas. Then the hearts of the parents are turned to the children, and the hearts of the children to their parents, as at no other time; and the hearts of all are turned toward the great and loving God, who "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." Even wicked men and infidels celebrate this day, and for a season seem to come under the softening influences which come along with it, and for that day, at least, seem reconciled to God.

For long ages, even from the days of the garden of Eden, when God promised to our fallen parents that there should come one born of woman who should bruise the head of the serpent, and set them and their children free from the guilt and power of sin, had the promise of our Lord's birth into the world been suspended before the expectation of men. For fifteen hundred years, from the calling of Abraham, who "saw Christ's day and was glad," to the last of the prophets of Israel, they and the sweet psalmists had spoken and sung of his coming. Every figure of speech known to the use of language, every allegory, simile, and comparison with things in heaven and things on earth, have the prophets, seers, and sages used to set forth the glories and the joys waiting upon the advent of Christ. The Old Testament Scripture throbs on every page with this hope; and as the time went on, age after age, the light of the dawn of his coming seems to glow in the later chapters of prophecy. Amid all the sin and suffering of that wonderful people, the Jews,

they never lost that hope, or gave up that expectation. Even at the time of his advent, the nation which received him not when he came, but rejected and crucified him, were longing for his coming with a passionate longing only possible to those who, for fifteen centuries, had been trained to expect him. The heavy yoke of the Roman bondage was upon them; every day they were being humiliated, and all their dearest traditions and beliefs were insulted, and there was absolutely no hope of deliverance out of the hand of Cæsar by any earthly power; so they turned with passionate desire to the promises of their Scriptures concerning the coming of their Messiah, at just such a time of bitter need as this. There were those, too, who were longing for his coming for other than political reasons; souls like old Simeon and Anna, the prophetess, who were longing to see the salvation of God, and the iron yoke of sin broken from the souls of God's people, and they introduced into the glorious liberty of a true salvation. There were also men in the nation, Israelites indeed, in whom there was no guile, who, like Nathaniel, were searching the Scriptures and looking for "him of whom Moses, in the law and the prophets, did speak." The time was now come.

The peasant carpenter, Joseph, of the royal line of David, with his wedded maiden wife Mary, had come up to Bethlehem, the ancient home of their forefather, in obedience to the decree of Augustus, to be enrolled in the census, which their Imperial master had ordered to be taken throughout Judea. They must have traveled slowly on account of the delicate state of Mary's health. Other travelers had passed them again and again on the road, so that when they arrived at the village caravansarie, they found all the little rooms in the building set apart for the accommodation of travelers fully occupied, and, of necessity, they were compelled to betake themselves to the rude outbuilding in the compound provided for the horses, asses, and camels. This was a cheerless and desolate place for Joseph to take his maiden-wife to, especially in her delicate condition. We can fancy him tenderly making the best of the bitter necessity, and selecting the most retired spot in the midst of the lowly and repulsive surroundings for his weary wife to lay herself down and wait for the coming of that event which, from all eternity, God had been waiting to accomplish. How little the world knew what was happening in that manger place; how little those about them knew, none of whom had volunteered to make place for her in the inn! We may be sure that Joseph gave no hint of the coming event, and made no claim to their courtesy on that account, for the mystery of that wonderful conception had been carefully hidden in



both their hearts. They, and they alone, knew the dread but glorious secret of the near advent of the long-expected Messiah, in the person of the helpless babe, about to be born there in that manger.

### I.—THE HERALD ANGELS.

In that country, perhaps a mile from the village of Bethlehem, there were some humble "shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night." These fields were probably on the site of the old homestead of the ancestors of Christ. There once, Ruth had followed, with a heavy and lonely heart, the gleaners of Boaz, the great-grandfather of David; there David had aforetime (the youngest and despised brother in the family of Jesse) watched the flocks of his father, and studied the heavens, the wonder and majesty of which had to his poetic soul "declared the glory of God, and showed forth his handiwork." Now, centuries after, there was to burst forth from those starry heavens, over these shepherds' heads, a brighter glory and a sweeter song than David sung, the words of which were to fill the world with hope and joy for centuries to come. How unsuspected and near are the great mercies of God to us! How suddenly do the most momentous events in God's great plan of redemption burst upon our vision and our hearts!

