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# **THE PARABLES OF THE LORD JESUS**

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**PERCY W. HEWARD**

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**“Have you understood all these things?”**

Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Because it is given **unto you** to know the mysteries  
of the kingdom of heaven.

*Matthew 13.51,9,11*

## ***Foreword to the reprint in 2012***

*“The Parables, like the Types, are full of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Having experienced and enjoyed a little of their inexhaustible fullness, I desire to share, with others of His beloved people, the food that He has graciously provided.”* Since the first part of this book was published in 1931, it was the intention of the author *“that the result may be a fuller consciousness of the inspiration and fullness of Scripture, of the food therein, the gracious blending of doctrine and practice, of guidance in our everyday life and dispensational teaching, while we patiently, and yet expectantly, wait for our soon coming Lord”*.

We share the intention of the author and feel the need for proper spiritual food in these perilous times. In presenting this extraordinary book as a reprint to the Christian public 80 years after the first publishing, we trust that again the Lord will bless His children through these pages to His glory.

Suggestions and questions are welcome. We value the prayer for further reprints and a short feedback of blessed readers after feeding from this publication.

*The editors*

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*"He said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables? The Sower soweth the Word."—Mark 4. 13, 14.*

# THE PARABLES OF THE LORD JESUS IN MATTHEW 13.

An outline study for those who  
acknowledge the full inspiration  
of Scripture, and humbly desire  
to please their Saviour and Lord.

*"Receive with meekness the engrafted Word."—  
James 1. 21.*

# PREFACE.

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THE Parables, like the Types, are full of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Having experienced and enjoyed a little of their inexhaustible fulness. I desire to share, with others of His beloved people, the food that He has graciously provided. A book on all the parables is in prayerful preparation, but this forerunner is herewith sent forth in faith, and dedicated to the Lord's service. It concerns the largest collection of parables spoken at one time, as recorded by the Holy Spirit for our instruction.

Our prayerful desire is that our Heavenly Father may use it to the edification of His children, and their definite separation from the world, and from the attractions of this age. The practical message of Matthew 13, with the unveiling of Satan's purpose, is deeply impressive. Worldliness can never please God—never.

Copies will be supplied as the Lord enables.

Suggestions and questions are ever welcome, for there is ever a fulness beyond all that any of us realize, and it should be our privilege and joy to learn more of our Lord Himself and of His words, while, in the enabling of the Holy Spirit, we await His return and pray expectantly, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

PERCY W. HEWARD.

# Some Preparatory Thoughts on the Parables Generally.

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“YE ought to remember the words of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 20. 35) was the helpful testimony of Paul to the elders from Ephesus. At Nazareth the people “wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth” (Luke 4. 22), yet soon rose up to thrust Him out of the city, and to become, in intention, His murderers. Grace was indeed poured over His lips (Ps. 45. 2), and well might the officers say, “Never man spake like This Man” (John 7. 46). The words of the Holy Spirit, through prophets and apostles, preserved in all Scriptures are equally inspired, but these holy men of God did not always experience this inspiration. Christ, on the other hand, spoke inerrantly at *all* times. Happy are we if unlike those at Nazareth, and, by contrast, like John the Baptist, we rejoice greatly because of the Bridegroom’s voice (John 3. 29). This joy is the mark of His sheep (John 10. 27), even as it is the characteristic of the Bride, for “His lips are like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh” (S. of S. 5. 13).

It is remarkable how many of the recorded utterances of the Lord Jesus are parabolic. This is the testimony of the Holy Spirit. On some occasions, “Without a parable spake He not unto them” (Matt. 13. 34). He Himself emphasized this aspect, “Therefore speak I to them in parables” (Matt. 13. 13). And we are told that this was in fulfilment of prophecy (Matt. 13. 35). It is important to ponder the reason. The disciples were contrasted with the multitude, because it was given to them to know “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” They were “within:” the parables were addressed to those “without” (Mark 4. 11). Accordingly when the Lord Jesus reproved His dear people for their “unwisdom,” with regard to their heavenly “generation” (Luke 16. 8) He used a parabolic mode of instruction even to them. It is evident that “mysteries” are only known to those who are brought “within” (cf. 1 Cor. 2. 7, 8, 15. 51: Col. 1. 26, 27, etc.), and that parables contain veiled instruction. Hence

we read, "Therefore speak I unto them in parables: because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." The Lord knew the condition of the nation, and was never deceived by the temporary and outward enthusiasm (cf. John 5. 35). The heart was gross, and there was an unpreparedness for the "healing" which only belongs to the broken in heart (Matt. 13. 15 with Ps. 147. '3). Hence these messages were only beautiful stories to those who were not humbled, and were given with the intention that only the wise might understand (Mark 4. 11, 12, see Dan. 12. 10; Hos. 14. 9). We think of the "very lovely song" of Ezekiel 33. 32, and the sad blindness of the people generally, though glad of heart that some were brought to experience a wondrous salvation.

We have seen that the Lord Jesus Himself uses the word "parable" which occurs 50 times, and is also rendered "comparison" or "figure" (Heb. 9. 9).<sup>\*</sup> The Holy Spirit, moreover, alludes to a type as "a parable with a view to the time now present," and thus we observe the close link between the types and parables. This is important. The one is usually in materials and actions, the other in words: thus *both* contain parallels *and contrasts*:—for every figure designedly falls short in showing for example, the glory of the Lord Jesus and His work. The Hebrew term is rendered "parable" 18 times, and "proverb" 19, for a proverb is often a condensed simile. The later Scriptures only once render "parable" in this way (Luke 4. 23), usually employing another term (John 16. 25, 29, 2 Pet. 2. 22), equally setting forth the opposite of speaking "plainly." We may therefore expect some things hard to be understood, and the Lord Jesus indicated that He would thus "utter things which have been kept secret" (Matt. 13. 35). It behoves us, therefore, to be reverently attentive and to seek God's gracious instruction as to the "things new and old," brought before our responsive hearts.

Such thoughts prepare us for a very important inference. Unless the Holy Spirit records the interpretation as with "the Sower" and "the tares," we must be careful not to use any parable to prove our opinion, instead of corroborating what has been revealed by God elsewhere. Many dear children of God

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<sup>\*</sup> We may hesitate as to the expression: "The parable of the unjust steward," for strong evidence is needed, when the Holy Spirit omits this word. Serious errors have been introduced through many assuming that we have "The parable of the rich man and Lazarus" in Luke 16. Satan would ever explain away Scripture.

have gone astray by building on types, in accord with their own ideas. The type was appointed perfectly, but we must not interpret, and say, "This is that," *unless we have Divine evidence*. In other words, parables and types, confirm, illustrate, amplify and impress, but, if we find no definite **Scriptural** clue, it may be we understand amiss. One realises the havoc through the so-called "spiritualising" of Scripture, and there are serious errors by human inferences of godly believers, e.g. regarding Enoch as a type of those said to be caught up before the tribulation, which they have wrongly linked with the flood, albeit the flood was not tribulation, but *wrath*. Many have thus been hindered in prayerful study of the prophetic Scriptures by these well-intended deductions. How vast, too, has been the superstructure of dangerous teaching founded on the theory that the gospel "leavens" the ruined world. It is so easy for us all to put *our interpretation* of a parable on a level with the words of God: may we be granted humility and discernment, lest His people be led astray. It is not with a sense of personal infallibility that these expositions are taken in hand, but with a desire for personal discipleship, and discipleship is always lowly, and the prayers of other disciples are a treasured possession, that our Father may not be dishonoured, nor the Holy Spirit grieved.

It is important to answer at once the common objection, "You must not press a point too far." It is often associated with a failure to realise the fulness of plenary inspiration. We venture to assert that when the Lord gives a parable, *every word has a meaning* whether we understand it or not; His own explanation in one case illustrates this fulness (Matt. 13. 37-41), and shows a helpful way of writing out others, with a column for the meaning (and another for parallel Scriptures as evidence). If Christ refers to the "joy" of the buyer in Matthew 13. 44, *there is a reason\**: if He alters the language from "came down" in Luke 10. 31, to "as He journeyed" in 33 *there is a reason†*. If He changes from "which was lost" in Luke 15. 6, to "which I had lost" in 9, there is a reason‡. Every sentence, every word, every order, every tense will contribute its blessing. If the Lord wished to omit anything (e.g. "the fold" in Luke 15. 4) the omission is spiritually helpful: the silence as to any buying in Matthew 25. 11, is full of in-

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\* Note Hebrews 12. 2.

† The Good Samaritan was not going down "by chance."

‡ No blame attaches to The Shepherd.

struction, the final view is "they went to buy." One there is Who if He goes *to do* a work goes *and does it* (John 14. 2, 3), but this cannot be said of all.

Such examples might be multiplied but the last enforces a very precious point. The parables have a solemnising, and refreshing practical *message*. Though they veil truth from the unready, they impress it on the disciple, and are full of blessing as to the person of the Lord Jesus and His work, and as to the accountability of sinners who make light of God's message (Matt. 22. 5), and the responsibility of believers to occupy till their Lord comes. These are not only narratives of beauty. They appeal to the heart, and bring before God's beloved people His gracious messages for their deep heart-searching, and only as we have the application, by the Holy Spirit, in our daily life, can we truly profit. The words of God are not given to make us clever, but lovingly obedient, and we shall find parable after parable to make us grateful for grace to the graceless, and, awakening praise, to summon to love's devotedness even though the words are not added as in Luke 10. 37, "Go and do thou likewise." Let it be repeated that the ruin of man, the redemption of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, the path of the believer and the coming again of our Lord will alike be before us, and in a deeply practical setting, that all our studies may bring forth fruit both now, and in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, and may we not hope that some reader will, through these meditations see, by faith, for the first time, "the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sin of the world," and realise the joy of the gift of eternal life by His finished work?

## The Parables of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 13.

THE Lord Jesus sometimes spoke one parable by itself, as far as we know, but usually two or more (e.g. Luke 5. 36-39, 13. 18-21). The "threefoldness" of Luke 14 is before us, and the three "panels," and threefold finding, in chapter 15. As the Book of Psalms contains parallel lines in the majority of verses, so the parabolic teaching of Christ is normally arranged that we may compare the parables with one another, and mark the appointed *contrasts* as well. We have seen that the Book of Proverbs bears the very name "Parables," and do we not find the same twofoldness in most verses there?

But Matthew 13 has a yet fuller structure, and, though the Lord uttered parables before this (Matt. 9. 14-17, 12. 29), He Himself laid a great stress on the understanding of the Sower. "Know ye not this parable? And how then will ye know all parables?" (Mark 4. 13). Furthermore, it is in this context that He was pleased to explain most plainly why He thus spoke, and to give the (unusual) explanation of two parables as a key to other passages also. Moreover, two of these precious similitudes, at least, were uttered for emphasis on another occasion also (The Mustard Seed and The Leaven). It seems therefore that we may humbly expect God's gracious help in parabolic interpretation if we take this chapter *first*; nor shall our faith be disappointed.

The setting is impressive. The Lord Jesus turned from "this wicked generation" in chapter 12. 45, and emphasized the new relationship of those who did the will of the Father (12. 50), even as He led up to the new order of scribes in 13. 52. There is thus a putting aside of mere Judaism, and we are not surprised to find His own description, "the mysteries of the *kingdom of heaven*" (13. 11). Mysteries are not mysterious to all, but only opened to those who have opened hearts and eyes. May we be such! The "kingdom of heaven," or more literally "of the heavens," is not mentioned in any other book. It is observable that Matthew's gospel alone refers to the "church" by name. The fact that the Holy Spirit uses "the kingdom of God" in a retrospective passage as Matthew 21. 43 reminds us that "the kingdom of the heavens" involved a fresh status, and was viewed as future in Matthew 3. 2, 4. 17. When we realise that the Sower evidently is the Lord Jesus personally, in

both the first two parables (Matt. 13. 37, see Mark 4. 14), we regret the omission by our translation of the definite article in verse 3, "Behold *the* Sower went forth (or came out, John 16. 28) to sow." Not only does this set forth His pre-eminence throughout the parables, but we have His own description of His earthly ministry. And inasmuch as "the kingdom of the heavens" tells of a heavenly calling, based on His atonement, it is fitting that in the first passage we do not read "the kingdom of the heavens is like," albeit we have the "word of the kingdom" (19). It is not till the second parable that we find the kingdom of the heavens inaugurated, and there the field has been purchased and the word "His" bears this testimony. So exact is the language of the Holy Spirit. Nor is it the exactness of strained effort, but of perfect wisdom.

The Lord Jesus was the Sower. How He delighted in the *word*. In ministry, amid temptations, when raised from the dead, He ever laid stress on *the word*. Alas, that men seek to introduce something else. *The Word*, and *the Word only*, is to be sown. "They have Moses and the prophets." And Paul could testify thus, "saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come" (Acts 26. 22). The human heart craves for novelty, excitement, and amusement, but we would preach Christ crucified. He is altogether worthy. The excellence of the message, and the perfection of the Preacher, did not mean that all received. The human heart is not changed by hearing the proclamation, any more than by the holy government of Christ's kingdom (Rev. 20. 8). How we need to look upward, and, while we feel our need, refuse to be discouraged, laying hold of the precious promise that "a seed shall serve Him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation" (Ps. 22. 30). And thus, in the fourfold ground (suggesting, it may be, the parallel world-wide condition), there is *one* soil that is "good." The ploughed ground, the prepared ground, welcomes the seed aright. Christ *shall* see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied (Isa. 53. 11).

But it is observable that, in every case, attitude to *the word* both at the time of hearing and afterwards, is brought before us. The wayside hearer does not understand *the word*, the rocky ground hearer receives it with joy, but in the absence of a living root and of the continued moisture of inner fellowship with God, receives in vain. That which brings out the failure is "tribulation or persecution . . . because of *the word*" (cf. John 17. 14). The thorny ground shows the choking of *the word*. In every case where there is failure, we behold a wrong

relationship to *God's Word*. Many have arisen to-day who would speak well of the Lord Jesus, but they disparage the full authority of the Words of Truth. This attitude is criminal. The Lord Jesus showed the importance of associating Himself and His words (Mark 8. 38), and said, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words" (John 14. 23). If the twentieth century thinks otherwise, the twentieth century is wrong. Men may think us behind the times if we look back to the first century, but believers are actually "before the times" for they look onward to the appearing of the Lord Jesus, "which in His times He shall show" (1 Tim. 6. 15).

Every true child of God has received *the word* aright. In Matthew 13. 23 we have hearing and understanding, reminding us of 1 John 5. 20 and Luke 24. 25. And the holy result is fruit. Is not this important? The aim throughout is fruit. God has a right to fruit. His holy perfection must emphasize fruit. To excuse the absence of fruit would be sin. The vineyard that rendered no fruit was taken from the husbandmen (Matt. 21. 34, 41), and the test whether of the fig tree in Luke 13. 6-9, or of the branch in John 15. 2, is fruit (cf. Matt. 3. 10; 7. 16-20): nothing can take the place of this. God is not seeking cleverness or greatness. The searching character of this parable is now more evident. It is not only dispensational, or general. It has a personal message. Do we bring forth fruit? Have we a holy response to His love in our lives? Our Bible study is with the object of fruit. Every word of God rightly received is fruitful (Col. 1. 6). If there is no fruit, the fault is with us. And in this connection we feel the personal application of the whole passage. Though children of God are a new creation, it is still possible to treat some portions of God's truth in a fleshly way. Is it not easy to find verses of God's testimony towards which even we are more like wayside hearers? And are there not other verses we welcomed till trial and isolation came in on account of the holy principles they set forth?—And now—what effect have these messages in our daily life? Can we find in ourselves some humbling, yet precious, passage which has been choked because we have become more worldly than we once were? Thanks be unto God, if there are portions of His truth which bring forth fruit—more fruit. But it may be that His teaching as to the judgment seat of Christ only as thirty fold, and that as to prayer only sixtyfold. Are there not differences in our assimilation of our Lord's gracious instruction? Do we not desire rather the climax hundredfold (Gen. 26. 12) with regard to all God's will? And,

if our heart is tender (2 Chron. 34. 27), this will be the result increasingly. The wayside is hard, and the rocky ground hard. The usual translation "stony" seems to miss the point. We have here the rock underneath, and a layer of dust like earth—linked with the serpent—on the surface. And,—striking indeed is Christ's description,—it is here that we find joy. Men urge a "happy" giving of the heart to God, without brokenness. When the spirit of grace shall be poured out upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the land will mourn; every family apart (Zech. 12, 10, 12). Men have a new theory, a more palatable gospel and mode of profession. But is it the work of the Holy Spirit or strange fire? Where is conviction of sin to-day? Is it sought? Is it expected? The comfortable preaching of an emotionally received gospel is the evidence of a hard heart. This diagnosis is startling, but it is perfect. The One Who spoke these words knew what was in men. The more we ponder, the more we realize the remarkable force of Christ's words. "Anon with joy receiveth it" may at first seem an encouragement. But it is the reverse. Is it a mark of love not to be moved to anguish by the judgment which broke upon the Lord? Is it an evidence of a work of grace to be so glad at personal salvation, that there is a slight sense of sin? Surely such joy is innate selfishness and the proof of a hard heart toward the Lord. And this is exactly what He sets forth! Yet many seek after emotional joy and hurried profession, and almost slur over the deep and painful work of God. The Lord Jesus unveils the real character of this happiness; many are too hard hearted to have felt anything of what their sin means to the Lord Jesus. Will they find themselves among His people in that Day? The theory of salvation by verbal acceptance of Romans 10. 9 as a formula, or by the criterion of "I am happy because I am saved" is very dangerous, and all who encourage it are unconsciously cruel. "A *broken* and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51. 17), and the context there suggests our need, albeit we are believers. Do we not sometimes have joy that is not in the Lord (Phil. 4. 4), and that lacks loving sorrow over sin? Do we enter into our Lord's standpoint and feelings as we should? Need it be stated that there is a joy in the beginning of the Christian life, and after, and that the added words in 1 Thessalonians 1. 6 ("of the Holy Spirit") are blessedly linked with the added contrast, even persistency amid "affliction." The Holy Spirit never leads to a light view of sin (Zech. 12, 10).

This passage agrees with other solemnizing parables; there is no thought that God will cast out those who have come to Him, or that saved ones will become unsaved. The grafted-in branch that is taken away in John 15 is not said to become fruitless; it is never seen with any fruit at any time, and the third ground is thorny before the good seed is sown, and this shows relationship to the first Adam, and a curse (Gen. 3. 17; Heb. 6. 8,—an important help in the explanation of this oft-misunderstood passage). Again, we behold the exact wording of the Holy Spirit. But the fact of eternal salvation never excuses carelessness. Only as we bring forth fruit are we welcomed to enjoy assurance. The test is not orthodoxy but living fruit, for faith worketh by love. Although the ministry of the Lord Jesus is primarily before us, the principles abide. We, too must preach *the word*. Fresh opinions and plausible theories are to be as nothing to us. We are not to please men. The rejected testimony must be given as in Luke 14. 17-20. We may not give the pearls of gospel promises to those who are unclean (Matt. 7. 6); but we are bidden to sound forth the gospel testimony, and as the watchman of Ezekiel 33. 7 to hear the word at God's mouth, and warn them from Him. Our message is not to change with changing times. The gospel is still the power of God unto salvation. And thanks be unto God there will yet be good ground. If we preach anything else we becloud the issue, for only by a right attitude to *GOD'S WORD* can the true believer be discovered. The wicked one hates *THE WORD*; the child of God brings forth fruit thereby. This is of vital importance. No other ground is good. No other ground produces anything for the Lord's garner. Happy, indeed, are they who "having heard the word keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience" (remaining under Luke 8. 15). So shall He have the glory when He comes back.

Inasmuch as the Lord Jesus makes this a test parable (Mark 4. 13), we expect that the seed and fine flour will elsewhere portray that which is from Him; and the birds of the air indicate the work of the evil one. But before we reach these in the parable of the mustard seed, we have the tares, of which as we have seen, the Lord Jesus gives His own detailed explanation. And it is the *first* parable of "the kingdom of the heavens" indicating a contrast with local Judaism, and also with outward glory. The Sower is first before us. He sows nothing but good seed. His people belong to Him and He sends them into the world, ("the field is the world") to bring

forth fruit. Helpfully we learn the blessing wrapped up in our earthly circumstances, if we use them aright. He has authority over the earth; it is His field (note John 17. 2), but He does not now show that authority in judgment. He will yet take the heathen as His inheritance (Ps. 2. 8, 9); but at present He "sits" (Ps. 110. 1). He looks for the witness of His people while He is "away"; they are sown with this object. He abides in the house (Matt. 13. 27). It is beautiful to realize that types, and parallels, are often twofold. Are not the servants themselves among the good seed? (cf. the bride and the body in Ephesians 5). The good seed is in the earth, but they also have fellowship with Him in the house. And they bring everything to Him, and rightly wait for His answer and counsel, unlike Israel (Ps. 106. 13); and Saul (1 Sam. 13. 12). and the disciples in Luke 22. 49, 50. Their concern is as to the tares, which do not appear at once, and this is well. But how came the tares? "An enemy hath done this." Observe the same antipathy to the seed as in Matthew 13. 19, but there we find taking away, here an adding. How has this been done? "While men slept." The Master is not said to have slept. The enemy is guilty, but he has taken advantage of sleep. The disciples entered into temptation in Gethsemane through sleep. As this dispensation begins, so it ends, with failure through sleep. "While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." Ah, we will not say "ends"; there shall be a gracious reviving, and those who are His will be "ready," but there is much to search us in this twofold "sleep." It is a key to the history of Christendom. It has a message for our personal life: we cannot excuse ourselves. We have not chosen evil deliberately, but have we kept awake? The enemy does not sleep.

The devil's object is to take advantage of our slumbering. Hence the stress on holy wakefulness in the conflict of Ephesians 6. 10-18, and 1 Thessalonians 5. 6-8. We see further, that Satan is not said to pluck up the seed. He cannot, but he can divide the people of God. He sows in the midst. Likewise in John 10 the thief comes *to* kill,—yet we are not told he kills. But the wolf comes and actually catches and *scatters* (verse 12). Thanks be to God, he cannot destroy; neither the enemy, nor the tares, nor even the sleep can kill the wheat. The enemy divides, and accomplishes this oft-times by "imitation Christians." Tares are not unlike wheat—at first. The word is strikingly chosen; by derivation it suggests "vomiting" and this plant has been said to be the only one of the grass

family with poisonous seeds. It produces dizziness. The spiritual parallel is impressive. The surprising fact is before us that the enemy is a patron of some mass movement of "Christian profession" in the present age, linked with a veiling of his personal activity. If we deny this, we deny Christ's parable. If we acknowledge this, we must grieve over Christendom. And this one fact will separate us from human methods to gain numbers and to attain success. Constantine's attitude and the after history of Europe, with so-called "Christian countries" to-day, are explicable in the light of these words, not otherwise. And this simple acknowledgment logically involves the break of humble discipleship from "state churches," and from the great denominations of to-day. The words "Let both grow together until the harvest" refer to the field, i.e., *the world*. It seems strange that any, in spite of Christ's interpretation, argue in favour of mixture in a Christian *assembly*. The whole principle of Scripture, and such passages as 1 Corinthians 5, 2 Timothy 2, and Revelation 2 and 3 impress on believers the need for holy separatedness in a local gathering. We cannot reform the world, nor purge Christendom, but we must seek to carry out all the will of the Lord humbly with those who call upon Him out of a pure heart. "Let both grow" does not only imply that believers are not to use the sword. Indeed, that is not the primary aspect, though *elsewhere* emphasized against Rome's sad perversions. Satan sows his counterfeit, yet he is not here associated with giving physical life; but religious profession. Hence if the planting is not birth, the uprooting is not death. It may seem to involve drastic measures, hence it is fitting that reapers (angels), and not the servants, are thus used, during this dispensation, even as the servants of Matthew 22: 13 are distinguished by the Holy Spirit's word from those of verses 3 and 4 (cf. too "His armies," 7). "*Here* is the *patience* and faith of the saints" (Rev. 13. 10). The *removal of nominal Christian profession* is before us—the gathering is "out of His kingdom" (41); the casting into the furnace of fire is subsequent. The exactness of Scripture is evident. The tares are *not* said to be taken out of the field when bundled together. And do we not read elsewhere of the overturning of Christendom's profession, (empty though that has been), in the climax 3½ years of the wild beast? We remember how, after supporting the whore of religiousness, he hates her (Rev. 17. 16). Will it not be then that "the kingdom of the heavens shall be likened unto ten virgins"? There are still unsaved ones, but they

are outwardly virginlike. During the *centuries* the enemy has rather aimed at a harlot-like travesty of the bride, yet many count this to be spread of the gospel. The practical bearing of these parables on the Christian life and separation from the great organizations of to-day, is deeply important for the unprejudiced and lowly disciple.

The reason for not gathering up the tares is searching. For years the writer thought, "The tares were at first like the wheat," but the language of Christ conveys a further lesson. "Lest . . . ye root up also the wheat with them." Does not this imply that the wheat sometimes becomes like the tares? This searches us, although we may be "wheat." *Healthy* growth is needful to present the contrast. But, above all reproof, the Lord's love shines out; no wheat shall be uprooted. He watches over all His people. The tendency to recognise all as Christians, who profess so to be, is quite against Scripture, but the other extreme is condemned. We do not know all the wheat, and must not root up, or glibly deny the relationship of any to Christ's kingdom, through our anticipatory judgments. The Lord knoweth them that are His (2 Tim. 2. 19), whether in Protestantism or Romanism. We leave the field to Him, in this connection. Love is sorrowful, yet often silent, as to the solemnizing state of affairs. It is not for us to pronounce either way. It is important to see how practical every passage is. The dispensational and prophetic instruction never makes secondary the Lord's humbling, yet refreshing, message to our hearts, as to His personal love, and our personal need.

The harvest is next before us. Observe "the *time* of the harvest," and "the end (or rather the ending) of the age." This expression occurs in verses 40 and 49, also, and in chapter 24. 3, and the last verse of the gospel (28. 20). The only other occurrence of "ending," is Hebrews 9. 26, alluding to Christ's manifestation on earth. May we not link that with the three and a half years, or so, from John 1. 31? "The ending of the ages" was a special season which seemed to belong to two dispensations—retrospectively and prospectively. Inasmuch as Antichrist will declare himself against Romanism, and every other "ism," and show himself as god, in the *midst* of the last seven years (Dan. 9. 27), will not the tares of Satan's intentional counterfeit be at that very time unmasked? This would make the ending of the age a like period to that of Hebrews 9. 26, and explain "Gather ye together first the tares." The burning is not said to be first. This is important, for the unsaved are not thus *judged* while the Lord's wheat are on

earth, but they are "gathered," for the final confederacies of evil. Many prophetic students ignore this, and assume that the Lord's people will be caught up first, but all Scripture harmonizes with itself. Some may find difficulty in that the reapers gather (at the same time as the change in heaven, Rev. 12, 7), whereas the work is linked with Satan's revelation and that of Antichrist (2 Thess. 2, 9), but this rather helps in view of Revelation 17, 17. The enemy prepares his array, but the Lord ordains the channel for this overflowing flood, so that the angels of the Lord Jesus "gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity" (lawlessness)—an apt description of defiant ungodliness alone. The bundles appear to remain awhile, but not for long; man's glory is short lived. There *is* a furnace of fire. But, thanks be to God, for the contrasted words "the wheat into My barn." No wheat is placed in the fire, no tares are found in the barn. The breaking up of Christendom will be a stepping stone to the glory of the Lord. The Lord Jesus does not rise up till "the last day" (see Ps. 110, 1), but He can send His angels before; yet (as we have observed) this is *not* physical destruction, which rather takes place *when* the Lord takes the kingdom, and "the righteous shine forth." They are not manifested now (see Col. 3, 4). The heavenly figure of the sun is helpful. The wheat shows us a pilgrim life of fruit-bearing (all the wheat seems to bring forth something for the Lord—26) but the heavenly glory is sure as well.

The contrasted futures are definitely marked. If any are not God's planting they shall be rooted up (Matt. 15, 13). To hide this message would be sinful. There is a tendency to-day to imagine an in-between position, but Scripture shows the glory *and* the judgment. The tares are not saved and then lost. They were never saved, but they appear to have associated with children of God, and acted as if they were. It is observable that the contrast began to be seen as soon as there was "fruit." Thus are children of God to be marked out.

It may be well, ere we approach the parables not explained by the Lord Jesus, to examine the structure of this passage. Everything in Scripture is precious, and there is an unique arrangement and order. It is evident that the mustard seed and leaven go together, as in Luke 13, 18-21. And Matthew 13, 44-46 provides manifestly a pair (selling and buying). The tares and the net, moreover, are alike linked with the ending of the age. Hence we have:—

- a. The Sower (Personal: not "the Kingdom of heaven is like").

- b. The Wheat *and* Tares.
  - c.(i) Mustard Seed.
  - c.(ii) Leaven (Hid).
  - c.(ii) Treasure (Hid).
  - c.(i) The Pearl.
- b. The Net, with Good and Bad.
- a. The Householder (Personal: not "the Kingdom of heaven is like").

It is important to realise the Lord's object—even the instruction of His people, that, as He uttered things kept secret, they may learn His truth and bring forth things "new and old" (verse 52) for His joy (cf. Song 7. 13). The setting aside of Israel in Matthew 12. 45, and the stress on spiritual relationship (Matt. 12. 49-50), are followed by the setting aside of Israel's scribes, and a new responsibility for every "scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven" (13. 52). Though somewhat anticipating, we may point out how dear the Lord's people are to Himself, and in how many ways He mentions them. "My brother and sister and mother"; the good ground, the good seed, the treasure, the pearls, and the good fish; and the servants of verse 27 and the scribe of verse 52 show the responsibility of His faithful ones. Individually and collectively are His people before us, and elsewhere other precious language shows again and again His intense love to them. There is always a note of affection in the Lord's ministry, and John 17 reminds us as to this characteristic of His abiding intercession (Heb. 7. 25).

