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THE
GOSPEL HISTORY
FOR THE YOUNG

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LESSONS ON THE LIFE OF CHRIST ADAPTED FOR USE
IN FAMILIES AND IN SUNDAY SCHOOLS

BY

WILLIAM F. SKENE, D.C.L., LL.D.

HISTORIOGRAPHER-ROYAL FOR SCOTLAND

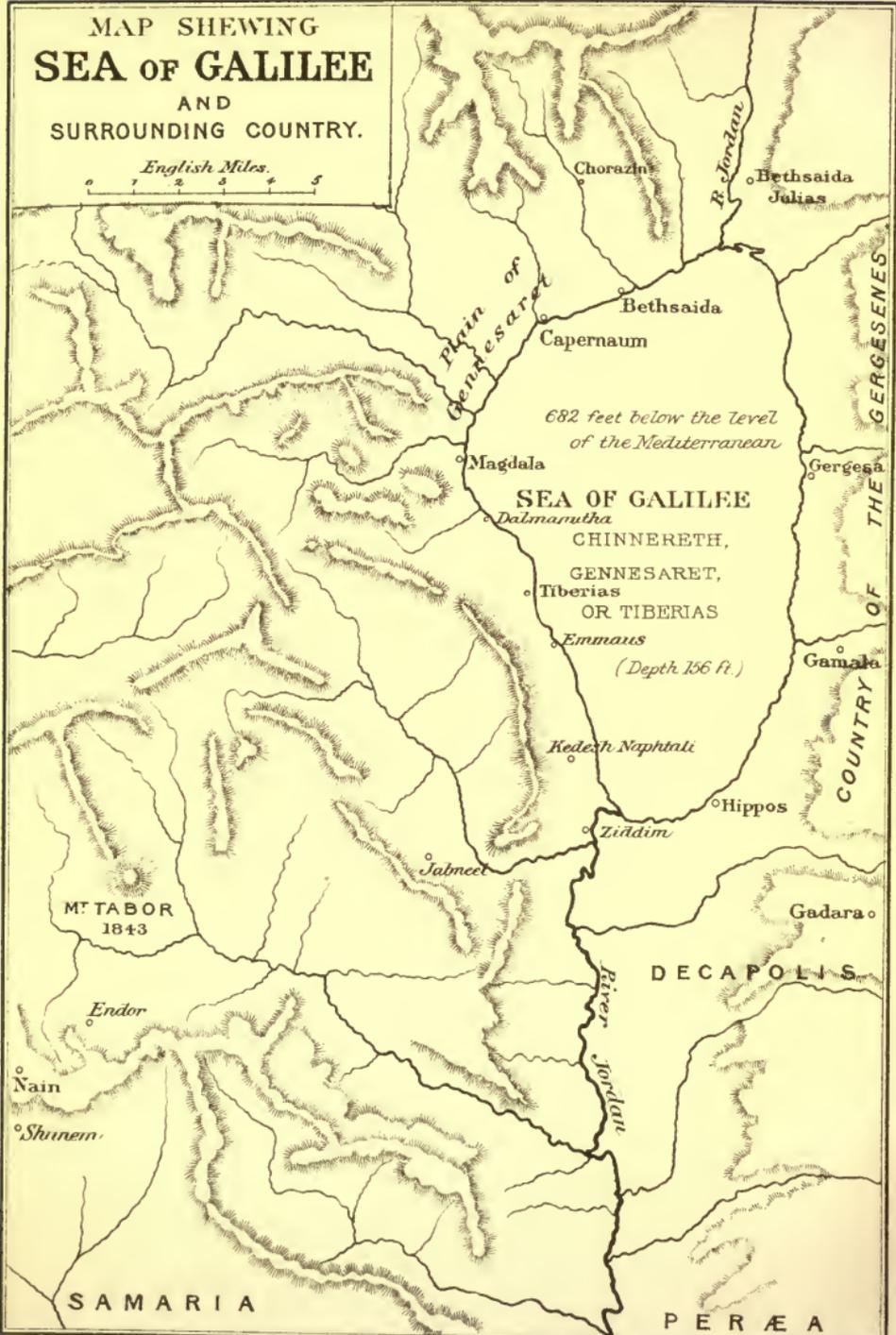
VOL. II.

EDINBURGH: DAVID DOUGLAS

1884

MAP SHEWING
SEA OF GALILEE
 AND
 SURROUNDING COUNTRY.

English Miles.
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Edinburgh: Printed by Thomas and Archibald Constable

OR

DAVID DOUGLAS.

LONDON HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO.
CAMBRIDGE MACMILLAN AND BOWES.
GLASGOW JAMES MACLEHOSE AND SONS.

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THE GOSPEL HISTORY
FOR
THE YOUNG.

PART II.

CHIEF PERIOD OF HIS TEACHING.

*JESUS AND THE LOST SHEEP OF THE HOUSE OF
ISRAEL.*

Lesson XXV.

THE APOSTLES AND THE BEATITUDES.

Read

ST. MARK iii. 7—12 ; ST. LUKE vi. 12—16 ;

ST. MATTHEW v. 1—12.

JESUS, having thus been rejected by the Pharisees, now turned to another class of the community, which had peculiar claims upon His sympathy, and which He designated as “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Among the Jews their nation was distinguished into two great classes. These were the

“scholars” or “disciples of the wise,” and “the people of the land.” The first class was composed of those who had been trained in the study of the law, and to it belonged the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians. This was the learned class. The other class comprised the unlearned, or those who knew not the law. They were, in fact, the common people, and were looked upon with great contempt by the Pharisees, and had no instruction whatever afforded them, but were left in ignorance. Thus, if you turn to the seventh chapter of the Gospel of St. John, and the forty-ninth verse, you will see how the Pharisees viewed them: “But this people, who knoweth not the law, are cursed,” and in the books of the Jews we find the same contempt expressed for them. Thus, “Is there a matter of controversy between a scholar of the wise and one of the people of the land? They adhere to the scholar.” “The scholars of the wise might not eat in an inn, nor in the streets, nor with the people of the land.” Their neglected state appealed largely to the compassion of Jesus. Thus St. Matthew tells us that when Jesus “saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as

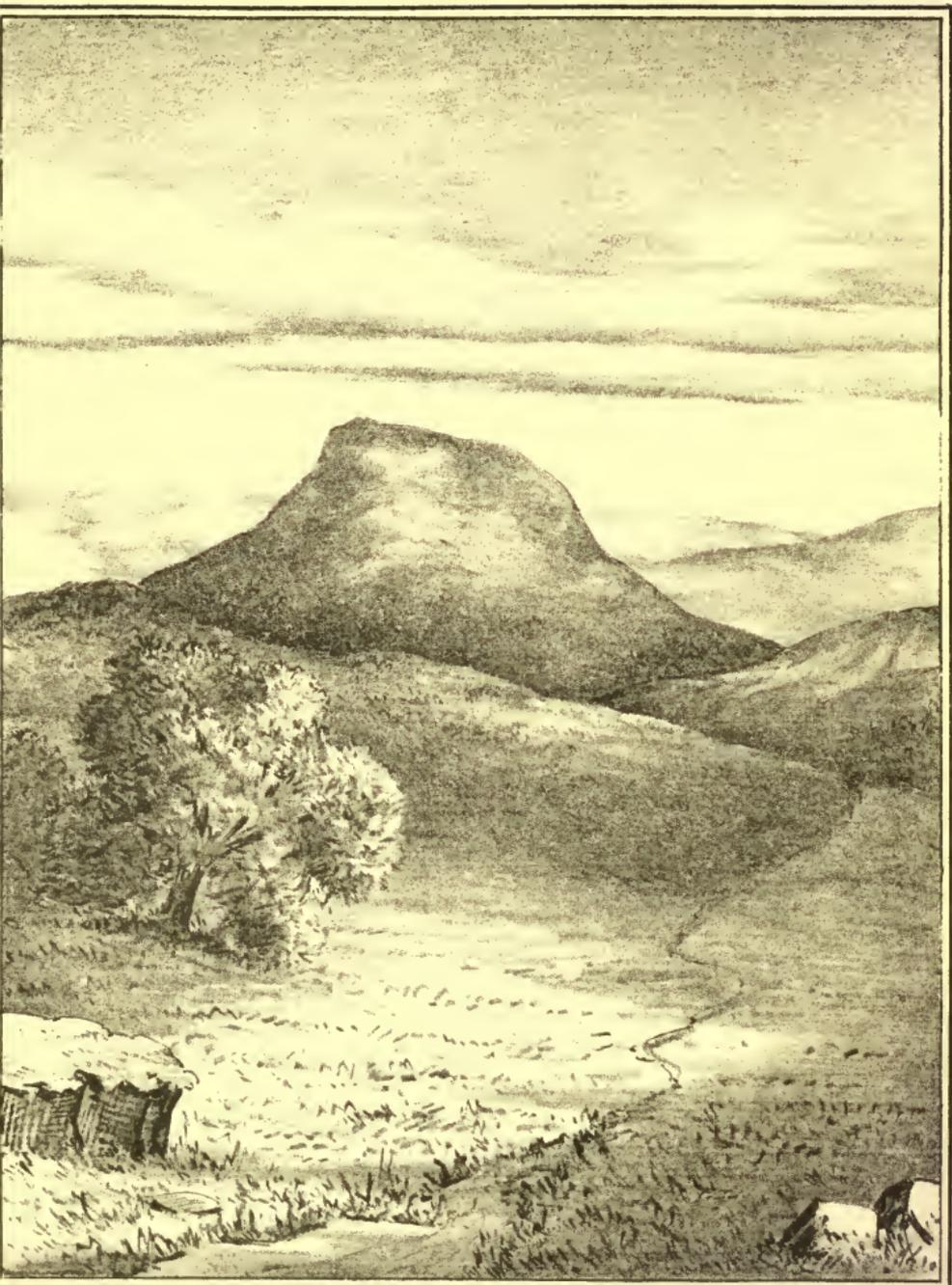
sheep having no shepherd" (ix. 36). He was probably the first teacher who ever addressed any instruction to them, and He refers to them when He says, in the fifteenth chapter of St. Matthew, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (ver. 24). Now if you turn to the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah you will see why Jesus so calls them. In the fiftieth chapter and sixth verse you will find: "My people hath been lost sheep; their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their resting-place;" and the relative position of the Pharisees and the people of the land is very forcibly predicted by the prophet Ezekiel when he says, in his thirty-fourth chapter: "And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds, Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that

which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the land, and none did search or seek after them." Again, in verses eleven and twelve: "For thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." The whole chapter is well worth your perusal as a very remarkable picture of the state of the people of the land in the days of our Saviour, and their utter neglect by the Pharisees and teachers of Israel.

These people had now been roused out of their sluggish condition, first by the preaching of John the Baptist, and afterwards by the fame of the

miracles done by Jesus and the startling novelty of His teaching, which gave them hopes that they, too, might be admitted into the kingdom of God which was at hand, and they now flocked after Him wherever they heard that this new Prophet was to be met. They came to Him from Judea, or the land north of Jerusalem, where He had healed the man with the withered hand and proclaimed Himself Lord of the Sabbath. They came to Him from Jerusalem, where He had healed the impotent man at the Pool of Bethesda in presence of the people. They came to Him from Idumea, as the southern part of Judea was then called, and from beyond Jordan, when He went along the east bank of the river towards Galilee, and even Gentiles from Tyre and Sidon, and they assembled around Him when He reached the Sea of Galilee. Here He first of all relieved them from their physical evils by healing many and casting out unclean spirits, from whom He received that recognition which had been withheld from Him by the Pharisees, for when they saw Him they fell down before Him, and cried out, saying, "Thou art the Son of God." He, however, charged them not to make Him known, and St. Matthew tells us that this was a fulfilment of a prophecy

of Isaiah, which you will find in his forty-second chapter: "Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit upon Him, and He shall show judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory. And in His name shall the Gentiles trust" (St. Matt. xii. 18). I have quoted this prophecy at length as you may not at first see how it applies. It alludes to the quiet and unobtrusive way in which at this time Jesus carried on His mission, and His trusting rather to the persuasive force of His teaching, accompanied by His works of mercy, than to an attempt to drive His hearers to receive Him by the weight of authority; and further, if He was to have access without hindrance to the people of the land, it was necessary not to draw the attention of the Pharisees to His proceedings. He would not make as much noise as would be caused by the breaking of a reed already bruised, or the hissing of smoking flax when water is thrown upon it. The kingdom of God was not to come with observation, but to be



J. Bartholomew, Edin^g

MOUNT TABOR

quietly spread by His own teaching, and the preaching of His disciples, till the obstinate rejection of it by the Jews as a nation brought judgment upon them. This scene appears to have taken place on the Sabbath, as He was arrested in His journey at the south end of the Sea of Galilee, and did not proceed on to Capernaum, which was far beyond a Sabbath-day's journey. And when the people pressed upon Him, He told His disciples to procure for Him a small ship to which He could withdraw.

Then, as was His wont on Sabbath-days, He went after sunset into a mountain to hold communion with God, and He continued all night in prayer to God. St. Luke says, in our Authorised Version, that "He went out into *a* mountain;" but it is more correctly rendered in the Revised Version, "He went out into *the* mountain." It was not any mountain in general, but one particular mountain. Now, one of the most conspicuous mountains in Galilee is an isolated hill at the north side of the plain of Esdraelon, about 1400 feet high, and the name of which you have no doubt often heard. It was called Mount Tabor, and it lies in a direct line due west from the south end of the Sea of Galilee. We find in the Old Testament that Mount Tabor was

known as "the mountain." Thus, if you turn to the thirty-third chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy, where Moses blessed the children of Israel before his death, you will see at verse 18: "And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and, Issachar, in thy tents. They shall call the people unto *the mountain*." Now, Mount Tabor is exactly on the boundary which separated the portions of Zebulun and Issachar, and is the mountain referred to. Here Jesus spent the night in prayer. In the morning, which corresponds to our Sunday morning, His disciples came to Him, as they did on a former occasion, when He called them to Him and chose twelve, and appointed them His apostles, literally messengers. St. Mark tells us what the objects were for which He appointed His apostles. They were three in number. First, "that they should be with Him,"—that is, to be witnesses of all He said and did. Secondly, "that He might send them forth to preach,"—that is, the kingdom of God; and thirdly, "to have power to heal sickness, and to cast out demons" (iii. 14, 15), as an evidence of their mission. The twelve whom Jesus selected consisted first of those six disciples who had joined Him at the first, when John the Baptist pointed Him out as

“the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.” These were—Simon, whom He named Peter, or the Stone, Andrew his brother, James and John the sons of Zebedee, which four He afterwards specially called; Philip and Bartholomew—for there is no doubt that Bartholomew is the same person as Nathanael of Cana of Galilee, the word signifying the son of Johani. To these He added Matthew, whom He also specially called. Of the remaining five we have no record of when they first joined Jesus as disciples. The first is Thomas, but as he is afterwards called Didymus, or the Twin, and is always coupled with Matthew in the list of the apostles, he may have been his twin brother. Then James the son of Alpheus, or, as he is afterwards called, Cleopas, the two names having the same signification; and his mother, Mary, is mentioned as one of the women of Galilee who followed Jesus to the cross. Then Simon, called Zelotes, or the Zealot; Judas the brother of James, or, as it is more correctly rendered in the Revised Version, the son of James. He is called by St. Matthew, Lebbeus, whose surname was Thaddeus. The surname is probably a Greek form of Judas, and he may have been called Lebbeus as a native of Lebba, a town on the sea-coast of Galilee.

Finally, we have Judas Iscariot, a name derived from the town of Kerieth, in the hill-country of Judea, not far from where John the Baptist was born. St. Luke adds to his name, "which also was the traitor;" and I daresay you may have often asked yourselves how it was that, if Jesus knew he would betray Him, He selected him as an apostle. There is no character in the New Testament more difficult to understand than that of Judas Iscariot, or one whose motives of action it is less easy rightly to gauge. You will see from the list of the apostles that ten of them were more or less connected with Galilee, though Zebedee, the father of James and John, appears also to have been a householder of Jerusalem; but Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot were certainly Jews from Judea. Now, the Zealots were a party among the Jews of Jerusalem whose object and aim was to drive out the Romans, and restore the independence of Judea. They were, in fact, fanatical nationalists, and they, as well as the Jews generally, looked upon the Messiah as one who was to establish a temporal kingdom, and to raise the nation to a height of glory. It must have been with some such expectation that Simon and Judas joined Jesus as disciples, and such

feelings, as you will afterwards see, were largely shared by the other apostles. Jesus accepted those at first who believed in Him—that is, accepted Him as the Messiah, however imperfect their conceptions of His true character and functions might be,—and looked forward to their being gradually led, under the influence of His teaching, to understand His own character as the Son of God, and the spiritual character of the kingdom of God He was to establish. Although Jesus foreknew that Judas would rather be hardened under His teaching, and in his bitter disappointment that his own conceptions of the Messiah's kingdom were not to be realised, was led into that dreadful act of treachery, He seems to have thought it right that he should be brought under the same influences which were extended to the other apostles, and should not be deprived of the same advantages which they had in His training and forming them into true disciples of His spiritual kingdom.

This is just the way that God deals with all of us. In His perfect omniscience He must know the future fate of every one of us, yet He does not on that account withhold His spiritual influences and opportunities of learning the truth from any man. He desires the death of no sinner, but rather

that men should turn from the error of their ways and live, and no man is lost except through his own wilful rejection of the truth, and his own deliberate choice of evil rather than good.

You will also see now why it was that Jesus chose His apostles from this class of the community rather than from the learned and the cultivated. They were appointed to preach the Gospel, but it was, as St. Matthew tells us, "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (x. 6),—that is, to the people of the land, and therefore it was that they were selected from a class that would better understand their characteristics and have more sympathy with them. When the Gospel came afterwards to be preached to the more cultivated among the Gentiles, then St. Paul, who was what the Jews called "a scholar of the wise," was selected for the purpose.

The apostles having thus been selected, Jesus now commenced to lay before them in detail the true principles of the kingdom they were to preach, in contrast with the erroneous conceptions of the Jews; and in this He brought out in the main the train of spiritual teaching that underlies much of the declarations in the Old Testament, and the spiritual meaning of those commandments of God which the

Pharisees took in their literal and carnal sense only. This discourse to His disciples is usually termed the Sermon on the Mount, and it is taken by St. Matthew out of its proper place on account of its connection in subject with what he had just narrated, instead of following the appointment of the apostles, which is obviously its proper place. It commences with what are called the Beatitudes, eight in number. I may mention here that there is a mountain near the Sea of Galilee, called the Kurun or Horns of Hattin, which now bears the name of the Mount of Beatitudes, from an erroneous idea that the sermon was here preached, but the tradition is not an old one. St. Matthew also has "the mountain" in the original, the name by which Mount Tabor was known. And we find a similar tradition rightly attached to Mount Tabor, for an old traveller, Sir John Mandeville, who ascended that mount in the year 1322, says "that there is a place, which they call the School of God, where He was wont to teach His disciples, and told them the secrets of heaven."

Now, if you turn to the twenty-third chapter of St. Matthew, you will find that Jesus denounces various features in the character and practices of the Scribes and Pharisees, and that each is forcibly

introduced by the emphatic words, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" If you count the number of passages so introduced, you will find that they correspond in number with the eight Beatitudes, and that there is a certain relation between the subject of each. It may therefore be as well that we should take them together, so as to contrast the spiritual features which ought to characterise those who belong to the kingdom of God, which He terms blessed, with those principles and practices of the Scribes and Pharisees which He condemns.

The first Beatitude is, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The same idea is contained in the fifty-first Psalm: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (ver. 17). But so far from the kingdom of heaven belonging in any sense to the Pharisees, the corresponding denunciation is, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in;"—that is, by their false teaching they pervert those who might otherwise have grasped the spiritual character of God's law.

The second Beatitude is, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted;" or, as the prophet Isaiah says of the office of the Messiah, that He was "to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called Trees of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified" (lxi. 3). The corresponding denunciation is, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore shall ye receive the greater damnation;"—meaning, that while there is in the Gospel comfort for the bereaved and the afflicted, they receive from the Pharisees nothing but a grasping avarice under cover of a pretence of religion and worship.

Then the third Beatitude is, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." You will find this promise likewise expressed in the thirty-seventh Psalm: "But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." The earth, or land, here means the promised land, and symbolises the kingdom of heaven.

The contrast is, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves;" thus, by their false teaching perverting them, so that, instead of inheriting the land, they inherit Gehenna, or hell.

The fourth Beatitude is, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." The righteousness meant is that righteousness which the Messiah came to establish, who is Himself the Lord our righteousness; and it is contrasted with the righteousness of the Pharisees, which consists in an observance of those rules of their unwritten law by which they make void the law of God. Two instances of this are given, connected with the sanctity of an oath. An oath "by the temple" is not binding, but if it is by "the gold of the temple" it is binding. So also with regard to the altar and the gift upon it. There is a prophecy of Isaiah which evidently refers to those who hunger and thirst after true righteousness, with which they shall be filled, in contradistinction to the artificial righteousness of the Pharisees that satisfies not. You will find it in the sixty-fifth

chapter : " Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry : behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty : behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed : behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit" (vers. 13, 14).

The fifth Beatitude is, " Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy." Thus we read in the thirty-seventh Psalm : " The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again : but the righteous showeth mercy, and giveth. For such as be blessed of Him shall inherit the earth ; and they that be cursed of Him shall be cut off." And Jesus places the Pharisees in the latter class, notwithstanding their outward show of religion, for He says, " Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith : these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." By the law the Jews had to pay tithes of their cattle, corn, and fruit, as you will see by referring to the Book of Leviticus, chapter twenty-seventh, verses 30 and 32 ; but the Pharisees added to this, by their unwritten law, the tithing of herbs,

down to the very smallest, as those above enumerated. Jesus does not condemn the outward observances of religion, but holds them of no avail unless there is the spirit of religion in the heart and in the conduct of men.

The sixth Beatitude is, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God;"—that is, as Moses saw Him in the mount, they shall see His glory and hear His voice, but in a spiritual sense, for "no man hath seen God at any time." Thus we read in the twenty-fourth Psalm: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? and who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation." But Jesus, who knew what was in the heart of man, presents a faithful picture of the Pharisee, for He says, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess."

The seventh is, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." This is the completion and result of the principles in-

volved in the previous blessings. They lead to peace,—peace in our own hearts, peacemaking with others; as we find it in the thirty-second chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah: “And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places” (vers. 17, 18). But of the Pharisees Jesus says, “Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness.” There were among the Jews two kinds of sepulchres. There were the deep sepulchre, which could not be known as a sepulchre: they were called “graves that appear not,” and are alluded to in the eleventh chapter of St. Luke, and forty-fourth verse; and there were the “painted sepulchres,”—graves that were painted white with chalk infused in water, that they might be seen and known. Jesus compares the Pharisees to these last. They looked from without as the peaceful habitations of the dead, but within were full of corruption, or, as Jesus Himself explains it, “Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto

men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."

The last Beatitude must have fallen with great surprise on their startled ears: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Those who possess the spiritual characteristics depicted in the previous blessings, and exhibit them in their lives, and possess the kingdom of heaven as children of God, must look for the enmity of the world, and for persecution from the powers of the world; but they will learn the great blessedness of suffering for Christ's sake, and that "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Ps. cxvi. 15). The last denunciation of the Pharisees shows from whom the first persecutions will come: "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers;"—that is, though they professed to disapprove of the perse-

cution the prophets had met with from their fathers, yet they were conscious that they inherited the same qualities that would lead them to fill up the measure of their fathers by persecuting those who preached the kingdom of God in its spiritual sense. "Wherefore," Jesus adds, "behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city." We have here the earliest titles bestowed by Jesus upon those who were to preach the Gospel. They were in no way connected with the Jewish priesthood or the service of the temple. The prophets were a separate class from the priests, and the name appears in the Christian Church thus: "Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them" (Acts xv. 32); and the "wise men" and "scribes" were known designations for a class of men connected with the synagogue-worship, and were probably the pastors and teachers of the Christian Church (Eph. iv. 11). The persecution they were to sustain from the Pharisees only tended to the spread of the infant Church, and to the perfecting of their Christian character, for "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

Lesson XX.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

Read

ST. MATTHEW V. 13—48 ; VI. 1—34.

WHAT is usually called the Sermon on the Mount was, in the strict sense of the term, addressed by Jesus to His disciples, and especially to the twelve whom He had selected from among them to be His apostles. After laying before them the general characteristics of the kingdom of God which He came to establish on the earth, and which they were to preach, as they are contained in what are usually termed the Beatitudes, He now addresses the apostles more especially, and again His first utterance to them must have fallen with surprise upon their ears. It was, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your

reward in heaven." The reason why they should rejoice you will find stated by St. Peter in his first Epistle: "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? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts"—or, as it is in the Revised Version, "sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord" (iii. 12-15). And again: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you" (iv. 12-14). He then points out to them the position they must occupy in that kingdom: "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be trodden under foot of men." Salt, you know, preserves

perishable articles of food from corruption. Common salt does not lose its saltiness, but the salt used by the Jews of old was a rock salt brought from the shores of the Dead Sea, and, when in contact with the ground or exposed to the air, was apt to become flavourless. The apostles were to be a similar preserving element among men, like salt, but were to be careful not to lose its flavour—by which the grace of God is meant, as you will see if you turn to the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians, and sixth verse. They were to be the light of the world, like a city set on a hill, which could be seen by every one, and like a candle, or rather a lamp, in a cottage,—comparisons suggested probably by the city of Safeel, perched upon the summit of a mountain nearly 3000 feet above the sea-level, which would be a conspicuous object from Mount Tabor, and from the houses of the common people in Palestine, which were probably very much the same then that they are now. They consist of a stone house vaulted, containing only one room, and admitting light only by the door, and the sole furniture is usually a hand-mill, a large earthenware jar in which grain was kept, and a little lamp or saucer filled with oil, which, as there was no table, rested on an inverted

bushel, which served for a table. This was the only light in the house, and Jesus refers to this custom by saying that men did not put it under the bushel, but upon it as a lamp-stand. In the same way as the lamp lighted the whole house, the apostles were to let their light shine before men, in the kingdom of God, that they might see their good works, and to win men to glorify their Father which is in Heaven.

Jesus then proceeds to remove a misconception which they might have acquired from the Pharisees, who had charged Him with a design to destroy the law of Moses. His opposition was not to the law of Moses, but to the unwritten law which the Pharisees had added to it, and by their glosses had made it of none effect. He assures His disciples that He did not come to destroy that written law which had been revealed from heaven, and was the reflection of God's own holiness, or that revelation of God's will through His prophets, but to fulfil them, and that heaven and earth should pass before one jot or tittle of the law should pass away till all be fulfilled. The word here translated "jot" means the letter י, which was the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet; and the word translated "tittle"

refers to those slight strokes which distinguish one Hebrew letter from another. The meaning is that the written law of God will be fulfilled to the very letter and the minutest degree, and that their position in the kingdom of heaven will depend upon the extent to which, as preachers of the Gospel, they value and observe, and teach men to value and observe, the commandments of God. But if they would enter the kingdom of heaven, their righteousness must in this respect exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. This latter righteousness consisted in a scrupulous observance of the letter of the law, and was obscured and perverted by their traditions; but in place of this unwritten law His disciples must not only obey the letter of the law as a rule for their external conduct, but also as it embraced in its principle the intentions of the mind and the feelings of the heart, and He proceeds to show them what this spiritual view of the law implied. He contrasts the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees with the righteousness they ought to profess, in five points.

The first of these is the commandment of God, "Thou shalt do no murder." The Scribes thus glossed it: "Thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill

shall be in danger of the judgment," and they thus modified the commandment of God. If a person from anger caused the death of another in any way, except by actually putting him to death with his own hands, he was guiltless so far as the earthly tribunals were concerned, but was left to the judgment of God. If, however, from hatred and the deliberate intention to put him to death, he killed him with his own hand, he was guilty of murder, and was liable to the judgment of the Council—or Sanhedrim, as it is in the original. And if it was a very aggravated case, or the death of two persons was caused, he was liable to the penalty of burning in the valley of Ge-Hinnom. Now Jesus tells them that the anger which would have led them to cause the death of a brother was as great an offence against the law of God as the act itself; that the hatred which was expressed by applying to a brother the epithet "Raca," a Hebrew word expressing the highest scorn and detestation, ought equally to expose him to the judgment of the Sanhedrim as if he had killed him with his own hand; and whosoever says to his brother, "Thou fool," would be equally in danger of the Gehenna of fire, for so it is expressed in the original, as if he had caused the death of another.

It will, no doubt, appear to you that the use of the expression, "Thou fool," is surely a less offence than the preceding, though connected with the greater punishment, but I think there is a deeper meaning contained in this expression. These are said to be offences against a brother. Now the Jews drew a distinction between brethren and neighbours. By the former they meant an Israelite by nation and blood, and by the latter an Israelite in religion and worship only, that is, a proselyte; so here by brethren Jesus means those who were spiritual Israelites, by being united in one common faith in the Gospel; and by one brother applying the term "Thou fool" to another, I cannot help thinking that He means one who should denounce the form of belief in a weak brother as folly, and so shake his convictions,—an offence which Jesus denounces elsewhere in the severest terms: "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (xviii. 6). This was an offence hurtful to the souls of both, and so liable to the highest punishment. That this is the view here taken of the term "brethren," and that the great lesson conveyed is the same so

frequently urged, that they should love one another, and give neither cause of offence, appears from what follows,—that if you approach the altar of God to offer the gift the Jews offered on that altar, and there remember that a brother has a good cause of complaint against you, go and be first reconciled to him. It is from this command that the Church of England requires of all who approach the Lord's Table that they be "in perfect charity with all men," and "in love and charity with their neighbours." Jesus illustrates the propriety of this injunction by the figure of a law-suit brought against you for a debt which is justly due. It would be a mere act of worldly prudence to come to terms with your adversary before the matter is brought into court, otherwise you may be cast into prison under a decree requiring you to pay the whole, without doing which you cannot be liberated.