1.—**The Angel of the Lord.**—Lying upon the ground, it may be looking up into the star-lit heavens, possibly at that very moment thinking of David's psalm, or maybe crouching under the shelter of some rock on that wintry December night, these shepherds were suddenly surprised by the appearance of a glorious being which "came upon them." It was the Angel of the Lord. Perhaps Gabriel, who had, nine months before, appeared to Mary and announced to her that she was to be the mother of the Lord. He came upon them as the burning bush in the wilderness suddenly appeared to the astonished eyes of Moses; as the Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon while beating out the corn behind the barn in the days when the Philistines reigned and tyrannized in the land; as the same glorious Angel appeared to Manoah, the father of Samson. At the same time, the glory of the Lord shone about them, outrivaling the splendors of that glorious winter night; a glory that put out the throbbing light of the stars, and made the moon to be lost in a light more beautiful than her own. No wonder they were afraid. Man always is afraid in the presence of the supernatural. Moses was afraid when God spoke to him out of the Burning Bush. Manoah was afraid before the Angel that appeared to him; Jacob, before him,

had been filled with awe, even at the vision of the ascending and descending angels; Isaiah was afraid, and thought himself undone because he had seen the Lord. And well may sinful man be afraid to "look upon God," or even upon the face of an angel sent from God, until he hears the assuring word of love and grace which God always sends to him when he appears in revelation, either by word or angel or adumbration of his gracious glory.

**2.—The Angel's announcement.**—The first word of the Angel was to allay their fears. "Fear not." How that simple sentence has had to come again and again to quiet the terror of sinful man's stricken conscience! It was often even on the lips of Jesus, when some sudden manifestation or revelation of his glory appeared to the eye, or to the faith of his disciples. Sin has made us afraid of God, but grace allays those fears. Listen to the fear-allaying words of the angels: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy." How wonderful that these good tidings should have been brought first to these lowly shepherds! Why were they not first communicated to the king in his palace, or at least to the High Priest of the nation? For the simple reason that neither of these great dignitaries was ready to receive Christ; and besides, God's grace is always first revealed to the poor and the lowly. It is much easier for the great and the rich to receive a Saviour who first comes to the poor and the lowly, than it would be for these lowly poor to persuade themselves that they had the right of grace to approach the Saviour who had first come to the rich. But grace always first comes to, and finds a welcome among, the poor. It must have thrilled the hearts of these poor shepherds to hear these words: "Behold, I bring *you* glad tidings." And yet, let not the poor rejoice over the rich, or the lowly over the great in this world, for God is no respecter of persons. And let not those to whom special privileges of grace and glory are manifested first, rejoice over others who have not been so highly favored. The Angel reminded them that the "glad tidings of great joy shall be unto *all people*." Even so the apostles, on the day of Pentecost, declared: "For the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all them that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." No man, no set of men, no class, no condition, and no race or tribe of men, have any exclusive right to the grace of God as that grace is revealed in the Saviour of all men. In Jesus Christ, the "grace of God hath appeared unto *all men*"; or, if you like the rendering better: "The grace of God unto *all men* hath appeared." Then followed the substance and explanation of these glad tidings: "For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Was this news—this au-

nouncement—incredible to those simple-minded men? They shall have every doubt satisfied. God does not ask us to believe his good news blindly, and without evidence of its truthfulness. Therefore said the Angel to them: “And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.” A most strange place, indeed, to find a Saviour, and most lowly conditions, indeed, in which he should be revealed to them. “In a manger.” “Wrapped in swaddling clothes.” How the proud world misses the Christ! They overlook him. They are searching for him in cathedrals, in theologies, in the regions of “the higher criticism.” The Jews sought for him in their voluminous interpretations, and in their elaborate symbolisms. The Greeks seek for him in philosophical speculations, the Jews seek for him in extraordinary signs and wonders, the modern scientific Jew, in scientific demonstration; but the real and simple-minded inquirer is sent to the lowly manger to find him wrapped about in the swaddling clothes of our poor humanity, with a marred face, and a broken heart, and a bleeding and crucified body. After delivering his message, there was suddenly present “with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts, praising God and saying: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good-will to men.” Contrast this scene with what was probably going on in the splendid palace of Herod the Great, not a dozen miles away, where there was reveling and dancing, and all the dissipations and excitements of a world’s high festival. These contrasts are still present in the world. While some are surfeiting themselves with that which cannot satisfy, and holding others in contempt, all who are not in their circle, God is revealing to them his salvation, surrounding them with a glory and filling their hearts with a song not visible to mere carnal eyes, or vocal to carnal ears. He who hath eyes to see, may always see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and who hath ears to hear, may always hear “the joyful sound” of God’s peace and good-will. Happy shepherds! Happy sinners who also have seen and heard the glory of God and the music of heaven always ready to burst upon the souls of them who are seeking after him!