Have we any doubt as to the meaning of the mustard seed? The beginning is small; but the growth is abnormal, "becometh a tree." Does not this imply a contrast with the original appointment, "after his kind" (Gen. 1. 11)? The "frequency" in nature would not make it normal, for nature now contains death, and designed departures from the original plan (e.g. Thorns and thistles, "it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength," Gen. 4. 12) to remind us of the devastation which sin has brought. The over-growth is the *only* reason which the Lord Jesus gives for the entry of "the birds of the air" ("so that"). His explicit statement and His explanation of the birds in verse 19 ("Then cometh the wicked one") would prevent our misunderstanding. Here is a radical *change*, with saddening results. When we add the Lord's interpretation of "His field" (31, with 38), we behold an apparent progress in the earth, with a development of Satanic tactics. The sowing of tares "in the midst" of the wheat has prepared for this.

The Lord has declared the tares will be awhile in His kingdom (41): Hence "the kingdom of heaven is like" presents no hindrance. Satan is not said to pluck up and destroy, after the first parable (when the seed does not denote persons): he aims at "imitations," his method changes, but not his purpose. Any theory that makes the birds good ignores this, as well as Christ's key-explanation (Mark 4. 13). Nor is the figure of a branching tree in the earth without meaning; in Daniel 4 it pictures Nebuchadnezzar, in Ezekiel earthly nations are thus described, and in Hosea 14 Millennial Israel. In the present dispensation may it not here suggest earthly greatness before the appointed time? The words "Therefore He was saying" in the parallel passage (Luke 13. 18), with the added, "Strive to enter in . . . for many . . . will seek . . . and shall not be able" (Luke 13. 24-30), may bear a similar warning.

We think of Luke 9. 43, 14. 15, 16; the Lord Jesus perceived the nature of profession (John 2. 24, 25) and no passage can be found which prophesied great "success" in the present dispensation. The common interpretation is out of harmony with the whole character of His prophecies. As soon as we see a saddening perversion of the narrow way, and the lodging of the emissaries of the evil one, we have a Divine key to the attitude of Constantine, and, to the changes in Europe from a persecuted minority to a state power, i.e. from a Christian brotherhood to Christendom. The woman of Revelation 17 is linked with ruling in verses 2 and 18. Ecclesiasticism with nests for these birds, instead of an assembly devotedness of the bride to the Coming Bridegroom, is the solemn message for our hearts, and if we now find our resting place where the birds of the air find theirs, we are out of harmony with the Lord Jesus. The word "lodge" indicates a tabernacle, and reminds us that the assembly should be God's dwelling place.

It is remarkable that we hear to-day of "branches" of Christendom, but, alas, men glory in that whereof they should be ashamed. It is for us to be humbled. If any one is prepared to make the birds good in spite of Christ's interpretation, he will naturally add the rejoicing in a kingdom-status to-day, and regard success from man's standpoint, but the Lord's message still sounds on some ears that are not deaf, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12. 32), and there is still music in the closing contrast with Revelation 22. 17, "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come." The Spirit of God has not changed.

Two objections may be raised, --the first urges that if Christ planted the seed, the result is the development of *His* work. But may we not add to what has been said regarding God's warnings in nature, that the Scripture has answered this objection in previous parables? "The choicest vine . . . it brought forth wild grapes" (Isa. 5. 2), and again "I had planted thee a noble vine wholly a right seed, how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto Me?" (Jer. 2. 21).

The other objection is that the mustard seed was proverbially used to suggest remarkable growth (Matt. 17. 20). Evidently as "less than all the seeds" (not in nature, as a whole, but among those which a man took; the context prevents misunderstanding), it was symbolic, but passages like Luke 17. 6 never mention the undue growth or branches, and it is possible they rather indicate that if we only had a little faith we should do much (see Luke 8. 25), for faith is more precious and more powerful than radium. No objection can be said to have weight against the only interpretation which fits exactly between the introduction of the *tares* and the *leavening* of the fine flour.

This fourth parable shows a woman. Is she the bride or the counterfeit? If we make her to be the Lord's faithful servants we imply that the fine flour pictures evil, and the leaven good—against the symbolism of Christ throughout, and that of all Scripture. Strong evidence would be needed for such a contrary usage. The characteristic of the present age seen in Revelation 17 (illustrated by the position of the woman in the fourth letter of Revelation 2), seems to fit in with the saddening yet evidently true interpretation, which shows corruption of God's fine flour. This suits the context and the added words, "Things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 13. 35). The thought of "progress" would be against Christ's testimony, and suggest approval of the very Christendom that has changed His appointments for "strangers and pilgrims." Hence the alternatives are striking—acknowledgment of the leaven as evil, or the nullifying of Christ's testimony in Matthew 24. 9, etc.

A remarkable corroboration is found in the earlier Scriptures. "Three measures" or seahs are an ephah, and thus we find a woman and three measures both in Genesis 18. 6 and Zechariah 5. 5-11. The words "make ready quickly" (cf. Ex. 12. 39) leave us in no doubt as to the absence of leaven in Abraham's arrangement. But the reverse is found in Zechariah.

The preceding parable-prophecy *may* hint Satan's counterfeit of the holy place (measurements in 5. 2), and the "declar-

ing innocent" of the sinner is through that "which frameth mischief by a law" (5.3, marg. Ps. 94.20).<sup>a</sup> Abiding in the house (5.4) reminds of the birds of the air, in Matthew 13.32. How remarkable when we behold "wickedness" in the midst of the ephah. "This is wickedness" (cf. 1 Cor. 5.8). The woman placed herself in the three measures. Nor is this two-fold symbolism strange. Christ is both the One Who builds and the Foundation, and He is the One Who presents that which is unleavened, which likewise pictures Himself. The system of evil puts "self" in the place of Christ, corrupting thereby the fine flour of sound doctrine. The Lord's allusion to Zechariah 5 seems more than probable, and inasmuch as Satan's ark with its talent of lead, (the opposite of the mercy seat), is awhile away from Babylon, to return thence via Palestine (Zech. 5.11), our hearts realise European Babylonianism in Christendom's nations, exactly that which the Lord Jesus seems to set forth in the parable of the leaven. Yet so few are spiritually affected by this holy warning.

But we have seen this sad interpretation fittingly follows the tares and mustard seed, and leads up to verse 35. Satan at first comes and sows but then goes his way (Matt. 13.25), content to work through instruments, and the professing church itself. The birds of the air are outward, the leaven is inward. The object of the enemy in both parables is a "change." The world is not being converted; the end of the age is the opposite, even Antichrist's revelation, according to Scripture. There is no prophecy of a so-called "leavening" by the gospel, and the spread of Christ's kingdom. That kingdom is heavenly, and there is a bringing out of the world. But if we have here a corruption of truth gradually but definite, we have that which has taken place and is taking place. Its hidden working, (leaven works in the dark), is the reason why many do not see. But our eyes should be opened and our hearts humbled.

The figure is very impressive. Leaven is a plant (a suited parallel with the mustard seed, though man's science did not know this when Christ spoke), a parasitic plant. This fungus is near at hand, clinging to the very bloom of the grape, but not inside; the slightest "breaking" makes its opportunity. It produces intoxication by altering the grape juice, even as Babylon's cup. When in fine flour, the end is putrefaction; unless stern measures are used. Only fire can deal with this; compromise is ruinous.

<sup>a</sup> The Hebrew is difficult. The above may be a hint by contrast, if "declare innocent," or "clear" parallels 2 Kings 21-13 (i.e. God's judgment throughout).

The method of Satan is not always open antagonism. Martyrdoms became a power in gospel witness. Balaam tried fornication when direct attack was forbidden (Rev. 2. 14), and this symbol of fellowship with the world (Jas. 4. 4) has often been the "new" plan of the evil one. The adoption of the fine flour of sound doctrine and its phraseology, linked with its gradual corruption, has been so frequent, that it is evident we are face to face with a subtle scheme, not an accident. Words such as "inspiration" and "atonement" have been employed with modified meanings, or, if we take one sphere more fully, even assembly arrangements; we find that if God specially used the word "church" of all saints, or a local assembly, the term has been warped to signify a national or denominational organisation or a building, or to indicate plurality of churches in a city, exactly the meanings God excluded. Baptism has been changed by many from immersion of believers, to the sprinkling of infants. The Lord's *supper* has been "transferred" to the morning and the word "wine," which the Lord Jesus never used, continually employed, and the leavened bread, about which He did not utter one syllable of symbolic teaching or command, substituted for that which He Himself used and lovingly appointed. If in Scripture we are impressed by the exclusion of ecclesiastical titles, whether "pastor" or "elder," we find these commonly sought to-day, and the holy condemnation of the terms "Father" and "Teacher" in Matthew 23 has been set aside by the adoption of the title "Doctor of Divinity", among many who rightly repudiate the former. If there is a special appointment of the Holy Spirit as to married elders, we realise Romanism first misused the term "presbyter," and then with a counterfeit priesthood ordained celibacy. Many can, by grace, see this deliberate leavening, but are not conscious of the sad perpetuation of linked errors. Not a few still observe "Christmas," despite its heathen origin, and introduce in the worship of God arrangements of musical service which are no more dispensational than the "sacrifices" and "priesthood" they deplore. If the Lord Jesus expressly forbade force, some will urge particularly that it is lawful for a Christian man to bear arms, and Christ's clear teaching as to refusal of legal oaths in this dispensation is equally nullified. And some who would grieve over this sin quite ignore—and almost seem to flout—the Holy Spirit's repeated instructions for godly women to dress neatly. The leaven has worked in every way, and is working. The Lord's people appear to be afraid to be unlike the world. But none of us can lift up our heads proudly. We

all need to be humbled. The writer would sorrow, with others, as to his own failure to represent the Lord Jesus, and to follow His gracious will. Yet is the call to awaken still lovingly granted, and our hearts, though they have long hesitated, would now hear and obey.

A striking illustration of the "leavening" has already been hinted. The Lord Jesus appointed two symbolic actions, the second, the Lord's supper, being two-fold. Christendom has not only leavened the doctrine, but the very materials He used. This is very remarkable, because bread and fruit of the vine were probably the two commonest things in Palestine, and in other lands, which are used in both an unleavened and leavened state.\* The change was, and is, "natural" and easy. Faith is needed to keep to the Lord's will. He has permitted this picture lesson to warn us of many errors, and it is significant, in view of His voice, and His *giving* and His words "*Take, eat*" and His "*This do,*" that the first woman, who prefigures the professing church misled by the serpent; "*took*" of the forbidden fruit, and "*gave*" to Adam, and he did "*eat,*" but the Lord rebuked with the words, "Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife." And to the designing tempter the solemn judgment sounded "Because thou hast *done this.*" May our hearts be attentive, and our eyes be open to seek the Lord's will and to seek none other.

The more we ponder, the more we must realise the gravity of the issue. If the common interpretation of the parable is to be accepted, with the thought of "progress," traditions and developments are sanctified, and the Scriptures *fall*. But if not, the holy view of the Lord Jesus is clear, and His holy hatred of the departure from His simple path is definite. With foreseeing wisdom He forewarned His people: so seriously did He regard the matter. And there is no in-between position. If the leaven is the work of the enemy, separation, though with gracious humility, is no longer optional. The question comes with burning power. Is Christ's standpoint ours, and are His interests ours, or not? Love to beloved children of God who remain in "national churches" must not blind our eyes to His condemnation (Rev. 17. 2) and His eyes are as a flame of fire. "Infant baptism" and similar errors are no longer misunderstandings, but part of an original scheme of the enemy, although, in the knowledge and experience of many, they are now unconscious misunderstandings, largely because of the un-

\* There is a parallel in the process, albeit the ferment remains in the wine, but is burnt out from the bread, though its results remain.

faithfulness of those who have seen something of the terrible plan of evil. But it is love to point this out, if done with lowliness and in the spirit of love, and with a frank acknowledgment that some in the systems of to-day may love their Lord more devotedly than many of us, who have come out, yet may have allowed the enemy to sidetrack awhile into the equally deadly sin of leaving our first love. There is room for a general breaking down and confession. The devil is willing for us to be warmhearted in error, or coldhearted in truth, but he hates the love of the truth, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the light of fulfilment, and of 2 Thessalonians 2, the reference to Zechariah 5 seems clear. In that chapter we have the mystery of lawlessness (feminine) inworking, till the man of sin comes forth. Verses 6 and 7 tell of that which restrains, which seems to be parallel with the talent of lead, and human government, "until he shall have become out of the midst" (verse 7 literally). No mistranslation has been more used than that of this verse, since there is no word "taken" nor is there any word for "the way." The uniform excellence of our version makes this veiling of Satan's plan by the misrendering the more remarkable, in the very passage which tells of a subtle "inworking." If only believers realised that the wickedness now inworking will arise out of the midst in Shinar, as "the man of sin," would they not be stirred the more to look and pray and prepare for that Blessed Hope, that, in love's separation unto the Bridegroom, there might be a godly going forth to meet Him?

It may be well at this point to call to mind the historical parallels many believers have felt between the first seven parables and the epistles of Revelation 2 and 3. And the study is doubtless, suggestive. The sequence in Revelation is impressive. Though the first letter starts much later than the first parable\* the lack of love there indicated had a sad counterpart in history, and, if Smyrna suggests a martyr period, Pergamum may bring before us Constantine's corruption of the "church" and its parallel with the work of Balaam and Balak. remind of the mustard seed, the *third* in each case. And the Jezebel of Thyatira, though primarily personal, hints, and more than hints, the woman and the leaven, reminding moreover of the Jezebel who led Ahab,—and are there not many believers like Jehoshaphat who still compromise with such?

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\* More definitely associated with the second.

The few names in Sardis may bring before us the treasure *hid*, and the refreshment as to Philadelphia may encourage even as the one pearl. There are contrasts as well as parallels, as to the seventh parable and letter, but both bring before us the dread result of sin,—and the casting away and spewing out. May our hearts be bowed down, lest we fall from our steadfastness. Again we look back to see the sowing of the tares *followed* by the coming of the birds and the leavening of the *whole*. The sin is one, and the *hiding* of the aim is evident throughout. Nor is the climax reached at once. Tares are sown, not planted as grown up already: the birds do not come till the branches tell of a radical change: the leaven is not seen at the outset. Only a little is needed to leaven the whole lump. Error does not proclaim its essential character, but if our eyes are not opened early they will be opened too late. These messages of Christ are not only for our study: His words are intensely practical. Are our hearts attentive, or are we still unmindful?

Some may still hesitate on one point, which to them remains as the one difficulty. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven." The parable before has prepared for this, the "change" does not alter the *wording* (e.g. Luke 5. 37, the "*new*" wine becomes fermented, but another name is not then introduced). This is part of the Divine teaching, and in itself indicative of the enemy's unholy tactics adopting words and appearances of truth, but denying the power (2 Tim. 3. 5).

In accord with this, and with the description according to profession, "the kingdom of *heaven*" is likened unto ten *virgins*, although five were *foolish*; and the *holy* city is still thus called in Revelation 11. 2. Nor can we forget the "ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." There is no impossibility in such language, but the problem may be to find the special shade of meaning. Here the lesson seems impressive, in accord with the fact that leavened fine flour is still so described, to indicate Satan's attempt in adopting the language of God's truth with a changed meaning. Hence far from being a difficulty the startling words themselves crystallize the sad meaning of the parable.

After the searching message of the hid leaven, with its climax affecting the "whole" (verse 33) we find a change both of place and of persons. The Holy Spirit separates the second set of four parables by a quotation from Psalm 78, and by the words, "Then Jesus sent the MULTITUDE away, and went into the HOUSE." Henceforth we have the disciples

alone, and fittingly the first words are interpretation. We have already meditated on these. The general principles, the dispensational setting, and the call to bring forth fruit, and to hate iniquity, here set forth, are ever important. The contrasted prospects, even the furnace of FIRE, and the shining forth as the SUN must speak to our hearts. "Why," I would ask myself, "Why am I not more earnest in view of all that has been revealed?" The words of the Lord Jesus are ever practical, and again the *present* tenses are before us, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." THIS link with Revelation 2 and 3 is suggestive.

The first parable in the house concerns a field, but not with regard to plant life; the earlier fruit parables thus stand alone, none of the latter are similar. Although the treasure is paired with the pearl, there is also, as we have seen, a structure, whereby the two central parables (4th and 5th) deal with a "hiding." But in the second we have the hiding of that which is precious. The kingdom, as explained to the multitude, might (and would) become corrupted, but the Lord's purpose cannot be broken. Hence the disciples are told of His true people. The treasure was one, though possibly of many parts. We are not told by whom it was first hidden, or when, or why. An eastern may hide his possessions through fear, and for his own use, and another, in finding, may not be entitled to claim. But as to all these things there is an INSPIRED silence, suggesting, it would seem, an appointed contrast with usual reasons of hiding, etc. May we not have here God's loving purpose, hiding His elect people, with a view to the work of His beloved Son, Who came as a Man, at the appointed time, to find, and hide awhile, until returning to claim the purchased land? This seems helped by the rendering "Hid in THE field" (44, see 38). The birds of the air and the leaven cannot destroy His chosen people. The finding preceded the purchase: there is no indication of a display then, rather the opposite. He alone "found," and we have just one illustration in John 1. 43. Another aspect of His finding is suggested by Luke 15. 4. From the standpoint of God's election, His people are a treasure: in their personal condition, they are lost: in both ways the Lord Jesus "finds." God's chronology is not ours, and thus, as the parables of the Sower and of the Wheat and Tares view the fruit at the end from the one sowing, so all the treasure was, as it were, visible to the Lord Jesus. In like manner, all His people's sins were laid

on Him. This difficulty is one from the human viewpoint: but to God all things are present.

In the brief compass of about thirty words we have the treasure, the hiding, the man, the field, the further hiding, the joy, the going away, the selling, the buying. The TWO words already explained in verses 36-43 have been rightly used to be the key, and everything else is fitting. The life, death, resurrection, and coming day of the Lord Jesus Christ are all unveiled, and we behold also something of His gracious and wondrous character. We see His joy in His people, and were not His delights with the sons of men (Prov. 8. 31)? Is not His joy often before us in Scripture, and frequently with a reference to His loved ones? "The oil of gladness above Thy FELLOWS" (Ps. 45. 7). "In that hour Jesus REJOICED in spirit, and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast . . . revealed them unto BABES" (Luke 10. 21), "Well done, good and faithful SERVANT. . . enter thou into the JOY of thy Lord" (Matt. 25. 21). And His joy was ever in the Father's will (Ps. 16 8, 9, 40. 8). The two-fold thought is found in Isaiah 64. 5: He was the One rejoicing and working righteousness; but at once we have the plural, even *the ones remembering God* in His ways, because they are accepted in the Righteous One Whose obedience is imputed to them as "the righteousness of God." And His exceeding joy in the fruit of His work is seen both in Jude 24, and Song 3. 11 where we have the day of the gladness of His heart. A Greater than Jacob toiled, and wearied not of His work, because of the love He had to His bride. Commandments are not grievous when there is love (1 John 5. 3). There was no forced labour in the obedience unto death of our glorious Saviour. We adore Him. His joy was a joy in the poor, guilty sinners He came to redeem—a joy in the elect of God—and nothing could change His purpose of heart. He went away—the very word used for His death and resurrection in John 8. 21, 22: 13, 36, etc.—and sold all that He had. In His incarnation He, Who was rich, for our sakes became poor, but, as Philippians 2 indicates, He yet further humbled Himself. He SOLD all that He had. We think of the way in which He was stripped of all, even His garments, taken by the Roman soldiers. But this, though typical, was not "SELLING," His personal, active work. Usually we associate it with the obtaining of money, and then the use of that wherewith to buy elsewhere. But the silence of the Holy Spirit as to this would suggest that the two-fold transaction was entirely with the

Father. And thus the precious work of Christ, in giving up all, was not lost, it was brought to God as the purchase price for those to be redeemed. The justice of God shines forth. The fact that they were His by creation, aye, and by electing love before the world's foundation, could not obviate the need for atonement. They must be purchased,—or they must be condemned. And He Who purchases must present an adequate price, and gladly give up the whole. Nothing short of perfection in fulfilling the will of God could be acknowledged, and thus the Lord Jesus sold ALL. The withholding of one detail would have invalidated all. As Daniel 9. 26 reminds us He had NOTHING: nothing could be kept back. But thereby He receives everything, for the purchase is rightly His, and, furthermore, His obedience must become His award in resurrection, in accord with the words, "The Man Who hath done these things shall live in them" (Rom. 10. 5: there is no "if" in the Hebrew of Lev. 18. 5), and if *His*, it must be theirs, for was He not their Substitute? Hence imputation *and* union stand together, and we are made "the *righteousness of God in Him*" (2 Cor. 5. 21).

Difficulties often lead to blessing. Some may ask—Why purchase the field, as well as the treasure? Matthew 13. 24 has already implied this, and as our beloved Lord was the Last Adam He must have earth's sovereignty (Gen. 1. 28). To withhold this would be to deny the acceptability of His work. As the Son of Man, He will bear the glory on earth (Heb. 2. 5-8), and He will be seen where He was rejected, and His people too are to be manifested where they are now obscure. "The Righteous shall be recompensed IN THE EARTH" (Prov. 11. 31). "That field" must be His, and Jerusalem its centre must be "a praise in the earth." All "spiritualizing away" misses the fulfilment of God's plan, and would destroy His truthfulness.

Some may still ask:—Why the PURCHASE, if the people are God's choice? And why the purchase from God, if they were sold to the enemy? Both questions lead to the further unveiling of our Redeemer's glory. Sin has not only brought in a separation, but guilt, and therefore the deliverance from the debt is necessary, and the payment must be to Him to Whom the debt is owed. God's election is never at the expense of His holy law, but there is a perfect harmony between all His relationships. Again, Satan has NO RIGHT to those who have sold themselves to him for nought (Isa. 52. 3). As a liar and a murderer he has gained a temporary

possession, but no right. And thus he must be cast out, NOT COMPENSATED, and, thanks be unto God, the Lord Jesus was manifested to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3. 8), and render him powerless against the many sons brought to glory (Heb. 2. 10).

The present tense is not an accident. We do not read "He went and sold and bought," but "goeth" and "selleth" and "buyeth." The vividness is not only to help our heartfelt realization, but to remind of the fulness of delight He had, as He made haste to do the Father's will, that we, rejoicing in Him, may not be slothful, or hesitating, but, on the contrary, overflowing with love's intense readiness. Obedience without love would not be obedience. His obedience lacked nothing of love, it was love throughout.

Do we read elsewhere of "selling?" We call to mind the words of Christ to the rich young man, and as He described HIMSELF when He spoke of the Samaritan, so that which the young man failed to do was more than done by our exalted Lord. He not only sold all, and gave, but sold all, and bore judgment itself, that He might be able to give more than earthly food and blessing to the *utterly* poor and helpless. And surely His TREASURE—the same word is found in Matthew 19. 21—will be His eternal joy, and we, as parts of that treasure, shall rejoice with Him. It is all so glorious—what can we do but praise?

Just as the three LATTER parables to the multitudes begin with "The kingdom of heaven is like," so is it, INVERTEDLY, with the three FORMER, addressed to the disciples. Thus these words continually meet us, with their practical message as to the "heavenly calling," even though we are humbled to see that which merely professes to be "heavenly." But in the "treasure" we have reality, and behold the delight of God the Father and God the Son in the redeemed, and our heart would rejoice as we meditate on the fact that we are His by grace and purchase. What manner of persons ought we to be in holy conversation and godliness:—His in love's devotedness.

The sixth parable is closely associated. If we already have guidance as to the Man, the finding, the selling and the buying, the fresh words of verses 45, 46, soon take their place in the picture. The description "Merchant Man" impresses. We realise that one may find a treasure unexpectedly, and APPARENTLY "by accident." Hence this further unveiling.

There was *nothing* of chance, or surprise, in the glorious work of the Lord Jesus. He came to secure a people for Himself. Men may speak glibly of the commercial view of the atonement, but the Holy Spirit has shown us Christ's own stress on the PURCHASE. The work was not an indefinite display of mercy: the Lord Jesus came for a definite transaction of grace. The seeking of goodly, or beautiful, PEARLS may present a difficulty. But is it not in harmony with God's testing of Israel under law, and with the words "These three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none" (Luke 13. 7, cf. Isa. 5. 2, Ps. 14. 2)?\* The Lord Jesus came unto His own possessions, and His own people received Him not. He found no pearls (plural): man is an utter failure. But there is a delightful change—the plural is left, and we find one pearl, and that of great price. A more literal rendering emphasizes this thought, "BUT having found." There is a precious contrast. He could not fail, nor be discouraged. And we shall yet see that, in one aspect, He found, in another He made, this costly pearl. The past tenses here do not remove the joy of the former parable, but they afford another aspect. Our Lord's rejoicing was not the temporary excitement of a child of earth. Here we see the grandeur of His love in counting the cost. As the Merchant Man He knew the value set upon the pearl, and, with definite calculation, "sold all that He had and bought it." His joy did not hinder this definiteness, and yet His view of all the circumstances did not make the action only part of an ETERNAL plan: there was a PRESENT, living joy as He wrought it out. The glory of His perfect character is before us, and every tense used by the Holy Spirit combines to refresh our hearts.

We do not read He bought the sea, to which the ungodly are likened. The sovereign possession of earth was before us in the fifth parable, but here the thought is changed. 'Tis His own people as the fruit of His own work who are brought before us now. The treasure tells of God's election, the pearl of Christ's redemption, the good fish of the Holy Spirit's quickening. The treasure was hidden, the pearl was made, the fish were brought out of the sea individually. Nor do we read of purchasing the oyster-shell, inasmuch as that seems to set forth, like the badger-skins, the humiliation of Christ in the

\* The treasure may hint this. Christ did not only buy the field, but came first to it, and found the treasure, as if He were about to display it. The long journey of Luke 19. 12 is revealed elsewhere.

days of His flesh, in the body prepared for Him, wherein men saw no beauty. *Now* He is glorified.

And how precious are His people to Himself, and how costly. "One pearl of great price." Nothing but His precious blood could purchase them. But He gladly gave all, and withheld nothing, and, even as the righteous will shine forth as the sun, so will they have the lustre of the pearl, and the rich display of His rainbow-like COVENANT love. Who can tell all that is wrapped up in the love of Christ (Eph. 3. 19)?

The direct teaching of the Lord Jesus is clear, and we would never build doctrine on our own inferences, or on unmentioned thoughts. But there is often much further help for the soul, apparently HINTED by the words used, and, if we test all by the definite statements of Scripture elsewhere, we shall distinguish the Lord's hints from human suggestions. We may therefore reverently ask—Does the Lord give us further blessing by the choice of a pearl? I think so, for a pearl shows that which is holy (Matt. 7. 6), excluding evil and welcoming praise (Rev. 21. 21). It is formed by the living oyster's response to that which pierces and wounds. Here is the lustre of love that WILL not be irritated. May we not thus sum up the life-attitude of our adorable Lord? Thus the pearl, as the beautiful tabernacle-veil, would seem to set forth His perfect life of obedience. But the blessings thereby are AVAILABLE only through His DEATH; and how can the pearl be obtained except via death? We turn again to the revelation of Leviticus 18. 5 (Rom. 10. 5). The remarkable fact is that the only deliverance from a position "under the law" (which Christ took, Gal. 4. 4) is by death (Rom. 7. 1). Hence we reach the apparent paradox that an Obedient One, not deserving death, can never reach the goal, UNLESS He becomes a Substitute for sinners. But if He becomes a Substitute He must finally receive the reward of His obedience after paying the penalty for those for whom He becomes a Substitute. And they, if He has truly taken their doom, must be free, and necessarily have His merits. Hence remarkably the law involves the demand that He should purchase His own obedience, and THAT very obedience becomes (as we have seen) identified with the people in whose place He stood. But such is exactly the wondrous picture suggested by the parable. The Lord Jesus both made and purchased the pearl. and we are His. Truly we may say the Law was with a view to Him:—and not only so, but Nature also was thus arranged.

Nor is this surprising,—their Author is One, and the Same. We can only worship and praise.\*

The seventh parable, in structure and language, reminds of the second. These are the first and last parables in this chapter which begin "The kingdom of heaven is like." The large drag net is cast into the sea, and it gathers of every kind or race (same word, Mark 7. 26, Acts 4. 36, 18. 2). And then we have the drawing on to the shore, and a definite severance, at a time of crisis, but there is no mention of IMMEDIATE glory or wrath. The good are contrasted with the corrupt, as the word signifies. There is not the hint that some "kinds," or nations, are rejected. Rather, the decayed and putrid may bring before us those whose profession is manifestly dead, and loathsome. Such are cast outside, i.e. outside the net. But at the same time the good are gathered into vessels, belonging usually to the owner of the net. The Lord Jesus again gives an explanation. The time is "the ending of the age," which, as we have seen in parable 2, implies a period.‡ The angels' activity is linked with the same time there. And in both passages we have a twofold action: (a) sever (b) cast them into the furnace of fire. There is no warrant for the IMMEDIATE sequence, any more than the immediate burning in verse 30. The putrid are OUTSIDE the claimed possession of the One Who has authority, whereas the good fish are gathered, on the shore, in separate vessels. May not this refer to the reviving and bringing together of the Lord's people in Scriptural assemblies, when Christendom is overturned, and the daughters of the harlot set manifestly aside? This would harmonise with Matthew 24. 45, 46, and show the Lord's delight in the fellowship and local gatherings of His people.§ The 3½ years are soon over, and the ungodly have the FURTHER casting into the furnace of fire. There is no hint that this takes place at the beginning. As we ponder these solemnizing subjects, let us not alone seek accuracy of interpretation, but a

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\* It is very remarkable that the Law, thus rightly explained, in its positive commands and glory, would fit NO ONE ELSE. It is like the types, definitely with a view to Christ.