The next point relates to the Seventh Commandment, and the lesson is the same,—that impure feeling or intention, if allowed to have a place in your mind, is as much an offence against the law of God as the act; and that it would be better to pluck out or cut off and cast from you the offending member than to remain subject to the penalty of a broken law.

The third point relates to the Third Commandment: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." The Scribes considered that this commandment was modified by what is said in Leviticus xix. 12: "And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God." They held that it was allowable to swear by the name of God, provided they did not swear falsely, and they escaped the general prohibition against using the name of God in vain by swearing by heaven, or by the earth, or by Jerusalem, or by their head; but Jesus tells them that the commandment implies a prohibition against every kind of swearing, and that their communication should be limited to "Yea, yea; nay, nay," a Hebrew expression which implies that what is said should be simply said "in truth and faith," for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

The fourth point relates to what was called the law of retaliation. This was undoubtedly an old law among the Jews, as it was among all people in a primitive state. Thus you will find it in the Book of Exodus xxi. 23: "And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning

for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe ;” also in the Book of Leviticus xxiv. 20 ; and in the Book of Deuteronomy xix. 21 : and this was practically resolved into a fixed pecuniary compensation for every personal injury ; but Jesus implies that the time was past when such a law of retaliation could be permitted, and that if they would be true children of the kingdom He came to establish, they must learn not to resist or retaliate when any injury was done to them, but submit to it patiently.

Lastly, he refers to the rule laid down in the Book of Leviticus xix. 18 : “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” By neighbours the Scribes understood all who were not Israelites by nation, and they added this gloss that they might hate those who were enemies, that is, who had not adopted their religion as proselytes ; but Jesus lays down, in opposition to this, the general law of charity,—that if they would be the children of their Father which is in heaven they must love their neighbours, that is, their fellow-men, whether they regard them as friends or foes, and even bless those that cursed them, do good to those who hated them, and pray for those who injured them ; for if their heavenly Father made His sun to rise equally on the evil and

on the good, and sends His rain equally on the just and on the unjust, they would thus be perfect in so doing, as their Father in heaven was perfect.

In the next chapter Jesus proceeds to advert to two points which must always form principal features in the worship of God. These are almsgiving and prayer. The Pharisees attached the greatest importance to the first, so much so that the word "righteousness" came to signify almsgiving, as if all practical religion consisted in giving money in charity, for they taught, and the common people believed, that alms contributed largely to their justification. They held that every one should contribute to the extent of one-fifth of their substance. In every synagogue there was an alms-chest, into which alms for the support of the poor members of the congregation were put before prayers, and, besides that, after the usual collection in the synagogue, there was often an extraordinary one made by the *Chazzan* for some particular purpose. There was also the public alms-dish, in which bread and food were gathered for the poor of the city. Jesus does not mean to underrate the importance of almsgiving in general, but denounces the ostentatious manner in which they were given in public by the Pharisees

in the synagogue and in the streets, who had a trumpet sounded before them to call attention to their liberality, so that they might have glory of men. The lesson He teaches is, that their alms should be in secret, and that they should look for no recognition except the consciousness that it was known to their Father in heaven.

Then in prayer He tells them not to use vain repetitions, as the heathen do, who think they may be heard for their much speaking. You have an instance of this in the Old Testament, where we are told in the eighteenth chapter of the First Book of Kings, and the twenty-sixth verse, that the prophets of the heathen god Baal "called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us! But there was no voice, nor any that answered." Jesus tells them they ought to make their supplications in short and simple words, for "your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him." And then He gives them that form of prayer known by the name of the Lord's Prayer. This prayer; though short, and consisting of only eight clauses, yet is pregnant with meaning in each clause, and the form of it was not unfamiliar to the apostles. I told you in a former

lesson, in which I explained the usual services of the synagogue, that the most ancient prayer in that service was a short prayer called the *Kaddisch*. The oldest form of it was written in Chaldaic, which was the language of Babylon, and it was therefore probably composed during the captivity of the Jews at Babylon. It is held most sacred, and cannot be used in private prayer. When I give you the terms of it you will see its analogy with the Lord's Prayer, and that it is the type upon which it was formed. It may be thus translated: "May His great name be extolled and hallowed in the world, which He created according to His will; may He cause His kingdom to come; may His redemption flourish; may His Messiah speedily come; and may He deliver His people in your life and in your days, and in the time of the whole house of Israel, and that quickly; and say ye 'Amen, Amen.' Let His great name be blessed for ever and ever. Let His name be celebrated, and His memory extolled through all generations. Let the name of the holy, blessed God be celebrated, praised, adored, exalted, extolled, and preached, far above every Benediction and Hymn, Praise and Thanksgiving, ascribed to things in the world; and say ye 'Amen.'

In pity and with favour receive our prayers ; may the prayers and the desires of all Israel be received before their Father who is in heaven ; and say ye ‘ Amen.’ May the name of the Lord be blessed from this time forth for evermore ; may there be great peace from heaven, and life for us and for all Israel. And say ye ‘ Amen.’” This very striking prayer is the only one in which God is addressed by the Jews as their Father in heaven. He was usually regarded by them as Jehovah, and the epithets applied to Him related more to His majesty and almighty power as a God who protected those who served Him and obeyed His laws, but punished iniquity, transgression, and sin, unless atonement was made by sacrificial ritual, than to His fatherly character ; but the chastisement brought upon them by their captivity in Babylon seems for the time to have brought them back to Him as children to a father. And this is now the view that Jesus sanctions as the appropriate relation between God and His believing people, when He commences the Lord’s Prayer with these words, “Our Father which art in heaven.” This is followed, as you will see, by the first two clauses of the *Kaddisch* prayer : “Hallowed be Thy name ; Thy kingdom come ;”—but

here they at once diverge. The Jews looked for a temporal kingdom, in which the nation should be delivered from their oppressors, and this is implied in the sentence which follows: "May His Messiah speedily come, and may He deliver His people in your life and in your days, and in the time of the whole house of Israel, and that quickly." But Jesus, who was Himself the expected Messiah, gives the true character of the kingdom He was to establish in the petition which follows in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." It was to be a kingdom in which the will of God was to be done on earth. This, of course, in one sense, is still future, for God's will is not yet done on earth as it is in heaven, but in another sense we are even now in that kingdom. As belonging to an earthly kingdom, we are under the rule of an earthly sovereign, and bound to obey the laws of the land, but we are also under the rule of God as a Heavenly Ruler, and bound to obey His laws and follow His revealed will; and the more we can conform our own will to the will of God, the more do we belong to that kingdom, and hasten the time when it will be fully established. The next two clauses relate to our temporal and spiritual wants. In the first we

pray that we may receive day by day our daily bread, and declare our dependence upon the goodness of God for our temporal comfort. It is a prayer for the necessary support of our life, but not for any luxuries or superfluities. In the second clause we pray for an equally great spiritual need—the forgiveness of our debts, that is, our sins against the law of God, and at the same time pledge ourselves to extend the same forgiveness to our brethren who may sin against us. Here, too, this prayer diverges from the conceptions of the Jews. With them the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins, though sanctioned by many expressions in the books of the Law, and especially in those of the Prophets, had failed to find a place in the Jewish mind; in their idea, trespasses against God and His law could only be atoned for by the trespass-offering, and that sins against God could be simply forgiven for Jesus Christ's sake to those who believed in Him, was, with their carnal views of the character of the Messiah, a conception quite foreign to their minds. It is just because this is a main characteristic of the Gospel that you say in the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." The last petitions in this prayer are that we may not be brought into tempta-

tion, but delivered from evil. The word translated "temptation" does not mean temptations in the ordinary sense of the term, as incitements to evil, such as St. James means when he says, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempteth no man: but each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed" (i. 13, 14). The word here used means rather those trials which are inseparable from the ordinary events, such as sufferings which test or try us. Poverty and bereavement are such trials, as they may lead us to despair of God's goodness towards us, and even riches are such trials, as they may cause us to trust too much to them, or to indulge in too luxurious a style of living; we therefore pray not to be brought into such trials, but, if we are to be subjected to them, to be delivered from the evil of them. The word translated "evil" is properly "the evil," or "the evil one," but the sense is the same, for if such trials lead us to evil it will be through the direct suggestion of the evil one; but the connection of the two sentences seems to limit its meaning to the evil of such trials, and it seems to be used in the same sense in the seventeenth chapter of St. John's Gospel, when

Jesus, in praying for the disciples, says, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (ver. 15), or "the evil one." The doxology at the end of the prayer is not in the original text, but seems to have been added when it was used in the Church service, and so crept into the text; but when this prayer concludes with the word Amen, it has the same conclusion with the *Kaddisch* prayer, and that is the only one of the Jewish prayers, either in the synagogue or the temple, in which it occurs. Jesus then enforces that part of the prayer which would appear most strange to them—viz. the forgiveness of sins,—and uses here the expression "trespasses," showing that if they expect God to answer their prayer and forgive their trespasses against Him, they must also forgive men their trespasses against them. He then repeats His warning against any ostentation in their religious observances, and uses as an illustration the custom of fasting. The Pharisees fasted twice a week, on the days of the synagogue service and, like their almsgiving, made it apparent to all men; but if they adopted that custom as useful to themselves, it should have been done in secret, and as unto God only.

It will no doubt appear to you strange that as Jesus thus warned His apostles against using vain repetitions, and gave them this form of prayer, the Roman Catholic Church should have made that very prayer the subject of constant and frequent repetition. What is called the devotion of the rosary was introduced into the Church by St. Dominic, and consists of the repetition of the *Ave Maria* or "Hail, Mary," that is, the salutation of the angel to the Virgin Mary, and of the Paternoster, or Lord's Prayer, the former being repeated a hundred and fifty times, and the latter fifty, and in the rosary now in use the repetition is limited to one-third of that number of repetitions.

The remainder of this chapter contains a powerful exhortation to them to make their relation to God and to the future life of supreme importance, and to subordinate all earthly possessions and attractions to those which are heavenly. He first reminds them that wherever their treasure is there their heart will be also, and that they ought not to set their heart upon earthly treasures—that is, the occupations, possessions, and enjoyments of this world,—but upon those of heaven, for the former are perishable, and will cease to exist when death terminates their life—

just as one may be robbed of an actual treasure by thieves,—but the latter endure for ever. Again, He reminds them that the light of the body is the eye, and unless the eye is sound they can have no light, but if it is diseased they will be blind; therefore if the light that is in them, that is, their reception of the truth, be darkness, or a false perception, their spiritual darkness will be as great as that of the body when the eye is diseased. Again, He reminds them that no man can serve two masters, for if their commands or the nature of their service is different, they must of necessity obey either one or the other, so they must not attempt to combine the service of God with the enjoyment of the world—for the word “mammon” was used in the East to signify material wealth or worldly riches. They could not make a god of their wealth and serve God at the same time, or, as it is often expressed, they cannot make the best of both worlds. He concludes by reminding them that to be over-careful and anxious about the things of this life—how they were to be fed and clothed—was practically to deny the goodness and providential care of God. He illustrates what He says as to food by pointing to the birds that were wheeling in the air above them, and asks them, If

the birds are fed and cared for by God, ought they not the more to trust Him? and as to clothing, by pointing to the lilies which grow among the oak woods around the northern base of Mount Tabor. These lilies, called the Huleh lilies, are very large, and their inner petals meet above and form a gorgeous canopy, such as art never approached; and He asks them, If God so clothed the flowers of the field which perish, how much more would He clothe them as immortal beings? He draws from these illustrations the lesson that they ought first to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, as matters of paramount importance, and trust to Him to add those things of which He knows that they have need.

Lesson XVI.

THE SERMON ON THE PLAIN.

Read

ST. LUKE vi. 17—36. ST. MATTHEW vii. 1—39.

WHEN we read this part of the sixth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel it would, no doubt, appear to you that you were reading St. Luke's account of the same Sermon on the Mount which we have already read from St. Matthew's Gospel, but if you attend to some differences in the two narratives you will find that, though delivered at the same time, they were in fact separate discourses, and addressed to a different audience. Thus St. Matthew says that Jesus was followed by "great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan;" and that, "seeing the multitudes, He went up into the mountain; and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him: and He opened His mouth, and

taught them," that is, His disciples; but St. Luke says that "He came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of His disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the sea-coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear Him, and to be healed of their diseases; and they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch Him: for there went virtue out of Him, and healed them all. And He lifted up His eyes on His disciples, and said." Both St. Matthew and St. Luke say that He ascended *the* mountain, a name which indicates Mount Tabor, but St. Matthew describes Him as sitting and teaching His disciples on the mount, while St. Luke represents Him as descending the mount with His disciples, and healing those who were diseased among the great multitude who were assembled on the plain, that is, the great plain of Esdraelon, before He stood and addressed them. This view is sanctioned by one of the greatest Fathers of the Christian Church, viz. St. Augustine, who considers it as the most probable explanation. Now, if you compare the two accounts, you will see that St. Luke omits just that part of the discourse

which was peculiarly applicable to the disciples. He gives only four out of the eight Beatitudes, and adds in contrast four woes which St. Matthew has not done. Then St. Luke omits that part of the fifth chapter which was more appropriate to the disciples, extending from the thirteenth verse to the thirty-seventh, which I showed you was peculiarly addressed to the apostles. St. Luke likewise omits the whole of the sixth chapter of St. Matthew, but in the main agrees with that part of the discourse contained in his seventh chapter. Now St. Matthew expressly tells us that this portion of the sermon was addressed to the people, for he says, "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine" (ver. 28). What is contained, therefore, in the fifth and sixth chapters of St. Matthew was a discourse especially addressed to His disciples on the mountain, but what is contained in this chapter of St. Luke and in the seventh chapter of St. Matthew was a discourse addressed to the great multitude assembled on the plain at the foot of the mountain, after He had descended from it. And this is what we might reasonably expect, for St. Matthew was one of the twelve apostles selected from the disciples, and

heard the discourse peculiarly addressed to them, but St. Luke was not an apostle, and could not have heard it; while, on the other hand, there is no improbability in supposing that he may have then stood among the multitude who had been attracted from districts even beyond Judea and Galilee by the fame of the teachings and miracles of Jesus, and so heard a discourse addressed to them. I have therefore called the one the Sermon on the Mount, and the other the Sermon on the Plain. These two discourses were delivered at the same time, the one following the other, and related to the same subject, viz. the characteristics of the kingdom of God, which Jesus came to establish, and therefore, although the place and the audience were different, we might naturally expect to find parts of the former repeated in the latter. Let us then see what St. Luke tells us of the discourse addressed to the multitude; and as the four blessings with which he begins the sermon are followed by four woes, we may contrast them as we did in the discourse reported by St. Matthew. The first is, "Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God." "But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation." It is not poor in

spirit, as in St. Matthew, but poor as contrasted with rich. Jesus was here addressing the people of the land, the poorest class among the people, and He had just been rejected by the upper or rich class. He places before the former the kingdom of God He had come to establish, and calls them blessed, because they were more likely to accept it than the rich, who had deliberately preferred their own worldly position and wealth to the spiritual kingdom He offered them. Then He says, "Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled." "Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger." The contrast here is between literal and spiritual fulness and hunger. The people of the land were disregarded by the Pharisees, and received no instruction in the law, but if they hungered now they would be filled by having the Gospel preached to them, while the Pharisees, who boasted of their legal righteousness, would find themselves destitute of that true righteousness obtained through faith in Christ. Then He says, "Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh." "Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep." The poor, with a sad and comfortless existence, and no knowledge of spiritual life, would enjoy the comfort

and blessedness which the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus would give them ; but the rich, satisfied with the full enjoyment of all the comforts and pleasures their wealth could afford, would, after their temporary possessions had passed away, find nothing left for them but to mourn and weep over their wasted life and lost opportunities. Lastly, He says, "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy ; for, behold, your reward is great in heaven : for in like manner did their fathers unto the prophets." "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you ! for so did their fathers to the false prophets." You will see here the difference between what Jesus said to the apostles, and what He now says to the people. To the former He spoke of persecution and of being put to death, but here He alludes only to separation and calumny. He warns them that if they accept His Gospel and believe on Him they must expect to be separated from their friends and relations who do not agree with them, to be looked upon with dislike, and to have their motives misrepresented,—a fate

which all who make a profession of religion and endeavour to act up to the requirements of the Gospel and enter into its spiritual life, must expect to realise from worldly people. But He tells them not to shrink from this prospect, but to rejoice in it, as they will reap a far greater compensating blessing in the world to come, while nothing but woe would be reserved for the Pharisees, who enjoyed honour and respect from men in this life. He adds that, in this respect, their fate was not different from that of the prophets in the Old Testament,—the prophets of God being hated and disliked by those whose lives they reproached, while the false prophets who flattered them were proportionably esteemed. You will find that this was especially the case in the time of Hezekiah and the later kings of Judah, if you refer to the Prophecies of Isaiah, chapter thirty, and of Jeremiah, chapter five.

Jesus then passes on to the next part of the Sermon on the Mount, which was applicable not only to the apostles but to all men, and addresses them in similar terms to that contained in the last eight verses of the fifth chapter of St. Matthew, but you will see He does not allude to the Pharisaic gloss, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine

enemy," but gives them the plain precept, "Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you," and enforces it in much the same manner, adding, however, the golden rule applicable to all men, "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." St. Matthew, who, in this part of the sermon, only narrates what was addressed to the apostles on the mount before He descended to the plain, inserts this rule in the latter part of it, which he says was addressed to the people, and adds, "For this is the law and the prophets," that is, it is a principle which embraces the whole law of God, so far as it relates to our conduct towards others. There is, however, a remarkable difference in the last verse, for in addressing the apostles Jesus said, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect," that is, Fulfil that spiritual view of the law which He had in the previous verses laid before them when He told them that their righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees; but this part of His teaching was not adapted to His present hearers, and so He confines Himself to the universal love they must manifest if they would be children of the Highest,

and says, "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

The last part of this Sermon on the Plain is contained both in the seventh chapter of St. Matthew and in the last thirteen verses of the sixth chapter of St. Luke; you have read it in the former, where it is given more fully. It opens with a still further exposition of that law of charity contained in the golden rule: "Judge not, that ye be not judged;" that is, do not judge others in an uncharitable spirit, or impute bad motives for their actions, and you may then claim a similar charitable judgment for yourselves. Jesus here reminds them of a common Jewish proverb, which is literally, "In the measure that a man measureth, others measure to him;" and St. Luke tells us that He spake a parable unto them, "Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?"—meaning that, if they who are blind through ignorance are led by the Scribes and Pharisees, who were spiritually blind to the true character of the law of God, they would both fall into error and darkness. Again, "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam in thine own eye?" This may seem to you a strange expression, for by a mote

is meant a small twig, and by a beam a large log of wood; but this too is founded upon a Jewish saying of which the following is an example, while at the same time it gives the explanation: "I wonder whether there be any in this age that will receive reproof; but if one saith to another, Cast out the mote out of thine eye, he will be ready to answer, Cast out the beam out of thine own eye;" and the gloss upon it is, "Cast out the mote"—that is, the small sin—"that is in thine hand; he may answer, but cast you out the great sin that is in yours. So they could not reprove; because all were sinners." Do not be hasty to observe and reprove a small fault or sin in one of your brethren, when a little self-examination may show you a greater fault or sin in your own case; but let your first consideration be to cast away your own faults and sins, and attain to greater purity, and you will be better able, not to see your brother's fault, but to persuade him to cast it out also. The next verse adds to this the important caution not to bring religious motives and exhortations to bear upon those who have as yet no knowledge of religion or spiritual feeling, as it will merely increase their contempt and dislike to them. Jesus then adds to this development of the law of

charity the still higher sanction that, if they thus act towards one another, they will find an ample recompence in their relation to God as their Father in heaven, who will be still more ready to respond fully in all their approaches to Him. They have only to ask in faith to receive an answer to their prayer; to seek Him as their Father in heaven to find Him; to knock at the gate of heaven to have it opened to them; and He illustrates this by referring to a circumstance in their daily life. The common food of the poorer class among the Jews consisted of three things. These were small loaves of bread, hard-boiled eggs, and fried fish, which still form the staple food of the peasants in Syria; and He puts it to them whether, if their children asked them for bread, they would give them stones; if they asked for fish, would they give them serpents? and as St. Luke adds in another place, "or if he ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?" (xi. 12.) He then places before them the conclusion from this, that, if they, being evil, know how to give good gifts to their children, surely if they recognise God as their Father in heaven, and ask Him as His children, how much more will He give good things to them! St.

Matthew concludes this exposition of the law of charity by repeating the well-known golden rule.

Having thus far explained to the great concourse of people who heard Him the principles of that kingdom He came to establish, and which were so opposed to the teaching and practices of the Pharisees, Jesus now proceeds to a more practical application of them, and places before them in striking words the end which inevitably lay before them, according to whether they made them the ruling principles of their life so as to become children of that kingdom, or disregarded them and rejected it. He uses one illustration familiar to them, for He compares their future life to two paths they had to enter, and follow to the gate at the end, which they must pass through. Among the Jews there were two kinds of roads, viz. those which were called public ways, and those called private. The former were sixteen cubits broad, and the latter only four. He compares those who accept Him as the Messiah, and follow His teaching, to men entering a private way leading to a small gate, alluding probably to the following verses of the 118th Psalm: "Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go in to them, and praise the Lord: this gate of the

Lord, into which the righteous shall enter" (vers. 19, 20). And the end to which they attain He calls simply life, a term He here for the first time applies to eternal life, for He Himself is the Way, the Truth, and the Life: the only road to eternal life is to accept Him, to believe in His teaching, and, finally, to enjoy Him for ever. On the other hand, He compares those who reject Him to men who continue to travel by the public highway to a large gate, and the end of their journey destruction, by which term is here merely meant a destroyed and wasted life. He warns them that many of those who were now hearing Him, and possibly impressed by His words, would continue in that broad way, and but few of them would seek for and find the narrow path of repentance, faith, and obedience which would lead them to life eternal.

Next He warns them to beware of false prophets, who come to them in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves, that is, teachers who bear the outward semblance of religion, and profess to lead the people aright, but by their false teaching would, in reality, retain them in this broad way that leads to destruction. He then answers a question which would naturally occur to His hearers. If these

teachers come in the outward guise of true teachers, how shall we know that they are not so? He replies, "By their fruits." He reminds them that the trees they usually cultivated were vines and fig-trees, and asks them if they could expect to gather their grapes from thorns, or their figs from thistles? for it is only from a good tree they can gather good fruit; and if the fruit is bad, so must be the tree that bears it, which is then only fit to be cut down and burned. In the same way they must judge of their teachers, and if their conduct shows that they are not actuated by true religious principle, then they may be sure that their teaching is not true spiritual teaching. He, no doubt, refers to the Scribes and Pharisees, who made an outward show of religion, and professed to bring the people to a knowledge of the law of God, but showed in their lives nothing but hypocrisy, extortion, tyranny over men's consciences, and disregard of their true welfare. While Jesus thus leads them to the conviction that He alone is the true Prophet who can teach them aright, and bring them by the narrow path to eternal life, He warns them that it will not be enough to make an outward profession of following Him as their Lord, in order to enter into the

kingdom of heaven, while their hearts and lives remain unchanged; but tells them that they, too, will be judged by their fruits, and they must show their sincerity by their lives being influenced by His teaching and regulated by the will of God.

A dark thought seems now to come over Jesus. This consideration seems to lead Him to think of one whom He had not long before chosen as one of His apostles, who would follow Him during the whole of the rest of His ministration on earth, and like the other apostles have taught in His name, cast out devils in His name, and done many wonderful works in His name, and yet in the end would betray, and show that his outward profession was hollow, while his heart remained evil and unchanged. He probably thought of Judas Iscariot when He said that many might call Him Lord, and profess to preach His kingdom, to whom He would say, "I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity."

And all this exhortation is as much applicable to us now as it was to the multitudes of the people of the land who surrounded Him and heard Him on the plain of Esdraelon. Before us, too, are the two roads,—the narrow road of faith and self-denial, of

self-surrender to Christ, which leads to life ; and the broad road of worldly pleasures and pursuits and devotion to the things of this world, which leads to destruction : and every one of us has to choose between them. We too are exposed to be misled by false teaching, and must test our teachers by the practical result of their doctrine, and compare it with the teaching of Jesus. And finally, it is not enough for us to make an outward profession of religion, and to satisfy ourselves with a merely ceremonial worship and performance of acts of benevolence, unless our religion influences our hearts and lives, and leads us to worship God in spirit and in truth.

Jesus concludes His discourse by a striking illustration, calculated to arrest their attention, in which He contrasts those who accept His teaching and become His disciples with those who simply hear Him and then go on in their old way. He reminds them that the river-beds were then dry from the heat of summer, as they usually are in the East, but that the rainy season was approaching, when they would be filled with impetuous torrents, accompanied by storms of wind and rain, which strip the rocks on the bank of the river of their covering,

and sweep away the sand ; and He compares those who hear His words and do them to a wise man who built his house upon a foundation of rock, so that, when the rain descended, the floods came, and the wind blew, and beat upon that house, it stood firm, because it was founded upon a rock ; so will every true believer stand firm amid all the storms and changes of life, because he too has founded his spiritual life upon Christ as his rock.

On the other hand, He likens those who hear His words and do them not to a foolish man who built his house on the sand which lines the river, and when the rain descended, and the floods came and swept away its foundation, and the wind blew and beat upon that house, it fell ; and so too will all who build their hopes and centre their affections upon things of this life, but when this world and the fashion of it passes away, are left without a foundation on which to rest,—and Jesus might well say, “and great was the fall of it.” St. Matthew then adds that “when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine,” or rather, as it is in the Revised Version, “at His teaching ; for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes.” The Scribes in their

teaching invariably referred to some former Rabbi, such as the heads of the two great schools of Rabbinical teaching, Hillel and Shammai, or referred to tradition as their authority; but Jesus spoke as if He had in Himself full authority to teach the people, and to assert that what He told them was the truth. When contrasting His teaching with that of the Scribes, He opposes to their traditionary law the expression, "But I say unto you," and He prefaces all His most solemn and important utterances with the words, "Verily, verily, I say unto you."

St. Luke tells us, in the beginning of the seventh chapter, "Now, when He had ended all His sayings in the audience," or rather, "in the ears of the people, He entered into Capernaum;"—thus showing that the whole of the discourse, as reported by him, was addressed to the people assembled on the plain, and not only to the disciples. After Jesus had finished addressing them, He left Mount Tabor, and finished His journey from Jerusalem by returning to His home at Capernaum.

Lesson XVII.

PUBLICANS AND SINNERS.

Read

ST. LUKE vii. 2—49 ; viii. 1—3.

WHEN Jesus entered Capernaum, the elders of the Jews, that is, the rulers of the Jewish synagogue, came to Him, and told Him that they were sent by a centurion, whose servant was sick and ready to die, and who besought Him to come and heal him. A centurion was a Roman military officer who commanded a body of Roman soldiers, and it is apparent, from his living in Capernaum, that, although Galilee, in which that town was situated, was under the rule of Herod Antipas, as tetrarch, there must have been a garrison of Roman troops in it. This centurion, though a heathen, seems to have had a friendly feeling towards the Jews, and had won their affection and gratitude by building them a synagogue. His amiable character, too, is

evinced by his solicitude for his servant, or rather slave, which the original word really means, and who, St. Luke says, was dear to him. It is not at all unlikely that it was the presence of the Roman garrison, and of this friendly centurion, which led Jesus to select Capernaum for His ordinary residence, where He could look to them for protection from the malice of His enemies. Jesus at once went with the elders, and when He was near the centurion's house, He was met by others of his friends, sent by the centurion to beg Him not to trouble Himself, for he was not worthy that Jesus should come under his roof, or that he should come to Jesus, but if He would say the word, his slave would be healed. The two words translated here "worthy" are different. The first word expresses "unfitness," that is, it was not fitting that Jesus, as a Jew, should enter the dwelling of a Gentile. The second word implies "personal unworthiness." He, as a Gentile, was not personally worthy to appear before Him, but he no doubt recollected how Jesus by a mere word had healed the nobleman's daughter, and also the paralytic, in the same town; and his slave appears to have been likewise struck with paralysis, for St. Matthew

says, "he was sick of the palsy;" and he urges that as he has only to command to be obeyed by his soldiers, so Jesus, as having shown His power over disease, has only to utter His command to dispel it. Jesus was surprised to find such faith in him as a Gentile, and the slave was at once healed. St. Matthew tells us that this faith of the Gentile centurion, which so much exceeded anything that the Jews had as yet shown, led Him to prophesy the future reception of the Gentiles and rejection of the Jews, in these striking words: "And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven: but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (viii. 11, 12); and, to make them more emphatic, He adapts them to the Jewish conceptions, for the Jews associated with the kingdom of the Messiah a great banquet, of which all who were worthy to enter it were to partake with the patriarchs; but while the Gentiles who should believe on Jesus would be admitted to this banquet, the Jews, who were the children of the kingdom, and yet rejected Him, would be excluded, and remain out in the

darkness in sorrow,—which is expressed by the word weeping; and in bitter anguish and remorse,—by gnashing of teeth.