## II.—THE HAPPY SHEPHERDS.

As suddenly as the Angel appeared to them, and the multitudinous company of singing companions, and the glory of God shining about them, these all disappeared and left the shepherds alone again under the shining stars. Was it a dream? Was it a mysterious hallucination? Or was it a blessed reality? How often we question

our experiences and wonder at the revelation which God makes of himself to our souls! Let us glance just a moment upon these wondering shepherds and note the effect which the vision of angels and the announcement of the Saviour's birth and the song of peace and good-will had upon them.

**1.—They believed the announcement.**—Speaking one to another, they proposed that they should go at once “to see this thing *which is come to pass.*” They did not doubt for a moment, nor ask each other what they thought of it all. God has told us this same thing, but how men hesitate to believe, and debate the possibilities of such things being true, and so fall into fixed unbelief! They did not say, “Let us go and see *if* this thing is come to pass.” It is that unbelieving “*if*” which hinders so many souls, really longing for Christ, from finding him.

**2.—They acted upon their faith.**—They were not content with believing the word of the Angel, but determined at once to go and find the Christ, the Saviour, who was born that night in Bethlehem. They did not content themselves with saying one to another, “I believe it is all true which the angel has told us, and it is a very good thing for the world that Christ has come. It is not necessary for us to go and find him, but it is quite sufficient for us to believe that he has come.” Is not this what many are doing to-day? Contenting themselves with saying that they believe the Gospel to be true; but never act upon the good news; never seek to find the Saviour of which they have been told. Moreover, these shepherds did not put off their journey to Bethlehem and the manger till the next week, or till the next day, or even till the dawning of the day; but said one to another: “Let us *now* go.” How many miss finding the Saviour because they do not at once act upon the convictions which the Holy Spirit works in their hearts! “At a more convenient season, I will call for thee,” has cost many a man and woman their souls. “To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”

**3.—They came and found.**—Having determined to go at once to see the thing which “is come to pass,” they did not delay acting upon their determination. Like the prodigal, who first said, “I will arise and go to my father,” and then forthwith arose and went, so these shepherds “came with haste.” They at least would lose no time. They did not stop to consider what might become of their sheep. What are sheep in comparison with a Saviour? Yet how many tarry and parley and postpone coming because of their “sheep,” or their “merchandise,” or their “oxen,” or their “farms,” or their domestic and social concerns. Be sure that this is no way to find Christ. If we find him, we must arise at once, and come in haste.

Then the record adds: "and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in the manger." Happy shepherds! The first sinners in this world who came and found the Saviour; for they were in advance of the Magi, who came after Mary and the Child Jesus had been removed from the stable into "the house." (Matt. ii, 11.)

**4.—They spread the news abroad.**—Not content with having heard of the advent of Christ, and having themselves seen him, they made haste to tell to others "what a Saviour they had found." Every man and woman who finds Christ is debtor to every other man and woman in the world to tell them of Christ, and faithfully reporting all they have seen and heard and known, seek to lead them to a knowledge of him. They were neither afraid nor ashamed of what they had seen and heard and done. It is true that, while some will believe our report, others will only wonder at it, and perhaps more will scoff; but that is of no concern to the true believer, who *knows* what he *knows*. What does it matter to you and me, who have "known and believed the love that God hath toward us," that others do not believe? What does it matter, though we are or may be called fools and fanatics? What if we cannot prove beyond our own testimony that we have seen a vision of angels, and heard the music of heaven? Paul told three times the story of his conversion. Whether others could back up his story or not, he knew it was true, and his subsequent life proved that he was not deceived. Peter said to the rulers who had forbidden him and John to preach any more in the name of Jesus: "We cannot but testify the things which we have seen and heard." So let us tell the story of how we found the Christ.

**5.—They return to their flock.**—"And the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them." Finding Christ does not take us away from our legitimate callings in life. It is true that, for a little while, they left their sheep in the field to go and find the Saviour, but they returned again to their work, with glad and happy hearts. The common work of this life can be much better done *after* having found Christ than before. How blessed it is that we can resume what is called our secular work, after conversion, "praising and glorifying God."

"But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." The holy reticence of motherhood was upon her, and the mysterious secret of the Child's origin was with her day and night. It was not for her to tell abroad her secrets, but she hid them deeply in her mother's heart. Yet Mary was not without voice and speech, and her magnificent song of praise (i, 46-55) is sufficient testimony to her faith.

## II.—THE QUARTERLY TEMPERANCE LESSON.—Romans

xiv, 12-23.

(12) So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. (13) Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. (14) I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. (15) But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. (16) Let not then your good be evil spoken of: (17) For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. (18) For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. (19) Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. (20) For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. (21) It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. (22) Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. (23) And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.—Romans xiv, 12-23.









Princeton Theological Seminary Libraries



1 1012 01249 5117