‡ The parallels would seem to include:—One field, one net; wheat, good fish: tares, corrupt fish: the end of the age and the angels in both: gathering out of His kingdom, casting out: final burning.

§ Appropriately the parable to the people speaks of bundles, or gatherings on earth of unsaved ones, ready for judgment: the parable to the disciples suggests gatherings of saved ones, waiting for their Lord.

godly exercise of soul in the Holy Spirit's enabling, that we may be ready for our Lord Jesus, and that we may be concerned as to those who know Him not, and who fear not the "wailing and gnashing of teeth." The practical nature of all Christ's utterances, both on *our own* behalf, and that we may be rightly anxious for *others*, needs continual emphasis.

And now we reach the last parable, the eighth, suggestive of resurrection ground, and a new order of "scribes." The eighth parable is personal, as the first, but there we have Christ in the FIELD, here we have His faithful people (viewed individually, "every"), following His example (note too Song 7. 13) in the HOUSE. The "scribe" is primarily a "writer," and the arrangement of Deuteronomy 17. 18 was very beautiful. I would never regret, when a young man, writing out the New Testament, in a somewhat literal translation. But reading and writing, though precious, are not enough without communion. Hence we have the word "instructed" or "discipled" (note Matt. 23. 18, 19, John 15. 8). It is by grace that we have become God's pupils (John 6. 45). And discipleship, implies docility and loving obedience in the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the Lord Jesus by the word "scribe" indicates the setting aside of Judaism. It is interesting to see the words brought over (e.g. assembly, priesthood—belonging to all believers—elder, etc.), that we may seek to please the Lord where the earthly nation failed. We have said the Lord's people are to imitate Him, and is not He the primary Householder of this chapter? Yet, though His disciples are usually described as servants, (and we behold their responsibility in Mark 13. 34, 35), their high privilege and care for one another may be brought before us by the same word.

Furthermore, in one of the parables of redemption, we have seen the Lord's treasure, consisting of His people, and now we rejoice in the treasure of His truth granted to His own. We must have treasures ere we can bring them forth, and though we praise God for new things realized for the first time, we would never weary of the old things also. And our adorable Lord shows that those who POSSESS must USE. "Therefore" implies this responsibility, and may urge that we should emphasize on believers to-day the message of this chapter, that there may be godly separatedness from the world, because of love to Christ. Truth is not given us for our benefit alone: we are trustees. And no part of truth is to be untreasured. It is a wondrous privilege to know the ways of God. The added verses in Matthew 13 show the blindness of Israel and their

unbelief (54-55). Should not our attitude be the one mentioned by the Lord Jesus just before the parables, even the attitude of doing the will of the Father (Matt. 12. 50)? The response of love to all the gracious unveiling of this chapter is also a responsibility. May we grasp this privilege prayerfully, in the Holy Spirit, and bring glory to our adorable Lord, as we look for His Coming.

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### Some Concluding Thoughts for the Heart on Matthew 13.

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How many well-known expressions come in this chapter, and how searching they all are, e.g., "Because they had no root, they withered away," "Blessed are your eyes, for they see," "Persecution ariseth because of the Word," "While men slept," "He sold all that he had," and so forth. The glory of the Lord Jesus shines out in contrast with the failure and sin of men.

As we have seen in the first parable, the relation to the Word of God affects everything, and we need to ask ourselves, Does the enemy take away the Word from *me*? Is there "no deepness of earth" to *my* experience? Have I anything that chokes the Word? Further, let us be humbly affected by the warning "while men slept." He cannot thus sow, while God's people are awake.

The third parable testifies against seeking of greatness in this age. How many Christian societies beginning with concern for God's glory have reached a similar broadness; and the parable of the leaven calls our hearts to godly concern in the Holy Spirit, lest we mingle *anything* with God's pure words. The importance of receiving truth as it stands, and of feeding thereon, is very precious.

It is a joy to know that the "buying" of this chapter is by the Lord Jesus: we were bankrupt and helpless; but the practical message for us is beautiful. Now that we are in Him (if, by grace, this is our joyous privilege and experience) let us seek to show more of *His* love for *His* people. He bought them by selling all, and shall not we be devoted (1 John 3. 16)? Moreover, shall it be said that He gave Himself for us, and shall we be unwilling to "buy the truth, and sell it not" (Prov. 23. 23) for *anything* of this poor world?

**No. 2. FREE.**

*“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of Salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness.”—Isaiah 61.10.*

# THE PARABLES OF THE LORD JESUS

Outline Studies for His believing people, who feel the solemnity of the times, and look for His Coming.

- (1) FIVE LINKED PARABLES.
- (2) THE PARABLES OF THE DEBTORS.

*“I forgave thee all that debt.”—Matthew 18.32.*

*“When they had nothing to pay, He frankly forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will LOVE HIM MOST?”—Luke 7.42.*

**T**HE Parables, like the Types, are full of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Having experienced and enjoyed a little of their inexhaustible fulness, I desire to share, with others of His beloved people, the food that He has graciously provided. A book on all the parables is in prayerful preparation,\* but this forerunner is herewith sent forth in faith, and dedicated to the Lord's service.

Copies will be supplied as the Lord enables. Our dependence is simply on Him. Hence no financial straits should hinder poor believers from ASKING for whatever copies they need. Such are equally beloved in Christ Jesus. If others, accepted in Him, send fellowship in expenses, it is received gladly in His Name, if without any thought of compulsion or purchase, but only because they feel thus guided by our adorable Lord.

Suggestions and questions are ever welcome, for there is ever a fulness beyond all that any of us realize, and it should be our privilege and joy to learn more of our Lord Himself and of His words, while, in the enabling of the Holy Spirit, we await His return and pray expectantly, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

PERCY W. HEWARD.

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\* Portions are issued in "The Student of Scripture" monthly. Further particulars and current issue gladly sent.

## Five Linked Parables.

Matthew 9. 14-17, Mark 2. 18-22, Luke 5. 33-39.

**A**T first it may seem as if we only have two parables, one of the garment, and the other of the wineskins, but a little prayerful attention will show that the first concerns the children (or sons) of the bride-chamber, and this is used to introduce the robe and the food, alike connected with the marriage feast (see Matt. 22. 11, 12, John 2. 1-10). The Lord Jesus, as in John 3, is emphasized as the Bridegroom, though so many fail to realise this, and the "taking away" of the Bridegroom conveys a lesson of deep solemnity. The appointed death was always before Christ's view, and He shows this in various parables. We should not have expected this reference to His sacrifice in the "taking away" here, but the Lord Jesus thereby includes an answer to the questioners' underlying thought; they imagined a new sect of Judaism, and realized nothing of the new birth on the ground of His finished work. Fittingly, therefore, the next parable reveals the throwing away of the rags of self-righteousness. The "old garment" is not to be patched. The remarkable fact is that mending is usual, but neither in Matthew or Mark, nor in the distinct parable of Luke 5, does the Lord refer to the normal mode of repair. He speaks of uncarded\* cloth in the one case, and in the other of a piece torn out from a new garment. People regularly mend with a strip of finished cloth; why does the Lord Jesus exclude this idea? Evidently the usual Divine principle applies, i.e. omissions are with a purpose, and often indicate that in the point omitted there is a designed contrast between the earthly custom and the spiritual theme. Clearly the garment of self's goodness is not to be mended. Every attempt ignores the depth of our ruin. Christ utterly excludes the possibility of any "normal" way of repair, and shows the failure of two abnormal ways, with much instruction for our hearts. The raw uncarded cloth would picture a good, but unfinished work. Those who knew nothing of atonement viewed the Lord Jesus as a "Good Teacher," to enable them to mend their own work. But, though there is nothing of the

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\* The margin is clear; strangely the translators render quite different words in Matthew 9. 16 and 17 as if alike, and also make the statement contrary to fact.

rag in uncarded cloth, and albeit it is not worn, it is incomplete, and not to be used. Thus the Lord portrays His work, as men wished, and still wish, to apply it, when viewing Him only as a Leader. No one uses unfinished cloth for earthly mending, else that which is put in to fill it up takes from the garment. And Christ will not provide a makeweight. He will not "fill up" a man's work, His real fulness is very different (John 1. 16). He will not help men to save themselves. Man's own garment, with all its religious rites (Matt. 9. 14), must be set on one side. The only hope is the new robe.

If we would understand the parallel, yet somewhat distinct message of Luke 5, we must seek a simple translation. "No one putteth a piece from a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, he will both rend the new, and the piece from the new agreeth not with the old." Here we find no thought of an unfinished work. A complete garment, unused, unworn, undamaged, is before us; it is a finished garment, evidently ready for wear, not merely cloth; and the word "new" implies a complete contrast with that which needs mending. Here we have a picture of the prepared and finished work of Christ (Isa. 61. 10), a striking contrast with the altogether inadequate apron of the first Adam. In ordinary matters, no wise man would cut up a good garment to mend an old and ragged one; rather would he discard the old, and accept the new. Yet that which a sane man would not do, as to his body, is commonly done as to the soul. Or rather the attempt is vainly made, for such is the foolishness of sin. The utter worthlessness of the flesh and of its works, is not acknowledged, although partial, personal failure is often confessed, to the extent that "repair" is said to be needful. The theory is held that "God helps those who help themselves" and that "if we do our part, God will do the rest." The Lord Jesus shows He will not be party to such a compromise and fallacy; it is impossible before God. We cannot tear somewhat out from His robe to patch our faulty garment. It is madness to try to do so, and there is no "agreement" between His perfect work and our failure. Possibly the attentive reader now sees the importance of this literal rendering.† The new would not necessarily make a rent, in earthly things, but if the man rends the new everything is clear; it is important to realize that Christ's statements are invariably true to fact. It is deeply important

† It is common to various translations; Wycliffe and Tyndale are both correct.

to lay hold of this part of truth; the writer has found it a help in open air witness also:—Do not seek to patch up your work, a man cannot have part of the work of Christ; God has revealed a complete salvation for a complete sinner; throw away your rags (Isa. 64. 6), this is the only safe step, and receive the finished work of the Lord Jesus instead. Judaism did not unveil this, but the gospel has nothing else. How blessed it is when we see that nothing “agrees” with Christ’s work, or rather that His holy work “agrees” not with our sin; yet, in mercy, the broken-hearted sinner is not condemned; the whole of “the righteousness of God” is imputed to him, and he is accepted in the Beloved. The parables are ever full of “the glory of Christ,” and of the fulness of the gospel.

The two messages, though distinct, have the same thought, Christ’s work is necessary in its completeness. Any incompleteness in viewing the work before He died, or in appropriating but part of it afterwards, would nullify the whole effect. “It is the blood that maketh an atonement” was prophetic of His precious blood, and in days when this is set aside, definitely or virtually, we cannot be too earnest in emphasizing that “Christ died for the ungodly.” We may own our garment is ragged, we may confess that we need Christ, we may work hard in sewing\*, yet all is vain unless we acknowledge our utterly lost condition. The man who had not on a wedding garment comes to mind. The Holy Spirit brings before us “the righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ,” and we rejoice. Every theory falters, but God’s purpose of grace stands. When men snatched at the kingdom of the heavens before the Lord Jesus died (Matt. 11. 12), they illustrated the same tendency to deny the utter ruin of the sinner. We cannot die to law except by the body of Christ (Rom. 7. 4), and the law hath dominion until there is death, hence Luke 16. 18 is linked with verses 16 and 17, to show the wish, namely an escape from law without atonement. Men were forcing themselves into the kingdom (16) but John clearly showed, through the type of baptism, that there could be no real entry except *via* “death” and the complete setting aside of the flesh. This denial of the utter fall is Satan’s effort. Evolutionary theories cast it aside altogether. The thought of the improvement of the world is linked. The present idea of salvation by a man doing “his part” ignores the lost condition of a sinner. The conception of falling from salvation implies that something of a man’s own

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\* Observe the reminder of Genesis 3. 7.

power guarantees eternal life, and this, traced to the root, unconsciously minimises the fall. The tremendous, and yet precious, responsibility of a believer, does not need a grievous error to prop up its message to a humbled heart. The sad practice of "Infant sprinkling" puts aside the believer's typical judgment and burial of the whole flesh. May our hearts be drawn to realize God's truth, and to rejoice in His glorious salvation.

If the life of the Lord Jesus would rend that which is old, showing its defects, and while His complete work does not agree with anything of the flesh, it is blessed to know that He came for His people's sake, and any poor, guilty, troubled sinner is now welcome to the whole of that accepted "robe." Such an one, by mercy, "agrees not" with his own labours and efforts, but casts them all away (Isa. 2. 20 is a helpful part-parallel), and looks only to Christ—only to Christ. If such an one reads these pages, may he find joy and peace in believing even now! The veil of the tabernacle was called a "division," but when rent it became the open door, and the word "mercy seat" contains the same letters as this word "division" graciously re-arranged, to show the life of the Lord Jesus would shut us out apart from His death, but the same gracious One brings us within His ever precious blood. "Thanks be unto God for His Unspeakable Gift."

Let us ever remember this in the testimony of the gospel whether at the street corner or in our home. Let the little ones early be brought to know the need for the work of Christ. Every attempt apart from Him, makes the rent worse, even as the last state of the swept and garnished house was worse than the first. Reformation and education, without Christ, will end in a climax of iniquity. There may seem to be "temporary blessing" from social reform, but those who urge this forget the solemn utterances of Christ as to the reaction.

The message of the new wine continues the testimony as to God's putting aside of the flesh. There is no thought of bringing old wine, until the last parable of Luke 5. 39. The wine is fresh and good, but if the wine skin has been used before, it cannot be cleansed by human skill. Water will not suffice. Nor can we purify the flesh to receive the precious doctrine of Christ, and the application of His finished work. A glass bottle may be scoured, but the usual eastern bottle is skin (cf. Ps. 119. 83), and contains the ferment in every part. And as we need a newness upon us, even the righteous-

ness of God, so we need a new life within to receive the wine of the gospel (Isa. 55. 1). The "must" of Christ's death and of the new birth are alike before us in John 3. 7, 14. Happy are they who have, by grace, learnt this.

But if we attempt the impossible, the old wine skins change and ferment the testimony of the Lord, to their utter ruin. It is a dangerous thing for a soul to trifle with God's testimony. To go to Him one's own way is to risk Korah's death, and to take the gospel to the flesh is to rush oneself into judgment. But present-day teaching often encourages this. We seem afraid of broken hearts, in which God delights. He has no cheap gospel, only a free one. He wounds, and He heals, He kills and He makes alive. The wounded and helpless man on the way to Jericho was ready for grace; the poor, maimed, halt and blind welcome the Saviour. Saul of Tarsus was cast down and blinded. There is a majestic laying low in the sovereign grace of God.

The beautiful harmony of these parables is now before us. And every one exalts the Lord Jesus, showing the vanity, and sin, of self-confidence. The clothing tells of God's work WITHOUT, the new wine, in the new wine skin, of His work WITHIN. Righteousness is not imputed apart from regeneration, nor can we have regeneration without righteousness. There is a completeness in all that is of God. The spoiling and spilling of the new wine seems clear; the rending of the skins is not so manifest. But it would seem that if the unquickened sinner claims the promises of the gospel, he not only changes its character to that which (as we shall soon see) is more palatable to men, but does this to his own destruction. But he cannot in reality accommodate himself to his altered gospel, nor suit its message to himself. If he has ever received its message without a right attitude before God, there is a terrible rending, and his condition is, indeed, pitiable. Many do not illustrate this solemn message, because they alter the gospel BEFORE receiving it, yea, many who preach have modified God's witness, and to unsaved souls no longer declare the humbling gospel of the grace of God. The words of the Lord Jesus show the peril of listening to a holy ministry of truth, without a broken spirit, and we do well to realise this danger, that we may warn souls the more earnestly, lest mere profession take the place of a true acknowledgment of God's testimony with simple faith in the finished work of Christ.

We have already noticed that there is no thought of bottling the old wine. The Lord Jesus definitely sets this aside. HIS gospel is altogether without ferment. It is the unveiling of the glories of the True Vine, and in Him we rejoice. But as nothing can be more easily fermented than new wine, so nothing can be more "easily" altered than His gospel, and we do well to be on our guard that we may hold fast the faithful word. When a believing heart—a new wine skin—receives God's message in a godly way, there is a perfect harmony, and "both are preserved." The word of the Holy Spirit in the gospel, and His work in the heart are in complete concord.

We have observed elsewhere the bearing of this passage on the often disputed fact that unfermented WINE is called wine. The question seems to be settled for disciples, and also the fact that such wine is obtainable, by the simple testimony of the Lord Jesus. One word from His lips sets aside all the reasonings of theologians, and the assertions of scientists. It is a remarkable evidence of the poverty of human wisdom that on this, as on most subjects, learned men differ, and great names can be produced on both sides of the "question." But for the humble believer the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is enough, and instead of an open question he can rejoice in a precious answer, and find food for his heart thereby.

The final parable is brief. "No one having drunk old wine straightway wishes new; for he saith, The old is agreeable" (Luke 5. 39 lit.). At last the drinking of old wine is before us, and it seems to be viewed as agreeable to the natural wish. It is plain in the earlier verses that the new wine and skin are parallel with the good garment which must not be rent, and that the old wine is parallel with the RAGGED CLOTHING, a point which those who, alas, think that old wine is appointed in the Lord's Supper and elsewhere often overlook.\* The same teaching seems to be continued. The natural man does not desire the real gospel. The message of salvation breaks self down, it is not agreeable to human pride. But if, in mercy, we have been brought to own His testimony

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\* Here the Lord Jesus avoids even the generic word "wine," and speaks only of the produce of the vine, in which ferment is not found. Unless we use in the Lord's Supper that which is unfermented, can we say that we have a command of our beloved Lord for our action? But to act WITHOUT His precept, and thereby to omit His precept, must pain many a humbled heart.

against ourselves, we shall no longer wish for the man-pleasing and palatable words of men. The Lord Jesus will be our one Hope and Resting Place, and we shall delight to hear of Him. Happy are those who have been drawn by grace to that which at first was not agreeable, and which had nothing to flatter, but which now reveals, not only the laying low of self, but One in Whom there is Righteousness and Strength, One Who is all our Salvation and all our Desire. May our grateful hearts be more occupied with Him, and may these pages be graciously used to cause a deeper love unto Himself, as the Holy Spirit takes of the things of Christ in the Scriptures, and shows them to us, in their living power.

## The Parables of the Debtors.

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**I**T is important to connect, and to study together, with prayerful meditation, the words of the Lord which appear to be linked by the Holy Spirit Himself. For example, we find messages concerning two sons both in Matthew 21. 28-31 and Luke 15. 11-32, and the wondrous references to clothing in the new garment of Luke 5. 36, the neglected robe of Matthew 22. 1-14, and the robe given to the prodigal, or rather the "found" son, in Luke 15. 22. There is a profound relation between the parables of the feast in Matthew 22 and Luke 14, but the differences with regard to the messengers (observe the *One* Who brings in and "compels"), and with regard to the final exclusion and final inclusion in the respective parables, are full of deep, helpful, spiritual lessons. The believer who compares and contrasts the aspects of truth which the Lord lovingly shows in the searching parables of the talents and the pounds will not go away empty. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable," and we would compare spiritual things with spiritual (1 Cor. 2. 13), that we may have a fuller view of His loving will.

It is thus with respect to the parables of the debtors in Matthew 18. 23-35 and Luke 7. 41-43, together with the narrative of Luke 16. 1-12, which is, in any case, applied parabolically, and, it would seem, set in appointed contrast with the frank and free forgiveness of the *two* debtors earlier in the Gospel. The thought of sin as involving a debt is embedded in Scripture. We call to mind the margin of Luke 13. 4, and the precious and practical words of the disciples' prayer, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." The present day tendency is to hurry toward the climax of the wrong dealing of man by insisting on his rights. The rights of God are largely forgotten, and the centre of thought has been transferred from the Creator to the creature, so that accountability to God is often in the background, and the thought of debt almost, if not quite, obliterated. But the *fact* cannot be thus abolished. It is only by the finished work of the Lord Jesus that our guilt can be removed. The tendency of to-day is to be occupied more with the safety and joy of the sinner, than with the glory of the Redeemer, the beauty of His finished work, and His delight in His own people. This tendency is part of one and the same attitude, which in science,

and daily life, and indeed, all things, as well as in doctrine, would minimise the authority of God, and make His exaltation secondary. With many, who are truly born again, this attitude may be graciously held in check, and may be unconscious, but we do well to search our ways that His majesty, and will, and joy may be dearer to our grateful hearts.

The parable of Matthew 18. 23-35 has a remarkable setting. The Lord Jesus had been dealing with faults among brethren, and the godly care which would wash one another's feet (verse 15), and accompany all necessary discipline with loving self-control, and definite prayerfulness (verses 16, 20). Peter, unconsciously thinking more of his brother sinning against him than of his sinning against his brother, asked a question which implied, and made essential, an answer of "limitation." But we should not limit the Lord, or restrict His answer as in Acts 1. 24. "How oft" suggests that one must draw the line numerically, and, moreover, that the speaker felt it probable others would do much that would be hard for himself to bear. The Holy Spirit's gracious words on forbearing one another (Eph. 4. 2. Col. 3. 13) are intended to correct the unconscious self-righteousness to which we are all prone. It is often easier to see a brother's fault than our own faults.

The added words "Till seven times?" contain a still further hint of limitation, and call to mind the Divine encouragement of Luke 17. 4 to forgive *seven times in a day*, never losing heart, nor becoming irritated. Such language, though it brings humiliation to the one who feels he has repeatedly failed, may well encourage against despondency, for the Lord will not prove less loving Himself than His words to His people, though we have grieved Him seven times in quick succession. Yet love never takes a wrong "advantage" of His love, nor uses forgiveness to veil the claim and expectation of victory. In Matthew 18 the Lord's answer repeated that of Peter, and adds, with a striking stress on the completeness wrapped up in the word "seven," "Until seventy times seven." And thereby we have one of our Lord's many allusions to the earlier Scriptures, for Daniel 9. 24 comes to mind, and its precious climax in the forgiveness and restoration of the spared ones of Israel. The Lord Himself will then illustrate, on a remarkable scale, that which He here inculcates, and yet He will excuse no sin. The "therefore" of verse 23 shows a close link. Behaviour in the kingdom of the heavens is of the deepest importance, in accord with Christ's commandments.

“ I say not unto thee, Until seven times; *but* ” : His word is His people’s law. Our lack of love toward others springs from a faulty realization of the love we have received. And so many failures are joined to an unconsciousness of the enormity of sin. The Deity of Christ, and His atonement, the path of separation and God’s teaching as to eternal punishment are alike attacked, because the enemy would blind the eyes to the terrible fact of sin. If our eyes have been opened, let us be prayerfully on our guard in this matter. It is worthy of notice that the King has authority before any are brought into the sphere of His redeemed people. The Kingship of God the Father is here brought out (verses 23, 35), as in Matthew 22. 7. This is important, for, as we shall see in that chapter, Christ is not yet acting in His kingship and judgement, nor is He called the King of His beloved people in the present dispensation.

The taking of account is a striking reminder that God has a right to all. His claims are, as we have seen, so often forgotten to-day. At once we are faced with a stupendous debt. The margin of our Bible suggests £187 10s., but why should we limit to silver, albeit this would mean nearly £2,000,000? Furthermore, the purchasing power was far greater. The denarius which our margin fixes at 7½d. was more comparable with 5s. or more, and this would suggest £15,000,000 as a minimum, even if we exclude gold. Our beloved Lord reminds us of what we ought to have rendered. And the amount has a real meaning: it is based on 10, the number of fellowship. Squares intensify the thought, and this is the *square* “*squared*.” The measurement of the Holiest of All brings before us 10 cubed: here we have the holiness and perfection which should have been presented. God’s holy law can allow of no compromise. How blessed it is to realize that in our bankruptcy our Saviour stepped in. But our hearts pause awhile to realize the great need, and the utter despair that reaches the sinner who beholds, for the first time, the majesty of the King’s law, and what the subject should have done. Nor is there any hope of compromise. A “composition” in the pound is impossible. In the debt parables there is the Holy Spirit’s stress on Christ’s repeated testimony that the hopeless debtor paid nothing, nothing at all. And why? The debtor had nothing, what then could he do? All the glory of man is thus swept away. Since our adorable Lord appears as the exact contrast, His Deity and love, and the glory of His salvation, shine out together.

And now we approach a part of the parable where the usual objection against “pressing every point” seems feasible, until we examine more carefully, and prayerfully, what the Lord Jesus *omits* to say. The command as to selling and his *family*, would seem to remind of Adam and what his sin incurred. But this, though remarkable, is only an allusion, with solemnizing power. The personal sinner is here before us. The importance of accountability, and the way we all affect others must not be overlooked. Parents have vast responsibilities. An Israelite sold into slavery involved his whole family. Moreover, as the statement is “all that he had,” in the earthly parallel all his possessions and treasures are enumerated. The bearing of this on the godly valuing of a godly home is important.

Everything seems hopeless, but grace shines out, for this is the “beginning” of the reckoning (verse 24, note 1 Pet. 4. 17 with another aspect), and if we have been caused to experience that we deserve the day of judgment, we shall, by faith, behold it *past*, the weight falling on the Son of God’s love, and not on ourselves in the *future*. But at first the outlook is dark. “He had not to pay.” Observe that this is a stronger statement than “He had nothing.” His *condition* was that of “not having,” and therefore the selling could provide nothing. His family were worth nothing. Nor could he, with able-bodied might, produce anything for the One to Whom his debt was due. This might was lacking. “Nought” is as definitely marked on his whole character and circumstances, as helplessness is seen among the poor, halt, maimed and blind of Luke 14. 21. But *they* are brought into the feast, and grace shall abound here.

We do not read, “*That* payment may be made,” nor “and thereby payment to be made.” The words of the Lord Jesus have a deeper, richer, fuller meaning than any earthly parallel. The King *commands* payment to be made,—and it *is* made, blessed be God! It is appointed, and there is no default. The Son of God became Man that payment might be made, a willing payment, a glorious payment, a complete payment, to secure the salvation of guilty sinners. But the way in which grace works is not unveiled at once. Nor is it so in our experience. We do not come to God as the elect, nor with a logical interpretation of all the covenant of grace, but as troubled sinners. God works through a man’s heart, not merely through his brains. A man’s will does not save him, but God does not save against his will. He lovingly causes a sense of need and a will toward Himself. Hence we have the needful experience

here. "The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me and I will pay thee all." Rather "Have longsuffering." The breaking down of "a sinner is important: when an unbroken heart "anon with joy" receives the Gospel, there is no evidence of root. But "longsuffering" is passive: it does not give. The "grace" of God *reigns* (Rom. 5. 21) in the days of God's longsuffering, and by *grace*, not longsuffering, we are saved. Each word is used perfectly. The debtor, like the prodigal, hesitates to ask too much, but God does not hesitate to give. The proposal is "I will pay." 'Tis a right acknowledgment of duty, but a wrong anticipation of power. Yet this is what we expect when the Lord's work begins. And now there is a tremendous response of grace. Nay, it is more than a response. It is not "Then the Lord of that servant was moved with compassion." Rather is it "but": "*but* the Lord of that servant," for He manifested more than longsuffering, He graciously gave all, and "loosed him and forgave him the debt." Why? Some will answer "Because he desired him" (verse 32). They miss the holy exactness of the Saviour's words, "I *forgave* thee all that debt (forgiveness is an experience) *because* thou desiredst Me," but not, "I *loosed* thee because thou desiredst Me." The "loosing" is prior to the forgiveness, and this word is from the same root as redemption, or release (see both words in Eph. 1. 7). Thanks be to God, the redemption is by the precious blood of Christ alone. Did we not see the holy command that the debt was to be paid, and it was! 'Tis not "I will" of the man, but "I have" of the Saviour. There is a call to praise.

The thoughtful reader may suggest "But it was commanded that he should be sold," and yet this was not carried out. Has such an one ever noticed the words of Genesis 49. 7, "I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel"? There is no declaration "*Therefore* will I scatter them in *judgment* among Israel": hence God, Who knew what He would do, could bring in the wondrous fulfilment of Jacob's words beyond all that he thought (1 Pet. 1. 12), in the fact that the Levites had no tribal inheritance but were scattered among other tribes in God's *service* (Jos. 21). So is it here: there is precious teaching underneath the surface. We have seen that the payment is not linked with any selling in judgment, but there was a precious payment in grace, and He Who paid is the One Who "loved the Church and gave Himself for it,"—He *bought* His people with His blood. There was a holy pur-

chase, and thus the word "sell" may come to mind in remarkable contrast with Judges 2. 14, for all the covenant transaction was between the Father and the Son.<sup>1</sup> And the Holy Spirit works a desiring in the heart of the redeemed that they may know the forgiveness and fellowship which spring from the one finished work. Yet the gospel is not preached as a philosophy, but as an invitation to the lost, and when we are saved we see the plan of grace, surpassing all philosophy, and we begin to rejoice in the hope of seeing Him Who wrought it that we might be His for ever. The utterly bankrupt sinner has an absolutely full Saviour.