The day following Jesus was to exhibit to His disciples, and to a multitude of the people who followed, the first of a higher description of miracle, and to show them that He could not only heal diseases, and cast out demons, but likewise had power over death itself, by raising one from the dead. St. Luke alone records the first example of His power over death, and tells us that He went from Capernaum to a city called Nain, and that His disciples and a great multitude went with Him. This was a small city some distance south of Capernaum, and was situated on the north-western slope of a low isolated hill on the plain of Esdraelon, called Little Hermon. Though not of great size, it was called a city, because it was surrounded by a wall for protection, through which admittance was gained by a gate. St. Luke's language implies that He went there for some direct purpose, and not merely that He came to it in the course of His preaching among the cities and villages of Galilee, and He appears, after His purpose was accomplished, to have returned at once

to the shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is probable that the same cause led Him to go there which on a former occasion made it needful that He should go through Samaria, viz. that He knew that there was one there to whom He could impart comfort and consolation, and by so doing manifest the glory of God. When He came near the gate of the city, He met a widow accompanying the dead body of her only son to the grave, in a cemetery which lay to the north of the city, on the side of the road which led from the north, and she was one who had earned the affection and esteem of her neighbours, as "much people of the city was with her." To her who preceded the bier which bore her dead child, He said, "Weep not," then touched the bier, and said to the young man simply, "Arise." And he arose from the dead, and Jesus restored him to his mother. This miracle must have recalled to the minds of the people the event recorded in the Second Book of Kings, when the prophet Elisha similarly restored to life the only son of a widow of Shunem, situated at no great distance from Nain (iv. 36), and led them to exclaim that a great prophet was arisen in their midst, and that God was again visiting His people, by once more sending

His prophets among them. St. Luke adds that "this report went forth concerning Him in the whole of Judea, and all the region round about" (that is, both in Judea and in Galilee), "and that the disciples of John the Baptist showed him of all these things." John, as you know, had been imprisoned by Herod Antipas in the fort of Machærus, but he seems to have otherwise enjoyed considerable liberty, and his disciples had free access to him. When they thus gave John an account of what they had heard and witnessed of the proceedings of Jesus, he called two of them, and sent them back to Jesus, to put this question to Him, "Art thou He that should come, or look we for another?" that is, "Art thou the promised Messiah, or is He yet to come?" It will no doubt seem strange to you that John should have sent such a message after he had witnessed the descent of the Holy Ghost upon Jesus at His baptism, had heard the voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son," and himself had borne such an emphatic testimony that Jesus was "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world;" but John had been divinely commissioned to preach that the kingdom of heaven, that is, the kingdom to be established by

the Messiah, was at hand. He expected that Jesus would soon take to Himself the power and glory of the Messiah, and be recognised as such ; but he had now languished for more than six months in prison, and there was no interposition of Divine power to release him. He knew that his own mission was accomplished, and that he must decrease, and Jesus increase, but he probably had no conception that it was to terminate in this manner. He had probably been told of the open rejection of the pretensions of Jesus by the Sanhedrim, and by the doctors and teachers of Israel, and yet Jesus took no steps to vindicate His Divine power, but had quietly returned to His own country. John could not probably reconcile this to his preconceived anticipations, and his mind, cramped and depressed by confinement, an awful doubt may have come over him, that he may have been mistaken and been subject to a delusion in the testimony he gave, and that, consequently, he had not been a true prophet. If such feelings weighed upon his mind, the report that Jesus had raised one from the dead in the city of Nain would arouse and startle him, and he would resolve to satisfy his mind at once by an appeal to Jesus Himself.

When John's two disciples came back to Nain, they found Jesus curing many of the people of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits, and giving sight to the blind. Jesus' answer was characteristic. He referred them to the same evidence upon which the proof that He was the Messiah had always been based, viz. that He performed those miracles which the Old Testament prophets had foretold the Messiah would perform. Thus Isaiah prophesied that in the days of the Messiah "the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped: then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert" (xxxv. 5, 6); that the Messiah would "open the blind eyes, bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house" (xlii. 7); and again, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me; because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek" (or "poor"): He hath sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound" (lxi. 1). John, no doubt, took the expressions about liberating the captives from prison in its literal sense, and was

surprised at its not being fulfilled in his own case ; but Jesus showed his disciples its spiritual meaning when He said, " Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard ; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised ; " and if the Pharisees have refused to hear Me, I am still fulfilling my mission, for " to the poor the Gospel is preached ; " and, He added, " blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me ; " that is, doubt His mission, because what He did and said might not correspond with their own carnal notions. Let him, therefore, acquiesce in the Divine dispensation in regard to him.

But while Jesus thus expresses Himself in regard to John's message, He proceeds to vindicate his character as a prophet, notwithstanding his eclipse in prison. He says in substance, " When you went out into the wilderness of Judea, upon the report of John's preaching, what did you expect to see ? not surely one like a reed shaken by the wind ; that is, one vacillating in his teaching by every external influence ? No ; or did you expect to see a great person in magnificent apparel ? No ; for such a one you must go to a king's court. But did you not expect to find a prophet ? Yes ; and I tell you more

than a prophet, for this was he of whom Malachi prophesied when he said, 'Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare my way before Me;' and I tell you that among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but whoever enters the kingdom of God, which I am come to establish, though less than John as a prophet, is in that respect greater than he." The meaning is that, whether John showed vacillation or not, whether he was in prison or in a king's palace, he was a prophet; the Word of the Lord had come to him, and what he gave forth was not his own word, but the inspired utterance of a prophet; and he was not only that, but was the destined messenger foretold by the prophets to prepare the way of the Messiah; nevertheless, whoever actually enters the kingdom of God believing in Him is greater than he who was only the fore-runner.

St. Matthew adds that "from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias" (that is, Elijah) "which was to come," alluding to another prophecy of

Malachi : " Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord : and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers " (iv. 5, 6); a work which John fulfilled when he preached repentance, because the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and when such numbers flocked to him and were baptized, as if they would press into that kingdom and take it by force. From henceforth the kingdom of heaven was open to all who press into it with genuine repentance, true faith, and earnest supplication, for Jesus Christ has " opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers." This discourse was uttered in presence, not only of the people to whom He had just been preaching the Gospel, and the publicans, but also of the Pharisees and lawyers, or Scribes; and we are told that the former justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John, but that the latter rejected the counsel of God, not against themselves, but, as in the Revised Version, for themselves, being not baptized of him. The scene appears to have taken place in the marketplace of the city, for Jesus, as usual, draws an illustration from the surrounding circumstances. There had just been a funeral of the only

son of a widow, which had excited great sympathy in the town, and some children in the marketplace were, as children usually do, playing at a funeral. Other children were playing at a marriage-feast, which may also have been held not long before ; but a third group of children would not play with either. They would neither dance with those that piped, nor weep with those that mourned, but sat apart, careless and unconcerned, and Jesus said that that generation might be likened to this class of the children, for John came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, but leading an ascetic life, and preaching repentance, and the Pharisees would not be baptized of him, but said he had a devil, or demon. The Son of Man, as Jesus usually designated Himself, came eating and drinking ; that is, taking part in ordinary life, and they charged Him with being “a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.” I think there can be little doubt that what gave rise to this accusation was the great feast which St. Matthew made for Him in his house when he was called to be a disciple. St. Matthew was himself a publican, and St. Luke tells us that “there was a great company of publicans, and of others, that sat down with them. But their Scribes

and Pharisees murmured against His disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?" (v. 29); and the Pharisees equally rejected Him. Jesus sums up what He says with the saying that "Wisdom is justified of her children;" that is, that the actions of the children of wisdom will be found to agree with the dictates of true wisdom.

There were, however, two persons among those who heard Him who were differently affected by His discourse. The one was a Pharisee, who thought he would judge for himself whether the accusation was just, by asking Jesus to dine with him. The other was a woman of the city, who was a sinner, and to whom, when Jesus preached the Gospel to the poor, His words had come home to her with power, and brought conviction to her soul.

The narrative which follows is, like that of raising the widow's son from the dead, given by St. Luke alone. He calls the woman simply "a woman of the city," and, as the only city previously mentioned in the chapter was the city of Nain, this, taken in connection with what goes before, shows that it was still in that city that this dinner took place. It was a custom of the Pharisees to have a dinner, partaking more of the character of a feast, on

the Sabbath eve, and to invite strangers freely to it, and no doubt it was to the Sabbath dinner that Jesus was invited; and He accepted the test at once. He went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat, or rather lay down, as the original word strictly means; for the custom at that time was to recline on couches which surrounded the table on which the food was placed.

When the woman which was a sinner heard that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster box of ointment, came in and stood weeping at Jesus' feet, behind the couch on which He reclined. As her tears fell on His feet she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment. When you find the word "sinner" used in the Gospels, as in the expression "publicans and sinners," you must not suppose that it always means persons of immoral life, for the term was applied by the Jews to women who transgressed the law of Moses, as interpreted by the oral or unwritten law, even in small matters, as when a woman has vowed and does not perform her vow, or if she appears abroad with her head uncovered, or spins in the streets, or infringes the law in many other minor things; but it is obvious

from the narrative that this woman was a sinner in the higher sense of one who had hitherto led a life of open immorality, and, under the teaching of Jesus, and His promise of free forgiveness to all true penitents, her conscience had evidently been aroused, and she had resolved to abandon her immoral life and to close with His offer of a free salvation. Full of love and gratitude, she could not rest without showing it to Him. She would have no difficulty in entering the house, for at the Sabbath-eve feast free admission was given to all strangers. It was a custom among the Jews to anoint the head with ointment, but, full of penitence, humility, and love, she stood weeping at His feet and anointed them. To the Pharisee this action was conclusive, and furnished the test which he wanted, for to touch a sinner was considered by them to infer ceremonial uncleanness. He could not suppose that, if Jesus knew the woman was a sinner, He would have allowed her to touch Him, and he argued within himself that if He did not know what sort of woman she was He could not be even a prophet. Jesus, however, read his thoughts, and, uttering the short parable of the creditor with two debtors whose debts were forgiven, put the question to him, "Which of the

two debtors would love the creditor most?" and he was obliged to answer, "The one to whom he forgave most." Jesus then contrasted the conduct of the Pharisee to Him with that of the woman. The Pharisee had not even shown Him the usual courtesy demanded towards a guest. He had not offered Him water to wash His feet, which was an indispensable attention, but the woman had washed His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head. He had not given Him the usual salutation to a guest, of a kiss, but she had not ceased since He came in to kiss His feet. He had not anointed His head with oil, but she had anointed His feet with ointment. He then announced the great Christian doctrine of forgiveness, that her sins, which were many, were forgiven, for she loved much, and, turning to the woman He said to her, what must have brought peace to her troubled and contrite soul, the simple but pregnant words, "Thy sins are forgiven." This utterance was an offence to the Pharisee and those present, who considered that God only could forgive sins, and to whom forgiveness of sins without expiation was a strange doctrine, and said to themselves, Who can this man claim to be, if, besides raising one from the dead and healing the

sick, He forgives sins also? But Jesus said to the woman, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace;" that is, as she had come to Him in the full belief that Jesus could relieve her awakened conscience by a free forgiveness to her, and showed it by her tears and her loving anointing of His feet, she received it from Him at once.

The first three verses of the next chapter belong, properly speaking, to this chapter, and should be read in connection with it. We learn from them that after—or, as it is in the Revised Version, soon after—these events which happened in the city of Nain, Jesus went throughout every city and village—that is, in Lower Galilee,—preaching and showing the good tidings, or gospel, of the kingdom of God. With Him were His twelve disciples, who were now called apostles. Among the towns which Jesus thus visited were certainly two which were situated on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, and lay between Nain and Capernaum. These were the city of Tiberias, which had been built by Herod Antipas about ten years before, and was now the seat of his government, and the smaller town of Magdala, a little way north of it. In these towns Jesus had healed certain women "of evil spirits and

infirmities." The first who is named is Mary, called Magdalene because she belonged to the town of Magdala. This is her first appearance in the Gospel History, and a very false impression has for a long time existed in the Church as to her proper character and position. She has been identified with the woman who was a sinner mentioned in the previous chapter, and a legendary history of her has gradually grown up for which there is no real foundation in Scripture. In the early Church there is no appearance of it, and it is unknown in the Eastern Church, but hints of it begin to make their appearance in the Western Church in the fifth century, and in the following century it became an established belief in the Church, mainly through the influence of Pope Gregory the Great, that the woman who was a sinner was the same person as Mary Magdalene, and that the latter had been reclaimed from a life of shameless immorality. This legendary history of her life thus became a standing belief in the Roman Catholic Church, and we have adopted it from them. But you will see that St. Luke, who first mentions her, gives no hint of this. He alone gives us the account of the woman who was a sinner, immediately before, and if Mary

Magdalene had been the same person he would surely have said so; but he first tells us that, after leaving Nain, Jesus preached the Gospel in other towns, and healed certain women of evil spirits, and then he says that Mary Magdalene was one of these, "out of whom went seven devils," or demons. This was a very different state from that in which was the woman who was a sinner; and as Mary Magdalene is mentioned before the wife of Herod's steward, she must have been in a very superior rank of life. I shall be better able to tell you what was meant by a person being possessed of seven devils, or demons, when we come to consider a subsequent chapter. After mentioning Mary Magdalene, St. Luke names Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna. The former must have belonged to the city of Tiberias, and of the latter we only know the name, but these three women must now have become noted followers of Jesus, and we are told that they and many others ministered unto Jesus of their substance. It was a custom among the Jews that women who possessed sufficient means devoted part of them to the support and maintenance of different Rabbis, for whom they felt a peculiar devotion and respect, in their journeys through the land,

and so these devout women, who were persons of substance, took upon themselves the duty of supplying Jesus' wants while teaching and preaching throughout the cities and villages of Galilee, as St. Mark indicates when, mentioning Mary Magdalene with other women as being present at the death of Jesus, he adds, "who also, when He was in Galilee, followed Him and ministered unto Him" (xv. 41). It must have been a glorious feeling to those women, after Jesus had risen from the dead, and thus declared Himself to be the Son of God with power, to reflect that they had thus lovingly ministered to Him in His days of humiliation on earth; and it should be a precious feeling to us that, though Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, we can still minister to Him of our substance, for He Himself said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me" (St. Matt. xxv. 40).

Lesson XVIII.

BEELZEBUB, THE PRINCE OF THE DEVILS.

Read

ST. MATTHEW xii. 22—50. ST. MARK iv. 35—41 ; v. 1—20.

WHEN Jesus returned from this circuit through Galilee to Capernaum, there was brought to Him one possessed of a devil, or demon, who was both blind and dumb, and He healed him, so that he both spake and saw. This took place in His house in Capernaum, as you will see from the last verse of the chapter. There was as usual a crowd of people assembled at the house, and when they saw the miracle they exclaimed that Jesus must be the Son of David, for Isaiah had prophesied of the Messiah that He would be the Son of David, and would open the eyes of the blind, and make the deaf to hear (xi. 1, 10 ; xxxv. 5 ; xlii. 7). But when the Pharisees heard it they endeavoured to counteract the effect of so striking a miracle by saying that

Jesus did not cast out devils, or demons, from any Divine power that He possessed, but through Beelzebub, the prince of the devils or demons. These Pharisees had come from Jerusalem to learn what Jesus was doing, and to find further means of accusation against Him, and were accompanied by some of the Scribes, for St. Mark says, "And the Scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth He out devils" (iii. 22). The report of what Jesus did at Nain had probably reached the ears of the Pharisees at Jerusalem, as well as those of John the Baptist, and led them to send some of their number with the Scribes to Galilee to inquire more closely into the proceedings of Jesus. They seem to have arrived just after this miracle had been performed, and were driven by the difficulty in which it placed them to make this outrageous accusation against Jesus. I explained to you in a former lesson that the word translated "devil" in the Authorised Version in all these cases of possession, is in the original "demon;" that by demons the Jews understood evil spirits, and that they believed the heathen gods worshipped by the Gentiles to have had a real existence, and to have been demons. If

you turn to the First Epistle to the Corinthians and the tenth chapter, you will see this view forcibly expressed by St. Paul when reproving the Corinthian Christians for partaking of food which had been offered in sacrifice to their heathen gods. He says, "What say I then? that the idol is any thing? or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils" (vers. 19-21). Now the word here translated "devils" is in the original "demons." The Jews, however, in the main, identified the demons by whom persons among them were possessed, with the gods of the Phœnicians or Canaanites and the Philistines, by whom the land had been possessed before it was occupied by the Israelites, and they distinguished two different kinds of possession—one physical, when persons were bodily possessed by demons, and oppressed by disease and infirmities; and the other mental, by which the mind was subdued and influenced by a spirit of evil. The cases mentioned in the New

Testament occurred mainly among the people of Samaria and Galilee, where there was a mixed population, partly of heathen and partly of Jewish descent, and it was probably when people tampered with heathen rites, and were unfaithful to the worship of the true God, that they became subject to such possession, and were enslaved by the spirit of evil. The Jews believed that there were three demons in especial, who were called "chief, or prince of the demons." These were, first, Sammael, or the angel of death. He is the same with the Satan of the New Testament, and was called Prince of all the satans; the second was Ashmodeus or Ashmedai, the king of the demons, mentioned in the Book of Tobit, iii. 8; and the third was Baalzebub, who was the local god of the town of Ekron, on the northern coast of Judea, which had been the principal city of the Philistines, and probably still possessed a heathen population. Jesus being Himself a Jew, of the tribe of Judah, according to His human birth, the Scribes and Pharisees charged Him with His exercising this power over the demons, which was too manifest to be denied, through this Baalzebub, the prince of the devils; but Jesus at once showed them the twofold absurdity of this accusation, for

He was manifestly destroying the power of the evil spirits over human beings, and it of course implied that the prince of the demons conferred this power upon Him to destroy his own kingdom. He reminds them that every kingdom, or city, or even house, divided against itself, so that one part of it destroyed the other, must be brought to desolation, and if Satan cast out Satan, how could his kingdom stand? and then, further, the Jews themselves had a form of exorcism which they believed to have been given them by Solomon, and, when used in faith, would drive out demons. Josephus, the Jewish historian, in his book on the "Antiquities of the Jews," written in the first century, gives the following account of it:—"Solomon left behind him the manner of using exorcisms, by which they drive away demons, so that they never return, and this method of cure is of great force unto this day; for I have seen a certain man of my own country, whose name was Eleazar, releasing people that were demoniacal, in the presence of Vespasian, and his sons, and his captains, and the whole multitude of his soldiers" (viii. 3). It is not to be supposed that the Jews really by such means drove out demons, though they believed that such an effect followed. You will find

these exorcists mentioned in the nineteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles: "Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus, whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded" (vers. 13-16). Jesus therefore retorts upon the Jews that if they thought He cast out devils through Baalzebub, might not the same thing be said of those among themselves who used exorcisms? The difference between the two was, that in their case the use of such forms exercises a certain influence upon the imagination, which may produce an apparent cure, but that when the effect upon the mind passes away, there will be a relapse into the former state, and that no healing of a demoniac can be effectual which is not founded upon a victory over the original evil power. Jesus adds that, as no one can enter a strong man's house and spoil his

goods unless he first bind the strong man, and that if He casts out demons by a power stronger than that of the prince of the demons, it must be by the finger of God, and therefore the kingdom of God is come upon them, and is casting out the kingdom of Satan. In using the expression, "the finger of God," Jesus evidently wishes to remind the Pharisees of what is said in the Book of Exodus regarding the Egyptian magicians, who, apparently, with their enchantments, produced the same effects which Moses effected by causing Aaron to stretch forth his rod; for when Aaron smote the dust of the earth, and produced lice on man and beast, and their enchantments failed to do so, "the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God." So if the Jewish exorcists failed to show the same power over the demons which Jesus exercised, they ought to make the same admission.

Jesus having thus shown the absurdity of the charge made against Him, proceeds to demonstrate its wickedness, in its spiritual aspect, and solemnly warns the Pharisees of the greatness of the sin to which it would lead them if they maintained that view. All manner of sin and blasphemy, if done in ignorance and repented of, might be forgiven; but

deliberately to attribute to Satanic agency what was obviously the work of the Spirit of God, was to blaspheme against the Spirit, and would not be forgiven. All their hard sayings against the Son of Man, and their rejection of Him, being done in ignorance, might be forgiven them, but wilfully, and out of enmity to Him, to speak against the Holy Spirit, would not be forgiven, neither in this world nor in the world to come. This latter expression refers to the belief among the Jews that all other sins might be expiated in this life except profaning the name of God, which is not expiated in this life, but is atoned for by the death of the blasphemer; but Jesus tells them that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit would not be forgiven, neither before death, nor, as they believed, by death. He then illustrates this by reminding them that a tree and its fruits must correspond; that good fruit implies a good tree, and bad fruit a bad tree; and so it is with men,—a good man, out of the treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man brings forth evil things; how then can they, being evil, speak good things? but the day of judgment will come, when men must give an account of every idle word that they speak, for by their words they will

be justified, and by their words they will be condemned.

And is not this solemn warning also applicable to us? Are we also careful to recognise the Spirit of God when it deals with the souls of men? Is it not the case that when we see any sudden revival of religion take place, or any great transformation in the spirits of men, though the circumstances may be unusual or the agency apparently irregular, we are too apt to shut our eyes to the natural inference that it may be the work of the Spirit of God, and produced by His direct operation on the souls of men, and attribute it to physical excitement, or a false enthusiasm, or any other unworthy motive?

The solemn warning given by Jesus to the Scribes and Pharisees, implying as it did that He had cast out the demon by the Divine power that was in Him, led to the usual demand made by the Jews whenever He claimed Divine power, that He should show some great sign to demonstrate it; for the Scribes had in their oral teaching a saying that "signs and miracles were not to be expected except by a fit generation," which they, no doubt, thought they were; but Jesus responded to the demand by saying that it was an evil and adulterous generation

that demanded a sign, and that, as He had said on a former occasion, the only sign which He would give to that unbelieving generation, of His being not only the Messiah, but the Son of God, was His resurrection from the dead. You will see from this that throughout His whole career Jesus knew that He would suffer death, but would rise from the dead on the third day. He then vindicates the epithets He had applied to the Scribes and Pharisees, for the men of Nineveh would bear witness that they were an evil generation, since they repented at the preaching of Jonah, but the Scribes and Pharisees had not repented at the preaching of one who was greater than Jonah. The queen of the south would bear witness that they were an adulterous generation, for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and they had refused to hear wisdom from one greater than Solomon, and adhered obstinately to their false teaching, as a man deserts his lawful wife for an adulterous connection.

He then brings this subject more home to them in its deep spiritual meaning. He says that, if an unclean spirit leaves a man, without the power of evil in the man having been overcome and replaced by the Holy Spirit, he will remain accessible to the

same evil influence ; and if he again becomes subject to it, the evil influence will possess him in a more aggravated and permanent form, and his last state be worse than the first. You will see from the expressions used by Jesus that possession by seven demons represents a relapse into evil after a partial reformation and a more hopeless subjection to Satanic influence, because it has been a turning again to wickedness after an attempt to depart from it, and this was, no doubt, the case with Mary Magdalene when it is said that out of her Jesus had cast seven demons.

Jesus applies this to that generation, for the Jews had, after their return from captivity, renounced all tendency to idolatry, and adhered for a time to the true God, but when the sect of the Pharisees had arisen among them they had by degrees brought in a devilish teaching which subverted the true principles of the law of God and corrupted the hearts of the people, so that when the Messiah came and claimed to be a Divine Teacher and the Son of God they closed their ears and their hearts against Him and rejected Him.

“While He yet talked to the people,” St. Matthew says, “behold, His mother and His brethren

stood without, desiring to speak with Him." St. Mark tells us that after the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus had returned to Capernaum, "the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread," and that "when His friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on Him: for they said, He is beside Himself" (iii. 20, 21). It was, no doubt, in order to carry out this resolution that His mother and brethren came to Capernaum and wished to speak with Him. They had probably become alarmed when Jesus was rejected by the Pharisees, and when He turned to the people of the land and drew such crowds of them to hear Him. He seemed to them to be disturbing the very foundations of the social condition of the land, and were afraid that He would bring the authorities down upon Him and come to destruction. They were, of course, as yet entirely blind to the great mission He was to fulfil, and thought to save Him from an inevitable fate by laying hold of Him and putting Him under restraint; but Jesus could not recognise the right of His own family to interfere with the great work to which He had set His hand. When they told Him that His mother and brethren stood without desiring to speak with Him, He said to

them, "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren, that they should control Me and impede my work? My disciples who believe in Me, and follow Me to share in that work, these are my mother and my brethren; and not only they, but whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, and whose Son I truly am, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother,"—thus declaring that all who are the true servants of God will form a great brotherhood and stand in that close relation to Him.

St. Matthew tells us in the beginning of the next chapter, that "the same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea-side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto Him, so that He went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And He spake many things unto them in parables." But on the same day also, in the evening, another incident took place, and as it is directly connected with the subject of this lesson, I think it would be more convenient to take this narrative now, and to postpone the consideration of the parables to the next lesson.

St. Mark tells us, that the "same day, when the

even was come, Jesus said to His disciples, Let us pass over unto the other side. And when they had sent away the multitude, they took Him even as He was in the ship. And there were also with Him other little ships" or fishing-boats. Jesus' object in thus crossing the lake was primarily, no doubt, to gain a little quiet and relief after a fatiguing day, but He may also have been actuated, as on former occasions, by His foreknowledge that there was a case on the other side which demanded His interposition. He left behind Him on the shore the great crowds who had been anxiously hanging upon His lips all day, but a few who were fishermen and possessed boats accompanied Him across. The Sea of Galilee had here a breadth of about seven miles, and they had not proceeded far on their little voyage when one of those sudden storms arose, to which all inland sheets of water surrounded by mountains are liable. The sea rose, as it does on such occasions, in short and boisterous waves, and began to be driven over the ship. It appears to have been one of those caiques, common in the East, partly decked over at the stern and the bow, but with an open space in the centre, and the seas which lashed over the small vessel began to fill the

centre space with water. Jesus in the meantime was sleeping calmly on a cushion in the small cabin at the stern, when His disciples, who had probably been engaged in baling out the water, finding it gaining upon them, and filling fast, awoke Jesus, and in their anxiety said to Him, "Master, carest Thou not that we perish?" Faith in Him seemed for the moment to have given way before a great fear for their safety, but Jesus at once awoke, and before them rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still," and the wind ceased, and there was a great calm; and after all that they had seen of His power, and the confidence He inspired in His followers, Jesus might well ask in surprise, "Why are ye so fearful?" and "How is it ye have no faith?" Those who had accompanied them feared exceedingly when they saw this manifestation of His power, and said one to another, "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" That He could thus control the elements, and interrupt the physical laws which regulated them, ought to have convinced them that they were in presence of one endowed with Divine power.

When they landed on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus found Himself in what is termed

by St. Mark, and also by St. Luke, in the Authorised Version, "the country of the Gadarenes," and by St. Matthew, "the country of the Gergesenes" (viii. 28), but the phrase is in the two former, in the original, "the country of the Gerasenes," and is so rendered in the Revised Version. These were the people of a town still called Gersa, on the east shore, directly opposite the plain of Gennesareth, and above it a mountain rises in which are ancient tombs. Jesus had no sooner stepped out of the boat than He was met by a man having an unclean spirit, who rushed out of the tombs where he had his dwelling, and when he saw Jesus from afar, came and worshipped Him. He is described as a furious demoniac whom no man could bind with chains, who burst asunder his fetters and chains whenever bound with them, and whom no man had strength to tame. He was always, night and day, in the tombs and in the mountain, crying out, and cutting himself with stones. This exactly answers the description given in the Jewish Talmudic writings of the worst kind of demoniac:—"These are the signs of a madman: he goes out in the night and lodges among the sepulchres, and teareth his garments, and tramples upon what-

soever is given him. He that lodgeth at night among the tombs burns incense to devils." To this man Jesus said, "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit," but the man cried with a loud voice and said, "What have I to do with Thee"—literally, "What between me and Thee"—"Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God? I adjure Thee by God that thou torment me not." This was not the voice of the man, but of the unclean spirit which possessed him. As in other cases where Jesus cast out unclean spirits, he recognises Him as "the Son of the Most High God," but he adds to it a very unusual expression, which is peculiar to this case. The individuality of the man was thus entirely suppressed and lost in that of the demon who possessed him, and in order to arouse his consciousness as a man, Jesus asked him, "What is thy name?" but the unclean spirit answered, "Legion: for we are many," and besought Him that He would not send them away out of the country. Now St. Mark says, "There were nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding." These were no doubt the swine which belonged to the whole community, and according to old custom were feeding together under the charge of a herdsman appointed by the

community to attend to them. The unclean spirits besought Jesus that He would send them into the swine, that they might enter into them. And He gave them leave; but they had no sooner entered into them than the herd rushed down the steep side of the mountain into the sea, and perished. The herdsmen when they saw it fled and told what had happened in the city and in the country, and when the people came out they found the demoniac sitting clothed and in his right mind. When he told them what Jesus had done for him, they besought Him to depart from their coasts, but, as Jesus was entering again into the boat, the man begged that he might go with Him. Jesus, however, told him to go home to his friends, and tell them how great things the Lord had done for him; and he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis, that is, in the region on the east side of the Jordan, extending as far as Perea, what great things Jesus had done for him.