And now the debtor is free: how will he use his freedom? Gratitude, and pity for others, and loving desire to know the mind and fulfil the wisdom of his glorious Benefactor, should characterize the whole life. But 'tis here that we find a painful contrast. Blessings do not guarantee a corresponding life: responsibility is lovingly urged upon us. "*But* the same servant went out": we are not told how soon, but it seems easy to fail quickly. Yet probably the 100 pence debt was contracted after the forgiveness just received. There is a right "going out" (John 10. 9), but there is a wrong one also. When we are outside God's communion we are in peril. There is an ominous silence after the gracious deliverance: we remember the Lord's question in Luke 17. 17, "But where are the nine?" It is easy to be more occupied with a blessing than with Him Who has bestowed it. "They soon forgot" has many sad parallels. The forgiven man "found" one of his fellow-servants which owed him an hundred pence. The *fact* of the debt is not denied. There are real responsibilities between fellow believers. Let us be careful how we deal with our brethren, especially when we are "in the right." Let us be careful as to "finding one" who owes us somewhat. It is easy to forget *how much* we have been forgiven, how much we have grieved the Holy Spirit, how much our brethren have used patience toward us. A slight sense of sin cuts at the root of true holiness among children of God to-day. This man gripped his fellow-servant, and "was throttling him." Horrible, you say. But have you never been irritated against a brother? Have you never acted in hastiness? May be you have comforted yourself that you did not mean to go as far as choking him; but only to bring him to a right attitude. It

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<sup>1</sup> With regard to election, they were "given" (John 6. 37), but the covenant agreement, in perfect righteousness, included His priceless payment, so that they are **His** in every way.

is easy to persuade ourselves that our action is permissible, as we can talk against others, even under the plea of asking prayer for them. Do we love those who owe us an hundred pence? Let us not turn aside the question—"They are wrong as well," "They ought to pay." That is not the point. How do we bear the sins of others against ourselves? Have we love's conformity with the words "forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any one have a cause of blame against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Col. 3. 13)? The Scriptures are intensely practical. The parables of Matthew's gospel speak to the heart. Call them not Jewish, and then turn aside the Holy Spirit's application of Christ's words!

You will have someone who owes you a hundred pence, and he will be a brother. It will be a real loss to you. He *ought* to deal with the matter. He is in the wrong, but if you do not love, you will be in the wrong too. Matthew 18. 15 is the exact opposite of taking by the throat. It is important to be ready when your brother turns and says, "I repent." It is important to seek him out when he is wandering, if, by gracious humbling, made spiritual enough to do it graciously (Gal. 6. 1), but *never* take him by the throat. Never deal with any case unless you love. Never reprove unless you love. Without love you will spoil all, however sound you are in doctrine, and Scriptural in practice. The Lord Jesus did not take you by the throat. His love is meant to melt all our hearts still.

The very words of the fellow-servant should surely have reminded of grace received:—"Have patience with me." But when the mind is made up it is hard to stop, and still harder when we have taken another by the throat. Let us seek grace to deal with sin at the outset. "Leave off contention before it be meddled with" is a Divine principle (Prov. 17. 14). "But he would not" is the solemnizing description that the Lord Jesus gives. He was contrary: hence the word "but." The *will* was wrong: there was no justification of his attitude. The evil was within: let us seek grace as to our *wills*. It is deeply important that we should *will* to do God's *will* (John 7. 17).

The wrong will brings forth the wrong action. He "went and cast him into prison." "He went." This was indeed a going *away* from God's path. The "casting" speaks further, in such a context, of the evil heart. We are reminded of Satan's work (Rev. 2. 10). Have you and I a prison for the believer who sins against us, or have we water and a towel as

John 13 appoints? The Lord indicates that Peter's "Till seven times" was proud forgetfulness of what he had been forgiven, and an attitude perilously near this unloving and unlovely bitterness. As soon as we make our limits, self is put in God's place. And the violence was against a repentant brother! "Prison" denies brotherly love, and raises self's barrier. It is easier to act thus than we realize.

His fellow-servants saw. They were very sorry. Are we sufficiently *sorry* because of the sins that we see? Paul spoke *weeping* of the enemies of the Cross of Christ, and rivers of waters ran down the psalmist's eyes because men kept not God's law. Especially do we need sorrow as to sins among God's people, and an unloving attitude. The fellow-servants did not "go," they "came." If a brother sins against us we should go and tell *him* his fault alone, but this was a more public sin, and they could, without unholy gossip, go together to their Lord. Fellowship in prayer as to the manifest departures from God's will to-day is Scripturally approved. God graciously deals with that which is laid on the heart of His people in united prayer. Daniel 9 comes to mind. Their Lord took action. He called the servant, and called him "wicked." There is a parallel with 1 Corinthians 5. 13 where (as 2 Cor. 2 shows) a wandering *believer* is before us. Sin must not be excused. The child of God who excuses sin becomes like the unsaved: hence the word "wicked," just as in Matthew 25. 26 for the unsaved professor, though there is nothing here of outer darkness, or eternal judgment with gnashing of teeth. The silver lost *in* the house is characterized by the same language as the sheep lost *outside*. Eternal salvation never involves glossing over guilt.

The Lord does not here say, "I know you not." He refers to the forgiveness as a fact, and there is not the slightest indication of undoing such forgiveness. That would be injustice, yet many dear children of God have interpreted the parable thus. When once we realize that the once-forgiven debt, on the one hand, is *not* given back, and that this passage concerns a present relation to God the *Father* on the other hand, and does not deal with the Judgment Seat of Christ, we shall be kept from two common errors of explanation.

We have seen that the cause of the "loosing" was the appointed and commanded "paying," which the glorious Substitute graciously did. The "forgiveness" was, however, an *experience*, in the application of grace, in response to the *desire* of a humble and quickened and awakened soul. The

*jett* debt—as the word “desiredst” shows—was graciously removed, and this was a call to graciousness. “*Shouldst not thou also?*” There is music in these words. We love because loved (1 John 4. 19). “Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4. 32), is a message of searching power. All doctrine is practical, and everything that we receive is to bring forth fruit in our life. If we turn the other cheek to one who smites it is to preach the gospel that Christ took the retribution for our guilt. If there is one smiting (sin), there must be a second (judgment). It should be normally on the sinner, but it is, by grace, on the One sinned against. Matthew 5. 30 is thus more than commanded gentleness, it is a panorama of the way of salvation.<sup>2</sup> So is it here. Forgiveness is to lead to forgiveness as an evidence of grace. “*Shouldst not thou also?*” We always have an “*also*”: we were not first. We have received that we may give (note Rom. 11. 35). Would that this message might appeal to our hearts more than ever before. The Holy Spirit never leads to an unmoved coldness.

The solemn words, “His Lord was wroth,” reminds of 2 Chronicles 32. 25. It is not a question of eternal wrath, nor of penal anger. God’s spotless holiness cannot, in any relationship, excuse sin, nor can He, consistently with perfection, be aught but angry against unholiness. The base ingratitude of the one forgiven could not be rightly overlooked. The term “Father” does not exclude fatherly anger, it only excludes that which is penal. A home is not a sphere of weak indulgence. Chastisement is beautiful, but the sin that necessitates it is ugly. The servant was delivered to the tormentors “till he should give back all that was due.” Observe there is no reference to the Lord Jesus Christ, on the future Judgment Seat, pronouncing as to His people’s works in the day of His coming, though that view is deeply important and solemnizing (Matt. 25. 19-23). *Here* we have a present dealing, and the holy parallel of 1 Corinthians 5 shows that a believer may be delivered to tormentors. The word “*that*,” in the context there, is impressive,—“*That* the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5. 5). Compare “*that* we should not be condemned with the world” (1 Cor. 11. 32), “*that* they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1. 20). In each case we see a purpose of mercy to those confessing Christ’s name.

<sup>2</sup> Leaflet gladly sent.

To read into Matthew 18 the handing back of the already once-forgiven debt is, I repeat, quite contrary to the passage. The noun "debt" of verse 32 is *not* repeated, nor the other word of verse 27. Notice it was "*that* debt." But in verse 34 it is "all that which *is being owed*" (*present participle*). The hundred pence is the outstanding account, and the same word is used in verse 30, as if to suggest that by rejecting his fellow-servant's confession and sorrow he became before God guilty of the very sin he had denounced. It was, as it were, no longer viewed as the burden of the other whose confession had been rejected by his brother, but transferred, from God's standpoint, to *himself*, the rejector. So serious is the effect of cherishing an unforgiving spirit.

The Divinely appointed principle is, "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another," and the omission is dangerous. The Lord Jesus does not merely say, "So shall My Heavenly Father do to you if ye take your fellow-servant by the throat," but, "if ye forgive not." Nor will an outward form of forgiveness suffice, to keep up reputation. The inspired words are, "From your hearts." Surely God's truth is practical, and the parables are searching. Let us not seek to blunt their edge. It is not enough to know how to interpret the parables, we must seek to live them out, in accord with the fruit of the Spirit, which is "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self control."

But it may be said, "Where do we see this to-day?" I grant that the manifest *link* of action and consequence, which we behold in the case of Nadab and Abihu, and, at the outset of the present dispensation, in Ananias and Sapphira, is not always made so evident. But what if we have here the key to many of our experiences? Though the Lord Jesus may not assert that the Father would *always* work in exactly the same way openly, ("to you" has a primary force), we may generally see His purposes for the present age.

1 Corinthians 11:32 gives a parallel testimony, "When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, *that we should not be condemned with the world.*" The same righteousness shines out, albeit there is no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus. Yet this never excuses sin. 1 Peter 4:17 helps our prayerful thought. We at once begin to learn a very important principle with regard to physical chastisements, and were it not that some dear suffering ones quite mistake God's gracious purpose therein, one might speak more fully as to mental trials,

with their torment and strain. The believer is not normally to be in this condition. Truly there is deliverance to God's glory. But let not the one who is free from such anguish look down on his fellow-believer. His own failures may be greater, though the chastisement may be of another kind. Yet it is all permitted in love. Do not occupy *yourself* with the strain, but confess failure and sin, and look up to your gracious Heavenly Father, for His way out.<sup>3</sup> The first thought in connexion with physical illness is not "I must get a doctor," but "I would find out why the Lord has permitted." *He* is not a tormentor, but He overrules all, and allows the tormentors, for our humbling. Why are we not more responsive to His hints, and to His loving rebukes?

There are more tormentors than one, and the torment has various aspects. We may, at first, shrink from the word, but can we doubt that it was torment in 1 Corinthians 5? Can we regard the trials of a believer, that oppress him, as sent by God directly, apart from his condition? Surely the Scriptural view is that He permits these in wisdom (Acts 10. 38), to bring us to Himself. The messenger of Satan that buffeted Paul was that he might not be lifted up. The words "all that was due unto him," may be the hundred pence which were really due to "him," yet there may also be the precious hint "unto Him," for the believer is *not* sold to the tormentors, nor does he render to *them*. In law we cannot give God that which we should: our only resting place is the finished work of Christ, but in the sphere of love's responsibility He allows a chastisement to continue *until* there has been the appointed rendering unto Him. Aspects may be different, but, inasmuch as Job's lips failed so grievously after the trial began, it was continued until he spoke of God the thing that was right, and until he prayed for his friends (42. 7, 10). There is a wealth of meaning here.

And what shall be the fruit of our meditation? Shall we not see God's hand in *all* our circumstances, and, thanking Him, acknowledge that He is righteous? Shall we not see that our attitude to our brethren affects much of our lives, and our enjoyment of relationship to our Father? Shall we not learn His approval of a forgiving spirit (Mark 11. 25), and seek grace against any other feeling? Shall we not glorify His Name by making manifest our gratitude for His so great

<sup>3</sup> I would emphasize this more fully as to nervous overstrain, because the Lord's honour is involved so frequently in a manifest way. This stimulates to expectant, yet humble, prayer.

love? Thus will Christian testimony be more consistent and the witness of John 13. 35 (“By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples”) shine forth among His beloved people. “Shouldest not thou also?” will thus become an undercurrent, and more than an undercurrent, in the enabling of the Holy Spirit, in our believing lives, to the praise of Him Who hath redeemed and delivered us from the wrath to come.

The parabolic message of Luke 7. 41. 42 has the same precious unveiling of grace as that just pondered, though the circumstances, and, to some extent, the standpoint may be contrasted. We have here two debtors, but, unlike the two sons elsewhere, both are brought into blessing. There is but One Creditor, just as in Matthew 18. But the aspects of a king’s power, and of His subjects, and of right to punish, are not here before us. The sin is owned, but the *legal* and *judicial* liability of the debt are not the primary thought, although these must never be forgotten. How many are the views of sin,—as a crime, a disease, an uncleanness, and so forth: and God’s grace is yet more manifestly “many-sided,” to meet every need of the guilty sinner.

If we may anticipate, we see that one special lesson here is *love* to Him Who freely forgives (verse 47). The solemn message “Shouldest not thou also?” and our relationship to fellow believers is rather the message in Matthew. It is true that love to Him means love to His people, but so slow are we to learn the various fruits of grace that we praise God for a different relative emphasis in different passages, that our hearts may be stirred to know and love Him more.

In both Scriptures the utter pennilessness and dire need of the debtor are seen. And in both there is no merit; no works are recorded to help secure the forgiveness. Mercy is absolutely free. The word “frankly forgave” is from the root of grace, and occurs in Ephesians 4. 32 and Colossians 2. 13. We shall never lay too much stress on grace. Its uninfluenced free bounty to those who deserve nothing is to call forth our fullest and eternal praise. And the Lord’s use of the message to convict, and thereby bring blessing to Simon, gives us a fuller insight into the purpose of the gracious record. How often we fail to realize that we were “by nature children of wrath *even as others.*” How often we overestimate our love. How often we fail to see the real nature of the devotion the Lord seeks and delights to receive. In money, Simon’s hospitality may have cost much, but, in reality, the woman’s devotedness was far larger to her Saviour. In a different

context we find a similar, though distinct, encouragement: the Lord seeth not as man seeth, and “two mites” are precious, beyond human valuation, when they are the gift of a heart that is willing to be stripped of all for Himself. But if we have an alabaster box, and bring but two mites, our hypocrisy is abominable.

We return to the thought of Simon’s feast. He had “a house,” and he invited Christ thither. But he needed to see that nothing was his own, nothing could he have done acceptably had not grace laid hold, and till he was forgiven. And the silver pence of the debt remind us that we owe that which our Redeemer pays. Silver, as in the tabernacle sockets, is often a reminder of redemption: and we could not redeem ourselves. We had not even one penny or a part thereof. “*Nothing to pay.*” What wonderful grace have we received. We shall never tire of grace when we reach glory.

Five hundred is ten times fifty. The multiples of five with respect to “debt parables” are impressive, for the number “five” speaks of God’s manifestation of Himself and particularly of *law* (ten commandments on two tables), and *grace*. The altar of burnt offering, picturing Christ’s life when made under the law, was foursquare with its “five” cubits. Yet after ten thousand talents, five hundred pence seem small. Why the change? The standpoint is different. In Matthew 18 we behold sin from God’s standpoint, and His holy estimate. Here we seem to see particularly the believers’ perception and realization of it. And this is part of the key to verse 47. At first it would seem as if that verse had two difficulties. Yet they are both radiant with the light of the Lord’s love when understood in any measure.

The first difficulty is that the forgiveness seems to be the response to the woman’s much love, and the second that it appears at the outset to be better to have *much* that needs forgiveness. The question of verse 42 plainly shows that Christ’s thought is of love as the fruit of forgiveness. At once we realize the evidential “for.” It is not common, but is, nevertheless, quite clear. “Her sins are forgiven”—this is plain, and the evidence is “she loved much.” Cf. “This is gold, for it does not change under that test.” “They said Paul was a god in Acts 28. 6, *because* the viper did not injure him,” i.e., “the evidence being,” &c. This is a help in John 3. 18, because sinners are judged for all their sins, even before they hear the gospel, as other Scriptures show (Rom. 1. 18-20, 12). The explanatory “for” or “because” is somewhat similar,

and illustrates how carefully each passage should be pondered in its context; 1 Cor. 10. 5, Matthew 13. 17 (" For I say "), Mark 5. 42, 1 Cor. 11. 26. Note also John 12. 39. There is often a wondrous fulness in inspired language, and so we see that the forgiveness causes the love, and this love leads to the consciousness of forgiveness. The order of Christ's words brings this out.

The second difficulty is met by what we have already seen. From God's standpoint none owe a little, but all are 10,000 talents in arrears. Thus there is tremendous scope for the one who has been least engulfed in outward sins, to realize his many evils, yea, ten times five hundred. There is no thought of blessedness in sin that grace may abound, but the Lord is dealing with us from the experience-standpoint, and showing the blessedness of a *humbling sense* of sin. Moreover, with graciously holy and gentle reproof He shows the danger threatening those who have not fallen into open sin. Satan has temptations suited to all, and he seeks to misuse every " privilege," against the Lord. This message is of deep importance to check pride, and to lead to lowliness those brought up in Christian homes, and to show one aspect of the godly training needed there, that the *many* advantages may not be counteracted by shallowness in the recognition of personal guilt, and the great sinfulness of *seemingly* little sins, when great privileges have been granted beyond those of others. The word " other " signifying of another kind in verse 41 rebukes *our* easily nurtured pride, as well as Simon's.

It is important to feel that none but forgiven debtors can ever enter heaven. No " merit " will be imagined for a moment when the praises burst forth " Worthy is the Lamb That was slain." But here, and now, do we not need a deeper and fuller sense of the " Debt ? " God had an original right to our obedience and devotion, and we rendered nothing. But, brought to realize this, we adore Him and admire the grace that has forgiven. And let us observe that the Lord Jesus emphasizes *Himself* as the Creditor. As in other parables, He is Central. The field belongs to Him. The royal feast is made for Him. He alone is the Good Shepherd. And thus we realize that sin is against Him: His Godhead shines before us, and He would lovingly attract love to Himself. There is no rival claim to our love, as with God or mammon, for He is God. He never separates Himself from the Father in a way that would ignore His essential Deity. He emptied and humbled Himself, but remained Himself. And he seeks not

only our knowledge of a creed, but our personal love. O let us remember this. His resurrection question rings in our ears, "Lovest thou Me more than these?" and yet again, "Lovest thou Me?" And the last book of Scripture sounds forth, near its beginning, the precious words, "Unto Him *That loveth us*, and loosed us from our sins" (Rev. 1. 5). And what, ah, what, shall be our response to Him to-day?

Ere we leave this narrative, let us see the gracious stress on "faith" and "peace" in verse 50. Must you say, dear reader (for it may be there is one who knows not the joy of forgiveness), that your debt remains a burden? It is well not to make light of it. Would that there were more tears and not less. 'Tis the rocky ground hearer that receives with "earthly joy." There is joy in heaven over a sinner that repenteth. But tears, though precious, are not to shut out the sunshine of grace. The Lord makes His rainbow of covenant love to meet the troubled sinner's eye; and there is the precious invitation to faith. He demands nothing. He gives all. Frank forgiveness is His prerogative, for the glory of Deity and the glory of atonement are alike His. Will you not believe Him, and into Him? Then taking Him at His word, you too may enter into peace, for He gives peace (John 14. 27), and appoints peace for His own, and even for such as you. The debt is removed, that you may love the Creditor Who has become the Giver; yea, He has brought His own into living union with Himself, beyond the types and pictures of salvation, for no parable can exhaust the fulness of His work, nor will eternity outlast it. But it is not only for eternity: He welcomes and saves—to-day.

Having studied praisefully our Lord's messages as to the frank forgiveness of sinners, and still seeking to find the precious fruit of such love in our lives, we are prepared for His further reference to debts. We notice the margin of Luke 13. 4. The present-day tendency is ever to obscure this thought of a debt. Accountability and stewardship, before God, are commonly put in the background, and self becomes central. Even redeemed ones need to be on their guard lest salvation be viewed primarily from the standpoint of personal safety than from that of the glory of His Name. Moreover, we all do well to remember the message of Matthew 6. 12. There is nothing against "grace" in this petition. It does not speak of the primary, and unchangeable legal settlement and forgiveness, but of the Father's forgiveness in the home, parallel with the *third* debt of Matthew 18. even as "our debtors" would remind

of the *second* debt there. Our sins, as trespasses against law, *have* been forgiven, but the family fellowship is in a new sphere, and is associated with a right and forgiving condition of heart, which humbly owns a need of being forgiven too, and, thanks be to God, which finds His fatherly forgiveness, and its experience and enjoyment.

We come next to our Lord's words in Luke 16. 1-12. the tendency to misuse and weaken the word "parable" may well make us on our guard against definitely employing it here without explanation. But even if the Lord Jesus referred to one specific man, He meant the message to apply to us also. Hence, whether an individual narrative is allegorized, or whether we have a direct parable, the message is the same to our lowly and attentive hearts. The question is first one of stewardship and its responsibility. And two debtors again are thereby before us. But let us never forget the primary message of stewardship, and the parallel with the lessons of the "Talents" and the "Pounds." May our Lord's warning and exhortation come with living power to each believer.

The steward was accused. By whom we are not told. Luke 18. 7 may give the key, but the angelic ministry of Acts 12.23, as well as Hebrews 1. 14 may well imply (with Daniel 10. 12 and Zechariah 1) that these heavenly servants have a deep interest in God's arrangements (1 Tim. 5. 21). The steward was accused "as one wasting." Wasting is not only in the far country (Luke 15. 13). This is deeply important. We call to mind the servant who kept the unused pound safe, but in a napkin. Here the aspect is different, but in both cases there is nothing for the Lord. If only we realized more that wasting is stealing, and leads to a loss of stewardship, even as in Revelation 2. 4, 5 leaving of first love leads to a holy threatening of the removal of the lampstand! We, as Israel of old, are not in authority, but we are under authority, and therefore having responsibility before God (cf. Matt. 8. 9). Let us seek grace to use time, and all alike, to His glory. The context here suggests a special thought of Israel, and the particular view of their trusteeship is explained as that of the oracles of God (Rom. 3. 2). It is easy to misuse this exceeding great and precious stewardship. Nothing can be viewed as a personal right. Whatever we have, and are, belongs to God. The Holy Spirit ever emphasizes this.

The steward is called, and the plain, searching question is put, "How is it?" or more forcibly, "What is this I hear concerning thee?" We remember God's questions to Adam, Eve,

Cain, and Jonah. He gives space for repentance (Cf. the mercy of Judges 2. 2) "What is this?" A saddening "this"; precious privileges and opportunities had been misused: happy are we if we "do His commandments, hearkening unto *the voice of His word*" (Ps. 103. 20). The expression "I hear" reminds of Genesis 18. 21, and, by contrast, of Exodus 3. 9. What does God "hear" concerning us? Happy are we if we are in fellowship with Him, and can say, "My voice shalt Thou hear in the morning" (Ps. 5. 3), and if the Lord hearkens and hears our words of love together, because we think on His Name (Mal. 3. 16). The steward was evidently away from his Master, and herein is the peril at all times.

No answer is revealed, and the words soon follow, "Give an (or the) account of thy stewardship: for thou mayest be no longer steward." There *is* removal from "stewardship:" we must distinguish from everlasting salvation. Stewardship may exist apart from salvation, as with Israel, Balaam and Judas (Heb. 6. 4-6), and may be given after salvation,—and be taken away (see Rev. 3. 11). This is a deeply solemn subject. Nor would we speak lightly of "eternal salvation." Grace never made a man careless, and the Lord Jesus saves His people from their sins. To assume salvation while choosing to wander is to trifle with covenant love, and its precious revelation by the Holy Spirit.

And what would *our* "account" be? How could we rightly describe our use of whatever the Lord has entrusted? It may be time: it may be influence: it may be money, for trusteeship is not limited to wealth: it may be a home with precious lives to train for Him: it may be health,—no mean privilege. What would our truthful "account" be? Let us not put aside the searching question. And what if we hear the words, "Thou mayest be no longer steward." They might be rendered, "Thou hast not power." Who can stand against the Lord? Let us not regard such privileges as a freehold.

Let us think again of Israel. They were blessed, and to them pertained varied privileges (Rom. 3. 1, 2, 9. 4), which the majority did not esteem. "The Kingdom of God" had been given to them (Matt. 21. 43), and the vineyard with its capacity for fruit, was theirs. The message of Matthew 21. 33-41 is parallel with that of Luke 13. 6-9. There is ever the same thought of "responsibility." The people of old rejoiced in their pride (Zeph. 3. 11), and said "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these" (Jer. 7. 4). They regarded their city and temple as their own, and

despised others. Nor has it been otherwise with Christendom. Nor has it been altogether otherwise with true children of God. Pride has come in unawares, and it has worked with cankering corruption. We may have used the doctrine of grace against responsibility, at least *in measure* parallel with the sin of those who have turned it into licence and lasciviousness.

The steward spoke "within himself:" there was no confession of sin. He was agitated as to his position, not as to his iniquity. Thus he showed the same disregard of God that is shown by every undischarged debt. "Self" is a tremendous power. Small wonder that he afterwards dared to alter the debts of others. "I cannot dig," he said, and this word is elsewhere associated with the "work" of a building (Luke 6. 48) or a garden (Luke 13. 8). He owned, yet without sorrow, the fact that he could not render acceptable work. How precious is the building of God's appointment, and how rich the fruit of the Lord Jesus. And His dear people are privileged to work well pleasingly on resurrection ground. But what is the alternative, if a man cannot work to secure a legal righteousness? Should he not come as a heart-broken sinner, and own his utter need? This is the deepest humbling of absolute poverty. But the troubled sinner begs for mercy, nor does he beg in vain. But the pride of man regards this as intolerable. "To beg, I am ashamed." If only he had been ashamed of the sin instead!

It is here that the thought of "his lord's debtors" comes in. As steward he was entrusted with a concern for their accounts, and yet he shows, by his very question, a wrong attitude. He *asks* what they owe. The hint is searching. If we have any stewardship for God, we should realize the responsibility of sinners to Him, and be troubled at the debt. His interests should be ours. But we find the reverse attitude manifested here. It may be said, "Why should so much be said about *stewardship* in that which is written regarding *debts*?" Should it not be impressed on our hearts that the *two* are linked. The payment of wheat and oil was a "stewardship,"—how many eastern arrangements are made thus, in connexion with the letting out of land. And thus a number of parables are brought to one focus, and, as we realize anew man's unfulfilled responsibility to God, our hearts again praise Him for the precious Substitute of His provision, and the wondrous merits of Him, in Whom we are accepted. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift!" Then, on the new basis, a new trusteeship is given to disciples, and the redeemed one who is concerned

that he himself may render unto the Lord has an exercise of soul, and is enabled, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to tell "his Lord's debtors" of the One Who paid the debt which neither they nor he could ever meet.

And now let us consider the present description of that debt the more fully. The first debtor says, "A hundred measures of oil." It would seem that we have a truthful answer, and it affords a remarkable type. "Oil" in Leviticus is a picture of spirituality and devotedness, and man ought to be devoted to God. Yet there is no evidence that even a part of the oil had been presented. Certainly the sinner has done nothing, and given nothing. All the "debtor" passages, and the "no fruit" parables, emphasize this humbling thought. The utter ruin needs utter grace, or else there must be utter hopelessness. The amount is striking, "an hundred measures." "Ten" is the first double figure number, and suggests apparently fellowship:<sup>4</sup> squares usually intensify the thought, and this is ten squared. Man should render fruitful service unto God, with the devoted fellowship of all that is within him. The offering of Leviticus 2, portraying the Lord Jesus, shows His perfect attitude. But men are in debt, aye, and know it, yet are often, as in this case, unmoved.

And there is a lesson in the second debt,—for "two" are selected, as elsewhere, with the striking "witness" of that number. 'Tis a reminder here of the witness of God's law against men. Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, wise and foolish are all involved, and as *two* witnesses were required for "proof" the Law emphasises the sad unimpeachable "evidence" that all are debtors. None can gainsay the fact, though they may awhile ignore the consequences. The nature of this second debt has a message for our hearts: "A hundred measures of wheat." If oil speaks of devotedness, wheat reminds of righteousness, and of fine flour contrasted with the chaff of men's own way. All of us ought to have been obedient, but none of us have obeyed. The wheat is here seen to be a debt, not a gift: a responsibility, not an optional present. And there is no hint here that one omer has been paid. Rather there is the clear testimony that the whole of the hundred measures remained unpaid. The condition of a sinner is solemnizing.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. "an instrument of ten strings," "ten curtains," "ten virgins," "ten servants." A solemn contrast is the fellowship of Anti-christ's ten kings (Rev. 17, 12). "Ten" was the smallest number Abraham named in Genesis 18. 32, and Israel to this day delay certain acts, when gathered, unless ten males are present.

He should have rendered much to God, and God's provision of wheat and oil in Israel's land (Deut. 8. 8) afforded merciful instruction as to these duties. But they failed and all have failed alike. In the parable of the husbandmen (which is also a debt-parable), those entrusted with privileges rendered *nothing*. Nor were we better.

Is there no hope? We call to mind the rejected alternatives in the steward's mind,—digging and begging. When the debt was not paid, the gracious appointment in Luke 7 was frank forgiveness. The unrighteous steward knows nothing of this. He urges a compromise. But the law allows of no compromise, and the gospel provides no compromise. Matthew 18 and Luke 7 have alike witnessed against such a deadly theory. The one who was “ashamed” to own his personal need, and “beg” for mercy, could not declare the one way of escape for the guilty.

His proposition was meant for his own advantage, and “peace”; a worthless proposition, yet giving, by contrast, a wondrous display of the gospel of the grace of God. “He said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.”<sup>5</sup> We may easily overlook the six things here before us. Let us mark them out.

- (1) “Take
- (2) Thy bill
- (3) Sit down
- (4) Quickly
- (5) Write
- (6) Fifty.”