I have repeated this narrative just as we find it in the Gospel of St. Mark; but I think you must have felt that it is a narrative which is extremely difficult to explain. The population of the region on the east side of the Sea of Galilee was a mixed

one, consisting partly of Jews and partly of heathens. This people of the Gerasenes seem to have been entirely heathen, and were probably the remains of an old Canaanitish tribe called the Girgashites. The possession of a herd of swine points to their being a heathen people, for it was unlawful for Jews to keep swine. They probably kept this large herd in order to supply the Romans of the Roman province of Judea, whose favourite food it was, and their conduct still further marks them as heathens. They seem, in fact, to have been given up to the worst rites of heathenism, for when Jesus had cast the unclean spirits out of the demoniac, the only effect upon them of this exhibition of His Divine power was that they prayed Him to depart from their coasts. They would have nought to do with Him. The name of "Legion," which the demoniac gives to himself, is a Roman term signifying a large body of troops, but it had been adopted by the Jews to express a large number, and was especially used by them with reference to demons, and this possession by a legion of demons signified a still greater depth of evil than that which we have already considered in the case of possession by seven demons. It would appear from this narrative that these evil

spirits could only influence men, and carry on their work on earth by taking possession of either human beings or animals. Thus Jesus tells us, you recollect, that when an unclean spirit goes out of a man "he walketh through dry places seeking rest and findeth none." So these unclean spirits considered that to cast them out from possessing human beings was to consign them to torment before their time, and they thought that, if allowed to enter into unclean animals like the swine, they would be enabled to remain in the district, and could again, when opportunity offered, resume their sway over its human inhabitants. Jesus probably foresaw what would happen, and gave them leave. The result was that the maddened herd rushed into the sea and perished. What the consequence was to the demons we are left to infer, as the narrative draws a veil over that; but we see from this narrative that out of the whole population there was only one man who came to Jesus and wished to attach himself to Him and follow Him, and that was the demoniac himself. This will show you what the love of Jesus is to sinners, that He thought no pains too great, no labour too arduous, if He could only redeem one human soul from the power of Satan

and of evil. Jesus did not accede to his request, because He wished him to be the means of spreading the knowledge of His salvation to others; and this, too, will show that when any one is converted, and becomes a child of God, he should not rest without endeavouring to extend the knowledge of Christ to others.

What the effect of the knowledge of this miracle being spread abroad among the heathen population of these regions was, we shall see in a subsequent lesson.

Lesson XXX.

THE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM.

Read

ST. MATTHEW xiii. 1—52.

JESUS having chosen twelve of His disciples to be His apostles, and having selected them mainly from the people of the land, the time had now come when He was to send them forth, as St. Luke tells us, "to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick" (ix. 2); but to prepare them for this mission, as well as the people to receive it, Jesus thought it necessary to lay before them the true nature of that kingdom. This He did in parables. When in the first part of His teaching Jesus addressed Himself to the cultivated class among the Jews, He taught in their synagogues and preached the Gospel to them in plain and unambiguous terms; but now that He was dealing with the lower and uncultivated class, or the people of the land, as they were called,

we find Him addressing multitudes in the open air, and explaining to them the true character of that kingdom which the Messiah came to establish. He had already opened this subject both to His disciples and to the people in the two discourses He had addressed to them at Mount Tabor, and now, preparatory to His sending forth His apostles, He again addresses both, but this time in parables. This form of teaching by parables was familiar to the Jews, and they were accustomed to exercise their minds in penetrating into their meaning. A parable was simply a comparison drawn between a fictitious narrative and a spiritual meaning with which it might be compared. The Jewish parables all began with this preface, "A parable, to what is the thing like?" and the word means simply comparison. If you will turn to the Book of Judges, ninth chapter, you will find there, beginning at the seventh verse, a parable exactly like those in the New Testament. It was not unnatural that Jesus should consider this an appropriate form of bringing a truth before the people, and one more likely to arrest their attention, and to lead them to apply their minds to make out its meaning, than if He had brought it before them by a direct discourse.

You are all of you, no doubt, familiar with a great allegory which was composed two hundred years ago by a common man, and no doubt anticipate that I am referring to the *Pilgrim's Progress*. Now that was simply a parable, and was not accompanied by any explanation, and yet it appealed at once to the minds of the common people. It became a household book in every cottage in the kingdom; and, next to the Bible, has been most powerful in bringing men to a knowledge of the truth of the Gospel. So the parables Jesus addressed to the people were more likely to be remembered and to be thought over than a plain discourse would have been. This mode of teaching had, too, the advantage that now that the enmity of the Scribes and Pharisees was roused against Him, and His words and deeds watched to find occasion to destroy Him, the parable afforded little which they could take hold of for that purpose; and this may have partly been the reason why the explanation of the parable was confined to the disciples, while they were at the same time taught what they could address to the people with less risk.

You will see that this chapter of St. Matthew contains seven parables, and that all of them, with

the exception of the first, begin in the same way : "The kingdom of heaven is like." Besides these seven parables, St. Mark adds after the first another parable, which likewise begins with the words, "So is the kingdom of God as if," etc. Four of the parables given by St. Matthew, with the additional parable given by St. Mark, were delivered to the people as well as to the disciples, but the explanation of the first two and the three last parables were told to the disciples alone. I call these parables "the Parables of the Kingdom," for the object Jesus had in delivering them was to unfold what St. Matthew calls "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven," and St. Mark, "the mystery of the kingdom of God," so as to prepare the apostles for their mission to preach the kingdom, and the people to receive their teaching.

Jesus then had gone from His house in Capernaum to the sea-side, that is, the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and there were gathered to Him great multitudes, St. Luke adds, "from every city." This was probably on the plain of Gennesareth, not very far from Capernaum. In order to avoid the pressure of the multitude, Jesus entered one of the fishing-vessels drawn up on the shore ; and here Jesus sat,

while the whole multitude, with the disciples, stood on the shore, as was usual with the Rabbis and their scholars. All were in expectation of what He was to say to them, when for the first time He addressed them in a parable: "Behold, a sower went forth to sow." It is probable that He had now arrived at that period of the year when the seed was put into the ground, and, as was His custom, derived His illustration from what passed before Him. The cultivators of the soil lived in the towns or villages, and their fields lay around the village, several of them being at some distance. He probably witnessed one of the small farmers proceeding from his village to sow one of his fields on the plain of Gennesareth. Among the Jews there were two modes of sowing their fields. The seed was either cast by the hand, or else it was contained in a sack filled with holes, and placed on the back of one of their cattle, from which it dropped as the animal was taken along the field. The former was evidently the mode indicated in the parable, and must have been similar to what we see in this country when the farmer has a bag full of seed suspended in front of him, and walks over the field, taking a handful of seed from the

bag, and casting it with a sweep from side to side, so as to cover as much of the ground on each side of him as possible. Thus, as in the parable, some of the seed would fall on the wayside, some on stony, or rather rocky, places, some among thorns, and the rest upon the good ground; and Jesus describes that, in the first case, the birds came and devoured the seed; in the second, the seed sprang up at once, for there was no depth of earth, and when the sun was risen they were scorched, and, because they had no root, withered away; in the third, the thorns sprang up and choked them; but in the fourth, the seed grew up and bore fruit. When Dean Stanley was standing on the plain of Gennesareth, in his visit to Palestine, he saw a field which at once reminded him of the parable. He says: "As I rode along the tract under the hillside by which the plain of Gennesareth is approached, a slight recess in the hillside, close upon the plain, disclosed at once in detail, and with a conjunction which I remember nowhere else in Palestine, every feature of the great parable. There was the undulating corn-field descending to the water's edge; there was the trodden pathway running through the midst of it, with no fence or hedge to prevent

the seed from falling here and there on either side of it or upon it; itself hard with the constant tramp of horse and mule and human foot. There was the rocky ground of the hillside protruding here and there through the corn-fields, as elsewhere through the grassy slopes."

When Jesus concluded this parable He added the emphatic words, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." All of course had, in the natural sense of the term, ears to hear, but all were not willing or cared to hear; yet those who were anxious to hear the truth, and would apply their minds to consider carefully the meaning of the parable, would not be left without some comprehension of it.

Jesus then proceeds to deal more specifically with the kingdom of heaven or of God. In another parable, still connected with putting the seed into the ground, but in a different aspect, He says, "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat." The word here translated "tares" is a Greek word, derived from the Hebrew word "zunin," and indicates a plant common in Palestine, and now called

zuwan. The English name is darnel grass. It is so exceedingly like wheat before it is ripe that it is hardly possible to distinguish them, but as soon as the grain is ripe the difference is at once apparent, for the ears of the wheat are yellow, while those of the darnel grass are black; and there is this further distinction, that while the one produces wholesome flour, the other is poisonous. So it was when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, that the servants of the householder perceived the difference, and said to their master, "Didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?" and he answered, "An enemy hath done this." It was not an uncommon mode of revenge in Palestine, when one farmer had a spite against another, to take this mode of injuring him, as the act could not be discovered till the grain had ripened. Another peculiarity of the darnel grass is that, as it grows, the roots twine round the roots of the wheat, so that the one cannot be pulled up without bringing the other with it. When the servants therefore asked if they should gather out the tares, he said, "Nay; lest ye root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together till the harvest, and when the wheat is reaped along with the tares,

bind up the tares in bundles and burn them, but gather the wheat into the barn.”

The next parable still relates to seed. “The kingdom of heaven is likened to a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becomes a tree, which affords shelter for the birds.” It was a common proverb among the Jews, when they wished to describe anything as exceedingly small, to say, “According to the quantity of a grain of mustard-seed.” It is here included among the herbs, but is correctly described as exceeding all the other herbs, so as to resemble a tree. There is one description of mustard plant found in Palestine, which reaches, as a shrub or tree, twenty-five feet high, and produces branches and leaves, under which birds take shelter.

The last parable Jesus addressed to the multitudes compares the kingdom of heaven to “leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.” You know, probably, that in baking bread the flour is first mixed with water, which forms what is called dough, and then yeast is added to it, which causes the dough to

ferment when put into the oven, and is thus said to be raised, and to form a light and wholesome bread. Now the cause of this is that any such material if kept long enough will spoil and ferment, and will cause any substance brought in contact with it likewise to ferment. Yeast is taken from malt after it has fermented, and causes the dough, when brought in contact with it, to ferment also. Now the old way of baking bread was to preserve part of the dough till it corrupted and fermented. This was called leaven, which, when mixed with unfermented dough, caused it likewise to ferment; and this was the difference between unleavened and leavened bread. So here the woman mixed the leaven with three measures of dough, till the whole was leavened. It is as well to explain this to you now, as you know this expression of unleavened bread is frequently mentioned both in the Old and New Testaments, and enters, as you will find, into the mode by which the Passover was celebrated. A measure of meal was a Jewish measure called a seah, and three seahs made an ephah, which was the usual quantity baked at one time into bread. Thus if you turn to the eighteenth chapter of the Book of Genesis, when Abraham entertains the three strangers, you

will see in the sixth verse that Abraham says to Sarah : " Make ready quickly three measures of meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth ;" and if you refer to the sixth chapter of the Book of Judges, you will see in the nineteenth verse mention made of " unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour." St. Matthew adds after this parable : " All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables ; and without a parable spake He not unto them : that it might be fulfilled which is spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables ; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world." This is St. Matthew's own comment, and the quotation is adapted from the fourth verse of the forty-ninth Psalm : " I will incline mine ear to a parable ; I will open my dark saying upon the harp ;" and from the second verse of the seventy-eighth Psalm : " I will open my mouth in a parable ; I will utter dark sayings of old." These dark sayings Jesus here terms the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. St. Matthew then tells us that Jesus sent the multitude away (ver. 36). After He had finished the parable of the Sower, St. Matthew says : " And the disciples came and said unto Him, Why speakest

Thou unto them in parables?" The expression "parables," in the plural, shows that He is here anticipating what took place after the four parables were finished; accordingly St. Mark says, "And when He was alone, they that were about Him, with the twelve, asked of Him the parable." It must therefore have been after He had sent the multitudes away that this conversation took place. It is plain, however, from St. Mark's expression, that the whole of the multitude on the shore had not departed, but that a part remained, who were about Him with the twelve. These, no doubt, formed the portion of the multitude who had ears to hear, and desired to penetrate into the meaning of the parable; while the careless and indifferent, upon whom it had made no deep impression, went away, and those that remained were rewarded by participating in the explanation given to the twelve. The disciples were surprised that, when Jesus had laid before the multitude the true characteristics of the kingdom of heaven in such plain and distinct language at Mount Tabor, He should now, as it were, cloak His meaning under the form of parables, and they asked Him why He now spoke to them in parables. In His answer Jesus draws a distinction between

those who accepted His teaching so far, and wished to know more of the truth, and those who listened to Him out of curiosity, but remained unimpressed by it, and hardened their hearts against it. The former are those whom He meant by "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear," and who now remained with His disciples; and to them it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; but to the other He spoke in parables, because they shut their hearts against Him, notwithstanding the authority with which He spoke and the miracles He performed before their eyes. St. Matthew refers to the prophecy of Isaiah, in his sixth chapter and ninth verse, as characterising them: "Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." Now if you turn to the twelfth chapter of St. John's Gospel and the thirty-seventh verse, you will see that he applies this description to those who "though He (Jesus) had done so many miracles before them,

yet they believed not on Him ;” and St. Paul also, in the eleventh chapter of his Epistle to the Romans and the seventh verse, applies it to that part of the Jewish people who were blinded, or rather, as it is in the Revised Version, hardened. Jesus therefore spoke to them now in parables which they could not but see contained some great truth ; and if they had had the willing ear, and remained to learn more, instead of departing, no doubt they too would have been further instructed in the mysteries of the kingdom. “ But,” Jesus adds, “ blessed are your eyes, for they see ; and your ears, for they hear.” “ Hear ye, *therefore*, the parable of the sower.” In this parable the seed is the Word of God, as St. Luke tells us (viii. 11), or, as we should now say, the preached gospel. The different kinds of ground represent the different dispositions of its hearers, and these are distinguished into the same two classes by which the hearers of the parable were characterised by Him. The way-side, where some of the seed fell, represents those who do not understand the Word when it is preached. It does not enter their hearts at all. They turn away careless and unconcerned, with their hearts still occupied with worldly feelings and

thoughts, but hardened through the rejection of the truth. The second class consists of those who hear the Word, and receive it with joy. They are those of whom Jesus says that they have ears to hear. When the Gospel is preached to them, it impresses them with its truth, and its adaptation to their spiritual needs, but the impression made upon them is not always permanent. There are those who are represented by the stony ground which has no depth of earth. The Gospel appears to them as a beautiful conception which captivates for the moment their fancy, but is not adopted as a principle of life, and when they are exposed to persecution, and feel the inconvenience to themselves of this new feeling, fall away at once. At the time the parable was spoken persecution was a reality,—among the Jews, excommunication and imprisonment; among the Pagan Romans, torture and death; but in our Christian land there is also a persecution,—the social persecution of dislike, ridicule, and misrepresentation. The young are especially exposed to it, and when they are ridiculed and laughed at by their companions as being over-religious and over-scrupulous, they find it difficult to maintain their religious character, and

are apt to fall away. Then there are others represented by those who receive seed among thorns. They are, on the one hand, absorbed and harassed by the cares and troubles of the world, which lead them to despair of God's goodness, and, on the other hand, are seduced by the possession of wealth, which leads them to luxurious living and pursuit of pleasure, so that the impression produced by the hearing of the Gospel soon ceases to influence their conduct, and becomes a mere sentiment which has no effect upon their lives.

Then, lastly, there are those represented by the good ground. They hear the Gospel, and understand it. They understand its importance, and how it must affect their lives for time and for eternity. They understand its claims upon the entire surrender of themselves to its influence, and the necessity of conforming their lives to its demands, and they bring forth fruit in different degrees according to their capacity. St. Mark adds another short parable immediately after this explanation: "And He said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth

bringeth forth fruit of herself ; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, for the harvest is come" (iv. 26-29). Here the seed is also the Word, or the Gospel, as in the parable of the Sower, and the ground is the good ground, as it brings forth fruit. The parable represents the effect which the preaching of the Gospel may have incidentally upon some casual hearers, without attracting the attention of the preacher, and it is only when he sees the change it has produced in their lives that he becomes aware that they have been converted, and then he gathers them into the kingdom of God, or the Church. The harvest here referred to is that which was alluded to by St. John when Jesus passed through Samaria and talked with the Samaritan woman. He then said to His disciples, "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal" (iv. 35).

St. Matthew tells us that Jesus now sent the rest of the multitude away, and went into His house in Capernaum. His disciples, anxious to learn the meaning of the other parables, came to Him there and

asked Him to explain the parable of the Tares of the Field. There the field represents the world. The good seed are the children of the kingdom, that is, true believers, and the man who sows them is the Son of Man, that is, Jesus Himself. The tares are the children of the wicked one, and the enemy that sowed them is the devil. The picture therefore here presented to us is that of the world professing Christianity; and its Christian population consisting of two classes who bear an outward resemblance by their profession, so that they cannot by their professed belief be distinguished from each other until the fruit of their faith upon their lives and conduct becomes manifest, when they separate into the two classes of the true disciples of Christ on the one hand, and those who, with a hollow profession, practically deny Him, and show that they are still under the influence of evil. The harvest here is the end of the world. They are left undisturbed till then, lest any one should be prevented from repenting and being converted, but at the judgment the separation will take place. Every evil will be eliminated from the kingdom of God at the judgment. And now for the first time is any direct hint given us of the future state in the next world, in these solemn words: "The Son of

Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend," or, as it is rendered in the Revised Version, "that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

Jesus then addresses to His disciples the same exhortation which I have already explained to you: "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear;" and adds three other parables. First, that the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hid in a field, which a man finds, hides it, sells all he has, and buys that field; then that the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking goodly pearls, who when he has found one of great price, sells all he has, and buys it; and thirdly, it is like a net cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind, and when it was full, and drawn to shore, the good were gathered into vessels, and the bad cast away. Jesus then asks His disciples if they had understood all these things, and they said unto Him, "Yea, Lord." They had understood the two parables he had explained, and were now able to penetrate into the hidden meaning of those short

parables which remained unexplained, and which presented to them different spiritual aspects of the kingdom of God. They now saw that the third and fourth parables signified the growth of the kingdom of God in its external aspect and its internal effect. Like the smallest of seeds, the mustard seed, though it begins with a few followers of the Saviour in the district of Galilee, it will spread in its outward aspect till it embraces many nations, and in its internal effect it will act upon the human soul as leaven acts upon dough prepared for baking. Leaven has two properties: the one, that it is dough which has undergone corruption, and this it communicates to fresh dough, and causes it to ferment; the other, its secretly penetrating and influencing power, in which respect it is emblematical of moral influence. With regard to the former quality leaven represents, as you will afterwards see, false doctrine, but in the latter it is referred to as illustrating the moral influence of the Gospel, and it is in this sense that it is twice used by St. Paul, when he says that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Cor. v. 6; Gal. v. 9); and it is in the same sense that it is used in the parable. Then they understood that the fifth and sixth parables illustrate the different modes in

which a human soul may be brought in contact with the Gospel. In the one, like him who unexpectedly found a treasure in a field, the man finds himself on some unexpected occasion brought in contact with the preaching of the Gospel, and is so powerfully impressed by it that he surrenders himself entirely to its influence, and his life is changed from a worldly and careless existence to a religious one. In the other, like a merchant seeking pearls, an anxious seeker for truth, trying one system after another, which are equally unsatisfying, becomes convinced that he has found the highest truth of all in the Gospel, and gives himself up to the truth as it is in Jesus for time and for eternity. Thus they also understood that the last parable resembled the second, with the difference that it referred rather to their own preaching than that of the Son of Man. As fishers of men they were to cast the Gospel net, which would embrace both real and nominal believers; and Jesus here adds the same explanation of the end as He did in the second parable. Both good and bad would remain together under the same outward profession. "So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them

into the furnace of fire : there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

Seeing that His disciples now fully grasped the meaning of those parables by which He brought before them the true spiritual character of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus then winds up the whole lesson by a short parable that every Scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old, and so they, like the Scribes, could now bring out of their treasure of learning those new truths that were to supplement and confirm those old beliefs in the kingdom of the Messiah, which had been so perverted and misrepresented by the Jewish teachers ; and thus were the apostles instructed and prepared for preaching the kingdom of God to the people of the land.

Lesson XX.

THE MISSION OF THE APOSTLES.

Read

ST. LUKE viii. 40—56. ST. MATTHEW xx. 36—38; x. 1—42.

THE day after He had delivered these parables, and had crossed in the evening to the country of the Gergesenes, Jesus was again to show His Divine power in two very striking miracles, which are recorded by the three Evangelists, St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke. As Jesus was returning to His house, after He had recrossed the Sea of Galilee, there met Him a ruler of the synagogue, whose name was Jairus, who fell at His feet, and besought Him to come into his house, for his only daughter, who was about twelve years of age, was dying. No doubt he was one of the elders of the Jews who came to Jesus at the request of the centurion, and knew of the miracle of healing which He then wrought. Whether or not he was prepared.

to accept Jesus as the Messiah, at all events he was convinced of His miraculous power, and the deep distress which his little daughter's danger threw him into, caused him at the moment to worship one who evidently possessed Divine power and entreat Him to save her. Jesus was never asked in this way in vain, and went at once; but the people had, as usual, collected about Him, and, as St. Luke says, thronged Him. In the crowd was a woman who had suffered for twelve years from an incurable issue of blood. She did not venture to press forward to address Jesus, for she was ceremonially unclean, but touched the border of His garment as the most sacred part of His dress—for it was commanded in the Law, and had a symbolical meaning, as you will see if you turn to the fifteenth chapter of the Book of Numbers, verse 37: "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments, throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: and it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them." They were worn

by the Pharisees and the Rabbis, and the former attached great importance to them, for St. Matthew says, "But all their works they do to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments" (xxiii. 5). This woman, then, thought if she touched this sacred part of His garment, and thus connected herself with the Saviour's person, it was enough,—and she was right, for she was immediately healed. Jesus felt that virtue had gone out of Him, and in order to bring her forward and declare how she had been healed, said, "Who touched Me?" Those who were about Him denied they had done so, but the woman, seeing she could not remain concealed, now came trembling, and fell down before Him; and then He declared that her faith in Him was what had healed her, and bid her go in peace. He had no sooner done so than a messenger came from the ruler's house to tell him that his little daughter was dead. Jesus, when He heard it, told the ruler only to have faith in Him and that she would still be healed. He entered the house, taking with him only Peter and James and John to be witnesses of the miracle, and put the people who were in the house out of it, except the father and mother, and, taking the little girl by the

hand, said, "Maid, arise;" and her spirit, which had left the body, came to her again, and she was restored to life. I have taken this account from St. Luke, as, being a physician, he no doubt gives a more accurate account of the illness of the little girl; the account given by St. Matthew differs but slightly from it. In the one St. Luke correctly says the girl was dying, while St. Matthew tells us more loosely that she was dead, and that Jairus besought Jesus to restore her to life. The account given by St. Mark corresponds better with that of St. Luke, as he says that she was at the point of death, and this is more consistent with the words added by St. Luke, that the parents were astonished, or, as St. Mark says, "astonished with a great astonishment," at her being actually raised from the dead. It is probable that the girl was actually dead, though her father knew it not, when he besought Jesus to heal her, and St. Matthew, knowing that this was so, stated it in this manner.

The time had now come when Jesus resolved to send forth His twelve apostles to preach, having so far instructed them as to the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God which they were to proclaim; but He seems before doing so to have resolved to make

one more effort to convince His own people of Nazareth. Accordingly both St. Matthew and St. Mark tell us that He went about this time to Nazareth, and St. Mark places the visit immediately after He restored the little daughter of the ruler of the synagogue to life. He says, "And he went out from thence, and came into His own country," and on this occasion He was followed by His disciples. The result, however, was the same. He waited till the Sabbath, and again appeared in their synagogue, and began to teach, and many, St. Mark tells us, were astonished at the wisdom with which He spoke, and at the fame of the miracles which He wrought; but were offended, because they knew Him, as they supposed, simply as belonging to the trade of His reputed father, Joseph, and the son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon, while His reputed sisters were still living in the town. They therefore shut their ears against Him, and, except a few sick whom He healed, He felt that their unbelief could not be overcome even by His working miracles among them. He then went round about the neighbouring villages teaching, and St. Matthew says that when He saw the multitudes "He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted,"

or, as it is in the Revised Version, "were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd." He therefore prefaced His sending the apostles forth on their mission by asking their prayers: "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest."

Having thus prepared His disciples to be sent forth as labourers to the harvest, Jesus formally called them together, and commanded them to go forth and preach that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, that kingdom the true character of which had now been made plain. St. Matthew here repeats their names, but he now for the first time gives them their official designation of Apostles, that is, messengers of Christ. St. Matthew tells us that Jesus gave them power against unclean spirits to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease, and commanded them not only to preach the kingdom, but to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out devils. St. Matthew gives us the instructions and directions of Jesus to His apostles much more fully than the other Evangelists, St. Mark and St. Luke, and it is natural that he should do so, for he himself was one

of the twelve to whom they were specially addressed. They are contained in the last thirty-seven verses of this chapter ; but if you read them carefully you will see that the first eleven verses refer especially to this mission during our Saviour's life, and that the rest relate to their future mission, when they were to preach the Gospel after His death and resurrection. So far as their present mission was concerned, the field of their operations was limited. They were not to go into the way of the Gentiles, or heathen people. Neither were they to go into any city of the Samaritans, but to confine themselves to the lost sheep of the house of Israel—that is, the people of the land ; but their future mission was to preach the Gospel to every creature. It will be necessary for us to keep this distinction in view in reading the instructions contained in this chapter.

Their present mission was therefore practically confined to Galilee, but that region was the largest and most populous part of Palestine, or the land inhabited by people of the Jewish race. The soil was rich and well cultivated, and it contained no fewer than two hundred and forty large cities and populous villages. It was to this region that the mission of the apostles was for the present limited,

and the object was that the preaching of the kingdom of God, or the Gospel, which had hitherto been carried out by Jesus alone, and could consequently only be confined within a limited sphere, should now be extended to every city, town, and village of that large province. In giving His apostles this mission, Jesus manifested His Divine nature in a very remarkable manner. He had hitherto shown that He was the Son of God as well as of man by healing the sick, casting out devils, and even raising the dead, but now, in order to add to their function of preaching the kingdom the authority which had accompanied His own, He conferred upon His apostles the same power, not only of healing the sick and casting out devils, but even of raising the dead, so that none might question the Divine sanction thus given to their mission; and He thus showed His Divine nature, for though God might bestow the power of working miracles on a man, no one who was a mere man could transfer that power to another. This was a power which God alone could possess, and the apostles themselves, as you will afterwards see, could hardly believe that such a power could be conferred upon them.

They were also to make no provision for their

journey, such as travellers usually considered necessary, but to throw themselves upon the hospitality of the people who might make a return for the unusual privilege, which even the very poorest among them, to whom no instruction had ever been given by their Jewish teachers, were now to enjoy, of having the Gospel preached to them, by providing food and clothing for those who laboured among them. Travellers usually carried a supply of money for their journey, and a sufficient stock of clothing to last during the time it was to occupy ; but the apostles were to take no money in their purses, neither gold, nor silver, nor even copper money. The dress of the Jews at this time consisted first of the *cetoneth*, which was worn next the body. It was a close-fitting garment of linen, cotton, or wool, reaching to the feet, with sleeves tied to the arm, and kept close to the body by a girdle. Over this was worn the *meil*, an upper or second tunic, which was woven without seam. These were the two coats referred to in verse 10. Then over the whole was the *addereth, tallith*, or outer garment, a sort of cloak or mantle, the ends of which were skirted by a fringe, and which was also confined with a girdle. This was the garment the border of which was kissed

by the woman with the issue of blood. The Jews usually went with their head covered by a linen cloth wound round it like a turban, and their feet were shod either by shoes or sandals. The former, usually worn by the better class, were of softer leather and covered the whole foot. The latter, consisting merely of a sole or lower part tied on the foot by leather thongs, were for more ordinary use. When travelling on foot, the Jews carried a leather pouch, here called a scrip, in which they put their victuals, and took with them a staff to assist them. The poorer class, and those who laboured in the fields, wore the *cetoneth* only, and sandals instead of shoes.

The apostles then were directed to make no provision for travelling, neither scrip for their victuals nor the usual travelling-staff. They were to wear the *cetoneth* only, and, as St. Mark tells us, sandals in place of shoes. They were thus to go amongst the people in the garb of the very poorest, so that, coming amongst them as poor, they might win the poor, and they were to trust entirely to the people of the towns or villages to receive them and support them. If they found them willing to do so, they were to abide with them, and to salute the house which received them with the usual salutation,

‘Peace be with thee,’ and their peace would come upon that house ; but if the people of the city would not receive them, or hear their words, their peace would return to them, and they were to shake the dust gathered in that city off their feet,—a very significant action, for the Scribes taught that the dust of heathen land defiled by the touch ; and, by shaking off the dust when they departed, they showed that they esteemed that city, though it may have been a Jewish city, no better than a heathen city, and as such its fate would, in the day of judgment, be less tolerable than the fate of Sodom and Gomorrha, that is, the ancient heathen inhabitants of the land to which the Gospel had not been preached and rejected.