“Take” or almost, “welcome.” Poor welcoming, when there is no authority—and when there is no removal of the debt, no forgiveness, no security. “Thy bill”: it remains “thine”: and remarkably the word “bill” is rather “letters,” and suggests the law, inasmuch as it is the very term of John 5. 47, Romans 7. 6, 2 Corinthians 3. 6. There is nought but legal condemnation. “Sit down”: as if to take a rest, but there is no rest in the treadmill work of self. “Quickly”: as if in fear of what may happen afterwards, and yet with a vain speed, as if pretending the blessing could be immediately bestowed. “Write”: God *has* written the bill already:—the only hope is blotting out: it is not for man to write, and if he presumes to write he cannot but write his own judgment. “Fifty:” “Fifty” is

<sup>5</sup> A gospel tract with this title gladly sent.

not "an hundred," but these *fifty* are enough to condemn: and thus we have here a miserable compromise, a lie, and an empty hope. He who has nothing and can do nothing, is no nearer the payment of one than of the whole. Nothing but pure grace can meet the sinner's need, and this shines out in the gospel. "Welcome,"—not a bill, but a receipt (Isa. 40. 2)! Not the letters of debt, for the "handwriting" against the guilty one is taken out of the midst (Col. 2. 14), and instead there is the Name of the Saviour which redeemed ones can present in prayer. The precious result is the writing of God's laws in their hearts (Heb. 8. 10). Ah, there is a "sitting down," for are not the Lord's own made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2. 6)? Well may they, as David, sit before the Lord in adoration (2 Sam. 7. 18). And this grace is both now and for ever: "quickly" indeed may the anxious sinner come, and, instead of "writing fifty," he may read the sure words of covenant love, "It is finished." "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift." What a precious gospel we have whereon to rest: what a precious gospel we have whereof to tell. We would never return to the unjust steward's compromise, but rejoice in One of Whom it is written "Ye are complete in Him" (Col. 2. 10). The Holy Spirit has given the witness and now causes the witness within (1 John 5. 9, 10).

The other debtor was dealt with in a similar way. There was no other proposal. *The debt remained*, though it was "reduced," yet without any guarantee. Sin was added to sin, and one sinner, made, or helped, another to sin. "So they wrap it up" (Mic. 7. 3). The proportion is different—"eighty," as if to emphasise the authority of the one speaking. But there is no authority except to declare what God has declared, and to bind that which has been bound in heaven. Nominal Christianity has struck on this rock. It has sought authority on earth, and it matters not whether the centre be self or the pope, there must be ruin. Peter himself learnt the precious contrast. 'Twas not God ratifying his decision, but his approval of God's decisions, that gave authority,—“What God hath cleansed” (loosed in heaven first), that *call not thou common*” (Acts 10. 15).<sup>6</sup> How blessed to declare a full gospel on the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of writing "eighty," redeemed souls may *sing*, "Unto Him That loveth us and loosed us from our sins in His own blood . . . to Him be the glory" (Rev.

<sup>6</sup> Leaflet available.

1. 5, 6). The *last* recorded word of the steward was a lie. Happy are those who know the truth, and can bring others to Him Who is the Truth.

The added application to the Lord's people is deeply precious. They are bidden to use the things of earth, as a trusteeship, for Him Whom they love, and in view of His Coming. "The lord (not Lord) commended the unjust steward," as one clever for himself, but believers are to realize that when they seek the encouragement of "that Day," they are both exalting *their* Lord, and attending to their own true interests. It is foolish, as well as sinful, for a child of God to be worldly, and to use the things of earth for himself. Unfaithfulness will bring loss at the Judgment Seat of Christ. But this part of the subject partly belongs to another series of articles, which would include the Pounds and Talents. Yet we would not pass it over here, for there is a holy consciousness of debt in the new sphere where God has in grace put us, And Matthew 18 has impressed this on our receptive hearts, that, in the enabling of the Holy Spirit, we may render again for every benefit, and view nothing as our own. In so doing we shall also bear a right witness to those who still have the great debt of sin, before God's throne, which we have been graciously forgiven.

In closing it may be well to refer again to the Parable of the Husbandmen. They were responsible to give the fruits in their season (cf. Song 8. 11), but Isaiah 5. 7 was illustrated, and God was robbed (Mal. 3. 8). And we have no thought that a part of the debt was paid, or that it was settled afterwards. One remarkable point in all these parables is that we find either complete forgiveness, or judgment. There is no ordinary payment, or compromise, or plan of instalments. This is of the deepest importance in the realization of the gospel. There is nothing *between* our own waywardness, guilt and doom, on the one hand, and the glorious contrast, even the reception, as poor guilty ones, of an entirely free salvation. There is no third alternative. Thus all the "debtor" passages make clear the marvellous grace of God, and welcome poor and helpless sinners to Himself. These parabolic messages are full of encouragement to those who feel their need, and of joy when we rest upon God's frank forgiveness. And not only is a believer's rejoicing encouraged thereby, but we have gracious guidance as to gospel proclamation. We have a real Saviour of Whom we can tell, and a real sal-

vation has been brought about by His finished work. We do not find the flood without the ark, nor have we a parable of wrath without mercy. All Scripture points to Christ, and His redemption, and our grateful hearts may once more say, with a love that will never die out, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift," for in Him "we have redemption, through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."

**No. 3. FREE.**

*“Except the Corn of Wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone : but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” John 12. 24.*

*“Herein is My Father glorified that ye bear much fruit ; so shall ye be My disciples.” John 15. 8.*

# THE PARABLES OF THE LORD JESUS

Outline Studies for His believing people, who feel the solemnity of the times, and look for His Coming.

- (1) CONCERNING FRUIT.
- (2) SOME “ CONTRASTED ” MESSAGES.

*“And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord when he will return from the wedding ; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.” Luke 12. 36.*

*“Blessed are they which are called into the marriage supper of the Lamb.” Revelation 19. 9.*

**T**HE Parables, like the Types, are full of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Having experienced and enjoyed a little of their inexhaustible fulness, I desire to share, with others of His beloved people, the food that He has graciously provided. A book on all the parables is in prayerful preparation, but this forerunner is herewith sent forth in faith, and dedicated to the Lord's service.

Copies will be supplied as the Lord enables. Our dependence is simply on Him. Hence no financial straits should hinder poor believers from **ASKING** for whatever copies they need. Such are equally beloved in Christ Jesus. If others, accepted in Him, send fellowship in expenses, it is received gladly in His Name, if without any thought of compulsion or purchase, but only because they feel thus guided by our adorable Lord.

Suggestions and questions are ever welcome, for there is ever a fulness beyond all that any of us realize, and it should be our privilege and joy to learn more of our Lord Himself and of His words, while, in the enabling of the Holy Spirit, we await His return and pray expectantly, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

**PERCY W. HEWARD.**

## Parables of the Lord Jesus concerning Fruit.

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**F**RUIT—Fruit—Fruit. How precious is the word, suggesting not only food, but beauty and refreshment. And our gracious God has a right to fruit in our lives, if we are His people. He has chosen and ordained His people that they may go and bring forth fruit (John 15. 16). In the light of such thoughts may these meditations be both written and read. From Genesis 1 (11) to Revelation 22 (2) we have fruit. Adam, too, was appointed to attend to the garden, and special instruction was given as to the fruit, but it is made plain he never eat of the tree of life (Gen. 3. 22). Nevertheless, grace has overflowed, and there will be those who, with washed robes, have access to that tree (Rev. 22. 14), and its fruit every month will not be in vain. Thanks be unto God for a glorious climax, a wondrous salvation for those saved from every nation. Are you, dear reader, in His mercy among such? Mental knowledge of truth never saved one soul, but Christ is mighty to save to-day.

When we come to the parables of the Lord Jesus, we find "fruit" emphasized very definitely in the parable of the Sower. The Holy Spirit uses the word: it is only an English idiom to limit to that which grows on a TREE. Fruit is here the result of receiving the Word, in a true heart, a ploughed heart, whereby there is a Divine contrast with the stony and thorny ground. The object of the Sower is "fruit." The power of the seed is that it brings forth fruit. The absence of root, and the presence of other things that choke the word, must mean failure as to fruit. And the Lord faithfully marks this out, that His people may be warned against indifference, emotion and compromise, and glorify Him by more than thirty or sixty fold, for there is a fulness of grace in Him (John 1. 14, 2 Cor. 9. 8), that with the welcoming of the rain which "comes off" there may be even a hundredfold unto Himself. But as this parable is pondered in the Notes on Matthew 13,\* we would ask the reader's prayerful use of these.

Likewise is it with "The Parable of the Tares." Thanks be to God, there was wheat as well—wheat first and wheat last—and the tares could not remove His mighty work of grace. Not one believer—likened here to wheat—is said to be destroyed by the

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\* Obtainable in booklet form.

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enemy's sowing. The Lord's harvest is sure: there shall be the gathering into the Lord's garner; there shall be fruit for His glory and joy. And as the Holy Spirit emphasizes this, we rejoice in His gracious teaching and encouragement, and would let every passage have its practical bearing in our life. In the first parable of Matthew 13 believers receive the seed of the Word; in the second they themselves are the seed, as a new creation in their Lord's purchased field. But in both cases there is the same stress on fruit for Himself.

Moreover, many other parabolic messages remind us of fruit. The new wine of the Gospel tells of the Lord's own fruitfulness, and the solemnizing message as to the unjust steward reminds us how many treat lightly the debt of fulness of fruit, which should have been rendered to God (100, wheat: 100, oil). All these passages are meant to be searching, for all Scripture is practical.

But shall we think especially of those passages which show definitely the failure of religious Israel to fulfil their obligations? The two parables of the vineyard in Matthew 21. 28-46 have this Divinely repeated lesson, which convicts our hearts also. The context leads up to the message. The "one" fig tree of verse 19 (margin) with "leaves only" portrayed the separated nation, with their boast of self-righteousness. The first Adam, we remember, used these very leaves, but the Last Adam had no room for counterfeit self-righteousness. He was the One Who came to make available the antitype of the coats of skin, and an everlasting righteousness. The Lord Jesus spoke the word: at once, in accord with His authority, the fig tree was withered. The gospel of Mark repeats this solemn message. The added words "The time of figs was not" has an underlying lesson. The stress on "one" tree implies that nothing around had any similarity of appearance. God had privileged Israel, and they should have shown the result, before the time of others. By early leafage they proclaimed that this was so. But it was not. The thought is the more painful because the Lord "hungered." There was nothing to refresh Him among His favoured people (John 1. 11). The context continues to tell of the rejection, by the leaders, of John's testimony (Matt. 21. 25) though he came that Christ might be manifested to Israel. They would persistently reject the counsel of God against themselves (Luke 7. 30), and climb into the fold "some other way." But such were not among the sheep to whom the Shepherd came. These thoughts remind us that the reference goes back further. In Matthew 7. 16-20 the Lord spoke very definitely as to fruit, and the ministry of John, yet earlier, was "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Matt 3. 8).

This is the first mention of fruit in the New Testament. And his parable of warning prepared for Christ's testimony. "Now also the axe is laid unto the root of the tree: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Matt. 3. 10). The absence of good fruit was sufficient evidence against Israel. Many hundreds of years before, the prophets had warned regarding this. The barren vineyard of Isaiah 5 and the "degenerate plant of a strange vine" of Jeremiah 2, and the "empty vine" of Hosea 10, preserved, in writing, the Holy Spirit's clear rebuke. But the people refused to listen. And though the long suffering of God waited, a crisis was inevitable. By His miracle as to the fig tree the Lord Jesus again granted a call to repentance. Yet men would not hear. It is noteworthy that immediately after He speaks of "faith." His action was thus a definite claiming of a Divine word, as well as itself a prophecy. It expressed His confidence, in accord with His perfect manhood, in the revealed purpose of God as to the result of sin. Immediately the added parallel of removing mountains seems intended to recall Psalm 46. 2-4, and thereby to speak of the river with its fruit in Ezekiel 47, and the river of Revelation 22. Though Jerusalem's house was left desolate, "the city of God" must be secure. And herein is a mystery, revealed to faith. Israel are set aside, and yet the promise stands to Israel. How can this be?

Many of us have, I think, long misunderstood "Let no fruit grow on thee HENCEFORWARD FOR EVER" (Matt. 21. 19). Israel is the fig tree, as well as the vine and olive of typical prophecy. But the Lord Jesus is the True Vine and He has become the Fruitful Olive, yet He is not the Fig Tree. The distinction is important, for Israel's "national" position, apart from Christ, is gone for ever, but not Israel's NATIONAL position, as an aggregate of saved INDIVIDUALS in Christ. We hear the Divine promise, "Thy people shall be all righteous" (Isa. 60. 21), individually accepted in the work of Christ, and standing by faith (Rom. 11. 20, 23), and collectively, "The holy people, the redeemed of the Lord" (Isa. 62. 12). Thus TWO sets of prophecies will converge, and coalesce. By failing to observe this, some have "spiritualized away" the prophecies, viewing the tree of Israel as gone for ever, in every national sense. Others have apparently "carnalized," if I may venture to use the word, attributing to Israel a future salvation, in which they make "grace" in measure less prominent than in the salvation of the Lord's people during the present dispensation. But the Scripture fully meets both difficulties. No fruit will ever grow EXCEPT on

the individually grafted-in branches, and Christ will be the Root of all the redeemed (Rom. 11. 32). But all the "individuals" will compose the "strong nation" (Isa. 60. 22), none unpardoned will be "reserved" (Jer. 50. 20). "Grace" will be the foundation, and grace the top stone, to the "praise of the glory of His grace."

Thus we approach the two sons of Matthew 21. 28. They were both disobedient, albeit in different ways. It is always so: all sin is essentially of the same nature. The two robbers on Calvary were alike at first. The two sons in Luke 15. 11-32 are both seen outside the house, when going in their own way. The mode of sin may be different, but sin is intrinsically one, and ever separates from God and His will. The first who said "I will not" but repented, is interpreted, by the subsequent verse, of publicans and sinners. Such were, moreover, types of Gentiles, and thus the Lord Jesus probably referred reprovingly to the Jewish theory that the "law" was first offered to Gentiles and rejected, but was "meritoriously" accepted by Israel. The underlying pride of the nation was thus judged, and a solemn warning given against trusting in "I go," and in the subservient language of "Sir" or "Lord" (cf. "Lord, Lord" in Luke 6. 46), without a corresponding obedience. Lest it should be thought that the expression "Go into the kingdom of God before you" implied that the Pharisees followed, the solemnizing testimony is given "yet . . . repented not afterwards, that ye might believe Him." Belief without repentance is merely mental: God's message is to be spiritually received. The Lord Jesus always dealt with the heart. Thus this parable shows that the religious leaders, who esteemed themselves (Luke 18. 11, 12), did no work in the vineyard for the One to Whom they owed all. Observe the dispensational period when Christ spoke, before Israel were set aside, and before His death on Calvary. Hence the Name "Father" was appropriate: Israel were typically sons, and the entrance was described as into "the kingdom of God,"\* a rare expression in Matthew, because the usual emphasis is on the heavenly calling, and "the kingdom of the heavens" gives an aspect of the kingdom of God

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\*The words here suggest much more than dispensational position. John 3. 3, 5, shows that those who truly enter the kingdom have been born from above, and out from the water of wrath by the glorious working of the Holy Spirit. And it is a joy to realise that despised publicans and harlots have been reached by God's sovereign grace.

brought in by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. So exact is every word in Holy Scripture.

Hence there is a gleam of hope, and more than a gleam. Albeit both parties rejected the words "work to-day," the Lord was pleased to bring in a further dispensation, of which the blessing to the outcast in the ministry of Christ gave a foreshadowing, and fruit has been brought and will be brought to the glory of God. His counsel shall stand, and He shall not fail nor be discouraged.

The attached parable (Matt. 21. 33-46) is deeply searching. It reminds of Isaiah 5. Everything was done providentially on behalf of Israel's vineyard. But there was no collective fruit for Him. The change of thought from Isaiah is important. There we have the vine and its wild grapes—here we have the husbandmen, a stress on their iniquity. Thus the latter figure emphasizes yet more definitely the deliberateness of the sin. Moreover, it shows the guilt of the leaders of the people. Those who should have tended the vineyard for God's glory betrayed their trust, like Adam. The attitude of Song 8. 12 was hateful to them. Selfishness and robbery are alike. This encourages us to see that, as there are "the poor of the flock" in Zechariah 11, so this passage does not ignore the few who rendered personal devotion unto the Lord. But there was no united or national Israelite-fruitfulness. In like manner the fig tree, as a Jewish community, was quite barren. Individuals were humbled before God, but their personal loving service was not part of a dispensational response to Him. It was oftentimes hated by the people generally. The very servants who were sent are a clear proof of this. Were they not prophets of Israel, and were not such beaten and killed and stoned? Thus the Lord Jesus could say "So persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5. 12), and Stephen could ask with sorrow the question in Acts 7. 52, "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" The treatment of these servants of God is mentioned in the very last chapter of the earlier Scriptures, as the books are arranged in the Hebrew:—"They mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy" (2 Chron. 36. 16). The ministry of these servants of God is now definitely before us in its true character. They had God's interests at heart, and came seeking fruit. They were sent with this unvarying object. They did not come in their own name, nor desire ought for

themselves. Which of them lived in luxury? Not one. They aimed at no earthly glory or comforts. Fruit for God was their plea. But all seemed in vain. This message is one of spiritual importance.

The further sending of verse 36 may remind us of Zechariah 1. 4 where we read, "Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried." This expression implies latter prophets also, and we do find such in the Hebrew Scriptures, in the days of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. The captivity purged Israel of outward idolatry, but it did not produce spiritual fruit. There is, however, the difficulty that "more" seems to signify not only "in addition to" but "more numerous," and we do not know of numerous prophets of God in the captivity.\* It may be said that our knowledge is limited, and further, that the prophets of the captivity period, such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, should be counted latter prophets,—and Zechariah 7. 7 surely implies that they must be so reckoned.† In any case, the thought is that the repetition showed how fully Israel were without excuse. "Two" is a number of witness, and it was, therefore, fitting that the warnings sent should be thus described in two parts.

The expression "when the time of the fruit drew near" (34) may be taken by some to suggest that the whole concerns the latter period of Israel's history. But is it so? Should there not have been fruit as soon as they entered the land? Jeremiah 2 definitely shows this, and if we refer to the division of books in the Hebrew Scriptures, we find Joshua to Kings described as the earlier prophets and Isaiah to Malachi as the latter. This may shed further light on the twofold sending, the more so as the living testimony of the books is often before us, ("they have Moses and the prophets"), though the personal sufferings of the men must here be noticed.

"Last of all He sent unto them His Son." Momentous words. This was the final witness to the nation as such, on national ground. The language used distinguishes the Lord

\* If, however, we take the prophetic ministry as one, and all the servants of the Lord as united, the "more" might well indicate that the "additional" witness, with the preserved record of that which was earlier, formed the accumulated testimony, which men rejected. This view of "more" would indicate God's patience and continuance, and would bring out the intense feeling of the Lord Jesus as He spoke.

† This intensifies the stress on sufferings, for those of Jeremiah are particularly detailed.

Jesus from all the “servants,” for though He took upon Him the form of a Servant, He was essentially God. The stress on “His Son” is impressive. No created being would have spoken of his own distinctness from all others, as Christ has spoken, throughout the parables. In the “earthly story” we see the owner was loth to assume that the husbandmen would utterly reject his son. We must remember that in parables, as in types, there are contrasts, and God the Father foreknew the despising of the Lord Jesus. But it is interesting in this connection to observe that the words could be read “Will they reverence My Son?” These two thoughts may remind of God’s “lingering” forbearance, and how He yearned over His nation, and also His provision of every test, to give space for repentance. But they repented not. They should have revered the Lord of glory: actually they crucified Him. The display of infinite mercy was met by the unveiling of a climax of sin. The word “reverence” signifies derivationally “be turned in”: they refused Him, and there was, as with Adam, the thrusting out. They cast Him out, and were themselves cast out. The Lord Jesus came seeking fruit (Luke 13. 7), and the message appeals to us. Is there fruit in our lives? What have we rendered unto the Lord for all His benefits to us? (Ps. 116. 12, see 2 Chron. 32. 25).

“He came unto His own (things) and His own (people) received Him not” (John 1. 11). They knew Him not, and thus He went about “despised and rejected of men.” And as His gracious words and wondrous works evidenced that a mighty Prophet, and One more than a prophet, had arisen, the leaders of Israel dared to assert that One Whom they could never convince of sin (John 8. 46) was a sinner (John 9. 24). Some stifled their convictions, for the passage before us means nothing less than this. They sinned presumptuously against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3. 29, 30), for they knew it was not an unclean spirit that He had. Deliberately they set themselves to disregard truth (Matt. 21. 25, 26), with a concern for their place and nation (John 11. 48). They sought false witness against Him (Matt. 26. 59), preserving the forms of justice with nothing of its reality. It is this solemn unmasking of iniquity which is here given. Such is man, religious man. It is evident from other Scriptures that the Lord does not mean every individual acted thus. Some, like Saul of Tarsus, acted ignorantly, in unbelief which was sinful but which was not this climax of evil (1 Tim. 1. 13), and how many such were afterwards brought to taste of His

mercy. But the Sanhedrin, which represented Israel officially and hence is viewed as the husbandmen, was almost unitedly against Him with daring defiance (Luke 23. 50, '51).

This parable, therefore, gives an unusually penetrating and solemn view of the rejection of Christ, and shows the power of the affections and will, refuting the theory of man that faith is merely mental, and that man cannot be blamed for unbelief. Moreover, such a passage as Luke 16. 31 may well be noticed in this context. The Lord Jesus was raised from the dead, yet the nation, as a whole, and in its leadership, remained obdurate. The message was sent after Him, "We WILL NOT have This Man to reign over us" (Luke 19. 14). Accordingly, a "notable miracle" (Acts 4. 16) did not bring to repentance. The words, "we CANNOT deny" are impressive, and at once hardened hearts indicated their attitude, without concern for truth or God's glory, "That it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this Name" (Acts 4. 17). The lesson for our own hearts is important. Let us beware lest we stifle conviction: let us seek a tender heart: let truth, not reputation and position, be ever precious: let the glory of God and not our own wishes be ever in front.

The story of the rejection is very striking. "They caught Him, and cast Him out of the vineyard, and slew Him" (Matt. 21. 39). The "casting out" of their sphere of privilege PRECEDES the death. "So Messiah shall be cut off" may include the thought that the nation treated Him as excluded: they thrust Him out of the camp, as if He, the only Pure and Acceptable One, were a leper. "They denied the Holy One and the Just" and no longer regarded Him, the true Israel (Isa. 49. 3), as of Israel. They handed Him to the Gentiles, and afterwards, at their request, He was slain.

The question now asked is, "What will He do unto those husbandmen?" The answer given in the crowd was against themselves, as if they were indignant at the crime, till they knew it was their own, and some at once demurred (Luke 20. 16). Not so David, when his indignation was shown to be actually against himself (2 Sam. 12. 5, 6, 13). But Israel, unlike their repentant king, repented not. There could be no question as to the wickedness of the men: they must be judged. As the steward of injustice, they must be driven out. But, thanks be unto God, the purpose of God is not defeated. As there is a new stewardship in Luke 16, so we find a new husbandry here. But the Lord Jesus at once explains how. The Scriptures, ever quoted

as authoritative, reveal Himself as the Headstone of a new building (Matt. 16. 18). That which is "marvellous" in man's eyes is not a surprise to Him (Zech. 8. 6). The Kingdom of God which Israel dispensationally possessed, was not destroyed by their failure, any more than "the way" of the tree of life was destroyed by Adam's fall. That way was "kept" with a view to Christ, and a new NATION is brought in, on the ground of Christ's finished work. Everything rests upon Him. Here we have the Stone and the holy nation, exactly as in 1 Peter 2. This is no mere earthly people: there is a heavenly relationship, and thus the bringing forth of the fruits. Christendom, it is true, has failed, even as Judaism, but the new creation, in Christ Jesus, has rendered fruit, by virtue of living union with Christ. There is fruit, there shall be fruit, there must be fruit, and our hearts rejoice in the promise here given. But as Luke 20. 18 makes so clear (for the parable is thrice recorded), there are those who are not "in Christ Jesus." Some have thought that the falling on the Stone concerns the broken-hearted contriteness of Isaiah 57. 15, and that is, indeed, blessed, but in a "building!" context and in the light of 1 Peter 2. 8 it would seem that we have a solemnizing view of those who still stumble at the Stone.

Of a very different character, in one sense, is the parable of Luke 12. 16-21. Here we behold natural fruit in its abundance, and nothing of that which is spiritual. The setting is impressive. A man in the crowd desired, yea, almost commanded Christ, to speak to his brother regarding an earthly inheritance. We call to mind His gracious, yet firm, wisdom when Martha somewhat similarly told Him what she felt He ought to do (Luke 10. 40). We cannot be too reverent. We need to be conscious of His wisdom, and of our peril, through self's assertiveness. Instead of taking the position of an arbitrator or judge (see John 12. 47, Acts 7. 27, 35), the Lord Jesus in reply unfolded the principles that concern true wealth. Possessions are not life: they do not become part of one's real life: they never become "personal." The words of Ecclesiastes 5. 11 apply, "What good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?" Men seek after realities professedly, and shadows actually. They set their eyes on that which is not, "for riches certainly make themselves wings" (Prov. 23. 5). How different are the true riches, emphasized in the similar parable in the same gospel (The steward of unrighteousness). The question of the foolish rich man, "What shall I do?" is likewise asked by the steward, and both give their own

answer, and are entirely contrasted with the anxious questions of many on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2. 37), and of the Philippian gaoler (Acts 16. 30). The decision is filled with self-confidence; "my" is its repeated word—"my barns" and "my goods." But the added words "my soul" show the futility of human plans. Psalm 146. 4 says "In that very day his thoughts (schemes)\* perish." "Many years" are not in man's power. How different is the invitation of the Lord Jesus to rest (Matt. 11. 28), and how differently has He said, "Eat" and "Drink" (Matt. 26. 26, 27, cf. Song 5. 1). "This night" reminds of boasting Belshazzar (Dan. 5. 30) who did not humble his heart on hearing the interpretation of the writing, as the previous verse shows. In like manner, Sodom did not heed the warning by the attack of Chedorlaomer. Men will go on frowardly in the way of their own heart. It is noteworthy here that God spoke to the man, but we read of no response. Sometimes He speaks years before; sometimes forty days are given and sometimes a few hours alone are permitted. How earnest we should be to warn those who are laying up treasures for themselves, and are not rich toward God. In the light of this statement of Christ, Matthew 6. 19-21 is deeply searching to believers, for we may become "worldlike" and may gradually set our affections more and more upon things on the earth.

All the parables are intensely practical, and call children of God to the path of love and devotedness. Hence although this message unveils the condition and destiny of a lost soul, it becomes a message to us, to draw us from the fading flowers and fruit of the earth, and from its passing success, to that which abides. If we have heavenly treasures (Luke 12. 33, Col. 1. 5) with our heavenly inheritance (1 Pet. 1. 4), we are indeed "rich toward God." These words sound forth with spiritual music. Are WE sowing for eternity? Are OUR fruits for Him Whom we love (Song 8. 12)? If it be so, we may indeed give thanks, and seek grace to have more and more fruit in the gracious enabling of the Holy Spirit.

And now we approach Luke 13. 6-9. This message is closely associated with a miracle in a synagogue, and the unveiling of the callous heart of its ruler. In passing, it may be said that the theory the Lord Jesus broke the Sabbath before He appointed the new dispensation by His death is utterly at variance with His perfect obedience when He

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\* Contrast the misinterpretation of this verse by annihilationism.

became under the law (Gal. 4. 4). The law of Moses contained nothing against healing on the Sabbath, nor against plucking ears of corn to eat. There was nothing of business or profit in this, and the mattress carried by the healed man was no more the working burden of Jeremiah 17. 21, (mark "gates" as Neh. 13. 19), than a man's clothes. The fruitless condition of Israel was manifested by the inability to perceive God's truth, and though the patient waiting of the Lord Jesus gave space for repentance, they repented not.