This solemn sentence closes the instructions given by Jesus to the apostles for their immediate mission to the people of Galilee. But they were not only to be temporary missionaries to the people of Galilee ; they were also to be permanent preachers of the Gospel, and the emphatic word, “Behold,” marks the commencement of more general directions, when Jesus looks beyond this temporary mission to that more permanent and important work in which they were to be engaged after He

had finished His own work on earth, and had been received up into heaven. St. Matthew alone records that part of the discourse which Jesus addressed to the apostles, but he was one of the twelve, and of course heard it, while St. Mark, who gives his account at second-hand, only notices the part connected with their immediate mission. Jesus tells them that in their future work, when they had to preach the Gospel to the unwilling ears of hostile Jews and superstitious pagans, they would be like sheep sent among wolves, and gives them, as a rule for their conduct, "to be wise as serpents"—that is, to show judgment and consideration—and "to be harmless as doves"—that is, to be irreproachable in their private character, so as not to incur the reproach of being either injudicious or intemperate in their mode of exhibiting their teaching, or of failing to show that their own conduct was under the influence of it. Jesus had already told them of the blessedness of persecution for His sake, but He now warns them as to the treatment they may expect from the opposition of the men of the world, the bigoted Jews and the worldly-wise Gentiles. By the former they would be delivered up to the councils, who would scourge them in their synagogues. In every syna-

gogue there was a council, or tribunal consisting of three magistrates, who judged in matters affecting the religion of the Jews and the synagogue-worship. There were two modes of punishment which they could inflict. One was excommunication, or being cast out of the synagogue; and the other was scourging in the synagogue. Thus, if you refer to the seventh chapter of the Gospel of St. John, you will see at the twenty-second verse that the Jews had agreed that if any man did confess that Jesus was the Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. In their scourging the Jews did not exceed the number of stripes to which they were limited by the law of Moses, which you will find in the twenty-fifth chapter of Deuteronomy: "Forty stripes he may give him, and not exceed" (ver. 3). In order to insure that they did not exceed the limit, the punishment in the synagogue was inflicted by a scourge consisting of three thongs, with which they administered thirteen blows, which thus amounted to thirty-nine stripes. St. Matthew was himself to experience the truth of this prediction, for that was the punishment to which the apostles were subjected by the council of the Jews when they began to preach the resurrection of Jesus, as you will see

in the fifth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles and fortieth verse: "And when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus." It is also to this punishment that St. Paul refers when he says, "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one" (2 Cor. xi. 24). Then, with regard to their treatment by the heathen, Jesus tells them that they would be brought before governors and kings for His sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles; and this too was exemplified in the case of St. Paul when brought before Felix the governor and King Agrippa. Jesus, however, encourages them not to feel afraid when thus called upon to give their testimony, for it would be given them in that hour what they should say, for the words they would utter would not be their own, but the Spirit of God would speak in them. Jesus then warns them to expect one effect from their preaching different from what they might probably look for, and that is, that it would create divisions in families, and excite so much animosity among the members of it that the natural ties of brother with brother, and children with parents, would be forgotten in the discharge of what they might con-

sider a religious duty. All experience tells us that there is no animosity greater than that created by religious feelings when accompanied by a narrow and intolerant spirit, and no bitterer feeling than that which often exists between members of the same family who are zealous disciples of a different creed. This is so well known that a peculiar name has been given to this intolerant feeling. It is called in Latin *odium theologicum*, or theological hatred; and so they might expect, if they converted a part of a family only to the true faith, that this feeling among the different members of it would inevitably follow, even to the extent, during the persecution of Christians by the Pagan powers, of such members of a family being denounced by the others. They too, the apostles, would draw hatred to themselves from those who resisted their teaching; but had to beware, in the fear of persecution, of drawing back from their mission; and if they persevered to the end of it, everlasting salvation would be their reward. Jesus, however, authorised them, if persecuted in one city, to take refuge in another, for they would not have accomplished their task of preaching in all the cities of Israel, and by constant and persevering efforts winning its

inhabitants over to the true faith, "till the Son of Man be come,"—that is, in judgment upon the nation of the Jews, who would be dispersed, and the city of Jerusalem, which would be destroyed. If you will turn to the twenty-first chapter of St. John's Gospel you will see this expression used in the same sense. Jesus, after His resurrection, had told St. Peter by what death he should glorify God, and Peter, seeing the disciple whom Jesus loved, that is, St. John, asked, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" and Jesus answered, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" Now St. John was the only one of the apostles who we know for certain was alive at the destruction of Jerusalem, St. Peter having suffered before that event.

Jesus then reminds them that if they were His disciples they could hardly expect to receive different treatment from that accorded to their Master; that if they were to be hated for His name's sake, they had seen Him rejected by the Pharisees, who had plotted to put Him to death; and that if they were to be reviled, they had heard Him stigmatised as working miracles through Beelzebub, the prince of the devils; but He encourages them not to have fear on that account, for their business was to proclaim the

truths which they had learned from Him, whom they knew to be a teacher sent from heaven, and speak in light what He had told them in darkness, and to preach or proclaim from the house-tops what they had heard in the ear. The allusions here are to the mode of teaching in the Jewish schools and in the synagogue, where the Rabbi whispered out of his chair to the interpreter his exposition, who with a loud voice repeated it to the whole school or congregation, and to the custom of announcing the coming of the Sabbath by the minister of the synagogue, who proclaimed it by sounding a trumpet six times from the roof of a high house. Jesus assures them that if they faithfully fulfilled their mission they would be under the providential care of their Father in heaven, without whom even a sparrow did not fall to the ground, and by whom the very hairs of their head were numbered. They ought therefore not to fear those who can kill the body only, but Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell. And if through fear of persecution they shrank from confessing Him before men, how could they expect that He would confess them before God? and whoever went further, and actually denied Him before men, him He would

deny before His Father in heaven. It was not without reason that Jesus addressed this solemn warning to His apostles, for He knew well that one among them, who listened to Him, would not readily accept such an aspect of their mission, and such a prospect of its effects upon themselves, but would cling obstinately to the delusive hope that Jesus, if He was the Messiah, was a Messiah who came to establish a temporary kingdom of glorious peace and splendour on earth, in which those who followed Him would reap their reward in a position of dignity and weight. This was Judas Iscariot, and Jesus knew that if such hopes were disappointed, he would not only deny, but betray Him, and this gives significance to what follows. Jesus would leave him under no such false hopes, and proceeds to tell them that they are not to think that He came to establish a peaceful kingdom on earth, but, on the contrary, He brought a sword, for the faith in a crucified Saviour was one that would create division in families, and that the true believers would find their foes in their own household. Those, therefore, who would love the peace and harmony of their own family more than Jesus are not worthy of Him. Unless they were prepared to take up

their cross and follow Jesus, that is, submit to the same sufferings and humiliation which He did, they were not worthy to be His disciples. If they would save their lives when in danger from confessing Him, by denying Him, they would find that they had lost a higher life; and they who lost their lives for Jesus' sake would find their compensation in that higher life, viz., eternal life in the kingdom of God.

Jesus having thus laid before the apostles the higher and more important function to which they were called, the hardships and discouragements which would accompany it, but also the great and glorious reward which awaited the faithful performance of it, and would prove more than compensation for their sufferings to those who persevered to the end, now returns to the immediate mission on which He was sending them, and concludes His instructions with words of encouragement. He bids them recollect that to receive them as His apostles was equivalent to receiving Jesus Himself who sent them. And to receive Jesus was equivalent to receiving Him by whom He was sent, that is, God the Father. To understand the expressions in the verses which

follow, I must explain to you that the Jews attached especial merit to the hospitable reception of sages; and if you refer to the eighteenth chapter of the First Book of Kings, you will see how Obadiah was honoured because he feared the Lord greatly, and saved the lives of a hundred prophets, hid them in a cave, and fed them with bread and water. So the meaning here is that those who receive the apostles as prophets, that is, as speaking not their own words, but the word of God, shall receive the same reward which attached to the hospitable reception of a prophet; and those who received them as righteous and true men would receive a similar reward which pertained to the hospitable reception of a righteous man as such; but more than this,—even the smallest kindness shown to the lowliest and most humble of His disciples, as a disciple of Jesus, would not lose its reward, for the expression “little ones” was the term given by the Jews to children who were learning the elements of religion under a Rabbi, as you will see by referring to the eighth chapter of the Book of Isaiah: “Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth His face from the house

of Jacob, and I will look for Him. Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me, are for signs," etc. (vers. 16-18). And in one of the Talmudic writings we find, "He who receives a disciple of the wise as a guest into his house, and gives him to eat and to drink, is as if he had shown kindness to all the children of Israel."

St. Matthew then tells us, in the first verse of the following chapter, which properly belongs to this chapter, "And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding His twelve disciples, He departed thence, to teach and to preach in their cities;" while St. Mark says, "And they"—that is, the apostles—"went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them" (vi. 12, 13); and St. Luke, "And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the Gospel, and healing everywhere" (ix. 6). No particulars are given us by any of the Evangelists, either of the cities visited by Jesus, and the events which accompanied His teaching, for He was alone, and those whom He had appointed to be witnesses of what He said and did were not with Him, neither are any particulars given us of

the towns visited by the apostles, and how they carried out their mission, for the object of the Evangelists was not to record the actions and words of the apostles by themselves, but of Jesus alone, and of the apostles only when they were with Him, and thus there is at this stage a period of silence in the Gospel History, which must have lasted several months, as required to enable the apostles to fulfil their mission, and as indicated by the events which follow.

Lesson XXX.

JESUS FEEDS FIVE THOUSAND

Read

ST. MARK vi. 14—31. ST. JOHN vi. 1—21.

WHEN we are told by St. Matthew that when Jesus had made an end of commanding His twelve disciples, He departed thence, to teach and to preach in their cities (xi. 1), and by St. Luke that the twelve disciples departed, and went through the towns, preaching the Gospel, and healing everywhere (ix. 6), you will see at once that it could not have been the same cities and towns in which Jesus and the disciples taught and preached, and that they must have gone in different directions. The towns in which the apostles preached were undoubtedly, as is indicated by their instructions, the towns of Galilee; and the cities to which Jesus now directed His steps were probably that group of ten cities situated in the region known by the name of

Decapolis. They extended to the south and east of the Sea of Galilee, one of them being on the bank of the river Jordan, and the others on each side of that river. Jesus had not as yet taught in their cities, but they were in a manner prepared for His appearing among them, for we are told by St. Mark that the demoniac whom Jesus had not long before healed in the country of the Gerasenes, departed, "and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel" (v. 20); and if you refer to the seventh chapter of the same Gospel and the thirty-first verse, you will see St. Mark says that "*again*, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, He came unto the Sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis," implying that it was not the first time He had visited their cities.

The region of Decapolis stretched far into the district of Peræa, which formed part of the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas. It was in Machærus, a fortress in the south of Peræa, that Herod had imprisoned John the Baptist; and during part of the time when Jesus was teaching in Galilee Herod had been in Rome, and, after his return, appears to have taken up his residence in the town of Julias, which had

been built by him, and which was the capital of Peræa. It was at a little distance to the north of Machærus, so that the work which Jesus was doing in Galilee was removed from his direct observation, but as He advanced through the cities of Decapolis He approached nearer and nearer to where Herod was holding his court, and circumstances had recently occurred which drew the attention of that tyrant powerfully to Him. Herod had been celebrating his birthday. That expression was used by the Jews at the time, either with reference to the anniversary of his actual birth or of the birthday of the kingdom, that is, his accession; and it is probable that it was the latter festival he was celebrating, for we know that his father, Herod the Great, had died on the 1st of April, when this Herod Antipas succeeded him in Galilee and Peræa, and you will see immediately that it must have been about this time that the festival was held. Herod made a supper to his lords, high captains, and the chief men of Galilee. One of the entertainments usually provided at such feasts in the East was dancing, performed by a troop of dancing-girls, usually slave girls trained for that purpose, but on this occasion the daughter of Herodias by her first

husband, a young girl about fourteen, whose name we learn from Josephus was Salome, danced before Herod, probably in the guise of a dancing-girl, to do further honour to the festival; and when Herod found that the dancer who had charmed him was his stepdaughter Salome, he swore to give her whatever she should ask of him, even if it were the half of his kingdom. This kind of oath, taken on the impulse of the moment, was what is called in the Jewish writings "a rash oath," and the form of it was to swear "by his head." The young girl went to her mother Herodias to ask what she should demand, and Herodias at once saw an opportunity of wreaking her vengeance upon John the Baptist, and told the girl to demand the head of John the Baptist. St. Mark tells us that Herod was exceedingly sorry, but for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, felt that he could not retract. He therefore sent his executioner and commanded that the head should be brought; and he went, beheaded John in prison, and brought his head on a charger, and gave it to the damsel, and the damsel gave it to her mother. It is this narrative which shows that Herod was holding his court not far from the prison of Machærus; but in teaching and

preaching in the cities of Decapolis Jesus would approach the northern boundary of Peræa; and as His name became spread abroad, accompanied by the rumour of the mighty works that He did, it would now force itself upon the notice of Herod. This part of the region of Decapolis which bordered Peræa on the north was the same district termed by St. John "Bethania beyond Jordan," where John the Baptist was preaching and baptizing when the deputation from the Sanhedrim reached him. Herod was himself a Sadducee, and did not believe in the resurrection of the dead; but he believed John the Baptist to be a prophet, and was filled with exceeding sorrow at having been trapped into ordering his execution. In his remorse, therefore, his scepticism was overcome by a sudden fear that this wonder-worker who was teaching and preaching in the very place which had been the scene of John the Baptist's work, and had drawn the attention of the Sanhedrim to him, might be John himself risen from the dead; while others, recollecting that the deputation had asked him whether he were Elijah, whose return was prophesied by Malachi, or the coming prophet foretold to Moses, said, either that He was Elijah, or that

prophet: Jesus however, when the disciples of John came and told Him the fate of their master and His forerunner, returned to Capernaum, and there met the apostles returning from their mission in Galilee, who "told Him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught." Jesus having thus for the time concluded His work in Decapolis, and the apostles having likewise brought their mission in Galilee to an end, He tells them that it would be well to retire to a desert place, where they could be apart from the people—who were as usual crowding upon them, and hardly leaving them leisure even so much as to eat,—and thus have an interval of quiet and rest. It was also well that he should for a time withdraw from the country which was under the rule of Herod. He therefore proposed to them to cross the Sea of Galilee to the east side, where they could find such a desert place, and also be in the region ruled over by Herod's brother Philip, who was of a milder disposition, and would not interfere with Him.

This brings us to one of the most remarkable scenes in the whole of this narrative. It is told us by all the four Evangelists, and forms a connecting link between them, which is of much importance in ascertaining the true order of the events

recorded by them. Of these four narratives I select that by St. John, because he gives us an important clue to the date of this wonderful scene, and he alone records an equally remarkable and important discourse which immediately followed it. St. John tells us that "Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias; and a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His miracles which He did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh." Now the Passover this year was held on Monday, the 18th of April, and the preparations for it began, according to the custom of the Jews, fifteen days before, when the feast was usually termed "nigh at hand." It would therefore be either on the 3d of April, or soon after that Jesus retired to this desert place, but if, as I told you was probable, Herod had been celebrating his accession to the kingdom on the 1st of April, you will see how close the two events would come to each other, and how consistent the narrative obviously is. St. John, however, as we shall see, probably had another object in stating that the scenes which follow took place about the time of the Passover. We learn

from St. Mark that the multitude which followed Him, when they saw them departing, and recognised Jesus in the midst of them, "ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and came together unto Him." They went round the north end of the Sea of Galilee, and thus met Jesus as He was landing from the ship. The mountain, therefore, to which He retired must have been close to the north end of the Sea of Galilee, where the mountain range terminates at the plain of Bethsaida, and the scene of what follows can be easily identified. St. Mark adds that "Jesus when He came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and He began to teach them many things" (vi. 34), while St. Luke tells us that He "spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing" (ix. 11); and thus the day in which Jesus had hoped to find an interval of rest and quiet for Himself and His disciples, after their missionary labours, was passed in opening up to these poor people, left in ignorance by their own teachers, the nature of that kingdom of God which was at hand, and the hopes and blessings connected with it. When the day began to wear away, the three other

Evangelists tell us that the twelve came to Jesus saying, "This is a desert place"—that is, a place where no food could be got; "send the multitude away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat." But He would not alienate them from His presence on that account, and said, "They need not depart; give ye them to eat;" but St. John simply says that Jesus lifted up his eyes, and saw that a great company had come unto Him, and said to Philip, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" The reason that He addresses this question to Philip was probably because he was of Bethsaida, a town at the north end of the Sea of Galilee, where the river Jordan enters into it, and the nearest town to the place where they were. St. John adds that "this He said to prove him: for He Himself knew what He would do." The few notices we have of Philip show that, with the exception of Judas Iscariot, he was the one of the apostles who could least grasp the idea that Jesus was the Son of God, and that God was His real Father, and therefore would not anticipate that He could provide food for so great a multitude by the exercise of a power which could only be divine. He would no doubt

have proposed that the disciples should go and buy bread, if they had the means, but two hundred pence was probably the amount of what they possessed in the common purse, and he replies that if they spent all that they had they could not buy enough so that each one might take a little. You know the value of the Greek denarius or penny was about eight-pence-halfpenny of our money, so that the whole amount they possessed was about seven pounds, and it may interest you to know that this is also the value of the coin at present in use in Greece which is called a drachme. Another of the disciples, however, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, who had been in closer contact with Jesus, and was one of that group of four whom He most intimately associated with Himself, seems to have felt that Jesus would meet the difficulty by an exercise of His own Divine power, and to his mind the incident recorded in the Old Testament, when in a time of famine the widow's cruse of oil was miraculously increased, may have recurred, as he told Jesus that a lad among the multitude had brought with him five barley loaves and two small fishes. This was the ordinary food of the common people, and he was probably one of a large family who may have come from a distance, and

brought them for their sustenance, and he adds in some doubt, "But what are they among so many?" Jesus told them to make the men sit down, and St. John adds one of these incidental coincidences which show that this was the narrative of an eye-witness, for he adds, "Now there was much grass in the place," for it is only in spring that the fields and hills are clothed with verdure, while in summer it is usually scorched and dried up with the heat of the sun. St. Mark tells us that they sat down in ranks, by hundreds and by fifties. St. John tells us that Jesus then "took the loaves; and when He had given thanks, He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would." The other Evangelists use the expression that "He blessed," in place of "gave thanks." These are two different Greek verbs; but you will see afterwards that the same two Greek verbs are used to express a similar prayer in the institution of the Lord's Supper, and a comparison of both shows us that it was simply a thanksgiving prayer to the Father. We can gather from this simple narrative that Jesus divided the loaves and the fishes into twelve portions, and gave one to each of His twelve

disciples, and desired them to distribute to the people. As we are told afterwards that they were about five thousand in number, this would place about five hundred of them under the care of each apostle to serve. Each had, no doubt, his scrip or wallet for holding food at his side, and would put the portion given to him into it, and, like the widow's cruse of oil, it would be miraculously increased, so that he would take portions out of it till all were served. When all were filled, Jesus said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." Now I must explain to you that it was the rule among the Jews, that, when they ate together, each must leave a portion of the food given to them untouched. This was to show that they had been served with enough to fully satisfy their appetite. This is still the custom in the East. In Greece, for instance, it is even now thought a great breach of good manners not to leave untasted a part of the food served to you on the plate. By the Jews this remnant was called "Peah," and it was left to those that served. It was therefore quite a usual proceeding when the disciples who had served them went round and collected these fragments, and each returned with

his basket full of the fragments of the portions that had been taken out of the wallet, into which one portion only had been received. The fact is probably recorded to show that by this miraculous increase of the five barley loaves and two fishes the whole of this vast multitude had been fully supplied with food. It is no wonder that St. John adds that "those men, when they had seen the miracle which Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world," and that "they would come and take Him by force, to make Him a king." It forced upon them the persuasion that Jesus was indeed the Messiah; and after the manifestation of so great a power, they would instal Him in that temporal kingdom which they believed the Messiah came to establish. But to such a view of His kingdom Jesus gave no sanction, and invariably resisted every attempt to force Him to exercise His power for such a purpose. So when He perceived their object, He departed quietly into a recess of the mountain where He was alone; and both St. Matthew and St. Mark tell us that He "constrained"—that is, commanded—"His disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before Him, while He sent the multitude away," and that He went up into

the mountain to pray. When even was come, His disciples accordingly went down to the sea, and entered into a ship, and went over the sea towards Capernaum, but Jesus remained alone in the mountain, holding communion with God in prayer. It was now dark, and the boat had not proceeded far on its way, when one of those sudden blasts of wind or squalls came on from the west, so that it was contrary to them, and the sea rose, and, as it was against them, caused the ship to pitch heavily. Jesus saw them from the mountain toiling, in rowing the vessel against a head sea, so He came down and went to them, walking on the sea, thus again showing His Divine power over the elements; and here again you have an indication that this is the narrative of eye-witnesses, for St. John says that he had rowed about five-and-twenty or thirty furlongs when Jesus drew nigh to the ship; and both St. Matthew and St. Mark say it was in the fourth watch of the night—that is, early in the morning; for the Jews divided the night into three watches of three hours each, the third watch ending at three o'clock in the morning, which was called cock-crowing: the time after that was called the fourth watch. You will find these watches

enumerated by St. Mark in the thirteenth chapter and thirty-fifth verse: "Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning."

When the disciples saw Jesus coming to them on the sea, which was bearing Him up, they were afraid, and thought they saw a spirit, for they could not understand how anything corporeal should not sink, and such a manifestation of Divine power was beyond their comprehension. St. Matthew says "that they cried out for fear," and St. Mark that "He made as if He would pass by them, and they cried out: for they all saw Him, and were troubled;" but Jesus reassured them, saying, "Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid." St. Matthew now alone relates a striking incident characteristic of the disposition of St. Peter. Recognising the voice of Jesus, and feeling persuaded that if He possessed such power over the elements, He could impart it to others, Peter said, "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water." And Jesus, to try his faith, said, "Come." Peter came down out of the ship, and began to walk on the water to go to Jesus, but when he saw the wind boisterous, he lost heart, and beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord,

save me ! And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt ? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased ” (xiv. 28-33). This narrative is very characteristic of Peter, who, at this time, was the one of the apostles who had most readily recognised the Divine nature of Jesus, and whose impulse led him to take the lead in openly acknowledging it, but who had not yet attained to that firm and steadfast faith that remained unshaken through trial. This exhibition of Divine power over the elements seems to have variously affected those that were in the ship. Some, including probably the disciples, could not but recognise it, for St. Matthew says that “they which were in the ship came and worshipped Him, saying, Of a truth Thou art the Son of God ;” but others seem to have been merely lost in wonder, for St. Mark says that they were sore amazed in themselves, and wondered, for “they considered not the miracle of the loaves,” or rather, as it is in the Revised Version, “for they understood not concerning the loaves,” that is, they received the food without understanding how it had been obtained ; “but their heart was hardened.” They seem, in fact, to

have been hardly satisfied that it was the same Jesus who had fed them on the other side who now came into the ship, for St. Mark adds that “when they had passed over, they came into the land of Gennesareth”—that is, the plain which lay to the south of Capernaum whither the wind had driven them,—“and when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew Him;” and both St. Matthew and St. Mark tell us that the people “ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard He was,” and as had become the custom in all the villages or cities into which Jesus entered, when they laid the sick in the streets, they “besought that they might touch if it were but the border of His garment,”—a custom which no doubt took its rise from their witnessing the healing of the woman with the issue of blood,—“and as many as touched Him were made whole.”

Lesson XXX.

JESUS THE BREAD OF LIFE.

Read

ST. JOHN vi. 22—71.

ST. JOHN alone reports the discourse which followed the miracle of the feeding the five thousand. It is one of the most important in the Gospel narrative, and produced a powerful impression upon the minds of those who heard it; confirming the faith of some in Jesus, but turning others from Him who could not receive the truth that He came, not only as their Messiah to establish the kingdom of God, but also as the Lamb of God who was to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

This discourse took place the day after that on which the feeding of the five thousand had taken place; for St. John tells us that the people who had been fed remained there the whole night expecting to see Jesus again next day, but finding that He

was not there, although His disciples had gone the previous evening in the ship that had brought them, and He had certainly not gone with them, they took shipping in some boats that had come from Tiberias to the same place, and crossed over to Capernaum seeking for Jesus. When they had found Him on the other side of the sea, they said unto Him, "Rabbi, when camest Thou hither?" for they could not understand how He had crossed, if there was no boat except that in which the disciples had gone without Him. Jesus, however, knew that they had remained there in the expectation of seeing Him, not because they were impressed by the miracle He had wrought, and the sanction it gave to His teaching, but in the hope of being again fed by Him. He therefore endeavoured to raise their thoughts from such a mere carnal feeling to a more spiritual conception of their true wants, and thus says to them: "Labour not," or rather, as it is in the Revised Version, "Work not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which abideth unto eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you: for Him the Father, even God, hath sealed;" that is, consecrated and set apart for this work. The people answered: "What shall we do, that we

might work the works of God?" In other words, We know what it is to work for our daily bread; we know that by the law the labourer is entitled to eat of those things wherein he laboureth; but what is that work which we must do to entitle us to obtain the food which endureth to eternal life? Jesus then tells them that "this is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." They must accept Him as their Messiah, and believe that He is able and willing to give them that heavenly food. This leads to the usual demand that He should show them some sign, that they might see and believe Him; and they add: "Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat." This quotation is taken from the seventy-eighth Psalm and the twenty-third verse: "Though He (God) had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, and had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven." You may not at once see the connection between this reference to the manna and the demand for a sign. The Jews termed Moses the former Redeemer, and the Messiah the latter Redeemer; and among their traditionary beliefs as to the

character of the Messiah's kingdom which presented such an obstacle to their receiving the teaching of Jesus respecting its true spiritual nature was one well known to the people. They believed that "the latter Redeemer, that is, the Messiah, shall be revealed amongst them, and whither will He lead them? Some say, Into the wilderness of Judah; others, Into the wilderness of Sihon and Og, and shall make manna descend for them." Now the wilderness of Sihon and Og, that is, of the Amorites and of Bashan, was on the east side of the Jordan, and extended even to where Jesus had fed the five thousand. So the sign the people looked for was, that if Jesus was the Messiah, He would lead them into the wilderness and feed them there with manna. Then Jesus answered them that the bread He spoke of was not the manna which Moses gave them from heaven, but the true bread which His Father gave them from heaven, and the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world. "Then said they unto Him, Lord, evermore give us this bread." They had at last some dim perception of His meaning, and were willing to follow Him if He would continue to feed them with this bread

from heaven, as they proceed to address Jesus as Lord.

I think you can hardly fail to be struck with the analogy which this discourse bears to that which Jesus held with the woman of Samaria. There He contrasts the natural water of the well with the water He can give, which springeth up into everlasting life, as here He contrasts the manna with the bread from heaven, and in both cases Christ Himself is meant. Then the impression is the same. The woman says, "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw," and when they say, "Lord, evermore give us this bread;" just as Jesus said to the woman, "I that speak unto thee am the Messiah," so here He says to the people, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." He then answers their demand that He should show them a sign that they should see and believe, by adding, "But I said unto you, Ye have seen Me, and believe not." He refers then to the verse, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek Me, not because ye saw miracles," or rather, as it should be rendered, "signs." They saw Him in His true character

when He miraculously fed them on the mountain, and yet they believed not. He then tells them, very solemnly, that their unbelief will not prevent His mission from being fulfilled, for that depends not on their will but on the will of God. Those whom the Father has given Him will come unto Him, and they shall never be cast out, for He, Jesus, came down from heaven, not to do His own will, but the will of God who sent Him, and it was the will of God that of those whom He had given Him He should lose none, but would raise them up at the last day ; and He concludes this part of His discourse with the plain meaning of the symbolic language He had used, " This is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on Him may have everlasting life, and I will raise Him up at the last day."

Among those who heard part at least of this discourse were some whom St. John calls the Jews, an expression by which he usually means the Scribes and Pharisees and the cultivated class among the Jews ; and they appear to have been on their way to the synagogue, where Jesus also went, for St. John says of that part of the discourse which follows, " These things said He

in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum" (ver. 59); and if we can fix the day of the week on which this synagogue service was held, it will also enable us to fix the day of the week when the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand took place, leading to a very interesting conclusion. You will readily see that it could not have been on the Jewish Sabbath, for boats had gone that morning across the sea from Tiberias, and those who had remained there in the hope of seeing Jesus recrossed the same morning, but such a journey, extending beyond a Sabbath-day's journey, would have been unlawful. Besides that on the Sabbath-day, there were services in the synagogues on the great festivals, and also on the second and fifth days of the week, that is, on Monday and Thursday, but if Jesus was present, and taught in the synagogue, this could have been no ordinary service. You may recollect that St. John in beginning his narrative says "that the Passover was nigh at hand," how near he does not say, but the Passover that year fell upon a Monday, when all those who could not go to Jerusalem would attend the synagogue, and if this was the Monday on which it fell it would make the service in the synagogue unusually solemn. Then

if it was on the second day of the week that Jesus delivered this discourse, it follows, of course, that it was on the first day of the week when He fed the five thousand. It was therefore on our Sunday that He said to His apostles, "Come ye yourselves apart and rest a while," and when He "went up into a mountain apart to pray,"—thus once more foreshadowing what the first day of the week was to be in His Church—a day of rest and of prayer. When after the law had been read in the synagogue Jesus began to teach, as was His wont, He was met by murmurs among the Jews who had heard Him say that He was the bread which came down from heaven. These Jews knew Jesus previously as the reputed son of Joseph, and believed that He was really his son. They knew His mother and His reputed father, and could not understand how He could tell them that He came down from heaven; but Jesus answered them, "Murmur not among yourselves," and tells them in substance, "You can only understand this if it is given you from God to know it. You cannot come to Me except the Father draw you, but if you come to Me in faith I will raise you up at the last day." This was the old difficulty with the Jews. They could receive Jesus as the Messiah,

but could not recognise Him as the Son of God, and He refers them to their own prophets, that in the days of the Messiah, in order to embrace the truth, they must be taught of God. You will find the passages referred to in the fifty-fourth chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah and the fifteenth verse : "And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord ; and great shall be the peace of thy children ;" and in the thirty-first chapter of the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and the thirty-third and thirty-fourth verses : "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. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, 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." If, therefore, they would be God's children, they must accept His teaching as from God and believe that He came from Him, for no man "hath seen the Father, save He which is of God, He hath seen the Father," and then He adds the solemn appeal to them, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life." Jesus then repeats to them what He had said to the people

on the shore, that He Himself was that bread of life ; that such an epithet could not be applied to manna, for those who ate it are dead ; but this bread cometh down from heaven that those who eat might not die ; that He is the living bread which came down from heaven, and that if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever. The time had now come, however, when Jesus was to advance a step further, and lay before the Jews the great truth that He was the Lamb of God who was to take away the sins of the world by offering Himself as a sacrifice, and therefore He adds : “ The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” The Jews therefore strove among themselves saying, “ How can this man give us his flesh to eat ? ” that is, a discussion arose among them as to the sense in which these words were to be understood. The idea of eating the flesh of a victim offered in sacrifice was quite familiar to the minds of the Jews, and presented in itself no obstacle to their conception of it. In the sin-offering, part of the flesh of the victim was eaten by the priests, and in the peace-offering by those who offered it. At that very time, too, the Paschal lambs were being slain in the temple at Jerusalem, and the flesh of the lambs eaten at a solemn

supper by the people, and they quite understood that, by the act of eating the flesh of the victim, they appropriated to themselves the benefits of the sacrifice. Some could not understand how the Messiah could be offered in sacrifice, in which sense alone His flesh could be given for the life of the world. Others, like Nicodemus in his conversation with Jesus, took the words in their literal sense, and as he, when Jesus said a person must be born again, answered, "How can that be? can a man enter his mother's womb and be born again?" so here they contented them by saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

I daresay you may find it difficult to keep before your minds the leading idea which underlies this discourse, and caused so much perplexity to the Jews, but it is the key to its meaning. Those Jews who heard Him believed in a coming Messiah, but they considered that he would be a mere man, though endowed with miraculous powers as an evidence of his mission, and that he would found a temporal kingdom. They were willing enough to recognise Jesus as that Messiah, and many, seeing His miracles, did so; but they could not understand how He could be the Son of God, and have come down from

heaven, believing, as they did, that He was the son of Joseph and Mary. The truth Jesus had now to press upon them was not only that He was the Son of God, and that His kingdom would be a spiritual one, but that He came down from heaven to offer Himself as a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, and to bestow eternal life on those who believed in Him. They understood that when they ate the flesh of a victim, they, by so doing, appropriated to themselves the benefit of the sacrifice. Eating the flesh of Jesus would imply that He too, though the Messiah and the Son of God, if He was so, would likewise be a sacrifice for sin, and that was an idea they could not grasp. The object of Jesus seems to have been to startle them into an apprehension of the truth, and to force them to apply their minds to grasp its meaning, when He says to them with great solemnity, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you." Here He uses the expression "Son of Man," a term applied by the Jews to the Messiah; but He adds still more plainly, "Whosoever eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

I think, in reading that part of this very striking discourse, you can hardly have failed to observe the gradually increasing meaning of the phrases, and how they have deepened in signification as He went on. There is first the bread from heaven. Then it is the true bread which is given by the Father. Then that the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven and giveth life to the world. Then that Jesus is the bread of life—the living bread which came down from heaven. Then that the bread He will give is His flesh, which He will give for the life of the world. Then that except they eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, they have no life in them. And, lastly “Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life.” Here, besides eating the flesh of the victim, the blood, instead of being sprinkled on the altar, as was the case with the Paschal lamb, was to be drunk by them as well, and the reason follows—because His “flesh is meat indeed, and His blood drink indeed;” or, as it may be more appropriately rendered, true meat and true drink, and the result is union with Jesus: “He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him.” And more than this: “As the living Father hath

sent Me, and I live by the Father ; so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me." Jesus does not here mean that life which He has with the Father as the Son of God, One with the Father in substance and in glory, but the life which He has with Him in His human nature as the sent of God, or the Messiah, and those who eat His flesh shall have the same relation to Him, and partake of the same life ; and then He closes this part of the discourse by again identifying Himself with the bread from heaven : " This is that bread which came down from heaven, not as your fathers did eat manna and are dead ; he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever."

Jesus seems now to have come out of the synagogue, and to have been immediately surrounded by many of His disciples, that is, of those who believed on Him as the Messiah and followed Him, in order to be further instructed by His teaching. They were sore perplexed by these dark sayings, and said among themselves, " This is an hard saying ; who can hear it ?" and hoped for some explanation. " When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples murmured at it, He said unto them, Doth this offend you ? What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before ?" The

meaning is, that if they were offended by the statement that Jesus came down from heaven, and gave His flesh as the bread from heaven, if they saw Him ascend up to heaven, would they not then understand that He "ascended up where He was before," and that it could not be His literal flesh and blood that they would eat and drink, for how could they eat the flesh of one that is in heaven? And then follows the explanation: "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." They must, if they would understand these hard sayings, endeavour to grasp their spiritual meaning. A carnal and physical eating of the flesh of a victim could profit nothing, but it is the spiritual eating and drinking of His flesh and blood which is meant, and that is life,—the appropriating to themselves by faith of the benefit of His atoning sacrifice, though it can hardly be doubted that there is also involved in these sayings a foreshadowing of that institution by which, after His death and passion, His disciples should show forth that death and their own faith in His atoning sacrifice, by spiritually eating His body and drinking His blood, in the symbols of the consecrated bread and wine.

Jesus having thus explained in what sense His words, that in order to have life they must eat His flesh and drink His blood, are to be taken, now proceeds to tell them what He meant by saying "that no man can come unto Me, except it were given unto him of my Father." Notwithstanding the signs and miracles they had seen, notwithstanding His repeated exposition of the spiritual character of His kingdom, and the spiritual sense in which His words must be taken, there were some who believed not, who could not grasp the truth, but stumbled at their carnal conceptions of the kingdom of the Messiah and the literal meaning of His words, and they could not attain to a perception of the truth unless they submitted their wills to God, and their minds to the teaching of God which would be revealed to them.

St. John then tells us that many of His disciples, that is, of those among the people who hitherto followed Him and hung upon His words, now drew back and walked no more with Him; and it must have been with a sad and sorrowing feeling that Jesus turned to the twelve apostles, those who had been for so many months in close communion with Him, and said, "Will ye also go away?" St. Peter, whose impulsive nature led him always to take the

lead, answered for all, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure, that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." The silence of the others showed that they accepted these words of Peter as a true representation of their feeling. They believed that the words Jesus had spoken were the words of eternal life, and that it was only by following Him and accepting implicitly His teaching they could attain to that life. The last sentence which Peter uttered, as we find it in our Authorised Version, does not give the true meaning of the original. It is correctly rendered in the Revised Version, "And we have believed and know that Thou art the Holy One of God." They believed this when they heard the acknowledgment made by the man which had the spirit of an unclean devil, in that same synagogue of Capernaum, when he said, "I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God." And they now felt this to be true; but Jesus knew that though all the twelve assented to the declaration of St. Peter, there was one who did not do so sincerely, who could not accept His words in their spiritual meaning, or realise that He was the Holy One of God, in the sense of being the Son of God as well

as the Messiah, who clung to the hope that He would establish a temporal kingdom, and adhered to Him from the expectation only of carnal advantage. From his lips such an utterance came in no better sense than it did from the spirit of an unclean devil. He therefore answered Peter by saying, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" St. John adds that "He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon," or more correctly, "Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he it was that should betray Him, being one of the twelve." Though he now assented to this declaration, Jesus saw that he had at last become a thorough hypocrite, and that his character would deteriorate till he became himself subject to the influence of the evil one, and under that influence would betray Him, and He does not hesitate to tell His apostles that they had among them one to whom He could apply the terrible epithet of "devil."

LESSON XXXIII.

JESUS AMONG THE GENTILES.

Read

ST. MARK vii. 1—37 ; viii. 1—26.

SOME days after the discourse which Jesus held in the synagogue at Capernaum, there came to that city the Pharisees and certain of the Scribes from Jerusalem. They were no doubt returning from the feast of the Passover, and may have arrived the following week. They seem to have heard of what had passed in the synagogue, and immediately watched the proceedings of Jesus and His disciples, in order to find some ground of accusation against them. Observing some of His disciples eating bread with defiled, that is to say unwashen, hands, they at once found fault, and called upon Jesus to say why His disciples walked not according to the tradition of the elders, but ate bread with unwashen hands.

Now you must not suppose that this was a

question of personal cleanliness. It did not relate to an ordinary washing of the hands, but to a ceremonial washing for the purpose of removing a legal defilement or uncleanness. This was required, not by the law of God, but by that oral or unwritten law which the Scribes and Pharisees superinduced upon it, and which they regarded as of greater weight. Thus it is said in their writings: "The words of the elders are weightier than the words of the prophets;" and again, "The words of the Scribes are more lovely than the words of the law, and more weighty than the words of the prophets." Now while Jesus during His life on earth fulfilled the written law of God, He opposed this unwritten law as in fact neutralising its precepts, and led His disciples to disregard it. I have already shown you some of its minute regulations regarding the Sabbath, which Jesus and His disciples transgressed without scruple; and it contained a number of equally minute directions regarding ceremonial washings. It prescribed two kinds of washing. One was plunging the hands in water up to the joining of the arm, and the other was pouring water upon them out of a vessel. It made a distinction between clean and unclean meats, clean and

unclean hands, and held that "clean food was polluted by unclean hands, and that the hands were polluted by unclean meats." In order to avoid this pollution there was prescribed a ceremonial washing of the hands, in one or other of the two ways, whenever food was touched, whether in eating or in bringing food from the market, and of the vessels which contained it; and this ceremonial washing, prescribed by the unwritten law or tradition of the elders, the disciples disregarded, as they did many other of its regulations, whether they conflicted with the sanctions of the law of God or resolved themselves into minute and outward observances, which could have no real value. Jesus answered this accusation by vindicating their disregard of such observances as these. He said to them: "Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. Howbeit, in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." You will find this passage, which bears so directly upon the attachment of the Pharisees to the unwritten law, in the twenty-ninth chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah and the thirteenth verse: "Wherefore the Lord

said, Forasmuch as this people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men;" and He applies this to them by saying, that laying aside the commandment of God, they hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups, and many other such things. He then shows them that they reject the commandment of God, that they may keep their own tradition, by a very pertinent illustration. Thus among the Ten Commandments is the injunction: "Honour thy father and thy mother;" and in the judgments which follow the issuing of the law in the Book of Exodus we read: "And he that curseth his father or his mother shall surely be put to death" (xxi. 17). The Scribes and Pharisees admitted that under this law a son was bound to nourish his father, but they held that by the unwritten law or tradition of the elders, if a son laid apart a sum of money for the purpose of assisting his parents, and then declared that sum as Corban, that is, devoted and dedicated to sacred use, he was not only free from all obligation to succour his parents, but was not permitted to do so, and thus they made the law

of God of none effect through their traditions. Having thus answered the Pharisees who accused His disciples of transgressing the traditions of the elders, by showing that these traditions were contrary to the law of God, Jesus called the people unto Him, and said, "Hearken unto Me every one of you and understand: There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things that come out of him, those are they that defile the man;" and He adds the same exhortation with which He accompanied the parables addressed to the people, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear," the meaning of which I have already explained to you. St. Matthew tells us that His disciples then came to Him and told Him that the Pharisees were much offended at what He said, but Jesus answered, "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up," that is, their doctrines, being not from God, would perish, for they were blind leaders of the blind, and as, if a blind man allowed himself to be led by another blind man both would probably fall into the ditch, so would it be with those ignorant people who trusted themselves to the guidance of the Pharisees.

Jesus then entered into His house, and His

disciples came to Him concerning this parable. According to St. Matthew, the question was put by St. Peter, who said, "Declare unto us this parable;" but Jesus was surprised that they had not perceived the meaning of so simple an illustration, and explained to them that ceremonial distinctions, as to food being clean or unclean, could not in any way affect a man's character or his thoughts and actions, and therefore could not really defile a man, but by the process of digestion affected the corporeal part of his nature only and passed through his body; while out of his heart proceeded evil thoughts and unclean passions which led to evil deeds, and it was by such evil things that a person was really defiled. He thus opposed moral to ceremonial considerations.

Jesus, finding Himself now exposed to the hostility of the Scribes and Pharisees in Galilee, and His discourse in the synagogue of Capernaum having led to many of His disciples among the people turning back from Him, seems to have thought it well to withdraw from Galilee for a season, and to visit for the first time the heathen nations which lay around it; thus acting on the warning He had repeatedly given the Jews, that, if they rejected the Gospel, it would be offered to the Gentiles. He goes first

through Upper Galilee to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. These were the principal cities of the Phœnicians, who inhabited a narrow tract of country along the shore of the Mediterranean, and between that sea and Galilee. They were descended from the Canaanites, the original inhabitants of the promised land, and you will see in the tenth chapter of the Book of Genesis and the fifteenth verse, when the names of the people descended from Canaan are given, that "he begat Sidon his first-born." These Phœnicians were of course heathens, and worshipped principally the god Baal and the goddess Ashtaroth or Astarte. Here Jesus was received into a house, and wished to remain there in private, but a woman of the country, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of Him, and came and fell at His feet. St. Matthew calls her a woman of Canaan, and says she "cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil," or demon (xv. 22). You may remember I showed you that such cases of demoniacal possession were connected with heathen idolatry, and mainly to be found in countries having a heathen population or a mixed population of heathens and Jews. St. Mark calls her "a Greek, a

Syrophœnician by nation." She was probably a woman of Greek origin, who had settled in Canaan or Phœnicia, and by calling Jesus "Lord" and "Son of David" she evidently believed that He was the Messiah of the Jews. You will not be surprised that Jesus not only found readily a home, probably in Sidon, but also a believer in the country, when you recollect that among the multitude who had followed Him to Mount Tabor, and came to hear Him when He delivered the Sermon in the Plain, and had witnessed His miracles of healing, were people from the sea-coast of Tyre and Sidon (St. Luke vi. 17). This woman then besought Him that He would cast forth the demon out of her daughter. St. Matthew tells us that at first "He answered her not a word." And when His disciples besought Him to send her away by granting her request, Jesus said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And when the woman came and worshipped Him, saying, "Lord, help me," He said, "Let the children first be filled : for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs. But she answered him, Yes, Lord : yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs." In order to understand this illustration, you must

recollect that the principal character in which Jesus came to the Jews was that of their promised Messiah, and that it was after their final rejection of Him that the Gospel was to be preached to the Gentiles; and He illustrates this by the ordinary custom observed at meals, when a slice of bread was used as a platter on which to put their food, and after the meal was over was thrown under the table for the dogs. It is this portion of bread that is here meant by the crumbs. The woman at once perceived the application of the illustration to the Jews as children and to the Gentiles as dogs, but answered that, even according to it, the dogs did share in the children's food. It is no wonder that Jesus said, as St. Matthew tells us, "O woman, great is thy faith;" and adds, as St. Mark says, "for this saying go thy way; the demon is gone out of thy daughter. And when she was come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed."

It is remarkable that His first convert among the heathens of Phoenicia was a woman, as it had been also among the mixed population of Samaria, and apparently the same motive had led Him to go there, for He appears to have soon after departed from the

coasts of Tyre and Sidon. How long Jesus remained after He had healed the woman's daughter we are not told. St. Mark merely adds, "And again departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, He came unto the Sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis." This region of Decapolis is situated, as I have already told you, to the south of the Sea of Galilee. We may therefore infer that Jesus proceeded along the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, that is, of Phœnicia, till He came to the plain of Esdraelon, which extends in the southern part of Galilee from the Mediterranean to the river Jordan, that He went through the plain near the border of Samaria, and crossed the Jordan some miles south of the Sea of Galilee, and entered the region of Decapolis. The word "again" does not apply to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, as He had not been there before, but to the region of Decapolis, where He had been teaching many months before, and where the people would be prepared to receive Him. Here He seems to have proceeded gradually north till He reached the mountains on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, and St. Matthew tells us that "great multitudes came unto Him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and

many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them; insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel." The expression, that "they glorified the God of Israel," shows us that this multitude was composed not of Jews, but of the heathen population of Decapolis, who thus recognised that Jesus, as a Jew, worked these miracles through the power of the God of the Jews. St. Mark specifies one case in particular, that they brought Him a man that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and besought Him to put His hand upon him. Jesus took him aside, put His fingers into his ears, and touched his tongue with the saliva of His mouth, and, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said, "Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And immediately his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain." This particular case seems to have been especially noticed, because the man was probably born with this infirmity, and in such cases, as you will see afterwards in the case of a man born blind, Jesus did not heal them merely by uttering a word, but by actual contact with the

parts affected, and by a process of manipulation, and in doing so expressed the compassion He felt for such evidences of the state in which mankind had been brought, by a sigh. St. Mark adds that the people were "beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: He maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak."

This great multitude had now been with Him for three days, and had exhausted the provisions which they had brought with them, having nothing to eat. Jesus said to His disciples that He "would not send them away fasting to their own houses, lest they faint by the way;" for many had come from a distance. His disciples answered Him, "From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?" Jesus however asked them what provisions were left, and they said, Seven loaves. "And He commanded the people to sit down on the ground." Both St. Matthew and St. Mark tell us that the people were about four thousand in number. Jesus "took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to His disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people." There were also a few small fishes, which He likewise blessed and set before them. "They all ate, and

were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full.”

You will see how closely this miracle resembles that of the feeding of the five thousand. It is therefore unnecessary for us to enter into any explanation of the mode in which this miracle was performed. But there are here, too, indications that the narrative is one of an eye-witness. There is, for instance, no mention of there being grass on the ground, for this event took place later in the season, when the verdure had disappeared, having been scorched and withered under the summer sun. And the wheat harvest being now past, the loaves are not said to be barley loaves. The only other differences between the two miracles are in the number of the people that were fed—in the fact that in the former case they were Jews from Galilee, while in the latter case they were heathens from Decapolis, and also that only seven baskets were used, which may have arisen either from their corresponding in number with the loaves, or that there were at the moment only seven of the apostles with Jesus. As soon as the multitude were fed, Jesus sent them away, and entering into a ship with His disciples, crossed the Sea of Galilee, and came into what St.

Mark calls "the parts of Dalmanuthá," but St. Matthew, "the coasts of Magdala." Now, as Magdala lay a little to the north of Tiberias, on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, this was evidently that part of its western shore which lay between Tiberias and the plain of Gennesareth. Here He was at once met by the Pharisees. The expression that the Pharisees "came forth" shows that they belonged to this district; and as St. Matthew joins the Sadducees with them, and St. Mark, in a subsequent verse, identifies those Sadducees with the party of Herod, it is probable that they came from Tiberias, which was Herod's chief seat in Galilee. They met Him with a demand that He should show them "a sign from heaven," some unmistakable communication from heaven to prove His mission from thence. But no sign could be greater than those which had been already exhibited to them if they would have attached to them their true significance. By these miracles of healing, which the Old Testament prophets had foretold that the Messiah would perform, He had given ample testimony that He was that Messiah. Such signs as those which had passed before them,—His casting out demons, raising from the dead, and, above all, investing His apostles with the

power of working miracles—powers which God alone could exercise—had given sufficient evidence that He was, as He asserted, the Son of God, and had come down from heaven. He therefore justly reproached them, as St. Matthew tells us, that while they could tell the signs of the weather; and, when the sky was red in the evening, they would predict fine weather, when it was red and lowering in the morning, foul weather; yet they could not discern the signs of the times, and see from His miracles that the days of the Messiah had come, and that He not only bore that character, but was indeed the Son of God. Accordingly He reproached them that they demanded a sign, because they were a wicked and adulterous generation; that is, they led an evil life, and perverted the doctrine of God, and except the signs they already had, no sign should be given them but that of the prophet Jonah. The great and culminating sign of His essential divinity was His resurrection from the dead; and St. Matthew explains in a previous chapter why this was called the sign of Jonah, “for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (xii. 40). It was by His rising from the

dead,—as St. Paul tells us, that He was “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. i. 4).

Jesus then left them, and entering into the ship again, departed to the other side. In the hurry of their departure the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and had only one loaf with them; so when they reached the other side, and Jesus warned them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod, or, as St. Matthew has it, “the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees,” they thought He alluded to literal leaven, and warned them not to take bread from them—for the Pharisees made distinctions as to what kind of leaven might be used or not,—and also found fault with them that they had not got it elsewhere. But Jesus reproached them with the carnal understanding of His words, of which they could not dispossess themselves. He reminded them that after the two miracles they had already seen, by which multitudes had been fed through the exercise of His Divine power, they surely could not suppose that the want of bread would cause Him any anxiety. Had they not seen five thousand so fully supplied by His

miraculous power with food, so that twelve baskets of fragments remained, and four thousand so sufficiently fed, that seven baskets remained? Had these wonderful exercises of miraculous power made no impression upon them? Had they not understood in one of the parables they had heard, that the Word of God was likened to leaven in its power of penetrating and influencing what it is brought in contact with? And could they not see that the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees was like leaven or dough that had undergone corruption, and would equally corrupt the dough with which it was mixed?

Jesus seems to have proceeded along the east side of the Sea of Galilee from the place where they landed, and round its north end till they came to Bethsaida,—not that Bethsaida-Julias which was on the east side of the Jordan, at its junction with the sea, which was a town, but that Bethsaida which was on the west side of the Jordan, and was a village some distance north of Capernaum. This was the Bethsaida to which Simon and Andrew had belonged before they moved to Capernaum, and with which Philip was still connected. Here they brought to Him a blind man, and besought Him to

touch him. Jesus took him by the hand and led him out of the village. He then put saliva on his eyes, as He had done on the ears and tongue of the deaf man with an impediment in his speech,—for the Jews believed that saliva was a cure for any defect in the senses,—and put His hands upon him, and asked him if he saw aught. His eyesight was so partially restored that he said he saw men as trees, walking; that is, he could distinguish what seemed to be figures, but was not sure that they were men. Jesus then omitted the saliva, and put His hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up; and he was restored, and saw every man clearly. The object of this difference between the two states was probably to show him that he owed his perfect sight to the power of Jesus alone.

Jesus then sent him back to his house, but forbade him to go into the village or tell any one there, so as to avoid at that time any demonstration on the part of the inhabitants.

Lesson XXXV.

JESUS AT THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES.

Read

ST. JOHN vii. 1—52 ; viii. 1—12.

JESUS appears now to have remained some time in Galilee, but whether at Bethsaida or at Capernaum we are not told, and we have no record from any of the Evangelists of what He said and did during that period, for St. John simply tells us that "He walked in Galilee, for He would not walk in Jewry," or Judea, "because the Jews sought to kill Him." The expression here made use of, "walked," implies that He continued His usual work in teaching and healing. St. John, however, gives us an indication of how long this period of unrecorded activity in Galilee lasted, for he adds, "Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand." This was the third of the three great feasts of the Jews, and it fell that year upon the 11th of October, so

that it was then six months after the discourse which St. John records as having taken place in the synagogue at Capernaum at the time of the Passover. You are aware that the three great feasts were the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles, and they corresponded with the periods of the Jewish harvest, but each had a symbolical meaning besides. The Passover feast lasted seven days ; it corresponded with the barley harvest, when the sheaf of barley or first-fruits of the harvest were waved before the Lord, and it celebrated the deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt. The Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, lasted one day only ; it corresponded with the wheat harvest, when two loaves of flour bread were presented in the temple, and it celebrated the giving of the law on Mount Sinai ; and the Feast of Tabernacles lasted seven days ; it was also called the feast of fig-gathering, and corresponded with the vintage, or conclusion of the harvest. It celebrated the forty years' wandering in the wilderness, when the children of Israel dwelt in tents, and the people commemorated it by dwelling in Jerusalem during the seven days in tents made of the boughs of trees on the roofs of their houses, and even in the streets.

By the law every male among the children of Israel was bound to attend each of the three great feasts at Jerusalem, but in practice this obligation was limited to persons residing within fifteen miles of the city, and those at a greater distance were only expected to attend one of the feasts. Now Jesus had not gone to Jerusalem to attend either the feast of the Passover or of Pentecost during that year, and His brethren came to Him and urged Him to go to this feast. St. John tells us that these brethren "did not believe in Him," that is, that He was the Messiah, and they seemed to be greatly puzzled how to regard Him. He had grown up among them as one of themselves, but His holy and spiritual character, even from infancy, must have marked Him out as separate in spirit from them, and they could not deny the wonderful works that He did. They urged Him, therefore, to show the same wonders in Judea, among the disciples He had there,—who probably were to be found in Judea, north of Jerusalem, where He had taught in His first year, and also cured the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath-day,—and to manifest Himself openly to the Jews, when, if they recognised Him as the Messiah, His brethren might be led to follow them in

the same belief. But Jesus said that His hour was not yet come. The time, though drawing near, had not yet arrived when He was to manifest Himself openly to the Jews at Jerusalem in such a manner, knowing, as He did, that He would be delivered up to the chief priests, and would be crucified and slain. He therefore said to them that their time was always ready, since they had not incurred the enmity of the world as He had, for the world hated Him, because He testified of it that its works are evil. By the world Jesus here means the worldly-minded Jews, the Scribes and Pharisees, with all their carnal conceptions of the law. And so He allowed them to go without Him. But although Jesus refused to go openly with His brethren to Jerusalem, so as to attract the attention of the Pharisees to His movements, and enable them to prepare for His reception, still less to manifest His miraculous power in Judea on this occasion, because the proper time for His openly manifesting Himself in Jerusalem as the Messiah had not yet come, still, as He had not been at Jerusalem during that year, either at the feast of the Passover or at Pentecost, He seems to have thought it right to go to one of the great feasts in each year. He began

His public ministry at the Passover. During the next two years He did not go to this feast, and He may have thought that after He had been solemnly proclaimed as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world, He could not with propriety Himself join in slaying and feeding upon the paschal lamb, which was His type; but in the second year He goes to the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, and this year to the Feast of Tabernacles. St. John tells us, however, that He went not up openly or publicly, but as it were in secret. He does not appear to have taken His disciples with Him, for when they accompany Him there is usually some mention of them in the course of the narrative which follows, but on this occasion they are not once alluded to; still on the other hand, St. John must have been with Him, for, as he himself tells us, he only declares what he personally saw and heard, and he is the only Evangelist who records what Jesus said and did on this occasion. There is reason to think, however, as you will see afterwards, that Jesus was accompanied on this occasion by the three apostles who were privileged to be more closely connected with Him, and were selected to witness His more private and solemn actions. These, as

you know, were Peter, James, and John. Neither are we told what route they took ; but it would be the one in which they would best avoid attracting observation. On their arrival in Jerusalem, they would, no doubt, quietly occupy one of the booths erected for the reception of those who came to the feast. The Jews evidently expected that Jesus would openly attend this feast, probably because they knew that He had not been present at either of the two others, and they sought Him in vain ; but the people were divided in opinion. "Some said, He is a good man : others said, Not so ; but He deceiveth the people," or, as it is in the Revised Version, "He leadeth the multitude astray." Here the Jews and the people are opposed to each other. By the Jews St. John means, as he usually does, the Pharisees or the cultivated class ; by the multitude, the common people, or people of the land ; and the Jews were aware that Jesus had, since He had been rejected by them, addressed Himself to the latter class ; but the people were restrained through fear of the Jews from expressing their feeling about Him openly. St. John then tells us that "about the midst of the feast, Jesus went up into the temple, and taught." The feast lasted seven

days: from the 11th to the 18th of October. The middle day of the feast was therefore the fourth day, or the 15th of October, and this day was in that year the Sabbath, which was no doubt the reason why Jesus "went up into the temple and taught." This word "taught" has hitherto been mainly used for His teaching in the synagogues. Now there was a synagogue in the temple, in the south-east corner of the Court of the Priests, and Jesus no doubt went to the synagogue service on the Sabbath, and taught after the reading of the prophet. We can even guess what the character of His teaching was, for the portion of the Prophets read in the synagogue during the Feast of Tabernacles was the same portion of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah which Jesus read in the synagogue at Nazareth, and, as on that occasion, He probably said, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears," and showed them that the prophecies regarding the Messiah were fulfilled in His person. The Jews, or cultivated people, were surprised at the character of His teaching, which seemed inconsistent with His outward circumstances, since they considered Him as belonging to the class of unlearned people, and said, "How know-

eth this man letters, having never learned?" But Jesus answered that His doctrine, or teaching, was not His own, but His who sent Him. His doctrine was not of Himself, but was the doctrine of God, and if any man will, or rather willeth, to do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine that it is of God. He thus vindicates His true character as a messenger to them from God, for if He was speaking of Himself He would be seeking His own glory, but if He was seeking the glory of God alone in what He said, that was an evidence that He was a true and righteous messenger.