The Owner of the Vineyard (cf. Ps. 80 and Isa. 5) is evidently God the Father. The reason why a fig tree is here mentioned may be clearer when we call to mind the judgment on boasting Israel portrayed in Matthew 21. 17-20. Moreover, the first Adam was appointed to dress the garden, and he had trusted to fig leaves. The last Adam is to be seen here, in His condescending love, as the Perfect Servant, and the Dresser of their Vineyard. The unveiling of His humiliation is as precious as of His glory, as when, for example, the King made a feast for His Son. The Holy Spirit's service is equally brought before us in the parable of Luke 14. 15-24. Such passages show there is no degradation in love's tending of the unworthy, and the attitude of the One serving, even when That One represents a Person of our Triune God, and when the service is voluntarily taken, is a definite witness against the socialism and self-exaltation which would override the due fulfilment of responsibilities. The Owner rightly sought fruit, and nothing could compensate for its absence. But He found none. It was not a question of fruitfulness becoming less, or being lost. Nor is it in John 15. There is no suggestion of fruit at any time. This is important, for those without Christ never produce that which pleases God as fruit (Rom. 8. 8), and those who are His are not said to become fruitless, or lost. But it is well to observe that the continued fruit-bearing is the evidence they are His. The Owner speaks to the Dresser of the Vineyard. There is perfect harmony: none other intrudes. We are brought into the hidden fellowship of the Lord Jesus in the days when He walked this earth. "Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none." Israel were to appear before God thrice each year, and every year God's own investigation is here brought before us. The public ministry of Christ was evidently between three and four years. In the first year, although myriads listened, there was not real fruit: They had before been willing for a season to rejoice in John's light, but with

most there was no living change. The testimony of Matthew 3. 8-10, echoed by 7. 19, comes to mind. The second year was the same, the third showed no change. And thus a crisis was nearing. Not a word of blame is uttered to the Dresser of the Vineyard. He had not failed. The fiat sounds forth, "Cut it down." God spake, and it was done in creation, but He spake and He waited, as to judgment. The axe was definitely laid at the root of the tree, but it was not at once lifted up. The same mercy that listened to Moses, who prayed in dependence on the Name of the One "bearing iniquity," (Num. 14. 17-20), was displayed. Indeed, the very language used by the Owner of the Vineyard prepared for the plea presented. He did not Himself cut down the tree, nor speak of doing so, but by mentioning this to the Dresser of the Vineyard He added words that gave opportunity for the "delay" of forbearance—"Why cumbereth it the ground?" The hint of the question was accepted, and the answering request was made, "Lord, let it alone this year *also*." Previous mercy made a background, and we think of the plea "From Egypt until now." Only one year's respite up till the fruit season:—we cannot see the book of Acts as a transitional age, in the light of Matthew 23. 38, 39, although the carrying out of the doom waited for about a generation of forty years as in the wilderness (Matt. 24. 34). Still further patient and painful service marked the year of sparing. Unlike the steward of unrighteousness this Holy Servant was willing to dig, and to be spent in the lowliest of services. The object was fruit. Ah, dear reader, we may well break off to ask ourselves the question, "And does my Lord have fruit from me?" And again, "Am I willing to perform the most menial and strenuous tasks that He may have fruit from others\* and willing to be disappointed and seem to spend my strength in vain as He was willing (Isa. 49. 4)?"

"If on the one hand it bear fruit." There was an "if." The law was weak through the flesh, and all circumstantial blessings are without the response there should be, for man's heart produces nothing except "the flower of grass" in the goodness of the flesh; there is no fruit. Thanks be unto God for sovereign grace, and an eternal salvation by the blood

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\* Contrast Luke 21. 31, 32 where the destruction of Jerusalem is not before us, but the Kingdom of God, and "this generation" has a moral bearing—no improvement of the age is to be expected. "This" in Matthew 24 specially concerns the year "70," "that" relates to the coming Day of the Lord.

of the Lord Jesus, and for a gospel to declare this. Proclaim it at all times, ye who have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Seek not the glory of a platform that men can see, and the publicity that the flesh envies, but the glory of pleasing God in a life that tells of Christ in the background. One's heart may well speak to oneself in this matter, as well as to others.

"But if not, after that Thou shalt cut it down." The added word in italics ("well") would seem to hide the intense feeling of the One Who speaks. He pauses in tender silence awhile, and then adds, "But if not." He Himself would not be remaining on this earth to cut it down, hence the words are part addressed to the owner. "Cut it OUT!" literally, as in verse 7, and Romans 11. 22—a striking parallel. The ground-cumberer cannot be allowed to remain indefinitely. The word employed by the Holy Spirit is impressive, and in the Gospels only occurs here. The fruitless tree renders the ground useless, without work: it is in the way of others. God does not fail to carry through His purposes: when Adam sinned, He was not defeated, nor could Israel's unbelief frustrate the faithfulness of God (Rom. 3. 3, the same word). "The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." (Matt. 21. 43). He shall not fail, nor be discouraged. (Isa. 42. 4). The True Vine of which we shall next speak is God's answer to this barren fig tree. But we may well plead "O that I may never cumber the ground, but use all that God grants, to His own glory." The personal tree is ever responsible, and it either uses the "ground" of circumstances and privileges, or misuses them. Everything in daily life may be sanctified to bring forth fruit, "the fruit of the Spirit." (Gal. 5. 22).

At last the crisis came. Would the digging and care be rewarded? Nay, the multitude cried, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." There was "no fruit," and the nation was set aside as a nation, though individual branches were caused to know a living unity with the One Who in His rejection became the Living Root of the Olive of holy privileges, that henceforth every blessing and every blessed one might be manifestly in Him,—to Him be glory for ever and ever. Yes, the blood of Christ has won the victory, and a great number throughout all eternity will be able to sing, and will rejoice to sing, "Unto Him That loveth us, and loosed us from our sins in His Own blood . . . to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (Rev. 1. 5, 6).

The brief parable of John 12. 24 crystallizes much that exalts our Lord Jesus, and should exercise our own hearts. Just as Matthew 4. 4 speaks of "THE Man," so this verse describes "THE Corn," and looks far beyond the general view of nature. The parable is true in nature, but did not our Heavenly Father appoint nature with a view to the glory of His beloved Son, and the display of His gospel? He Who was "over all, God blessed for ever" became Man, became a Servant, became the Corn of wheat. Verily He was born TO DIE (Matt. 20. 28). He came into the world to save sinners, and without the pouring out of blood is no remission (Heb. 9. 22). Thus He, the Living One, "fell," (for this word is impressive), into the ground. He, Who grew up as a Root out of a dry ground, living amid death (Isa. 53. 2), was also pleased to be laid low and "forsaken," as our Surety. The ground was rejected, and He Himself took the doom and became a curse (Gen. 3. 17, Gal. 3. 13). It is all beyond human reasoning and words. There was an entire contrast with the moral "fall" of the first Adam. The Lord Jesus willingly suffered for sinners, that those given to Him might be His for ever, righteously His! Hence as their Representative and Substitute, He fell into the ground, and died. It was no accident, it was no unexpected circumstance: everything was part of a plan, and that plan the covenant of grace. It looked like defeat, but it was the reverse. In His death He won (Heb. 2. 14). The wrongly "sold" earth became His, to display His gloriously purchased people "in that Day." There was a warfare with the wrongful and usurping owner, but the payment was to the Holy One Whose rights had been outraged. And thus the Surety "must" die, and He died. And, in that death, those who were to become His fruit, in resurrection, are said to have died legally. "I have been crucified with Christ." Those given to Christ were viewed as there, on the tree of judgment, and the true force of 2 Corinthians 5. 14 seems to be that all such "died," before God, that they may be viewed in the blessedness of which Romans 7. 4 speaks, to the joy of every believer's heart.

The lessons of sowing and reaping are precious. "That which thou sowest is not quickened, EXCEPT IT DIE" (1 Cor. 15. 36). And observe the added words "God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed his own body" (38). Do you not see the precious thought? The Lord Jesus MUST die (John 3. 14), that He might have His people. But they were viewed as in Him: that is election. Hence the

seed grows up with what is its "own." Nevertheless the thought of God's GOOD PLEASURE, in raising Him, and blessing them in Him, shines out once more. If this "good pleasure" is seen in nature, is it not much more manifestly so in grace? God the Father gave His people to His beloved Son, and then in raising Him from the dead, He made manifest His power and love to each one of His children (Eph. 1. 19, 20). It is all "as it hath pleased Him" (Eph. 1. 5, 9). There is no room here for human merit or glory. We behold a covenant salvation, and rejoice. And each redeemed one is "in Christ." There are not two gospels and two salvations, one which allows of "works" in some measure, and another which does not. The gospel of the kingdom is the gospel of the grace of God. All salvation is headed up in the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 1. 10). Every one who is blessed is part of the "much fruit" on the one stem of our risen Saviour.

Alone in His life, He will not be alone in glory (Rom. 8. 29, Eph. 5. 27). When He walked this earth, He Himself was the Unique and Obedient One.\* There can be no union by incarnation, no union apart from His precious blood. The veil could only shut out till it was rent (Heb. 10. 20). Hence the words "and die" ring out. The Lord Jesus fully foreknew His death and realized its fruit (Matt. 22. 4). The natural ground does not now allow of a full increase (see Ps. 67. 6). Psalm 72. 16 tells of a future blessedness so different from that which Adam found (Gen. 3. 18), and still more evidently Cain (Gen. 4. 12). The Lord Jesus is like the millennial corn—and still more glorious than all. He has "much fruit." Thanks be unto God for this revelation of grace. His people are a great multitude which no man can number (cf. Rev. 7. 9), for He bore the sins of many (Heb. 9. 28). He shall not fail, nor be discouraged: His words of confidence will never be falsified (John 17. 9). Well may believers rejoice in the bringing of many sons to glory (Heb. 2. 10), each one a trophy of the same finished work of Christ.

This parable of fruit-bearing comes in striking contrast with those which we have read concerning Israel. Here we have nothing but fruit. The typical people failed, but the glorious Antitype failed not. Thus, too, the last Adam is contrasted entirely with the first. It is observable that Matthew

\* Observe in the Greek "it" may be rendered "He Himself alone." The same words are found in Matthew 4. 10, Mark 6. 47, and John 6. 15, and the emphatic "He Himself" in Ephesians 2. 14, 5. 23, Colossians 1. 17, 18, Hebrews 1. 5, 2. 14, 18, 10. 12.

21. 42 hints the putting aside of Israel's temple together with the removal of their vineyard, and John shows Christ's raised up Temple in chapter 2. 21 even as the raised up Corn of wheat. He was Glorious when Israel were not gathered (Isa. 49. 4, 5), and the elect remnant of that nation shall yet be blest and fruitful, being personally engrafted into Him as Isaiah 60. 21 with Romans 11. 23, 26 shows. And so is it for redeemed ones from the Gentiles to-day. All are HIS much fruit, yea, and His joy. All blessings are "in Him," and our fruit-bearing does not begin till we are first made His fruit. "In Christ" is the beginning of a Christian life of love and service, and the Holy Spirit has delighted to emphasize this. And thus we gratefully reach the wondrous parable of John 15. Here again the Lord Jesus is Central. As in the tabernacle, the cherubim would have fallen without the mercy seat and the ark, the branches in the lampstand were dependent on the shaft, the boards needed the sockets, and the laver required its foundation, so here the branches are nothing without the Vine. In other words, the types of God's people are always in need of Himself. Blessed be God, if we have learnt this in experience also. It is very remarkable that in the Lord's Supper, the Lord Jesus is set forth by bread and fruit of the vine, and in the gospel that does not record the institution of this precious symbolic service, we have some of the same lessons in that He is the Corn of Wheat and the True Vine. Thus all Scripture "implies," and illustrates, and confirms all Scripture, to lead us to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

The context of John 15 is impressive. The Lord Jesus was leaving the city, and possibly He contrasted Himself with the massive vine wrought in the temple linked with Herod's unholy name. In any case, He was the True Vine as distinct from the typical vine brought out of Egypt (Ps. 80. 8), on which fruit was sought in vain. John 14 shows the patience of Christ with His disciples and the preciousness of His words. The fact that He was going away is set forth, as in chapter 16, and in between we see the Divine provision of a people representing Him, and bringing forth fruit, in view of His Coming, sustained because of a living union with Himself, ever enabled by the Holy Spirit. The words of 14. 30, "The prince of this world cometh and hath NOTHING in Me," impress us as we read "I am the True Vine, and My Father is the Husbandman." The Father found EVERYTHING in His beloved Son. The enemy came of old to the garden, and there was failure, utter failure and iniquity, in the misuse of fruit, with a driving out

to a land of thorns. But here we have glorious fruit: the prince of this world is judged (John 12. 31), and defeated.

If we are reverently thoughtful, we shall soon find that John 15 is richer in its unveiling of the glory of Christ than we have before realized. We may have been blessed in the realization of this again and again, and we thank God for this, but there is "much more" awaiting our appropriation. Our beloved Lord begins this section with the emphasized "I," which occurs eight times up to the 16th verse, and there is a continual stress on "My" and "Me." Here is one of the well known "I am," passages, all of which glorify the Lord Jesus, and usually bring before us Himself with relation to one of our own pressing needs, for truth is ever practical.

Thus the Lord Jesus is likened to a tree, even as the One Who delights in the will of God in Psalm 1. We remember, too, "the Tree of Life," and call to mind Romans 11. The Lampstand, moreover, with its branches and almonds, pictured a tree, and in that type we have the unveiling of our Lord in resurrection.\* As the Lord's Supper set forth in advance the glorious position of believers through His accomplished death, and as the prayer of John 17 showed in advance the character of His present intercession, and thus used such words as "I have FINISHED the work," so is it here. In view of Calvary, our beloved Lord spoke of what He would there complete. The prayerful student may notice that though "am" and "is" in verses 1 and 5 are in the Greek, "are" in verse 5 is in italics: another illustration of the perfect accuracy of Scripture. Living union, we repeat, was to be His people's on resurrection ground. The use of words by the Holy Spirit emphasizes the REALITY of our relationship to the Lord Jesus. God the Father regards His people as living with the very life of His beloved Son (Col. 3. 1-4).

"My Father is the Husbandman." His deep interest is ever shown. But the Vine itself needs no purging. And so we pass on to the branches. "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit, He taketh away." Why is this failure mentioned first? Are we not conscious of our tendency to forget

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\* Hence the lampstand was of gold without wood, as was the mercy seat. It is observable that in both these types we have the living union of His people pictured (cherubim and branches). Thus John 12. 24 is again illustrated. He abode "alone" till by death He redeemed us, to be in Him on resurrection ground. There is not the thought of living union wherever gold and wood (Christ's humiliation) are together in the tabernacle.

the searching messages of Scripture, or at least to assume that everything is right, if we are "orthodox"? We would not say one word against "godly assurance," resting on God's immutable things, but it is blessed to seek the right condition for this enjoyment. God honours humility: it is not despondency. We hope that many a believer will have a richer delight in assurance after our study, but one that is humbler. At first we are startled:—"Every branch in Me," yet "He taketh away." We learn once more that as salvation is not a matter of uttering a formula of faith, so eternal preservation is not to be studied as a mere matter of logic. Inner experience is always emphasized by the Holy Spirit. It is NOT, "I am saved because it is logical to say one cannot be lost after believing," but "Am I bringing forth some fruit, as love's evidence of the Lord's gracious work?" The doctrinaire may resent this, but let not the lowly believer be stumbled. The Lord seeks much fruit, but, thanks be unto God, we do not read, "Every branch in Me that beareth a little fruit He taketh away." Ah, dear child of God, disappointed in your small response to Him, feeling "What fruit have I?"—God looks to those who tremble thus (Isa. 66. 2), and He Who has the number of your hairs, sees cups of cold water, and is "not unrighteous to forget" (Heb. 6. 10) little things, in the name of His beloved Son. Do not underestimate His love. Are there not some things you do, and are there not affections for Him, for which YOU cannot take the "credit"? Then why not thank Him for these evidences that He has begun a good work (Phil. 1. 6) and count on Him Who will not quench the smoking flax (Isa. 42. 3), that there may be growth in grace, and "more fruit" thereby?

But what about the difficulty still remaining, "Every branch IN ME"? The verbal inspiration of Scripture shines out. God chose the exact word to light up the whole passage. "Branch" is from a root "to break off." But it CANNOT mean broken off from this Vine, for the same word is used of the fruit-bearing branch. Then it must signify broken off from elsewhere. Then every branch here is engrafted,—every one, no other word is found. This involves many lessons.\*

(1) No one is by nature, a member of Christ (Rom. 11. 24).

(2) Our beloved Lord is viewed as a beautiful Vine, but a beautiful Vine must have, or have had, branches of its own, yet not one of these is here before us. Then they must have

\* A leaflet on "The True Vine" gladly sent.

been dealt with FIRST—yea, dealt with in judgment, for He became our Substitute. Thus the sole use of this word “broken off” (i.e. engrafted branch) involves in itself a deep though hidden reference to our Lord’s DEATH and RESURRECTION as prior to the living union of His redeemed. If other words had been used, this would have been obscured, if not contradicted.

(3) We understand now why ALL the branches need purging or taking away. Christ’s own branches and fruit, in His earthly life, are not mentioned. He was full of fruit without any purging.‡

(4) The branch taken away is not said to have BECOME fruitless. Far otherwise, the Lord views it as always without fruit. The NATURAL branch of a vine in this condition would show a failure of the vine, but what would a vinedresser say of an ENGRAFTED branch which never had fruit? Would he not infer that it was never truly joined within? Hence the word, Divinely chosen, explains WHO are “taken away.” There is no failure of grace, no failure as to “eternal life.” It is not a BECOMING fruitless: there is no hint of living union. Solemn words: there may be apparent relationship to Christ without reality. This is a key to much that saddens in history. The wheat and tares are together, the wise and foolish virgins will be together. The Father Who, as the King in Matthew 22. 13, excludes the one without righteousness, still takes away the fruitless branch. God is holy, and shows His holy righteousness. It is a serious matter to be disapproved as to parts of service, and our hearts would ever be searched as to this, but something more than that is before us in John 15. 2. How serious then is the present-day tendency to encourage a profession of Christ without repentance and reality, and to bring “hay and stubble” into God’s temple (1 Cor. 3. 12), for the fire will burn up such, even as it works here (John 15. 6). And Hebrews 6. 8 is a parallel, where we have great things, and outward privileges, followed by falling away. But, beloved, there is at once rich blessing when God speaks of the things “that accompany salvation” (Heb. 6. 9), and these are the little things (Heb. 6. 10), just as blessing is joined with the little things in 1 Corinthians 13. 4-7, and not with the great display of verses 1-3, and our hearts call Matthew 6. 6 to mind, in contrast with verse 5. Likewise in John 15 we read at once “AND every branch that

‡ “Christ’s Claim to Sinlessness and its Unique Meaning” may help some (a leaflet readily sent).

beareth fruit." "Fruit," ah, what is it? Not something great, but the evidence, often in tiny details, of the life of Him Who is our Life. "Ah," you say, "how little fruit there is, and how imperfect I am." Your Lord knew this, for at once He added, "He purgeth it." You need PURGING, and so do I. There is imperfection, and we are brought down very low. But, thank God, when there is some fruit, and a deep and prayerful longing that there may be more,—fruit that is from Him, and also, in His loving acceptance, unto Him.

When in God's grace we find an appointed key to a passage our hearts should indeed be grateful. There still remain other precious applications of the underlying display of God's character. For example, though we dare not interpret this removed branch of a true believer united to the Lord Jesus, and having eternal life, the message does not lose its searching power to those who are His. It shows God's hatred of unreality and all sin. A vital relation to Christ is essentially different from a dead profession of Christianity, so that when there is actually the former, there is a godly fear of grieving God. The idea that a possible loss of personal safety is the only powerful argument against "fruitlessness" cuts at the very root of God's healthy doctrine (Tit. 2. 1). It brings everything to the evil touchstone of selfishness. It affords a parallel with Rome's argument, and that of others, against free grace. "You will despise good works, and live as you like" is a poor objection, for it shows ignorance of the new "liking" which springs from the new life. It denies a new CREATION, with its new standpoint, and then proceeds to draw inferences from its own unfounded denial. It is a solemn thing to become less fruitful if one is a child of God. The principle of this passage is clear, that one must never use words of doctrine against the appointed evidence "Is there fruit?" And it is clear, from the unveiling of God's character and standpoint here, that one who brings forth less fruit will become disapproved as to much service, though that is not the subject of this passage. Hence to a believer the searching message remains, without nullifying the precious certainty of the work of Christ.

The contrast which we have seen between God's dealings in verse 2 is very striking. He is never weary of purging when there is fruit. He does not use the knife to cut off His own, but He may use the knife to prune, in a very painful way. The stones of His temple, unlike those which pictured Christ the perfect Altar (Jos. 8. 31), need much preparing

for glory (1 Kings 6. 7). Do we welcome the live coal (Isa. 6. 6), and the chastening that is all in love (Heb. 12. 6)? The object in view is fruit, yea, more fruit. There is no suggestion that more fruit can be attained without purging, nor can gold be refined without fire.

Every believer is a living member of Christ, and thus is privileged, and responsible to represent Him. And as the Vine has been seen as One possessing precious grapes BEFORE, the grafted in branches should have the *same* characteristics; and should we not walk as He walked, and be imitators of Him, with the love and meekness and gentleness which He showed when on earth? No branch has a separate life from the others, or a different purpose. There may be contrasts in race, and position, and ability among believers, but union with Christ is the same. And the power for fruit is receptiveness of His inflowing life. "Abiding" is a Divine work from God's standpoint, and the manifestation of obedience from ours. This aspect of responsibility reminds us that the antitype excels the type.

The thought of a branch implies an individual privilege,—although we are members one of another. The two aspects are before us in 1 Corinthians 3. 5-8. It indicates, moreover, that the physical frame is to be presented to the Lord, and that it is the body which He uses to express His will (Rom. 6. 13).<sup>\*</sup> Nor is this strange. How can we be "known" in this world except by the activities of our members? How important then are they. And yet the body remains an earthen vessel (2 Cor. 4. 7), and the wood of the Vine is humble (Ezek. 15. 3): the glory is not in the wood. Yea, the fruitful branch is hidden more and more by the much fruit, and, not only so, the beautiful burden bends it down, and in lowly self-abnegation the laden branch feels, as it were, the strain, but has the choice privilege of bearing that which will glorify the Vine, rather than itself. No personal power attaches to the branch, nor does it receive the honour. Its appointed usefulness is to make known the nature and richness of the life of the Living Vine. Everything else is failure. That alone is success. The glory of the advertised preacher before men is vanity, and more than vanity. Is not the One Who is called the Husbandman well pleased alone with the fruit that exalts His beloved Son?

<sup>\*</sup> The allusion to the cutting off of our beloved Lord's own branches and the removal of the grapes, emphasizes this interpretation: they pictured His body and blood.

“More fruit” (verse 2), “much fruit” (5), “fruit to remain” (verse 16): we thank God for the possibility. And we desire this in our own lives. Yet we are not here commanded to bring forth fruit: we are commanded to abide. The message is pertinent. When we are concerned as to the privilege of a right relation to Christ, He will cause the fruit. The Holy Spirit is glorifying Christ, and He Who is likened to the oil in the “branches” of the Lampstand still ministers the living power of our risen Lord. Is not this always so (Eph. 1. 14), even as those who know Christ as their Life are said to be born of the Spirit?

It is of the deepest importance to observe that as the Lord Jesus met the enemy in the wilderness with the WORD OF TRUTH, and in the garden with the equal threefold stress on PRAYER, so throughout Scripture the two are united. Psalm 119 comes to our mind, and the preface to Daniel's supplication in chapter 9. Ephesians 6. 17, 18 helps our meditation on this practical theme. So is it in John 15. “If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will” (7). There is no antagonism with verse 5 “He that abideth in Me, and I in him,” for we cannot have Christ without His words “If a man love Me, he will keep My words” (John 14. 23, cf. Mark 8. 38). How often has Christendom ignored this, but the emphasis of His Person without His Words is sentiment, not truth, and the stress on His Words without His Person is formal orthodoxy, not living power.

And it is fitting that the thought of power in prayer, consequent on a right relation to the Lord Jesus and His words, should be followed by a reference to the glory of God the Father. We have all failed in forgetting that the object of salvation is not only our safety but God's glory. So is it in everything. “HEREIN is My Father glorified,” for we cannot honour Him if we have any other standpoint. And what is the effect? “That ye bear much fruit,” not merely a statement, but an object in view. The word “that” as in John 17. 3 denotes purpose.\* The fruit bearing life

\* *iva*. The remark that “the use of *iva* for *ὄτι* is another peculiarity of John,” is, we are persuaded, an unintentional forgetfulness of verbal inspiration. God has no mere synonyms but has ever used the exact word to express His will, and we dare not substitute another. Ch. 8. 56 is wrongly adduced. Abraham rejoiced, it may be in Genesis 22. 8, with the prospect of seeing Christ's Day, and his faith was honoured (Heb. 11. 13) and he rejoiced again. Sometimes the thought may be veiled, but purpose underlies,

springs from a God-glorifying attitude, and in such a life there is much fruit. How searching are the words "little" and "much" in Scripture. Only as we are more like our beloved Lord in character can we become more like Him in fruitfulness (12. 24).

The associated intimacy with Himself is found in the immediate thought "So shall ye be My learners" (cf. Matt. 11. 29).

One more reference to fruit in this chapter awakens our prayerful meditation. "Ye have not chosen Me but I have chosen you, and placed you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." The purpose of God's election is fruit, and the purpose of His "placing," wheresoever we are put by Him, (same word in 1 Cor. 12. 28), is fruit. It is not that there may be great intelligence and knowledge. Every Scripture witnesses against the exaltation of man and of human brilliance (1 Cor. 8. 1). The boasted glories of men find no place in 1 Corinthians 13, nor in such descriptions as those of 1 Timothy 3. Fruit is God's will, and without fruit there is no other evidence of relation to Christ. Real fruit is abiding, it is not "tied on," but living. There is thus a contrast with the goodliness of the grass-like flesh, and its fading flowers, a contrast, moreover, with the cloud-like goodness of Hosea 6. 4. An abiding branch has abiding fruit. God desires that which is not of nature but grace. As the incorruptible seed has an incorruptible harvest (1 Pet. 1. 23), so the living branch in the Living Vine has fruit that will not be lost. It will abide, and be found to God's praise in the day of Jesus Christ.

It is important, therefore, to ask ourselves if this object is ours. Have we, by God's grace, taken God's standpoint, and do we seek, in the Holy Spirit's enabling, to bring forth fruit? Again we are reminded that fruit is the manifestation that we, taken from the old vine, are no longer to manifest our old life. Christ is to be seen in our body (as the "branch" indicates), and our daily life is to be a reminder of what He is, that He, the Unseen One, may be known through us, and that the result may be delight and refreshment to be presented to our gracious God and Father, a token of the glorious work of His beloved Son. Is it so in our wish, and walk? Or is this only "theory" about which we write and read? May

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e.g. 4. 34 is not "My meat is TO DO the will," but rather "That I may do the will of Him That sent Me (the holy INTENTION leading to the holy ACTIVITY) is My meat."

the searching power of truth be resultful in the experience of all believers who read these lines, in view of the near Coming of our Lord Jesus. Parables of wheat and fruit give the thought of the time of ingathering, and so are equally a reminder of that Blessed Hope. James 5. 7, 8 illustrates again this precious association of thought. "Fruit" is not meant to remain on a tree for ever. There is the precious ingathering. Let our awakened hearts say, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."‡

‡ It would be well to study Romans 11 with John 15. There we behold the olive of privilege from which branches are cut out. About the same time the aspect is changed so that no longer is it the tree of privilege alone but of acceptance with God, and the root, from verse 16, is essentially Holy, and the branches have the same character. Hence afterwards, though there are holy warnings, none of the graciously engrafted branches, standing by faith, are said to be cut off. We thus realize the crisis in this chapter, when the Lord Jesus, by His finished work, becomes the ROOT, and His people henceforth have more than privilege, even living union with Himself to bring forth fruit to His joy. A leaflet will gladly be sent.

## Some "Contrast" Parables.

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THE Holy Spirit shows remarkable contrasts, as well as parallels, in the appointed types of the Old Testament, e.g., the redemption money was paid by the persons themselves, the manna partaken of by the people soon bred worms and stank, the sacrifices were never raised from the dead, the temple itself was destroyed. In accord with the designed incompleteness of each and all of the "shadows," we often find the appointment of a twofold type, e.g., Noah *and* the ark, Isaac *and* the ram, Moses *and* Aaron. Yet even such fall far short, and the epistle to the Hebrews seems especially written to indicate the glory of Christ beyond all the graciously given pictures of Himself and His work. Thus we read of many priests, made without an oath, and not suffered to continue by reason of death. We see, moreover, the priests standing, and not sitting, offering oftentimes the same sacrifices in which there is a remembrance made of sins, showing that the way into the holiest was not yet made manifest. All such contrasts were designed—they were not unperceived "defects,"—designed, in love, to be a foil for the fuller display of the majesty of the Son of God. And are we surprised when we find a similar object in the parables? It is evident that the Lord Jesus is Central in these. If there is a Foundation, He is the Foundation-Rock. If there is a Sower, He Himself is pre-eminently before us. If there is One beyond others Who gives and acts and appoints, He is That One. Any rare exception has a special purpose; for example, in Matthew 22 God the Father is seen making a feast, and searching among the guests, but our hearts are taught to realize that it is a Marriage Feast for His Son, Who is thus exalted, though unseen in the narrative.

Inasmuch as our adorable Lord transcends anything of earth, and transcends it infinitely, we are conscious that every parable must suggest a contrast. But some seem to have this thought in their very warp and woof, and these are particularly in the Gospel record according to Luke. The first we approach is in chapter 11. Here we behold "the importunate friend." The parallel is in the intensity, the contrast is in almost all else. And this makes the Divine stress on the intensity the more remarkable, and shows how definitely our Lord approves

burning fervency, and a promise-claiming expectancy in prayer. We little realize, however long we have known the Lord, the tremendous influence placed in our hands by the privilege of humble prayer within the line of God's will. We live as if bankrupt, when we might be spiritually rich beyond conception. Prayer is to be a remarkable business of life: the writer feels his own shortcoming as he writes, but this is not to be misused to cause silence as to the possibilities through power in prevailing prayer. If every reader realizes that it is not from the standpoint of pride or attainment, but with a humble desire to help fellow-believers to reach the privilege God has set before us, it is surely a responsibility to emphasize this. Remarkably the gospel which contains parables of importunate prayer records the personal prayers of our Lord Jesus with regard to His baptism (Luke 3. 21) and His transfiguration (9. 29).

In Luke 11 we have the petition in verse 5:—

- (a) It is based on friendship, not relationship: equality, not dependence.
- (b) It is limited to a request for lending. The loaves are wanted for "use": the word "give" is excluded.
- (c) The number of loaves asked is a small one: it is but "three."
- (d) The request is delayed till the last moment: the emptiness is not felt before.

The reason is found in verse 6:—

- (a) Nothing is asked for personal need.
- (b) An unexpected emergency is urged as the sole reason for unseemly disturbance.
- (c) An acknowledgment of helplessness is made, without any thought of sorrow or humiliation ("I have nothing").