Jesus then reminds them of what passed between them on the last occasion when He was at Jerusalem on the Feast of Pentecost. The Pharisees then resolved to kill Him, not only because He had broken the Sabbath, but had said that God was His Father, and He told them that He would not accuse them to the Father, for there was one that accused them, even Moses, in whom they trusted, so now He says, "Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill Me?" The people, who did not know that the Pharisees had resolved to kill Him, or rather a part of the people, answered Him, "Thou

hast a devil: who goeth about to kill Thee?" Jesus answered, "I have done one work, and ye all marvel." He here refers to His healing the impotent man at the Pool of Bethesda, to their surprise that He should have done so, and also told the man to carry his bed on the Sabbath; and He reminds them that Moses gave them the law of circumcision, by which every male child must be circumcised on the eighth day, and if the eighth day fell upon a Sabbath, they circumcised the child on the Sabbath, that the law might not be broken. If they disregarded their own rules for keeping the Sabbath in order that the child might be circumcised on the eighth day, ought they to be angry at Him because He made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath-day? They ought not thus to judge from the mere appearance of things, but judge righteous judgment.

Some of those who heard Him, and who were Jews of Jerusalem, were surprised at His speaking so boldly in the temple without interference, and said, "Can this be He whom they seek to kill?" Is it possible that the rulers admit that He is the Messiah? By the rulers are here meant the chief priests, who were Sadducees, but these people pro-

bably belonged to the sect of the Pharisees, for they say in opposition: "Howbeit we know this man whence He is"—He is a Jew from Nazareth in Galilee, where His family are well known; "but when Christ," that is, the Messiah, "cometh, no man knoweth whence He is." This expression refers to the traditionary belief of the Pharisees. They knew that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, but their tradition was that He would immediately after His appearance at Bethlehem disappear and be hid, and after some space of time would at length show Himself; only from what place, and at what time, no one knew. But though, from Jesus performing these miracles of healing which were prophesied of the Messiah, they might on that ground recognise this as a manifestation of the Messiah, yet on the other hand it could not be, for they knew whence He was. He came from Galilee, a quarter from which they did not expect the Messiah to arise. Jesus then cried in the temple, as He taught—that is, declared loudly in the synagogue where He was teaching, so that all might hear Him,—that they both knew Him, and whence He was, and yet, notwithstanding, He had not come of Himself, but He that sent Him is true—that is, bears

true testimony to Him whom they knew not; and Jesus adds emphatically that He knew Him, for He had come from Him, and He had sent Him. The people who heard Him were divided. Some tried to take Him, but did not succeed, for the time had not come when He was to surrender Himself to His enemies; but others believed that He must be the promised Messiah, for they said, and with truth, "When Christ," that is, the Messiah, "cometh, will He do more miracles than these which this man hath done?" By calling Him, notwithstanding, a man, they evidently did not go further than to believe He might be the Messiah, without admitting His claim to be the Son of God.

When the Pharisees heard what the people said about Him, they, along with the chief Priests, who were Sadducees, resolved to arrest Jesus. Accordingly they sent officers to take Him; but Jesus said to them that He must still be with them for a short time, and so could not now be taken, and when that time had elapsed He would return to Him who sent Him. If they did not accept Him while He was with them, the time would come when they would seek Him in vain, and would not find Him. And where He then

would be, thither they could not come, for He would be with God, whose testimony they were rejecting. The Jews, as usual, took this in the literal sense. They said, "Whither will He go, that we shall not find Him? will He go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?" or rather, as it is correctly translated in the Revised Version, "Will He go unto the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks?" Unless He meant this, they could not tell what He meant, and the idea that the Messiah could possibly go to the Gentiles, or that they could in any point of view be admitted to the kingdom of God, and share in its privileges with the Jews, was one so utterly abhorrent to them that they could not admit it as possible.

Jesus seems now to have left the temple without being arrested, but returned on the last day, which was called the "great day of the feast." This was the eighth day, or the day after the ordinary seven days of the feast, and was considered an especial feast or holy day. Thus in the Book of Leviticus the feast is thus described: "The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the Lord. On the

first day shall be an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work therein. Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord; on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you, and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein" (xxiii. 34-36). It was therefore regarded as a festival day by itself, and was kept as a Sabbath. On each of the seven days of the feast a libation of water was brought by the priests at the morning sacrifice from the Pool of Siloam in a golden vessel, and poured upon the altar while the following part of the twelfth chapter of Isaiah was sung: "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; He also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." The Jews considered that this ceremony was emblematical of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Thus we find in their writings: "Why is the name of it called, The drawing out of water? Because of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, according to what is said, With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." But on the eighth day no

such libation of water was brought. When Jesus appeared, therefore, He stood in a conspicuous place where all could see Him, and proclaimed in a loud voice, "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." Jesus here refers to the opening words of the fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah: "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." The expression which follows is almost the same as that which Jesus used to the woman of Samaria: "But whosoever drinketh of the water I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (iv. 14)—and which I have already explained to you. St. John explains here that Jesus "spake of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost," or the Spirit, "was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified." In addressing the people in these terms, Jesus had evidently in view that passage in the forty-fourth chapter of Isaiah where Jehovah says, "For I will pour water upon

him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground : I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring ;” and the passage He refers to as contained in the Scriptures is not to be found in any one isolated text, but is gathered from another chapter of Isaiah, the fifty-eighth and the eleventh verse, where it is said, “ And 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,” and from the fourteenth chapter of the prophet Zechariah and the eighth verse : “ And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem ; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea : in summer and in winter shall it be.” When St. John adds “ that the Spirit was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified,” he is referring to what Jesus said to His disciples not long before His death : “ It is expedient for you that I go away : for if I go not away, the Comforter”—that is, as He had previously said, “ even the Spirit of truth ”—“ will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you ” (xvi. 7), and also to the fact that it was not till the Pentecost after Jesus had ascended

to heaven that the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles.

The effect which this solemn declaration of Jesus produced upon the people who heard it was various, and caused division among them. Some said, "Of a truth this is the prophet," that is, the prophet which it was foretold to Moses would one day arise. Others went further than this, and expressed their belief that "He was the Christ," that is, the Messiah; but a third party objected that Christ, or the Messiah, was not to come out of Galilee, and that the scripture said that "the Messiah was to be of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was." I need not refer you to the passages in the Old Testament where this is said of the Messiah. You will find them in the eleventh chapter of Isaiah and first verse, in the twenty-third chapter of Jeremiah and third verse, and in the fifth chapter of Micah and second verse. We of course know that these prophecies were fulfilled in the person of Jesus, for He was of the house of David, and his descendant, in so far as regarded His human nature, from him, and was likewise born in Bethlehem. This last portion of the people would have taken Jesus and delivered Him to the officers sent

by the Sanhedrim, but we may infer from the expression, "but no man laid hands on Him," that the others, who partly believed on Him, prevented them, while, as we shall see, the officers themselves were so impressed by what they heard that they felt reluctant to execute their orders.

While Jesus was thus addressing the people, the chief priests and Pharisees had again met together. They are here mentioned separately, because the chief priests were Sadducees, and they formed together the Sanhedrim or Great Council of the Jews, and met in a large council-room in the temple, on the south side of the Court of the Priests. They evidently expected that Jesus would be brought before them; but when the officers they had sent at their previous meeting to arrest Him returned without Him, and they asked them why they had not brought Him, they answered, "Never man spake like this man," or, as it should be literally rendered, "Never man so spake." The power of the words of Jesus and the force of His character had not only so impressed some of the people as to render His arrest difficult, but had even had its effect upon the officers themselves, who felt they dared not touch Him. You will see that this is implied when the Pharisees

asked them if they also were deceived. They put it to them whether any of the rulers, that is, the Sadducees, or of the Pharisees, believed on him. Those who believed belonged not to the "disciples of the wise" but to the "people of the land," who knew not the law, and were beyond the pale of the true Israelites and the object of their contempt and dislike.

One of the Pharisees who was present, however, was not prepared thus summarily to dismiss the question. This was Nicodemus, with whom Jesus had held that remarkable discourse at night, after He had made His first public appearance in the temple, and in order to identify him St. John adds, "He that came to Jesus by night, being one of them." He urged upon the council that it was not according to the law to judge any man without hearing him and ascertaining the true facts concerning him. Nicodemus here probably refers to the law laid down by Moses in the first chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy: "And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him. Ye shall not respect persons in judgment, but ye shall hear the

small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's." This law he held they were transgressing, and therefore they would not be judging righteously; but they answered him with a sneer, as they did the officers, and said, "Art thou also of Galilee?" that is, Are you actuated by a local feeling in favour of this Galilean, or do you rank yourself among His followers, but "search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." This did not mean that none of the Old Testament prophets had come out of Galilee, for some of them were certainly Galileans, but only that if he would examine the books of the prophets, he would find no prophecy that any future prophet was to arise out of Galilee. That Nicodemus was really a believer in Christ is very probable from the part he afterwards took at the time of His burial, but the same timidity which made him come to Jesus secretly by night is very manifest in the hesitating and feeble manner in which he interposed, and in his being left without an answer when he was ranked by the Pharisees with the followers of Jesus from Galilee. It was to such timid believers, and to us too, if as Christians we show the same timidity in avowing and acting upon our principles

in the face of the world, that Jesus said, in His solemn address to the apostles recorded by St. Matthew, "Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (x. 32, 33).

The last verse of this chapter, and also the first eleven verses of the next chapter, you must omit, for although they contain an ancient and probably genuine tradition, they certainly form no part of the original Gospel of St. John.

Lesson XXXV.

JESUS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

Read

ST. JOHN viii. 12—59 ; ix. 1—38.

WITH the exception of the discourse which Jesus delivered in the synagogue at Capernaum at the time of the Passover, there is no more important discourse addressed to the Jews, or one more pregnant with solemn meaning, than that which concludes His teaching at the Feast of Tabernacles. It was delivered, St. John tells us, in the treasury, that is, in the Court of the Women, and here during the seven days of the Feast two great candelabra were erected, having four lamps each, which were lighted at night, illuminating the temple and casting their light over Jerusalem. They were emblematical of the pillar of light which guided the children of Israel in the wilderness ; but on this eighth day, when they were not lighted, Jesus ap-

pears, when night approached, to have entered the Court of the Women, and there proclaimed to the assembled people, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." These words will no doubt recall to your mind the expressions used by St. John in the opening sentences of his Gospel, when he says of the Word of God, "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." And again, "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world;" or, as it is correctly rendered in the Revised Version, "There was the true light, even the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world." Jesus was the light of the world, for He brought life and immortality to light.

Some of the Pharisees, who appear to have been brought by the report which their officers gave them of the power of the words of Jesus to hear Him, and judge for themselves of the impression produced by them, objected at once that He was bearing record of Himself, and that His record was not true. By this they meant that the testimony of a person regarding himself could not be received

as proving the truth of his statement ; according to their rule, " One witness is not to be believed in his own cause." But Jesus answered, that though He bare record of Himself yet His record was true, if they had respect to His Divine character, for He knew whence He came, and whither He went. He came from heaven, and would return to heaven ; but they doubted Him, because they did not believe that great truth. They judged carnally, and could not look beyond His appearance in the flesh ; but He judged no man, for He was not come for judgment, but to save sinners ; if He did judge, His judgment would be true, for He was one with the Father who sent Him. Jesus then, having thus based His testimony upon His relation to His Father, urges that even according to their own law they ought to receive His testimony, for by it two witnesses were sufficient to establish the truth of any fact. You will find this law in the nineteenth chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy and the fifteenth verse : " At the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established." He Himself was one witness, and the Father that sent Him was also witness for Him. He bore witness of Him when the voice from heaven came

at His baptism, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He bore witness of Him when Jesus by the finger of God cast out devils and raised persons from the dead; and He bore witness of Him in the power of His words to paralyse His enemies and to draw believers to Him. To this the Pharisees answered, "Where is thy Father?" They probably knew well enough who Jesus meant by His Father, but thought to place Him in difficulty by saying, If you appeal to the testimony of your Father, produce Him as your witness, and let us hear Him; but Jesus showed the futility of such a demand by saying that they in reality knew neither Him nor His Father. If they had known and believed that He was the Son of God, they would have known that God, who was His Father, could not be seen of men. St. John adds here, that though Jesus was speaking in the treasury, which was in the Court of the Women, no man laid hold on Him, for His hour was not yet come in which He was to be delivered up to the Jews; but He now proceeds to warn the Jews solemnly that He was to be but a short time with them, and unless they believed on Him, the time would come when they would seek Him in vain. He says, "I go my way,

and ye shall seek Me, and shall die in your sins : whither I go, ye cannot come." To this warning the Jews said, " Will He kill Himself? because He saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come." But Jesus tells them plainly that it was because of their carnal and earthly nature that they could not comprehend Him or His spiritual teaching. They were from beneath ; He was from above. They were of this world ; He was not of this world. And He adds, " I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins : for if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins." The expression in the original is simply " that I am," that is, that He had an eternal existence in Himself as possessing the Divine nature ; and the Jews no doubt understood that He was applying to Himself the following passage in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, " Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen ; that ye may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He : before Me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the Lord ; and besides Me there is no Saviour. I have declared, and have saved, and I have showed, when there was no strange god among you : therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord,

that I am God. Yea, before the day was, I am He; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand" (xl.iii. 10-13). This led to the Jews at once demanding, "Who art thou?" To which Jesus replied, "Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning." He here refers to the declaration He made before the Sanhedrim, at the Feast of Pentecost, in the previous year, when He explicitly told them that He was the Messiah and the Son of God, and when they sought to slay Him because He made Himself equal with God. Jesus adds, that notwithstanding their wilfully refusing to understand Him, He had yet many things to say to them, and to judge of them, for He that sent Him was true, and He must fulfil His mission by proclaiming, not only to them, but to the whole world, the message which God gave Him to deliver. The Jews still could not understand that by Him who sent Him He meant God the Father. Jesus places before them the true meaning of the warning He had given them: "Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am He," or literally, "that I am." It is the same expression which He had used before, and implies His eternal self-existence as the

Son of God. He adds, that He did nothing of Himself, but what He said was the message which God had given Him to deliver, and that He was not alone, for God was with Him. This expression will recall to you what Jesus said to Nicodemus, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life;" and I then referred you to another passage in this Gospel, where He says, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me. This He said, signifying what death He should die" (xii. 32, 33). He therefore by this expression refers to His crucifixion, when He should be declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. These solemn words came home to many of His hearers with power, for St. John adds, "As He spake these words, many believed on Him."

Jesus thus had now before Him two parties among the Jews: one, those who were now disposed to accept Him as the Messiah, and to admit the high claims He made as to His Divine nature; the other, those who were still hostile to Him and sought to destroy Him; and He adapts the rest of this discourse

to both parties, as is clearly shown by the tenor of it. He first of all turns to those whom He has impressed with the truth of the solemn words He had uttered, and endeavours to deepen and strengthen their faith, so as to convert what may be merely a hasty impulse into an abiding principle. He says to them, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." They took, however, this expression of being made free in its literal sense, as relating to personal freedom, and could not understand it, for they were Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man. They do not here refer to national freedom, for they were as a nation at that moment under subjection to the Romans; but they meant personal slavery, which, as children of Israel and descendants of Abraham, they had never been subjected to, for slavery had no existence among the native-born Israelites, and only strangers could be held in bondage among them. Then Jesus shows them the spiritual meaning of what He said. It was not physical but moral bondage He referred to, and He tells them emphatically, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant," or rather, the slave, "of

sin. The slave abideth not for ever in the house. He may be sold, or otherwise disposed of; but the son abideth ever." Therefore, as long as they were the slaves of sin, they were not true members of the household of God. "If then the Son shall make you free," that is, from the slavery of sin, "ye shall be free indeed." The rest of the discourse was addressed to the whole of the Jews who were hearing Him, and especially to those hostile to Him, as the tenor of it shows, and He has them in view when He proceeds, "I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill Me, because my word hath no place in you." Jesus admitted that they were, in an external sense, the descendants of Abraham, but the leading idea which runs through the sentences which follow is this, that they rested their claim to share in the covenant which God concluded with Abraham, and to inherit the promises which God made to him, entirely upon their natural descent from him, and upon their being circumcised, which was the sign of the covenant; and yet when the promise made to Abraham, that in his seed all nations should be blessed, was about to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ, they sought to kill that promised Seed. What Jesus told them was that which He

their deeds proved they were not the children of God, but of the devil. The Jews, in their rage at this conclusion, retorted upon Him, "Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?"

There was great enmity and much religious animosity between the Samaritans and the Jews, and it was among such mixed people as those of Samaria and Galilee that demoniacal possession was most common. The meaning therefore is, that Jesus could not be a true child of Israel to cast such a slur upon His brethren as to call them the children of the devil, but must be Himself a Samaritan and have a devil. Jesus did not reply to the first accusation, for the Jews knew well that no Samaritan could be admitted to the temple, or dare enter it, but replied, that He had not a devil, for He honoured God, who was His Father, and they dishonoured Him by the mere supposition; moreover, He sought not His own glory, for there is one, that is, the Father, who seeketh His glory, and judgeth if it is not rendered. He here reminds them of what He had said at the feast of Pentecost in the previous year: "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth

not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent Him" (v. 22, 23). Then He tells them solemnly, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying," or word, "he shall never see death;" but the Jews as usual took this saying in the carnal and literal sense, as applying to physical death, and said, "Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou Thyself?" Jesus does not deny the inference that He is greater than Abraham and the prophets, but answers that, if He alone honoured, or rather, as it is in the Revised Version, glorified Himself, His glory is nothing. It is His Father that glorifieth Him, and they, the Jews, said of that Father that He was their God, and yet they knew Him not in His true character and purposes towards His people; but Jesus knew Him, and if He delivered any message at variance with His will, He would be a liar like unto them; but He knew the mind of God, and must keep or regard His word. Then, to show that He was greater than Abraham, He adds, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and

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was glad." He believed the promise that in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed. He knew that that seed was the promised seed of the woman that should bruise the serpent's head, and that the day would come when that promise would be fulfilled by the appearance on earth of One who would bring blessing to the human race and redeem them from their sins; and he rejoiced in that anticipation of it as a certainty, as if it had been actually realised. But the Jews took the expression, that Abraham saw His day, in its literal sense, as if he and Jesus had actually met, and said, "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?" The reason that the Jews here specified fifty years was, because that was the age when the Levites ceased to exercise their functions, as you will see if you turn to the fourth chapter of the Book of Numbers and the third verse: "From thirty years old and upward, even until fifty years old, all that enter into the host, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation. This shall be the service of the sons of Kohath, in the tabernacle of the congregation, about the most holy things." What they meant was that Jesus was still in the prime of life, and how could He have seen Abraham? Jesus closes the

discussion by a solemn assertion of His own eternal self-existence as the Son of God. He "said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was"—that is, was born, or came into the world—"I am," for the verbs expressing "was" and "am" are here different. The one is a verb which literally means "to be born;" the other expresses simply "being," and here implies an existence which had no beginning. The Jews now understood rightly that He claimed an eternal existence, which was only consistent with a Divine nature, and as they still viewed Him as a mere man, this was blasphemy in their eyes, the penalty of which was stoning. They therefore took up stones to cast at Him. These they could not of course find in the Court of the Women, which was within the proper building of the temple, and must have gone for them to the Outer Court of the Gentiles; but meantime Jesus hid Himself among the people who remained, and were not hostile to Him, and when those who went returned, He had gone out of the temple. The concluding expression in the last verse of this chapter, "going through the midst of them, and so passed by," we must omit, as it is not in the original text.

Jesus appears to have remained in retirement in

Jerusalem till after the Sabbath. The eighth day of the Feast fell this year upon a Wednesday, so that after two days came the Sabbath, and as the journey from Jerusalem to Galilee was a three days' journey, He would not commence His return journey till after the Sabbath. During this interval, the Pharisees, probably in order to repress the tendency which a part of the Jews who heard Him had shown to believe in Him, came to the resolution that "if any man did confess that He was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue" (ix. 22), that is, be excommunicated. On the Sabbath-day, as Jesus was passing by, with those of His disciples who were with Him, He saw a man who had been blind from his birth, a fact which was probably well known in the town. His disciples asked Him, saying, "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" It was a common opinion among the Jews that any physical infirmity of this kind was the result of sin, either on the part of the sufferer or of his parents, which was visited on the child; and when the infirmity had existed from birth, they even thought it possible that an unborn child might sin in its mother's womb. The question put to Jesus arose out of this belief;

but Jesus answered that they ought not to impute this man's infirmity to any such cause. It was enough for them that he was there in order that the works of God should be made manifest in him; since Jesus must work the works of God while it was day, for the night cometh, when no man can work. Men only work during the day, and not during the night; so by day here Jesus means the period during which He was in the world, and must fulfil His mission, and therefore He adds, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Jesus, then, in order to make the miracle of giving sight to one born blind more evident, anoints the eyes of the man with clay mixed with saliva, and tells him to go and wash them in the Pool of Siloam, whence the water was taken that was poured out at the altar during the Feast of Tabernacles. The object of Jesus in taking this mode of curing him was probably once more to test the absurdity of the minute regulations for keeping the Sabbath required by their oral law, for such a proceeding was forbidden by their law, and yet they could not avoid admitting the reality of the miracle worked through it. The blind man did as he was directed, and returned seeing. Those who had long

known him as a blind man who sat begging, were surprised to meet him in the possession of his sight, and some even doubted if he were the same man. When he recounted to them how through the act of Jesus he had received his sight, they asked where Jesus was, no doubt that they might accuse Him to the Pharisees of a breach of their observance of the Sabbath; but when the man could not tell them, they brought him before the synagogue council of the Pharisees, who judged in religious matters. When he repeated his story to them, the Pharisees were divided in opinion. Some said, "This man is not of God, because He keepeth not the Sabbath-day; but others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles?" The blind man himself, however, declared that Jesus must be at least a prophet. It then occurred to the Pharisees that he might be an impostor, and that no such miracle had been performed, but on sending for his parents, they assured them that he was their son, and had been born blind. They however declined to admit that they knew how he had received his sight, through fear of the Jews, and referred them to their son. The man was again sent for, and the Pharisees told him to give God the praise for having unexpectedly re-

ceived his sight, but not to attribute it to a man who was a sinner. The man however said, that whether He was a sinner or not, it was very certain that He had opened his eyes; and being once more called upon to relate how Jesus had opened his eyes, he asked them why they wished to hear it a second time; were they now inclined to be His disciples? that is, to believe on Him. Then they reviled him, and said that he was His disciple, but they were Moses' disciples. They knew that God had revealed His will to Moses, but they knew not whence this man was. They could not deny the miracle, but denied that Jesus could have worked it through the power of God, and thus laid themselves open to the obvious retort of the man who had been born blind. He said, "Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth His will, him He heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that one who was a mere man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, He could do nothing." The Pharisees, finding that they could extract nothing from him that would justify their refusing to acknowledge the miracle, and that every question brought the man more and more to confess

and believe in Jesus, resolved to enforce against him their resolution to excommunicate every one suspected of being His disciple. They said therefore to him, "Thou wast altogether born in sins," that is, we believe your blindness was caused by your own sin as an unborn child, "and dost thou teach us?" And they cast him out of the synagogue.

When Jesus heard of this He sought him out, and when He had found him, said unto him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" The man answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him?" Jesus said, "Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee." This will recall to you what passed in an earlier part of His ministry, between Jesus and the woman of Samaria, when she said, "I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when He is come, He will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am He."

Thus while Jesus observed a certain reticence in dealing with the Pharisees who were hostile to Him, and obstinately resisted His truth, He never failed to announce His true character plainly to any awakened soul prepared to receive it.

By using the term "Lord" the man showed his

belief that Jesus came from God, and some conviction of His Divine nature dawned upon him. There is something very striking in the few words which follow, and the vast importance of what they record: "And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped Him," that is, gave Him the external act of worship due to God.

Lesson XXVI.

JESUS IS TRANSFIGURED.

Read

ST. MATTHEW xvi. 13—33.

ST. MARK viii. 34—38 ; ix. 1—13.

THE time was now approaching when Jesus was to close this chief period of His ministry, and to submit Himself to the great end of His appearance on earth—His death and passion at Jerusalem ; but before doing so He had some objects still to accomplish. He had once more, and for the last time, to visit Galilee. He had to confirm the faith of His disciples, and to show Himself to them in His glory as the Son of God, and He had to preach the kingdom of God to the Samaritans, who, you may recollect, were, along with the Gentiles, not included in the mission of the apostles. Those Gentiles who surrounded the region of Galilee He had Himself visited, but the Samaritans were not to be left with-

out having the Gospel offered to them before He concluded His teaching on earth. He appears to have left Jerusalem after the Feast of Tabernacles as quietly as He came to it, and to have proceeded along the east bank of the Jordan, and the eastern coast of the Sea of Galilee, till He reached what is here called the coasts of Cæsarea-Philippi.

This was a town some distance north of the Sea of Galilee, close to the sources of the Jordan, and not far from the great mountain of Hermon. It was within the tetrarchy of Philip, the brother of Herod Antipas, by whom the city—originally founded by Herod the Great, and named Cæsarea in honour of the Emperor Augustus—was enlarged, and named Cæsarea-Philippi, to distinguish it from another Cæsarea on the coast of the Mediterranean. He thus, after passing through Peræa, would continue His journey through the country subject to that prince, from whom He had not to fear any molestation. Here He asked His disciples, saying, “Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” By using here the title of the “Son of Man,” which the Jews generally understood from the prophecy of Daniel (vii. 13) to mean the Messiah, He did not mean to ask if they believed Him to be the Messiah,

but, if they did not believe Him to be actually the Messiah, who they thought Him to be? They tell Him that some thought John the Baptist was the Messiah, and that He was John the Baptist who had risen from the dead. This was the suggestion, as you may recollect, of Herod. Some thought He was the prophet Elijah, and others thought He was Jeremiah, or some other prophet who had re-appeared in His person; for it was a current belief among the Jews that, at the coming of the Messiah, the prophets were to rise again. He then asked them, "But whom say ye that I am?" and Simon Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ"—that is, the Messiah—"the Son of the living God." The disciples had long believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but their difficulty was to realise that one whom they knew as a man, and subject to all the conditions of human nature, and with whom they were in daily intercourse, could yet be the Son of God who came down from heaven. After the discourse in the synagogue at Capernaum, Peter stated his belief that He was the Holy One of God. He had recently heard the discourse in which Jesus declared His eternal existence before Abraham was born, and he had witnessed the scene with the man who was

born blind and had received his sight, in which Jesus announced Himself to him as the Son of God, and had been worshipped by him, and so he had, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, at length reached the full conviction that Jesus was not only the Christ, or the Messiah, but in truth the Son of the living God. Then Jesus said to him solemnly, "Blessed art thou, Simon, son of Jona! for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." He had not attained this faith through mere human teaching, for, as Jesus said at Capernaum, "No man can come unto Me, except the Father, which hath sent Me, draw him. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me;" and as Peter had said to Jesus, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," so Jesus says to Peter, "And I say also unto *thee*, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,"—very pregnant words, the meaning of which you must rightly understand, and I shall endeavour to give you the sense of them as they are now understood by the best expositors. The word here translated Peter is "petros," a stone, and the word translated "rock"

is a different form of the same word. It is "petra." The one means a single stone; the other the rock or mass of stones from which it is hewn. Thus Isaiah said: "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn" (li. 1). The first word had been given to Peter when he was chosen an apostle, and the meaning is that he was rightly called Petros, a stone, as by his confession he showed himself a true stone in the living temple, which, as you know, was the body of Christ. Then the other word, Rock, is in the Old Testament a designation given to Jehovah alone. I may note a few passages for you, which you can refer to: "He is the Rock" (Deut. xxxii. 4). "In the Lord Jehovah is the Rock of ages" (Isa. xxvi. 4). "God only is my rock;" He is "the rock of our salvation" (Ps. lxii. 2; xcvi. 1). Now, when Jesus says, "upon *this* Rock," He appropriates the epithet, in a spiritual sense, to Himself, just as He did the temple of God, when, at His first appearance in the temple, He said, "Destroy *this* temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews understood Him to mean the actual temple in which He then was. St. John, however, adds, "But He spake of the temple of His body." Jesus, in thus stating that He

would build His Church upon Himself as the Rock, probably had the passage of the prophet Isaiah in view, where it is written: "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried store, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation" (xxviii. 16); and St. Peter himself applies this to Jesus when he says, referring to Him in his first Epistle, "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house," etc.; and he quotes the same passage from Isaiah, and likewise another passage from the eighth chapter and fourteenth verse, where He is said to be "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence even to them which stumble at the Word, being disobedient" (ii. 4-8). The word here translated "stone" is not "petros," but "lithos." The word "rock" here applied to Christ is, however, the same word used by Jesus to Peter. It is "petra."