The answer occupies verse 7, and is most impressive.

- (a) It begins, in the Greek, with the negative.
- (b) It denies relationship, "*My* children" are contrasted with the intruder. ("Me" and "my" three times: "with me" implies "thou art not mine, thou art away from me").
- (c) There is an unwillingness to be "troubled" (the same idiom is found in ch. 18. 5, Mark 14. 6).
- (d) Stress is laid on the shut door, the time ("now") and the bed.
- (e) A further negative is joined to the word "can"—"I cannot"—not physical inability in itself but because the will was opposed.

- (f) The word “give” occurs for the first time, linked with a “not.”
- (g) The last word of refusal is “thee”;—a personal rejection.

Verse 8 assumes that the petitioner persists, and, last of all, for his own peace, but without any love, the unwilling “friend” rises, and gives as many loaves as are needed. The sidelight on the selfishness of the human heart, and on the hollowness of much friendship, is humbly important.

We should never have thought of such a parable. We should have urged continuance in prayer by some other language. But One Who never erred has chosen this message to deal with our hearts, and to remind us that our persistency in supplication is to be just as real as if our Father were unwilling to give, although His reason for seeming hesitation is entirely different. We thus have a precious sidelight on any apparent absence of answer awhile, that we may not be discouraged nor cease praying, *unless* we have the Lord's own indication in that direction (2 Cor. 12. 8, 9), or learn that the petition we thought to be according to His will, when we asked it, is actually against that will.

The contrasts in verse 7 seem pressing upon us for immediate notice, that they may be noticed and felt, in the gracious instruction of the Holy Spirit. Our Heavenly Father loves to encourage: He neither begins nor ends with a repelling word. Ah, we have already seen the primary contrast which the Lord Jesus deigns to utter on both sides of the parable (verses 2 and 13). Our “*Father*” is intimately related, because by grace we are His children. The petitioner here is sharply distinguished from the family, but we have been brought *into* the family. Blessed be God for such grace, and its fullness. Far from spurning our prayers, He welcomes and commands them, whenever we are in a condition to ask in faith; and, even when we have wandered, He lovingly draws us back. He does not view our supplications as a “burden,” but the prayer of the upright is His delight (Prov. 15. 8). In one sense there is no shut door with Him, we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10. 19). And, further, He Who still keeps His beloved people neither slumbers nor sleeps (Ps. 121. 4). He does not need to rise, and no “cannot” is found with Him. He rejoices to give because He is “our Father,” as Matthew 7 also impresses upon slowly learning hearts. And the epistles continue this gracious ministry, for they contain the prayers of God's servant

addressed to "the Father." Yet the deeper realization of this name, so graciously revealed and declared (John 17. 26) seems often absent to-day (Rom. 8. 15, Gal. 4. 6).

It is striking to notice in this gospel that there will be a rising up to shut the door (Luke 13. 25). The contrast is solemnizing—only those who are sheltered by the precious blood of Christ have the right of access now, and the glorious prospect of that Day. We cannot be too thankful, or too earnest, if we are thus privileged. The glory of the gospel of grace is its freedom on the one hand, and its fulness on the other. The measure of God's love is seen in the gift of His Beloved Son, and are we not convinced after such a Gift that He will, with Him, freely give us all things ?

Yet we are bidden to be as earnest as if the door was closed. And in our *experience* it may be (verses 9, 10, Matt. 7. 7). Our Heavenly Father does not always explain why He keeps us waiting. Daniel, in chapter 10, was called to go through three weeks' expectation; and, if God appoints three years, His will is perfect. Moses was forty years in the back of the desert, yet the time was not lost. But if we become listless or forgetful in prayers that have been graciously brought before us, and laid upon us, we lose a blessing. Only *via* intensity can we be in a condition to use the wondrous supply "as much as we need." Here is God's training for His trustful people.

Ere we leave this practical message it is well to notice that parabolically it comes after the Good Samaritan. There we behold a helpless man delivered without asking, and everything done for one who had nothing but needs. As soon, however, as we are brought into the experience of a new life, we are called to *ask*, and to "continue in prayer and watch in the same with thanksgiving." In the narrative the prayer-parable follows Mary at the feet of the Lord Jesus. Importunity is not the only part of our life. We must wait before Him to know His will, if we would learn the power of prevailing with God and man, and the immediately preceding words contain the disciples' prayer in contrast with vain repetition (cf. Matt. 6. 7-9). And therein we find the request for daily bread. May it not be the Holy Spirit indicates thereby further precious lessons from our beloved Lord? Let us not only ask for "a friend," but let us be conscious of our own emptiness. And, further, let us not delay till the last moment, though grateful for God's emergency love, but let us seek to live in a condition to help others, even if they come at "midnight." If we serve

the Lord in usual things, we shall be more prepared for unusual (Col. 4. 6). Midnight prayers and praises are a helpful study: we remember the psalmist (119. 62), and Paul and Silas (Acts 16. 25): and verily it is now nearing the world's midnight. Though we should urge petition for ourselves that we may have the needed spiritual food, yet there is a further encouragement here to seek unselfishly for others, and to intercede unwearingly for them, even as the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends (Job. 42. 10). Thus are we instructed in the "what" as well as the "when" and the "how" of our prayers, that we may ask in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and "receive," that our joy may be full (verse 10, John 16. 24). Our Heavenly Father desires us to expect much from Him, and there is never a time when we cannot count on His loving interest. If one has suggested above that the prayer should be day by day, and not only when a sudden trial comes, it is a joy to be mindful of the mercy that welcomes us equally in such an emergency, whatever be the difficulty, whatever be the hour. Our Heavenly Father would not have us send others away empty, who look to us, though we feel our own need, and say "I have nothing." Can we not look to Him that we may have a word in season to speak to him that is weary, and that we may have lips to feed many, though we feel ourselves so unworthy, and, as to material resources, barren? He would encourage us at such a time to anticipate His enabling, nor shall a lowly believer have confidence in vain. The Holy Spirit will enable, in our experience, that which is impossible otherwise (Luke 11. 13). It is well to feel "I have nothing," but it is well to *pray* expectantly in full view of the overpowering need. God is greater than the emergency. I can find no words more suited to refresh the weary but humble servant of God who would minister God's truth, and who, though conscious of God's resources and the wealth of Scripture, feels personal insufficiency, and cries "I have nothing." God will not fail. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble" is a message with a myriad of applications, for God is both living and loving to-day.

The dream of old was doubled to Pharaoh that he might realize the certainty (Gen. 41. 32) and it is not without significance that we find a second parable in Luke 18 of the same character. Again it behoves us prayerfully to notice the exact language. The persons brought before us are "a certain judge" and "a widow." There is no relationship. The judge is in one city alone, his power is limited: but even there he

complains of being worried. He breaks the first commandment ("which feared not God") and with it the second ("neither regarded man"), and boasts of his attitude (verse 4). His intense selfishness shines out:—"Lest by her continual coming she weary me." The Lord Jesus describes him as a judge who was "made," as it were, "of unrighteousness" for the expression is stronger than in the English translation. A parallel is found in "the steward of unrighteousness" (Luke 16. 8), and "children of obedience" (1 Peter 1. 14, see Eph. 2. 2). The link with Luke 16 is impressive, for we at once think of the Scribes and Pharisees (note Mark 12. 40). Thus the passage contains a holy reproof of evil around in the very place where the Lord Jesus spoke.

Now we begin to feel the force of the contrasts. God is not limited to one city, nor is He ever wearied by multitudes of His Own who call upon Him. He is the One Who has none beyond Himself to honour, Who has no one to fear, and yet He tenderly regards men. And has He not revealed Himself as specially concerned with the interests of the fatherless and the widow? But those who belong to Him, viewed spiritually, are the reverse of widows and orphans (1 John 3. 1, see John 14. 18). He is the *Righteous* Judge, but to them He is more than this, He is their Father, Who will judge every man's work (1 Pet. 1. 17), and thus cause tribulation to those who trouble His beloved people (2 Thess. 1. 6).

But there is a further thought. We have seen that God's people are related to Himself, and He Himself has described them as the bride of His Beloved Son. The widow is thus a complete contrast, to reveal His love the more. Hence, with expectant faith, the redeemed of the Lord, without the trembling and distance which the widow felt, can draw near. They do not fear that an Ahasuerus will hold back his golden sceptre. Nor is their prayer limited to a cry for deliverance. They rejoice to love and praise Him to Whom they are dear, since they are His own elect (7). We seem to find a wealth of contrasts, but the appointed parallel *still* remains. We are to be as intense in prayer, as if the answer seemed impossible except to desperate earnestness. Although we have a definite promise, but yet there is to be fervent prayer (Ezek. 36. 37). "Continual coming" is before us in verse 5, or "one coming unto the end" (cf. Matt. 10. 22, John 13. 1), and we remember the principle of 1 Peter 2. 4 "To Whom coming," and again "Pray without ceasing." "Weary" is an unusual word: it is found in 1 Corinthians 9. 27, and indicates "striking under

the eye" until there is a bruise, but, blessed be God, His eyes are upon the righteous and His ears open to their cry (Ps. 34. 15). Rather, if we do *not* come, we "weary" (Isa. 43. 23, 24).

A further thought, we have an "adversary." The singular is important. We call to mind Matthew 6. 13, and realize that the believer is never viewed as vindictive. We are to love those who hate us, and pray for them; but there can be no compromise with the arch-enemy. Hence the link of *prayer* and *conflict* in Ephesians 6 and elsewhere, and the precious message of James 4. 7, 8 "Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you."

Thus we look forward to the promised avenging of God's elect, when the accuser of our brethren shall not only be cast down (Rev. 12, 10) but bound (Rev. 20. 2, 3), and then confined in the Lake of Fire for ever (Rev. 20. 10). The attitude here has therefore a close parallel with the disciples' prayer already noticed, and we realize the concern of a believer that he may not be defeated in the present conflict with spiritual principalities and powers. And do we not find that prayer is the climax in that context also (Eph. 6. 18)?

It is solemn to realize that those who continue in the way of sin will share the doom prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25. 41). Hence the thought of this holy vengeance brings 2 Thessalonians 1. 6 to mind, yet it is not for believers to avenge themselves (Rom. 12. 19) but to commit themselves to Him Who judgeth righteously (1 Pet. 2. 23, 4. 19). Whenever we pray "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" we realize a little of what this means for those who despise Him; and giving place to "THE wrath" implies a holy recognition of God's righteousness in punishment. It is, however, deeply important to see that the elect are not said to pray "Avenge me," but are simply characterized as crying for help (Heb. 4. 16). This also seems part of the gracious contrast appointed as to our mode of prayer. The parallel is again the intensity, as found in the words "Day and Night."

"Though He bear long with them" seems a little difficult. A more literal rendering would be "And He is long-suffering over them." As a rule "longsuffering" reminds us that there could be sternness against those to whom longsuffering is shown, and their failures are emphasized. Here we should have anticipated a reference to His longsuffering toward the world as in Romans 2. Nor is this overlooked, but evidently the primary thought is longsuffering to His beloved people. James 5. 7 may be produced by some to show that the word

can be employed (unusually) without the suggestion of failure in the part of those to whom it is manifested. But is this so? Does not the type there refer to the land, and its slowness in producing fruit since the fall? And thus we learn from Luke 18 that the seeming delay in God's intervention is because of our spiritual need (cf. 1 Pet. 1. 6). The trials and tribulations are God's longsuffering to us, that we may know godly repentance, and growth and fruitfulness! This is a deeply helpful thought. The elect cry day and night, but their Heavenly Father will not remove the enemy before the appointed time. The wrath of men, and of the arch-enemy himself, cannot destroy the redeemed. But our felt need is our strength, and our Father is training us through all. Yea, He is LONGSUFFERING, for we might well be cut off, as the disobedient prophet, and those at Corinth. This passage becomes thus a striking help as to permitted strains, and God's use of the end of this age will be similar. The great tribulation is not His wrath, but man's wrath, under Satan's instigation, overruled for the good of the Lord's redeemed. Thus Luke 18 is closely parallel with 2 Peter 3. 9, where the longsuffering is definitely said to be towards God's people that they may be brought to repentance. And thus we anticipate the precious revival, promised for the present dispensation, in the gracious working of the Holy Spirit.

But a day will come when speedily, and with events in rapid succession, God will arise on behalf of His loved ones. But what will be the effect when such are caught up to meet Him in the air? Will there be then a change "on the earth" among the ungodly who thus have evidence of God's interposition? Will He after that event "find the faith on the earth"? Nay: Antichrist will but stiffen his rebellion, and men will unite with the adversary against the Lord of Glory. Such is man. This allusion to those "on the earth," parallel with the many passages in Revelation which describe the earth-dwellers (e.g. 8. 13, 11. 10, 13. 8, etc.), gives the key which exactly fits the lock.

And now we return to another "Contrast Parable," which concerns "that Blessed Hope" (Luke 12. 36, 37). The words "Ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord" show that there is a parallel. This is in the believers' attitude. "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching." The added words at once show that the other part is in an appointed contrast. "I say unto you that

He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them." (Luke 12. 37). In other words, our Lord is the opposite of "their lord" in verse 36. And this instantaneously removes a difficulty which has perplexed many. "*Their* lord" returns from the wedding, *our* Lord comes to welcome His people unto the "Marriage Supper of the Lamb." We can picture the contrast. The eastern servant might well be anxious as to the return of a master, after the festivities of a wedding. He could hardly expect love and consideration. What if there were drunkenness, and disregard of others? How different is our Lord! This is the point of the message. It will be observed that as in the parables of Luke 11 and 18 the contrast is in the One Who gives and controls: the parallel is to be found in the attitude and intensity of the Lord's people. It is evident that the Lord Jesus Christ hints a danger into which the enemy would seek to make us fall. And what is that danger? Is it not the misuse of grace? Because our gracious Lord is not an unjust judge, and because He comes to welcome us, shall we be less earnest, or less prepared? The peril of misusing His love is the Divine teaching in the warp and woof of all these parables.

And we find a helpful illustration, and corroboration in Luke 17. 7-10. This seems to show us that by God's grace we are on the right track. The parallel is less fully explained, but its meaning is, I think, clear. Albeit we rightly say, we are unprofitable servants,<sup>1</sup> the Lord does not thus speak of those who seek to please Him. Rather, He says "Good and faithful servant." And in the light of Luke 12 we seem to see the precious surprise of the future. Might we not anticipate that after our ploughing and shepherding, (two helpful parts of service), He would expect us in that Day to provide something more for Him? But has He not deigned to unveil that He will come forth and welcome His own into His banqueting house? He has nothing for which to thank us, yet He will not say to us "Afterward thou shalt eat and drink." In striking contrast the words shine forth, "Until that day when I drink it new *with you* in My Father's Kingdom" (Matt. 26. 29), and again, "That ye may eat and drink at My table in My Kingdom" (Luke 22. 30). Such is grace, and thus every one of these related messages emphasizes His love altogether beyond all that we receive from the fickle men

<sup>1</sup> Distinguish from "unfaithful." We cannot bring the Lord profit. because of His own we give to Him; but we can be faithful.

of earth, or could hope to receive even from the kindest. And "grace" is thus set forth by the Holy Spirit, that we may not be proud and self-reliant, or misuse the mercy received, to become gradually less and less earnest in prayer and daily life. Our watchfulness should be as real as if we dreaded our Master (though, by grace, we do not), and love should be stronger than terror, with an intense desire for His joy and glory.

We repeat that, throughout these contrast parables, which seem to make two "pairs,"<sup>2</sup> the message is one. The believer is to present a likeness to those of this world in their fullest earnestness. The cause with them may be sudden emergency, or fear, or great trouble. The *cause* with redeemed ones is quite different. But the intensity is to be felt and manifested. Our gracious God never withholds unlovingly, never acts unjustly, never proves a hard Master. Every passage reveals His glory by contrast. But we are not to "take advantage" of His perfect love. Moreover, for our training He graciously deals with us at times in a way which we cannot understand, and which the enemy will suggest is evidence of neglect, or indifference. But His silence and seeming delay are set forth by these parables as to be expected, yet never to be resented, or attributed to anything except love. The practical bearing of these messages on our attitude, under God's unexplained dealings with His own, is now becoming evident, and we realize gratefully, in the Holy Spirit's enabling, the way in which every word of Scripture is addressed to believing hearts, that God's beloved children may trust in Him at all times, and never complain of His gracious refining and moulding, in order that there may be a vessel to His own joy and glory.

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<sup>2</sup> We call to mind the mustard seed and leaven: the hid treasure and pearl: the two parables of rejected invitations to the feast, etc.

**No. 4. FREE,**

*“When He hath found it, He layeth it on His shoulders, REJOICING; and when He cometh home, He calleth together His friends and neighbours saying unto them, REJOICE with Me; for I have found My sheep which was lost.”*

*Luke 15. 5, 6.*

# THE PARABLES OF THE LORD JESUS

Outline Studies for His believing people, who feel the solemnity of the times, and look for His Coming.

## THE MESSAGE OF LUKE 15.

*“I will GREATLY REJOICE in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness.”*

*Isaiah 61. 10.*

4

**T**HE Parables, like the Types, are full of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Having experienced and enjoyed a little of their inexhaustible fulness. I desire to share, with others of His beloved people, the food that He has graciously provided. A book on all the parables is in prayerful preparation,\* but this forerunner is herewith sent forth in faith, and dedicated to the Lord's service.

Copies will be supplied as the Lord enables. Our dependence is simply on Him. Hence no financial straits should hinder poor believers from **ASKING** for whatever copies they need. Such are equally beloved in Christ Jesus. If others, accepted in Him, send fellowship in expenses, it is received gladly in His Name, if without any thought of compulsion or purchase, but only because they feel thus guided by our adorable Lord.

Suggestions and questions are ever welcome, for there is ever a fulness beyond all that any of us realize, and it should be our privilege and joy to learn more of our Lord Himself and of His words, while, in the enabling of the Holy Spirit, we await His return and pray expectantly, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

**PERCY W. HEWARD.**

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\* *Petitions are issued in "The Student of Scripture" monthly. Further particulars and current issue gladly sent.*

## THE MESSAGE OF LUKE 15.

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THE publicans and sinners drew near to hear the Lord Jesus, and the Pharisees and Scribes murmured. This was the background of Luke 15. Surely God works graciously and gloriously in His overruling love. The self-righteous dared to say, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." The misapplied words are precious, meaning, as those of Caiaphas (John 11. 51), something far otherwise than men thought. He DOES receive sinners; it was for sinners He came; it was for sinners He died. And He causes them to eat—the welcome to the gospel feast is free, and everything is "without money and without price" (Isa. 55. 1). Yes, "He eateth with them," for He still rejoices in the joy of His own saved ones. "There is joy in heaven." The objection was a wicked one, and ill-befitting those who themselves loved the uppermost seats at feasts, and devoured widows' houses. But He answered the evil assault with a pearl.<sup>1</sup>

The words of verse 3 cause us to ask, "Is there but one parable of the 'found' sheep, or should we behold two panels in the beautiful picture, reckoning the 'found' silver of verses 8-10 the second?" May we go further, and include verses 11-32 as a third panel of the "found" son? Pairs are common, as with the mustard seed and leaven, but Luke 14 contains a THREEFOLD parabolic teaching as to feasts (7-11, 12-14, 15-24).<sup>2</sup> May not chapter 15 be similar? We hesitate to say "the PARABLE of the found son," for the word is omitted for a purpose, and the Lord might well allude to an incident known to Himself. But even then the message is the same: history often contains types. Each part of the chapter reveals a lost condition and a finding, and the precious climax is thrice in the "house." The reader will appreciate our desire to avoid expressions which are used so often that their meaning is forgotten, hence we do not speak of "The Prodigal Son." But shall we say "The Lost Son"?—nay, this is not the climax. The three words with an initial "S" will help our memory. The lost sheep becomes the found sheep:

<sup>1</sup> A picture of Christ's finished work and its fruit in Matthew 13. 45, 46. The pearl oyster when there is a piercing irritant only makes a pearl! See booklet on the Parables of Matthew 13.

<sup>2</sup> Note also the threefold "he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14. 26, 27, 33); moreover the unfinished tower, the contemplated war, and the useless salt are likewise linked.

the lost silver becomes the found silver: the lost son becomes the found son! This is the glory of grace. And surely the exaltation of God's work gives another reason against the usual title. The evil "prodigality" of a man is not the central thought, but the superabounding love of God. Every Scripture leads to praise.

We return to verse 4. The Lord Jesus addresses the Pharisees, and refers to their possessions. "What man of you, having AN HUNDRED sheep." Every word is full of meaning, for a Greater One than they had sheep. Israel's dispensational position of privilege is before us (Matt. 10. 6, cf. Zech. 11). And the Lord Jesus indicates His possession of the nation, though only the poor of the flock were brought to hear His voice. Such were truly His own sheep (John 10. 4). The really "lost" sheep, the consciously lost sheep, is the one sought. The others, a large number, are never said to be in the fold: the silence is striking. They were "in the WILDERNESS": they did not know their condition. They did not feel they were lost, and thus they did not know Him Who came to seek such (Luke 19. 10). The number who are unmindful of their need is ever very large. But there is a further reason for the contrasted "one."

The finding of a soul is definite and individual, and the Shepherd-Saviour's personal love shines out. Each rescued one is brought into personal contact with Himself. "He goeth after" each sheep that is found, else would it not be found. And, thanks be unto God, each one after whom He goes is assuredly found. We read of no sheep finding its own way back, nor of one whom He cannot find. "Until He find it":—He shall not fail, nor be discouraged. The "untils" of Scripture are a precious study. "And when He hath found, He layeth on His shoulders, rejoicing." Observe the continued present tense, vividly suggestive of His living interest. The word "it" is in italics: the Holy Spirit always omits for a purpose. The meaning is clear, but the emphasis is to be kept away from "it" that we may think first of the finding and laying and rejoicing, i.e. more of the Lord's work and His joy. The Shepherd is more prominent than the sheep.

"On His shoulders." We cannot hesitate as to the meaning. In the types the shoulder of the sheep was given to benefit the priest (Num. 6. 19), but here we have the shoulder of the Shepherd. Yes, He does everything. He takes the journey, He bears the weight. The sheep is not viewed as walking home. The shoulder is the place of power (Deut.

33. 12, cf. Ex. 28. 7). When the Lord returns, the government shall be upon His shoulder (Isa. 9. 6), but He is willing for a tiny sheep (cf. Isa. 40. 11); yea and for this loving care He uses both shoulders. Truly God delights to give us "a strong consolation" (Heb. 6. 18). How can we think that the sheep may fall off? The Shepherd is determined to bring it home. And the rescue, though costly to Him, is His joy. In each "panel" of Luke 15 we find joy. Why should it not be so? Our loving Lord is under no compulsion to save. It is all free grace. We read of Christ as "the Man of sorrows," but how much are we told about His joy.<sup>3</sup> He has joy before He arrives home, and the joy is not diminished by the journey: He speaks of it when He reaches the house, and longs for others to share it. Such is the standpoint of the Lord Jesus as to salvation: is it ours?

The sheep of John 10. 4 are not taken back to the sheepfold: the lost sheep "found" in Luke 15. is not taken back to the others. The Lord Jesus came to inaugurate something new. Not new from the standpoint of a Divine purpose, not new in a way that excludes saints of the Old Testament, for they too are brought in (Matt. 8. 11, Heb. 2. 15 lit.), but new "dispensationally," i.e. from the standpoint of stewardship, and the manifest working out of God's gracious plan. "And when He cometh home," i.e. "into the house." How often a house is before us as to the present time, "a spiritual house" (1 Pet. 2. 5, cf. Eph. 2. 19-22), and moreover, we think of the church in the house. Judaism had a fold, the word is the same as "court," but children of God now are not in the "court," they are in the house itself.<sup>4</sup> The emphasis on intimacy is precious. "He cometh home." Ah, dear reader, (for God can use these pages to the salvation of sinners), have WE been brought "into the house"? Each part of Luke 15 lays stress on this and the threefold parabolic message of Luke 14 is similar. And chapter 16 continues with the house, contrasted with "their houses" (verse 4). There is a vast difference between the house and the wilderness! The 99 are not brought into the house: they boast, and think themselves righteous, but they are in the wilderness. Remarkably when the house of God became "your house," as the Lord Jesus said to Israel, it became "desolate," the very word for a wilderness (Matt. 23. 38). How strikingly verses of Scripture refer to one another.

<sup>3</sup> A leaflet gladly sent.

<sup>4</sup> A leaflet "Are Believers now in the Courts of the Lord?" may help.

The shoulders lovingly bring to the house: the shoulders are first. We cannot know the "house" aright till we know the Person. So is it in Luke 10. 33, 34: the "Good Samaritan" is known first: He brings to the welcoming "inn." And in that passage also we have the carrying,—“set him on His own POSSESSION.” There is a similarity in chapter 14. 21, where a Person “brings” to the house. What personal love there is in God’s salvation. If any reader thinks there is undue emphasis on this, may not the question be asked, “Are YOU acquainted with such love?” We cannot over-impress the personal note in grace. Mere “Religion” involves a generalizing and gives a cold, impersonal note.

On arriving home, the Shepherd Who has alone found the sheep, at once calls together others. The joy is in the house, not where the “99 sheep” are. They had no joy in the Shepherd’s joy.

But there are some whom He views as “Friends and neighbours.” They take His standpoint: they joy in His joy. “Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15. 14, cf. Luke 12. 4). There is much about “friends” in this very context.<sup>5</sup> EACH section of Luke 15 mentions them (verses 9, 29), but the contrast of “My friends” in the latter verse is painful. The question comes, What causes us joy? Is our friendship out of harmony with the Lord Jesus? Will He gather us to tell us that which is His delight? Have we intense pleasure in the finding of a lost soul? Ah how solemnizing, to the writer also, is this thought! Possibly we enjoy Bible study, and have great interest in these parables, but what about the fruit of Christ’s work and His rejoicing in it? May our gracious God and Father cause a deep concern for the attitude that is here set in front of us. There are those whom the Lord Jesus does NOT call “friends.” Why?

“The neighbours” are also before us: this term only occurs here (twice), and in Luke 14. 12, John 9. 8. It evidently implies those associated with the same district. Since it is not employed of believers, as the term “friends,” and since in verse 7 we read “joy in heaven,” and in verse 10 “in the presence of the angels of God,” it may seem to refer to such. There is plainly a reason for the TWO companies that rejoice with the Shepherd. It is refreshing to see how elect angels are deeply interested in the plan of grace (1 Pet. 1. 12, cf. Rev. 5), and here in the bringing of a soul to Christ,

<sup>5</sup> There is helpful food for thought in 14. 10, 12, 16. 9.

as well as the preservation (Heb. 1. 14). But though the joy is communicated, it is first our Lord's joy, and though "friends and neighbours" are glad, they are not said to find the sheep. Every one rescued is personally found by the One Saviour. Angels' hands may bear up amid trials (Ps. 91. 11, 12) but only His shoulders can bring the lost sheep home. His glory He will not give to another.

The words of delight are very beautiful, "Rejoice with Me; for I have found My sheep which was lost." His delights are with the sons of men, and He Who was alone on Calvary shall not be alone in the joy of its fruits. Once He asked, "Could ye not watch WITH ME one hour?" (Matt. 26. 40). The disciples faltered then, but shall He seek without response our sharing in His joy now? Surely our hearts grieve that we have not found more gladness in His gladness hitherto.

The rejoicing is not only because the sheep IS found, but "because I FOUND." This is precious. It is for the Lord's sake first: has He not a right to joy? We observe, if the writer may anticipate, two contrasts with the church's utterance in verse 9. The woman there does not say "MY piece," but she does say what the Shepherd does not say, "which I had lost."<sup>6</sup> The verbal inspiration of Scripture is not a theory. The Lord Jesus OWNS His people; and secondly HE has no blame for the losing. The woman rightly confesses a fault as to the wandering believer, committed to her trust, but lost IN the house.

The emphasis on the "one sinner" in verse 7 is ever refreshing. A woman of Samaria, a Zacchæus, a Lazarus, a man of Macedonia, are dear to the Holy Spirit. If the lime-light of outward success takes us away from individual dealing there is something wrong. The Shepherd never undervalues one: He calls many to rejoice as to one.

The sinner "repenteth." The emphasis on grace "finding" never makes salvation a work of God without a personal experience. The glory belongs to the Shepherd, but the "found sheep" always repents. None are brought to know Him without this foundation (Heb. 6. 1). The message to both Jews and Gentiles was repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20. 21), and so is it to-day.

The ninety and nine are remarkably described:—"Just

<sup>6</sup> The difference between active and passive is likewise impressive in Romans 9. 22, 23—"fitted to destruction," but "HE had afore prepared unto glory" (active).

persons who are of such a kind that they need no repentance.” The language allows of two interpretations:—If any were absolutely obedient throughout, they would have nothing of which to repent. But of only One can this be said: He never confessed sins, for He had none to confess. The only other meaning possible seems to be that THEY wrongly take this standpoint. In the light of verse 29 this appears the saddening thought. The fact that there is not said to be any joy in heaven over these makes evident that we have the key. If any were truly obedient, how real would be the joy in God’s sight, as Isaiah 42. 1 indicates. Nor is this the first use of such language in this gospel. In 5. 32 we read, “ I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” And subsequently, “Ye are they which justify yourselves before men” (16. 15, cf. 18. 9). In other words, there are two standpoints,—that of God and that of the self-trusting sinner. The latter is here given. This solves the “elder brother” in the added narrative. Parables emphasize this use of language. The professing “Kingdom of God” is described as such (Matt. 13. 33), and those who claim to be virgins are allowed the name. It is deeply solemn to realize that many who heard the Lord Jesus did not feel their own sinfulness. They spoke of others as “sinners” (cf. Luke 7. 39). But such, unconscious of personal need, were, without exception, left in the wilderness, far off from the Shepherd and His house. This message is never out of date. The need of to-day is not mental acquaintance with the gospel, but a breaking down before God. The message of grace has nothing to flatter the flower of the grass or to spare the “best” of Amalek. “Christ Jesus came into the world to save SINNERS,” “He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away.” The large number in the condition of self-righteousness is one surprise of this parable, and it is meant to startle us. How alarming is the state of those in whom the Lord Jesus has no joy.