This, too, is the first time that the word "Church" occurs in the New Testament. The original word is "Ecclesia," which simply means an assembly. Hitherto the expression used for the institution Jesus came to establish on earth was the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God, by which the

Jews understood the reign of the Messiah on earth, the privileges of which were to be confined to them; but now it was to assume its true character of an assembly of the true Israelites, in which the unbelieving Jews had no share, and to which believing Gentiles were to be freely admitted. The word translated "hell" in our Authorised Version is "Hades," the place of departed spirits. It is represented as an edifice with gates into which the Church would not enter; that is, would always exist on earth. It is with reference to this conception of it that Jesus is said in the Book of Revelation to have "the keys of death and of Hades" (i. 18). In order to accomplish this transformation, Jesus promises to give Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven—not, observe, of heaven, but of the kingdom of heaven. It too is represented as an edifice with gates, the keys of which are given to Peter, so that the Church might possess it; but it also implies a power of regulating the laws of the Church. Those who exercised this function among the Jews were the Scribes, or, as they are often termed, the lawyers. They were the authorised interpreters of the oral or traditional laws which had been superinduced upon the law of Moses; and in this capacity they

were held by the Jews to possess the key of the kingdom. Thus if you will turn to St. Matthew xxiii. 13, you will see that Jesus denounced them for their abuse of this power. "But woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." Now compare this with the parallel passage in St. Luke: "Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye enter not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered." Peter having then declared the great truth that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, occupies the place of a Scribe in the kingdom which Jesus came to establish, and has the key of knowledge intrusted to him, thus fulfilling what Jesus had Himself appointed for the twelve, when, after they had heard the parable of the Kingdom, He said unto them: "Have ye understood all these things?" and they said, "Yea, Lord. Then said He unto them, Therefore every Scribe, which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old" (xiii. 52).

Then in order to enable him to fulfil this duty, Jesus gives him this authority: "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven;" and this power, as you will see by referring to the eighteenth chapter and eighteenth verse, was afterwards conferred upon the whole apostles. It refers to things, not to persons; for it is not "whosoever," but "whatsoever thou shalt bind," etc. This, too, was one of the privileges claimed by the Scribes or Rabbis, and the expression of binding and loosing was quite familiar to the Jews in connection with their interpretation of the traditionary law of the elders. It was the mode by which they expressed their decision as to what was prohibited and what was permitted by that law. I may give you a few instances, among many, of the use of this expression among the Jews, and I shall take them in connection with the traditionary law of the Sabbath. There were, as I think I have told you before, two great schools among the Rabbis, who differed in their interpretation of this law. These were the school of Hillel and the school of Shammai. Now take these examples:—

"In Judea they did works on the Passover eve

till noon, but in Galilee not. But that which the school of Shammai binds until the night, the school of Hillel looseth until the rising of the sun."

"They do not send letters by a heathen on the eve of the Sabbath, no, nor on the fifth day of the week. Yea, the school of Shammai binds it even on the fourth day. The school of Hillel looseth it."

"To them that bathe in the hot baths on the Sabbath-day, they bind washing, but they loose sweating."

"Women may not look into a looking-glass on the Sabbath-day, if it be fixed to a wall. Rabbi loosed it, but the wise men bound it."

"Concerning gathering wood on a feast-day, scattered about a field: the school of Shammai binds it, the school of Hillel looseth it."

"Concerning the moving of empty vessels on the Sabbath-day, of the filling of which there is no intention: the school of Shammai binds it, the school of Hillel looseth it."

These are merely a few instances among many. You will no doubt be struck with the extremely trivial nature of these distinctions, but that is characteristic of the Scribes, and they illustrate the use of the expression. What the one school declares

to be binding, or prohibits, the other school looses, or permits; and we can hardly avoid the conclusion that the power given to the apostles was one of declaring what portions of the Jewish law were to remain in force in the Christian Church, and what to be held as abrogated. It was, in fact, a legislative function, and by the gift of the keys of the kingdom in heaven, whatever they declared on earth would be ratified in heaven.

I think, perhaps, two instances may occur to you in which the apostles eventually exercised this power. You know that every child of a true Israelite was admitted to the covenant which Jehovah made with Abraham by the rite of circumcision, of which it was the seal, and which was performed on the eighth day after their birth, but for this rite that of baptism was substituted in the Christian Church. The apostles may thus be said to have loosed circumcision, and bound baptism.

The other instance relates to the Sabbath. The Jews kept this day on the seventh day of the week, or Saturday; but this is not directly enjoined in the Fourth Commandment, for it does not say, "The first six days of the week thou shalt labour, and rest on the seventh day of the week;" but, "Six

days shalt thou labour, and do all thou hast to do, and rest on the seventh day;" now Saturday was appointed as a Sabbath for the Jews even before the giving of the law, as you will see by referring to the sixteenth chapter of the Book of Exodus, and in the thirty-first chapter and the seventeenth verse, it was so fixed to be a sign between the Lord and the children of Israel. When therefore the first day of the week came to be observed in the Christian Church as the holy day in commemoration of the resurrection of our Lord, the apostles may be said to have loosed the Sabbath from the seventh day of the week, and bound it on the first day of the week.

"From that day forth," says St. Matthew, "began Jesus to show unto His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." He thus presented to them the full sense in which He was the Rock on which the Church was to be built, not only as the Son of the living God, but as a crucified and risen Saviour; but this was a sense which they could not yet grasp, and it proved a rock of offence to Peter. He could not endure the idea that one whom He believed to be the Son of the living God

could suffer many things, and be killed by the hands of man, and remonstrated with Jesus, saying, "Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee." But Jesus rebuked him in the same words with which He had repelled Satan, when he tempted him by showing Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and saying, "All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them, if thou wilt therefore worship me." Jesus then said to him, "Get thee behind Me, Satan, for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shall thou serve" (Luke iv. 8). So now He turned to Peter and said, "Get thee behind Me, Satan; thou art an offence to Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Peter was no doubt acquainted with the history of the temptation in the wilderness, and thus understood the application of these words to himself. He would feel that if, when Jesus announced to the disciples that He must suffer many things at Jerusalem, and be killed, in order to fulfil the will of God, he endeavoured on merely carnal grounds to dissuade Him, he was tempting Him in precisely the same spirit as Satan did, by urging Him on purely human motives to shrink from the great work of redemption He

came into the world to accomplish. These words too, as applied to Peter, would be doubly significant, for they were uttered under the shadow of that very "exceeding high mountain" which was associated with this particular temptation. Peter, who had just been called a stone, from his confession of Christ's Divinity, was now told, that by this relapse into a carnal state of mind he became a stone of stumbling and an offence to Christ; and this was probably in his mind in those expressions I have quoted to you from his first Epistle.

Hitherto Jesus appears to have been alone with His disciples, but there is evidently here a break in the narrative, and when it is resumed, St. Mark tells us that He called the people unto Him with His disciples, from which we may infer that He had now entered into the city of Caesarea-Philippi, and had drawn upon Himself the attention of its inhabitants. The address which He now makes to them springs naturally out of what went before, and is coloured by the thoughts and feelings to which it was calculated to give rise. He says unto them: "Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." The allusion here is to death by crucifixion, when the

sufferer had to bear the cross on which he was to suffer to the place of punishment, and as Christ would have to bear His cross, so must a true disciple follow bearing his ; but St. Paul gives us the spiritual meaning of which it is emblematical, when he says, " And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts," or as it is more correctly rendered in the Revised Version, " And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof. If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk " (Gal. v. 24). Then He places in contrast, first, temporal life and eternal life. Whosoever will deny Christ to save his life here shall lose it hereafter in eternity, but whosoever will surrender his temporal life here for the sake of Christ and the Gospel shall save his eternal life hereafter. Then, secondly, He places in contrast the world and the soul ;—in the one scale the world with all its advantages, pleasures, and ambitions, and in the other the human soul with its immortal life and eternal destinies, and asks what advantage it would be for any one to gain the whole world here in this short and transitory life, and peril the salvation of his own soul during an eternal existence, or what could compensate any man for the

loss of his immortal soul. Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of Jesus and of His words, that is, in the humiliation which He had told them lay before Him, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He cometh in the glory of His Father, with the holy angels, as was prophesied of Him by Daniel the prophet (vii. 13).

It is difficult to avoid the impression that in these solemn words Jesus was making one more powerful appeal to the conscience of that one among His apostles whose soul was in deadly peril from an over-anxiety to grasp a worldly advantage out of his position as a follower of Christ.

Jesus, however, appears to have felt that in announcing His impending sufferings and death on the cross at the hands of man, He was making a great demand on the faith of His disciples, and that they well might feel staggered at the idea of One whom they now fully believed to be not only the Messiah but the eternal Son of God, who came down from heaven, being subjected to such a fate, and to have resolved to confirm their faith by showing His essential glory as the Son of God to chosen witnesses among them. He therefore tells them that some of them standing before Him should even in this life

see that glory. How that was accomplished is told by three of the Evangelists, but I take the narrative from St. Mark, as he derived his information directly from one of the eye-witnesses.

He tells us that after six days Jesus took Peter and James and John, those three of the apostles whom He always selected to be witnesses of His more private life, and led them up into a high mountain apart by themselves. It is obvious, from the previous narrative, that the mountain referred to was in that part of the country termed the coasts of Cæsarea-Philippi, and not far from the town of that name, and the only mountain which answers that description is the lofty ridge of Hermon, rising over the town on the north. It is the highest mountain in Palestine, and its summit is covered with eternal snow. Jesus and the three apostles probably ascended to the top of one of its southern peaks, and there, while, as St. Luke tells us, He was praying, He "was transfigured before them, and His face did shine as the sun" (Matt. xvii. 2). "His raiment became shining, white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them, and there appeared unto them Elias with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus." The words "as snow" are not in the oldest MSS., but

if this account was derived from St. Peter, he would naturally compare the whiteness of His raiment to the snow which was before his eyes on the higher peaks of the mountain. Moses here represents the law, and Elijah the prophets, and might therefore appropriately by their presence bear witness that Jesus was the Messiah of whom both had prophesied; but they were also the two who are recorded in the Old Testament as having been in the presence of God, and, like Jesus, fasted under the influence of that Presence forty days and forty nights. St. Luke adds a very significant fact when he tells us, that they not only bore witness by their presence to Jesus being the Messiah, but also to the sufferings and death He had announced to the disciples as awaiting Him, for he says that "they appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem." Peter seems to have been overwhelmed by the sight, and his first impulse was that it should be perpetuated, and that they should not descend again into everyday life below, but remain there till the kingdom of God was fully come. He therefore, under this impulse, said, "Master, it is good for us to be here: let us make three tabernacles," that is, tents or booths; "one for

Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias." But St. Mark adds, "He wist not what to say ; for they were sore afraid." While he spoke, however, a still greater testimony was to be given them, for "there was a cloud that overshadowed them : and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son : hear Him." St. Matthew tells us that it was a bright cloud. It was one well known to the Jews as the traditionary Shekinah, or glory of God, which had filled the tabernacle in the wilderness ; and they must have recognised this voice as the voice of God, which was wont to proceed from it. St. Matthew adds, that when they heard it, they fell on their faces, and were sore afraid ; and that Jesus came and touched them, and said, "Arise, and be not afraid." "And suddenly," says St. Mark, "when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves." They then descended from the mountain, and as they came down Jesus "charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of Man were risen from the dead." It was not till after His resurrection that the true character of Jesus as the Son of God and the redemption of the world by Him was to be preached, and this could be given as

an evidence ; and St. Peter himself alludes to this when he says, " For we have not followed cunningly-devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount " (2 Pet. i. 16-18).

The disciples must now have felt themselves constrained to accept the statement that Jesus was to suffer death at Jerusalem, though the Messiah and the Son of God, a fact of which they could no longer have any doubt after receiving such a revelation of His essential glory ; but they were still unable to realise that the event which was to reconcile these two apparently inconsistent statements was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and they reasoned with themselves as to its meaning. They felt that what they had witnessed might indeed be the coming of the kingdom of God with power, but then they were taught by the Scribes that Elias, or Elijah, would precede the coming of Christ. Jesus answered

“that Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things;”—according to the prophecy of Malachi, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers” (iv. 5); but it was also written of the Son of Man in the prophecies, “That He must suffer many things, and be set at nought.” He refers here more especially to the twenty-second Psalm and to the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, and then says, “That Elijah should indeed come first, and restore all things,” and He explains to them in what sense it could be said that Elijah had indeed preceded Him, and that the Jews had done unto him whatsoever they listed.

“Then,” St. Matthew adds, “the disciples understood that He spake to them of John the Baptist,” of whom, you may recollect, it was said by the angel when he announced his birth, “And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke i. 16, 17).

Lesson XXVII.

JESUS TEACHES HUMILITY, TOLERATION, AND LOVE.

Read

ST. MARK ix. 14—50. ST. MATTHEW xviii. 10—35.

JESUS was now to return to Capernaum for the last time before finally leaving Galilee and submitting Himself to the will of the Jews.

When Jesus rejoined the rest of His disciples, who had probably remained in Cæsarea-Philippi, which, St. Luke tells us, was on the following day, He found a great crowd about them, and the Scribes questioning with them. St. Mark alone tells us that “straightway all the people, when they beheld Him, were greatly amazed, and, running to Him, saluted Him;” and here again we have an indication that it is the record of an eye-witness, for it is probable that Jesus bore in the expression of His face, and in His whole bearing and appearance, the impress of that glory which He had manifested on

the Mount of Transfiguration. If you will refer to the thirty-fourth chapter of the Book of Exodus and the thirtieth verse, you will see that the same effect was produced on Moses after he had been on the mount in the presence of God. "And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone: and they were afraid to come nigh him." Jesus then asked the Scribes what they questioned or disputed with the disciples; and then one of the multitude came forward and said, "Master, I have brought unto Thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; and wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him; and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to Thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not." This description shows very plainly the features of epilepsy, which was then an incurable complaint. St. Matthew calls him a lunatic, so that he combined insanity with it; and both were caused by the possession of the boy by an evil spirit. The impression which the character of the whole narrative is calculated to produce, is that the boy was not brought to the disciples with any expectation that they could cure him, but that the rumour of their casting out devils,

when on their mission as apostles in Galilee, had reached the Scribes here, that they brought the most difficult case they could find to test their power, and now announced with triumph that they had failed. It is quite in accordance with this that Jesus says, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? Bring him unto Me." The boy, when brought, had a fit before Him, which led the father to say, still doubtingly, "If Thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us." Jesus said unto him, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." Conviction seems to have, at the aspect of Jesus, at once flashed on the father, and he cried out, and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief."

The result was that the unclean spirit was cast out of him, and the boy was restored to health. When Jesus came into the house they occupied in the town, the disciples asked Him privately, "Why could not we cast him out?" And Jesus said unto them, "This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting." So it is in the Authorised Version; but this word "fasting" is not in the original, and it is rightly rendered in the Revised Version,

“This kind can come out by nothing, save by prayer.” St. Matthew gives as the reason, “Because of your unbelief,” or rather, “Because of your little faith.” The disciples were over-confident of their power to cast devils out in all cases, and may have approached this task in a spirit of presumption; whereas the incurable nature of the complaint ought to have taught them that they should have proceeded after much prayer, and in strong faith.

St. Mark then tells us that they departed, or went forth from thence, and passed through Galilee on their way to Capernaum privately, as “He would not that any man should know.” One object in journeying thus privately with them, when He entered Galilee, was that He once more announced to His disciples the fate that awaited Him at Jerusalem. He said: “The Son of Man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill Him; and after that He is killed, He shall rise the third day.” But this they could not understand. They probably now realised that Jesus, though the Messiah and the Son of God, was nevertheless to suffer, and be slain. That He should rise again at the general resurrection they could well believe, but they could not comprehend His rising three days after

He had died, and were afraid to ask further what it meant.

When they reached Capernaum, Peter seems to have gone before to the house to prepare for Him, for St. Matthew tells us he was there met by the collector of the tribute-money, who said to him, "Doth not your Master pay tribute?" to which Peter assented. The word here translated tribute is *didrachma*, and means the half-shekel that was paid by every Jew to the temple. This was originally a voluntary offering, but became eventually an annual tax, and was usually paid at Passover. But Jesus had not gone with His disciples to the last Passover, and had been little at Capernaum since. It was now demanded from Him, as a householder of Capernaum, having resided there for at least twelve months, which made Him liable as such. When Jesus came to the house, He anticipated Peter by saying, "What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter answered, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free." The word here translated custom or tribute is different from that of *didrachma* used in the previous verse, and is the

word ordinarily used for a tax or tribute in the proper sense of the term; and by strangers are here meant the inhabitants of other countries that have become subject or tributary to a kingdom. The meaning of the passage is, that the half-shekel is an offering by the children of Israel for the maintenance of the worship of God, and by making it an annual tax it ceases to be an offering, and becomes a tribute which should not be imposed upon the children of the land, still less upon One who was Himself the Son of God. Still Jesus resolved to pay it in order not to give unnecessary offence, but did not think it right to take it from their common purse. He therefore told Peter to cast his hook into the Sea of Galilee, and he would find a piece of money in the first fish he caught, with which he should pay the half-shekel due for Jesus and for himself, leaving the other disciples to pay in the towns to which they belonged.

When the rest of the disciples came to the house, St. Matthew tells us, they asked Jesus, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" upon which Jesus asked them in return, "What was it ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had dis-

puted among themselves who should be the greatest." This dispute, or reasoning, as St. Luke calls it, arose naturally out of what they had recently heard and witnessed. It had brought home to them the reality of the kingdom of God and the persuasion that it would shortly be manifested in its power; but how little they yet understood its spiritual nature is obvious from their anxiety to ascertain which of them would occupy the highest position in it. Peter would no doubt claim the pre-eminence, as having been promised the keys of the kingdom of heaven. John and James would contest this, as having been privileged along with him to witness the coming of the kingdom with power in the transfiguration of Jesus. Andrew might urge that he, along with John, was the first to join Jesus as a disciple; and no doubt Judas might put in his claim as filling the important position of treasurer of the little community of the twelve, and holder of the common purse; but Jesus sat down, and called the twelve, and, as St. Luke tells us, "perceiving the thought of their heart," said to them, "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all." He then took a child, which, as St. Matthew says, He had called unto Him, and set him

in the midst of them, and when Jesus had taken him in His arms, He addressed His disciples in words, some of which are recorded by St. Matthew alone, and the rest by St. Mark and St. Luke. They are as follows: "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Their position in that kingdom would not depend upon any outward privilege, but upon their spiritual character. There must be an entire change of heart and mind, and they must become as humble, as full of faith and trust, and as teachable as a little child, to become true members of that kingdom, and their highest privilege was to give themselves up to its service. It is, in fact, the same doctrine which Jesus placed before Nicodemus when He said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John iii. 3).

Jesus then adds, "Whosoever shall receive one of such children," that is, one such converted person, "in my name, receiveth Me; and whosoever shall receive Me, receiveth not Me, but Him that sent Me," that is, God. This leads to St. John saying to Him,

“Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and he followeth not us; and we forbade him, because he followeth not us.” He now doubted whether, as this person was casting out devils in the name of Jesus, they ought not to have received him, and his doubt was confirmed when Jesus said, “Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can speak evil of Me. For he that is not against us is on our part.”

This was, in fact, laying down the great principle of toleration. According to our modern notions, the disciples were right in forbidding this man. If he followed not the apostles, he ought not to be recognised as a fellow-worker, and should be discouraged and disowned. There is, in fact, no lesson so hard to learn as the nature of true Christian toleration. The very opposite spirit too soon prevailed in the Christian Church, and continued for centuries, and now the lesson has only been learned in part; but if there is any meaning in what Jesus said to His disciples, it is that they ought not to look solely to external communion with them, but also to the internal relation to Himself. They must regard the character of the work done more than the agency, and if done in the name of Jesus, and the result is

the conversion of sinners and the reclaiming of evil-doers, it is God's work, and will assuredly be owned by Him. Nay more, the smallest service, even a cup of cold water, if rendered in the name of Christ, and to a disciple of Christ, will not lose its reward.

Jesus then gives them a solemn warning that whosoever shall offend one of these little ones who believe in Him, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea ; and if their hand, or their foot, or their eye offend them, they ought to cut off hand and foot, and pluck out the eye, as it is better to enter into life maimed than to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched ; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched ; for every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good, but if the salt have lost his salt-ness, wherewith will they season it ?

This language, you will at once see, is symbolical throughout, though, no doubt, the apostles well understood its meaning. By the little ones who believe, Jesus meant those who had been converted, and become simple, truthful, and humble believers, and he contrasts them with the teachers of religion and preachers of the Gospel. If they place a

stumbling-block in the way of the former, and do anything to shake their convictions or unsettle their faith, that is an offence so great in His eyes as to bring a heavier condemnation upon them than if the upper millstone had been hung about their neck, and they were cast into the sea; but they must equally guard against a stumbling-block being put in their own way. By the hand is probably meant their outward actions; by the foot their entering into worldly society, and joining in worldly pursuits; and by the eye their secret lusts and passions. The word here translated "hell" is Gehenna, a term taken from the Valley of Hinnom, which bordered Jerusalem on the south, and where the dead bodies of criminals and evildoers were thrown, to be devoured by worms, and destroyed by a fire which was constantly kept up to consume them. When it is said that every sacrifice shall be salted with salt, the reference is to the injunction given in the second chapter of the Book of Leviticus and the thirteenth verse: "Every oblation of thy meat-offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat-offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt." And the language regarding Gehenna is

taken from the last few verses of the Prophecies of Isaiah, where it is said: "For by fire, and by sword, will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many" (lxvi. 16). And again: "For as the new heaven, and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before Me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before Me, saith the Lord. And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against Me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh."

You will see, then, that while they must avoid unsettling the faith of others, they must also be careful not by their own unrighteous actions, secret desires, or undue compliance with the world, to imperil their own souls, by making shipwreck of their faith, and so incur that doom.

They will be tried by fire, but they must not lose the salt of the covenant of their God, which represents the grace of God (Col. iv. 6), but have salt in themselves, and have peace one with another. St.

Paul expresses the meaning of Jêsus' warning very shortly when he says, "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly ; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air : but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection ; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. ix. 26, 27).

The rest of what Jesus said at this time is recorded by St. Matthew alone. He tells us that Jesus further warned them to take heed that they "despise not one of these little ones : for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." This expression has, as you will readily believe, caused much difficulty as to whether it is to be understood literally or not, but I think St. Paul probably expresses its true meaning when he says, the angels "are ministering spirits, sent to minister for them who shall be heirs of the salvation to come" (Heb. i. 14). The next verse, "For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost," is not in the original text, and is omitted in the Revised Version, but its meaning is expressed in the short parable which follows, of a shepherd seeking a lost sheep, and rejoicing more over that sheep than over the rest which went not

astray, and Jesus concludes this part of the discourse with these words, "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." The humblest and poorest believer, if he has a sincere faith and trust in Jesus, is under the special protection of his Father in heaven, and will not be allowed to go astray, unless he wilfully forsakes the truth or yields to temptation or false teaching. That a special blessing would attend the little child whom Jesus held in His arms you may well believe; and this was literally true of him, if we are to believe an old tradition in the early Church, that He was St. Ignatius, afterwards first bishop of Antioch.

Jesus now passes to another branch of the law of love, the forgiveness of injuries, and gives His disciples the following directions: "If thy brother trespass," or as it is in the Revised Version, "sin against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church." This is in exact accordance

with the practice of the Jews. By brother the Jews understood an Israelite by nation and religion, in contrast with a proselyte and a heathen, and the practice was founded upon the injunction in the nineteenth chapter of the Book of Leviticus and seventeenth verse, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon Him." Their rule was, that any one against whom a sin had been committed must "deliver his soul by reprovng his brother and by not suffering sin in him;" and if he could not bring him back to the right way, he must reprove him before witnesses so that they might testify that he against whom the sin was committed used due reproof, the witnesses also adding their friendly admonition, and if the offender hearkened not unto them, then they made proclamation concerning him in the synagogues and in the schools every day for four Sabbaths. The same procedure was prescribed when the offending brother wished to be reconciled, and the one he had sinned against refused to pardon and be reconciled to him. You will see how close the analogy is between this practice of the Jews and the direction given by Jesus; only in the latter, the "Ecclesia," or church,

is substituted for the synagogues and schools, and by a brother is meant any believer in Christ. Jesus adds, "But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen and a publican." Observe, it is not "let him be unto the church" but "unto thee." This therefore does not imply excommunication, but simply a releasing or loosing the offended person from his obligations of love and reproof towards his brother. This is the only other occasion in the Gospel history in which the word Ecclesia, or church, occurs, and the law of the church is here further developed in three respects. First, the power of binding and loosing is extended to all the apostles, if not to the church generally, with the same sanction of confirmation in heaven: "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Then, secondly, there must be a concurrence of two apostles in any act that is to receive such sanction: "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven;" and this will explain to you why, when the apostles were sent upon their mission, they were directed to go two

and two together. And thirdly, by the custom of the Jews there could be no synagogue, unless there were ten men of leisure who could attend its services regularly, and it came to be a belief among them, that unless these ten men were present their prayers in the synagogue were not heard by God; but Jesus adds, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

St. Peter then came to Jesus and said, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" In saying this, Peter no doubt thought that he was showing a spirit of great charity towards his brother in offering to forgive him seven times before proceeding against him in the manner above sanctioned, for the rule of the Jews was that forgiveness was only required three times,—"for they pardon a man once that sins against another; secondly, they pardon him; thirdly, they pardon him; fourthly, they do not pardon him." But Jesus answered, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven," that is, he must put no limit or bounds to the exercise of Christian love and charity towards a brother.

Jesus concludes this discourse with one of those parables of the kingdom in which so much impor-

tant truth as to its spiritual character is strikingly conveyed in a form familiar to the people. In this parable He shows how this doctrine of forgiveness, both as regards their relations with God, and also with one another, is an essential feature of that kingdom. He presents this to them under the figure of a temporal king who proceeded to settle accounts with his servants, and found one occupying an important position in relation to the finances of the kingdom, who proved to be indebted to the extent of ten thousand talents, and as he could not pay, the king commanded him to be sold, with his wife and children, and all that he had, in liquidation of the debt. The servant fell down and worshipped him, saying, "Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." He did not ask to be forgiven the debt, but undertook what he knew he could not perform,—to pay the debt if time were given him; but his Lord, moved with compassion, forgave him the debt. This servant, however, found one of his fellow-servants who owed him a hundred pence, and demanded immediate payment; and when appealed to in the same manner, refused to listen to him, and cast him into prison till he should pay all. When this was reported to the king, he called him

unto him and said, "Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou besoughtest me: shouldest not thou also have had mercy on thy fellow-servant, even as I had mercy on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due."

Here the debt due to the king represents our sins and transgressions against God; and the debt due to the servant the transgression of one brother against another. The difference in the amount shows the relative greatness of each. The sum of ten thousand talents is equal to about a quarter of a million of pounds of our money, and a hundred pence to about three pounds ten shillings; and so great is the difference between our sins against God and against one another.

The debtor being delivered to the tormentors till he pay all represents the future state of the wicked; and Jesus enforces the great lesson of forgiveness in these solemn words: "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

In reading the whole of this discourse delivered by Jesus to His disciples in the house at Capernaum,

you can, I think, hardly avoid being deeply impressed by that terrible picture which Jesus brought before His hearers of the future state of the lost. Throughout the Gospels He presents it to us under three different figures. One, as here, of being cast into the fire of Gehenna, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched; another elsewhere, as being bound hand and foot, and cast into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. xxii. 13), which is said to be the portion of the hypocrites (xxiv. 51); and the third, as here, to be delivered to the tormentors till he should pay all that was due to God. How far there is literal reality in these figures by which the future state of the lost is conveyed we know not; but they undoubtedly convey to us the impression, in the first figure, of a state of ceaseless remorse and despair over wrecked lives and ruined hopes; in the second, of a state of determined alienation from God, who dwelleth in the light; and in the third, a state of the hopeless weight and burden of unforgiven and unredeemed sin against Him; but whether Jesus as the Son of God, "in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins," who is "the head of the body,

the church," and in whom it pleased the Father that "all fulness should dwell: and having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" (Col. i. 14, 18, 19, 20), shall yet one day reconcile these lost souls to the Father, I cannot venture either to affirm or deny.

We have also here, as you will have seen, laid down to us the great principles of humility, toleration, and love, and I think I cannot show you their practical bearing on your conduct better than by reading to you almost the last written words shortly before his death of a great writer, in whom the qualities of toleration and charity were exhibited through life in a marked degree:—

"Love one another in spite of differences, in spite of faults, in spite of the excesses of one, or the defects of another. Love one another, and make the best of one another, as He loved us, who, for the sake of saving what was good in the human soul, forgot, forgave, put out of sight what was bad; who saw and loved what was good, even in the publican Zacchæus, even in the penitent Magdalen, even in the expiring malefactor, even in the heretical Samaritan, even in the Pharisee Nicodemus, even in the heathen soldier, even in the Canaanite.

"Make the most of what there is good in institutions,

in opinions, in communities, in individuals. It is very easy to do the reverse, to make the worst of what there is evil, absurd, erroneous. By so doing we shall have no difficulty in making estrangements more wide, and hatred and strife more abundant, and errors more extreme. It is very easy to fix our attention only on the weak points of those around us, to magnify them, to irritate them, to aggravate them ; and by so doing we can make the burden of life unendurable, and can destroy our own and others' happiness and usefulness wherever we go.

“ But this was not the new love wherewith we were to love one another. That love is universal, because in its spirit we drive out evil simply by doing good. We drive out error simply by telling the truth. We strive to look at both sides of the shield of truth. We strive to speak the truth in love—that is, without exaggeration or misrepresentation ; concealing nothing, compromising nothing, but with the effort to understand each other, to discover the truth which lies at the bottom of the error ; with the determination cordially to love whatever is loveable, even in those in whom we cordially detest whatever is detestable.

“ And in proportion as we endeavour to do this, there may be a hope that men will see that there are after all some true disciples of Christ, because they have love one to another.”



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