Immediately we pass to the woman and her ten drachmæ. At first sight the parable seems similar, but the contrasts already noticed are not the only ones. The general principle is the same, viz., that the Lord emphasized personal mercy to personal sinners, and loving concern to carry the work through, whatever hindrances were met, and that He repudiated the unholy insinuation of those who wickedly maintained that He sought sinners for His own physical enjoyment (verse 2).

Let us summarize some distinctions:—

- (a) The silver is lost IN the house.
- (b) The seeking, therefore, is NOWHERE ELSE.
- (c) The woman cannot find without a LAMP.
- (d) The other nine pieces are viewed as in the house, and are never LEFT.
- (e) There is no added thought, consequently, of self-righteous ones, and, as we have already seen,
- (f) The woman does not say, “MY piece,” but
- (g) She owns that SHE had lost the coin.

The three panels show us three separate Persons “finding.” we realize the meaning of the Shepherd and the Father. But here we do not see the Holy Spirit. However, the passage implies His gracious enabling, for it shows us the church, pictured as a woman, and He indwells God’s people. This is very helpful, for as there are Three Persons in the Godhead, we are reminded that the Holy Spirit does not fail to encourage the believers in finding a lost one, and likewise reminded that the fruitful ministry of God’s people would not exist without the Holy Spirit.

Silver reminds of redemption (1 Pet. 1. 18, 19, see Ex. 30. 11-16).<sup>7</sup> The number 10 is one of fellowship—the number linked, typically, with an assembly (cf. Matt. 25. 1, Luke 19. 13). A believer can be “lost,” not, thank God, FROM the house, but IN it. This is a very serious matter. He thus becomes PARALLEL awhile with the unsaved, and repentance is quite as necessary. This part of truth is unpopular, but observe the place of repentance in messages to believers (2 Cor. 7. 9, 10, 2 Tim. 2. 25, 2 Pet. 3. 9, Rev. 2. 5, 16, 3. 3, 19).

The woman lights a lamp. Would the silver have been lost if the lamp had been kept burning? We ever need the light of God’s words (Ps. 119. 105). The woman dare not attempt the work without the lamp. When this is ready, she sweeps; for the silver is on the floor. Sin involves a fall, and there is a loss of usefulness. In one sense, the silver

<sup>7</sup> The word used, Drachma (see margin), is very suggestive. It occurs only here, and by derivation implies that which is “grasped in the hand.” We remember John 10. 28, and the word “cherubim.” Though we are held by our loving Lord, we have responsibilities, and may in our experience be on the ground, in the unswept house. The didrachma, or temple tax, in Matthew 17. 24 is related: thus redemption is yet more fully emphasized. The fact that this was not the ROMAN WORLD’S denarius may have a message as to separation from earth’s politics.



is still possessed. It is still, as we have seen, within the house, but it is not in manifest possession. How searching is this thought. Am I useful to the Master, and to fellow believers, or am I not?

The silver is found at last. The word "until" is again employed, and implies it is not an easy task. Restoration of a child of God is no small matter. How important not to be away from God, and not to need this further finding. The seeking is "diligently" done. Have we this enthusiastic concern for others? Remarkably the exact word only occurs here, but the verb in Luke 10. 34, 35 also, where the one who welcomes is parallel with the woman, serving in the house in view of the Lord's return ("When I come again"). It is also found in 1 Timothy 3. 5, another assembly passage, but nowhere else, though the noun is used of love received, again among believers, in Acts 27. 3. This intense interest in the spiritual condition of fellow members of Christ needs to be felt more and more by all who are, by grace, His. We become "used" to the wandering of a believer, and some resent the finding,—nor is "sweeping" without a measure of godly zeal which may seem to the one who is found a little sharp. But it should be with tender humility (Gal. 6. 1). The holy concern of Hebrews 12. 13 should be ours, "Rather let it be healed." The rebuke of Ezekiel 34. 4 is a message to us all, "Neither have ye sought that which was lost."

When the silver is found, it is with the others—in the house. They are not in the wilderness. The individually found sheep can be blessed alone, but the pieces of silver seem to be associated: they are not to be "spent": they are an abiding possession. How beautiful is this thought for the Lord's redeemed. The woman does not come home: she is at home. But she too calls friends and neighbours together. There is the same attitude of joy: there is the same fellowship of joy. Are we glad to rejoice with other believers when another is spiritually revived? Happy the local assembly, and happy the individual believer, that can take this standpoint—the Lord's standpoint. We do not naturally like the words, "lost," "sinner," and "repenteth" in this context, but a lightness as to sin among children of God is one of the great perils of to-day. The grace of God never lowers the standard of holiness, nor does His mighty love obliterate plain language. Angels rejoice over such repentance, and where it is not found assemblies lose their true witness. The glorious gospel of God, and eternal salvation in Christ, never blunt the edge

of God's gracious warnings, or make us unmindful that it is an evil thing and bitter to leave His will.

The way in which the woman speaks exalts, as we have seen, the Lord Jesus, by the twofold contrast. Let us not forget the practical lesson to ourselves personally. His redeemed are His, not ours: and if any are away from Him, have not we some share in the losing, and should not we be more concerned lest our actions, or inaction, should lead any to a period of spiritual declension? We are members one of another. And the saints of God should be together. Then there is true joy, and the interest of heavenly ministrants in the revival of believers (Heb. 1. 14) is instructive. How grievous is a "worldly assembly."

Immediately, with the background of the found sheep and the found silver, we rejoice to reach the found son. Ah, but how solemn is the record, ere he was found. Let us realize the heinousness of sin, and its folly. It is clear that the Holy Spirit associates this narrative closely and the words "BUT He said" seem to imply a holy reproof for those who, like the elder brother, have no joy in the salvation of a soul.

"A certain man had two sons."<sup>8</sup> How often has the narrative been told: how many know something of its words, yet little of its meaning. It is true that there are general thoughts as to a loving attitude, and the gentleness with which the pride and hastiness of the one who "would not come in" are sadly contrasted. This is so always. The Good Samaritan shows the absence of a revengeful spirit, and may be used to teach children love to those of another nation. All the moral lessons are valuable, but there is something far, far deeper. Morality without a spiritual basis is temporary and incomplete. These passages are full of the gospel, and thus full of Christ. If we empty the narrative of the work of Christ, we feel at once that its centre has gone. Salvation by His precious blood is the pivot: it is the scarlet thread throughout Scripture. "Worthy is the Lamb That was slain." The younger son speaks to the father. He uses the name, in address, but is occupied with possessions, not relationship. Nor does he say, "My Father." This is a searching message. And the word for "goods" is a remarkable one: it only occurs in this chapter, and is from the root of "being." To him the "things" were the real "being," but he was to learn his

<sup>8</sup> The tense is the "imperfect": "was having." In this context as in 16. 1 it may suggest the temporary dispensational relationship contrasted with our eternal nearness "in Christ Jesus."

grievous mistake. When we read of what the father gave, another word is employed. "He divided unto them the livelihood," *not* "his livelihood," *not* "the being." The young man did not realize true "life" till he was brought back (verse 32). "Livelihood" can be spent and squandered: real "life" is vastly different (Rom. 6. 23). "Not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey." How deeply solemn is the message. He waited a few days: sin is not in full bloom at once. How earnestly we should deal with souls, while we have opportunity. But how quickly sin goes forward. "Not many days after" there was the further action. Why? He wanted the things, not the Person. What about ourselves? Are we occupied with blessings, or with God? "Enoch walked with God." The only right use of blessings is in God's presence, and in dependence on Him. If we own anything aright, He owns it first, and we possess it in love's relationship to Him. Let us never journey away from Him. The tendency of man is to leave God: the characteristic of a believer is to seek Him. The far country betokens separation from Him: how blessed it is when far off ones are made near (Eph. 2. 13). "There he wasted his 'being,' living riotously." A saddening "there," and everything was "scattered," (Jer. 3. 13): it is a glorious privilege to be devoted to the Lord, and to have one contrasted object in view. The very "being" of this young man was wasted. "Seeing life," as men say, is still "seeing death." He was living without salvation, and in the unholy condition of which 1 Peter 4. 4 speaks. And nothing was "saved" as the word "riotously" denotes: a life without salvage: there was nothing with a view to eternity—nothing!

This is not only the history of the "sinners" who then stood beside the Lord Jesus. It is still being illustrated. And the root-sin budded in the wish to be away from the father. The normal and right attitude is seen in Philippians 2. 22, "As a son with the father." But sin has made everything abnormal. O, Christian parents, seek to have your children WITH you: do not encourage the spirit of the age by allowing "a little worldliness." Pray with power in the Holy Spirit for your families, and bring them up in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Seek to command them after you (Gen. 18. 19), and claim the promise of Proverbs 22. 6.

The young man here wanted gifts, to spend upon himself. The question arises, WHY do we want God's blessings? Is

it to use for Him or for self? Let us beware of selfishness as to spiritual things, so manifest at Corinth. Our Father delights to "give" (Matt. 7. 9-11) but He delights to give FOOD, which will "build up," and food is "daily." Such gifts are precious, keeping us daily near to Him, and consciously dependent. Do we want something to "spend," or that which will enter into our very being, that our whole life may be more devoted to Him? And so everything was gone. "Privileges" can be spent and bring no return: a solemnizing thought.<sup>9</sup> We compare the words "Ye have sold yourselves for nought." How evil is the misuse of God's gifts.

"But when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he himself began to be in want." At first he was quite careless: he did not feel his approaching need. But when he had used up his blessings to gratify self, he was brought very low. God can work by a famine: it is important to see how God still speaks in everything of earth, but here we are rather reminded of a spiritual famine. When God is dealing with a soul the far country yields no fruit to satisfy or refresh. The famine is "mighty": it lays the sinner low, and he "begins" to feel what he had never felt before,—a real need. The word "to be in want," or "to come short," occurs in Romans 3. 23. How deeply important it is to FEEL a need. "In their affliction they will seek Me early" (Hos. 5. 15). How different is Laodicean self-complacency as in Hosea 12. 8, "Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin." It is possible that one reads these pages who is still a stranger to the Lord Jesus. Dear reader, do you not yet know what it is to be "in want"? But is God graciously bringing you to a disappointment with your own way? It is a mercy if He is thus working. While the lost son was without the sense of need, he never thought of the

<sup>9</sup> In this context we think of Israel's blessings (see Nehemiah 9). Romans 3. 2 is definite as to their advantage, "Unto them were committed the oracles of God": though Luke 15. 12 rather refers to MATERIAL things asked. "Blessings" do not sanctify: do we seek grace to USE our blessings aright? We remember how the Corinthians misused their "enrichment" (1 Cor. 1. 5). And both sons here had these goods for "He divided unto THEM," but there was no fruit. The knowledge of truth can be "spent" to gain self's vain wishes. It is solemnizing to see that God has not always withheld the request of men (Ps. 106. 14, 15). The heart that craves against God's will may be judged in receiving its own will. Never pray apart from a love for God's will, and loving willingness for His decision.

precious journey to the Father. At first there was only a "beginning."<sup>10</sup> He tried to deal with the famine in his own way. God's thoughts are not men's thoughts. It is so natural at first to send to "king Jareb" (Hos. 5. 13). The words are illustrated, "Yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord": "they return, but not to the Most High." Yet He continues His own precious work. The lost son "went" yet further, in his distress and "joined himself to a citizen of that country." It was not his country: God did not let him settle down there. A special allusion to the publicans and sinners" of Luke 15. 1 is evidently before us.

Thus the wanderer was sent to feed swine. There was no dignity in this, and God sometimes causes a humbling, that "the service of the kingdoms of the countries" (2 Chron. 12. 8) may become a heavy yoke. But here another thought is before us. The swine were unclean, and far off from God. and thus there was an entire contrast with nearness and temple service. The handling of money, by a Roman taxgatherer, had nothing but husks. He brought nothing to God. None of the Lord's sheep can find food in "money." There is a tremendous contrast between the loving shepherd in the beginning of the chapter, and the swineherd here. But will he settle down in this estate? Nay, the famine remains for him. The citizen does not seem to feel the dearth. There are husks for the swine. They are not killed off. They can find sustenance. But he can find nothing. Wherever he is, there is famine in his experience. And so he abides in the fields, until a deep longing for the Father's house is caused. God's ways are wondrous. He graciously brings a sinner to an end of himself (Ps. 107. 27), and when the sinner can do nothing, how rich is the display of grace to the unworthy. He was feeding swine, but was himself without food, for only Christ can meet the case of a burdened soul. All earthly things are husks. "He would fain" have found a fulness, but he had emptiness still. He could not eat the husks. Impressive are the Divine words. It is a mercy to be held back from earthly satisfaction. The language used by the Holy Spirit signifies that "he was desiring" to do so, yea, keeping on desiring, BUT! Thanks be unto God for that "but," and for every "but" of a hedged-up way that shuts us up to Christ. Again one thinks of any who are unsaved. Ah, dear reader, have you spent all, or have you still "something"? A "citizen" possesses husks, and the swine enjoy them, but

<sup>10</sup> How different the precious "beginning" of verse 24.

can you? Or has God made everything a disappointment, that your broken heart may yet say "I will arise and go"?<sup>11</sup>

"And no one was giving to him." The Holy Spirit repeats what is called the "imperfect, or continuative), tense." "He was desiring," "the swine were eating," "no one was giving." God was working: there was a deep experience: He would not give up the wanderer. The swine continued their enjoyment, but the lost one could not share it. He had nothing but resultless "work." He had no resources; strangely, yet not strangely, his master is not said to have paid any wages. He could not BUY any food. And no one was willing to GIVE:—no one was ABLE to meet his real need. This is a parable of Divine dealings to-day. When God brings to famine and closed hands, it is to reveal His own open heart. Verily He GIVES, He has nothing to sell. It is true we shall find the lost one proposing to become a hired servant, or rather "as" one of these, but God is not like the "citizen of that country." He does not send into the fields, and then pay no wages, but welcomes into the home, and gives everything. EVERY word in the experience when afar off suggests a delightful contrast. Happy are those who realize sovereign grace: "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is everlasting life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6. 23).

"And when he came to himself." Rather we have the word "But." Here is the definite step. A sinner has a personal experience: he knows himself accountable, and he "comes" to himself, and "comes" to the Father. But, thanks be to God for the order of Scripture, we are reminded of grace in the record of the Shepherd "finding" first, and, moreover, the last word of the chapter is "found." We rejoice in the word "came": before we had the painful thought of "going." Such an expression suggests the madness of sin in departing. And now this folly is seen, and he says, "How many hired servants of my Father's have bread enough and to spare, BUT I perish here with hunger." There were "many" in the Father's house: we think of the "ten thousand times ten thousand" among the angels. Why are these servants before us? Is it because our Lord would emphasize the abso-

<sup>11</sup> There is such wealth in God's words. I have been looking at the Typewritten Notes on the Parables, &c., in which Luke 15 is included, and feel that God will use them, as He has used them. They seem to contain refreshment from Him that cannot all be introduced in these brief pages. Gladly sent to believers for a fortnight. Particulars on application.

lute grace that saves fallen sinners? Yet observe that where we have the Shepherd's gathering together we do not read of those hired, nor is such language ever used except by the lost son. We should not speak of the angels thus, but the Holy Spirit shows the use of the word in the transition period of the perplexed wanderer, about to return, that our hearts may understand the mistakes of such an one, and also be amazed at the privilege of sonship in the Beloved Son of God, and at the same time humbled as we see our calling, "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him That justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. 4. 5). A sinner must feel he ought to do, and then his utterly hopeless heart values "It is finished."

Abundance of bread was misused in Sodom (Ezek. 16. 49): it is rightly used here. There was no famine in the long forgotten house. We hear no more of the husks. Ah, but when he returns, he finds more than bread: a banquet is before him. Swine and husks are gone for ever, and the fatted calf of sacrificial acceptance displays the riches of God's love (cf. the underlying thought of "What must I DO?" in Acts 16. 30), and the wondrous supply for His undeserving people. "No one was giving to him": the father did nothing but give! That is the contrast. But we are going onward too quickly. It is easy so to do. Yet every word must be pondered and enjoyed.

"I perish here with hunger." The "I" is emphatic: the need is so personal: the sinner is rightly concerned with his own lost estate. For the first time the word "perish" is before us from his lips but it is the very language of verses 6, 9 and 32. Ah, he was not only perishing: he was already "perished" from God's standpoint. But grace was not defeated. "Here" has a terrifying meaning to the awakened soul: he longs that it may become "there": the distance is felt (see verse 13 "there").

"I will arise and go to my Father." Once he could settle down, but not now. There is a rising up. Beyond his realization this was the showing forth of a new life. The "going" is of the right character,—the same word is found in verse 15, but how different is that journey. The objective is not the house, not the hired servants, but the father. And there is a claiming word "My Father." It is not found in verse 12. We use a capital letter, for the type is full of the Antitype. A quickened soul feels relationship. "And I will say to him." The mouth is opened. The last words previously

were very different from these in the heart now—"The portion of goods" was the delight then: the father was not loved. Ah, how is it with us? Are we concerned to be with OUR Father? Have we all felt the ruin of our own way, and have we all been brought to see how much we can lose if away from our Father, after we have been brought to know His love? "Enoch walked with God."

How blest is the word "Father" from a quickened soul. There is a vast difference between Luke 15. 12 and 18. "I have sinned" is now the painful thought. Both Saul and David said these words (1 Sam. 15. 30, Ps. 51. 4), but how contrasted their feelings, attitude and purpose. Sin described as reaching to heaven is great (Rev. 18. 5, with Jer. 51. 9). That which is so great is grievous, even before godly men, but the added thought shows what should be the standpoint in confession—"Before Thee." Here is a reminder of Psalm 51. 4,\* 90. 8. What mercy shines out when we realize that Christ is before the Father for us, and that God the Father ever looks on Him (see Num. 23. 21, Isa. 38. 17, Mic. 7. 19). It is well to bring before unbelievers the striking thought, "Where are your sins?" And believers need to realize humbly more what God in grace has done, that, in the conscious enjoyment of Hebrews 10. 2, they may seek and expect victory over sins.

Unworthy! Yes, it is important to feel this. There is only One Who is worthy (Rev. 5. 9, 12). But the "unworthy" are accepted in Him. That which we feel at first as to grace we realize afterwards as to service (John 1. 27), yet it is important to see the love of God in 2 Thessalonians 1. 11, and the stimulus in Ephesians 4. 1 to a life which *corresponds* with the high calling, for that is the force of the Holy Spirit's word. Yet redeemed ones will acknowledge grace throughout (Luke 17. 10, 19. 16, 18): there is no pride in heaven. The expression "To be called Thy son" leads our hearts to the stress on Divine calling in Isaiah 43. 1 ("by thy name"), Romans 9. 25 ("My people"), Hebrews 2. 11 ("brethren"), 1 John 3. 1 ("children," lit.), John 15. 15 ("friends"). Observe also James 2. 23 ("the friend of God"), and remember Hebrews 11. 16 ("to be called their God"). Many things are "so-called," and persons too, with the result that this compound word has passed into various languages, but with God there is reality, and no counterfeit.

\* Many have misunderstood these words. The thought is, as the end of the verse shows—The sin is on my side, not on Thine. O for more humbling before God.

The returning one thought to add "Make me as one of thy hired servants." He felt unable to ask more. Nor did he say, "a hired servant," but "*as one.*" He could not speak of his worth, nor of what he would do. He had been a hired servant of "a citizen of that country," and this had proved a sad bargain. "No man gave unto him." But all the servants in the home whither he went were well supplied (verse 17, note 2 Chron. 12. 8). The request was humble, yet it was not low enough, nor, (thanks be to God), was it high enough. He who sees his utter need, and feels his utter unworthiness, yea, and powerlessness, receives absolute grace. And, as we shall see, the Father did not even give opportunity for these added words. Grace reigns!

Verse 20 encourages our hearts. There is a decisiveness: there is a promptness. He "stood up," and he went,—rather let us say "came," for the standpoint is not the far country, but the house of true blessedness,—the Father Himself. And the Holy Spirit NOW uses the word "*his* Father." There seems a designed contrast with verse 12 (note italics in English). The same stress is continued in verse 20. True, the dispensational position of Israel would permit the word "his," as verse 28 shows, and some parables indicate the "profession" (e.g. "just persons," verse 7): but the Scripture here is emphasizing a change, a change wrought by grace.

The young man is "yet a great way off" when we read of the gracious seeing and running. Our mind turns to Ephesians 2. 13. "Yet" is a precious word (Rom. 5. 6, 8). The beholding of grace reminds us of Luke 19. 5 and John 9. 1. This word for "compassion" is found in Matthew 9. 36, 14. 14, 15. 32, 18. 27, 20. 34, Mark 1. 41, 6. 34, 8. 2, 9. 22, Luke 7. 13, 10. 33, ever with regard to Divine compassion, and, apart from the threefold typical or parabolic emphasis, always concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. What compassion He showed, and what love we should manifest! What compassion we ourselves have received: everything is in grace, else we should still be shut outside. The Father "ran": the intensity and urgency of true love is thus seen. This is a keynote of Luke 15, and of all Scripture. The Shepherd had joy in the finding of the sheep. Why do we not realize this more? There is no bureaucratic salvation: we do not find a stiff formalism. God delights in His own loving work, and should not we? There might have been fear in the prodigal's mind, but it was more than allayed. The sinner was met with overflowing love. The Father "fell on his neck and

kissed him.” What a striking contrast with 2 Samuel 14. 24. Men are often clumsy when they seek to show love. No book shows the real forgiving of sin, without any “excusing” of sin, as the Holy Scripture. The kiss was a token of pardon, and relationship, and delight. It was for a son, and not for a servant. Surely it was altogether more than could be expected, and everything was before the son could utter a word. Grace must be first, and the glory of God is seen in the display of His love from beginning to end. O that we may realize God’s standpoint more and more, and feel more and more His love to heart-broken sinners, and to His people. Formalism may do much by theory, but God’s love altogether excels human ideas and ideals. And the word for “kiss” is an intense word in the Greek: it implies a completeness, the thoroughness of love.

At last the son found his words, and the first word showed the confidence, which is graciously inwrought. How long a time had passed since the name used in dispensational privilege was now to be used in real nearness. And it is a marvel of grace when the sinner who has long ago learnt, parrot-fashion, the disciples’ prayer, can, for the first time, from a true heart, say, “Father.” How quickly the confession comes “I have sinned.” There is too little repentance to-day, both in the world, and among believers. Everything is too shallow and superficial. God dwells with humble and contrite hearts (Isa. 57. 15). The rocky ground hearer still “anon with joy” receives the word: it is easier to have joy than to repent. This note of John’s preaching, aye and of the Lord Jesus, of Peter on the day of Pentecost, and of Paul (Acts 20. 21, 26. 20), is often lacking to-day. The glory of grace shines out on the background of sin realized. And so the son continued, and was allowed to go as far as the words, “I am no more worthy to be called thy son.” It is well to notice that the Father did not intervene at once. Confession of sin is important. But though earlier interruption would have been too soon, further postponement would have been too late. It was fitting that something should be excluded, and that this should not be the confession, but the request. The statements of fact were permitted, but the proposal was lovingly disallowed. There is no room for the sinner to choose what shall be, even in his sense of utter unworthiness.

It is important that God should be glorified in arranging everything. Truly the returning soul knew not what to pray for as he ought (Rom. 8. 26). But the Father knew what to

give, and He gave. He spoke in commanding love. We find no uncertain suggestions. His word was with power. All around were gladly subject to Him. And all heaven rejoices still in the salvation of a lost soul (cf. Luke 15. 7, 10). The words of mercy remind us forcibly of Zechariah 3. There too God provides the clothing, and this in turn brings before us Genesis 3. 21, where God's first recorded work after the fall is the provision of a sacrifice, and the making of clothing. It is all so wonderful, and the tenderness of grace shines out in the brief added sentence "He clothed them" (cf. Isa. 61. 10). His work is ever complete. Our hearts cannot understand why He has been so gracious, but we rejoice in the fruit of overflowing mercy, and bow the head and worship. We are not merely students, we are worshippers, unless we have misread Scripture, and missed its object. "Bring forth the best robe." How sweet is the music of redemption. The robe does not need to be made: it is awaiting the "found" son, for though he has *come* back, there is a profound unveiling of sovereign grace, and the Divine preparation of all. The Lord Jesus will "not fail, nor be discouraged": "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." Thus as the Rock should have been *addressed* to bring forth "its water" (Num. 20. 8), and as the fountain of Zechariah 13. 1 only needs to be "opened," so we are reminded here that the robe is ready before the sinner arrives. It is only "brought out." It is "the first robe" (literally), for man has never made such a robe: he never gets beyond "aprons" and incompleteness. But God always supplies a fulness. The *first* man did not make "the first robe." And all men after him have failed. But the Lord Jesus never failed (Isa. 42. 21) and thus through "the Second Man, the Lord from heaven," is the great need met. Ah, it is well to ask ourselves, "Have I this robe? or, alas, am I seeking to go in without a wedding garment?"

It could not be permitted that the son should abide in the house with the rags of the far off country. Much instruction is found as to clothing in God's presence, and when we think of Exodus 28, we call to mind a possible, and precious, rendering of Revelation 19. 8. "The fine linen is the righteous appointments of the most holy place." It is one of the mysteries of grace that *each* redeemed one has "the first robe," and unitedly all such are made the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Cor. 5. 21). As with the type, so is it here, the work is complete:—"And put it on him." He is treated right

royally. "No man gave unto him" before, but now all are eager to show their love. There is a blessedly absolute difference between the Father's house and the far country. The robe fits exactly, for it is made on purpose, hence the word is "*clothe* him in it." Everything is appropriate, and yet everything is marvellous. We do not read what the son "said." He may well be viewed as too amazed to speak: he is overwhelmed with love: and is not this a reality in God's salvation? Have we not often forgotten the wealth of His love to us? We become too much "used" to grace: there is a deep need to realise anew what it means to be welcomed into the family of God. But the unveiling of love here is not finished, "Put a ring on his hand." Is nothing to be done to make him feel how wrongly he has acted? It is here that the weakness of much modern teaching comes before us. The fulness of salvation is not realized because the gospel message is sadly misused. A "cheap" gospel is preached, gospel promises are given to everybody, and sinners without brokenness of spirit are urged to "give" God their hearts. The wound is healed slightly, and on such a background, the unjudged "flesh" cannot be trusted with the grace of God. But let the Divine breaking down be owned, let the thunders of the law applied by the Holy Spirit make the sinner tremble and cry "Unclean, Unclean," let the flesh be condemned, and the "wine and oil" can be poured in the deep wounds, and grace can be seen reigning through righteousness. The prodigal HAS been laid low, repentance has been felt, and now he is in such a condition that the very outflow of love will only melt him all the more. Hence "put a ring on his hand." The histories of Joseph and Mordecai help us to understand this. The "gift," (for thus the word "put" should be translated), speaks of acceptance and favour, and a willingness to use the accepted one in loving service. God always saves us with a purpose. And what about his feet? Shoes are provided for these. As the healed leper of Leviticus 14 was "sealed" on the right ear, and hand and foot, even as the priest of Exodus 29, so is it in Luke 15. 22. And the "ear" has first heard the words of mercy, and thus, though the welcomed "son" is not to be "as one" of the hired servants, he is called to priestly service, and the whole scene provides a contrast with Matthew 22. 11-13 where the unanointed ear hears solemn words, and the hands and feet of one who despised "the first robe" are bound, and he is cast out.

But the joy is to be yet fuller. There is one fatted calf, as verse 30 shows, and that is "brought," even as the robe; although here, it seems, God grants a contrast-parable, for the sacrifice (the word "kill" is from the same root) is made as it were, in the presence of the one redeemed. Possibly, moreover, this is to remind us of his personal realization of grace, and his personal joy in the work, and the joy of all heaven too.

4

"Let us eat": when the passover blood was on the door there was eating within, and "blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb" Rev. 19. 9). "Let US eat," for the Father, too, has joy, and invites others to share His joy. "The husks that the swine did eat" are an amazing contrast. "I perish with hunger" is now a blotted out experience. "Shall never hunger" and "shall never thirst" are the Divine language. And the added word for joy is far preferable to our now-spoiled English term "merry." The history of words, and their tendency to become evil (e.g. knave, sharp, cunning, smart) afford a striking illustration of the fall of man, and the natural tendency in so many things to deteriorate. The reason for the gladness is before us in verse 24. "This My son": he is claimed, he is owned, he is lovingly honoured with grace. And have not we a like experience in Christ Jesus? What shall we say to these things, and what shall we render unto the Lord for all His benefits? Exposition without praise is a failure. He "was dead, and he lived." These words have a remarkable emphasis, they come again in verse 32. God brings them with power to our hearts. Sin involves a real death, and salvation is a real quickening. Thus the glory belongs to the Lord. The dead one "lives," and so marked should the contrast be in the daily life. And yet fuller is the emphasis, "He was *lost*, and is *found*." It is not that he found himself. A personal sense of sin, and individual repentance and coming to the Lord, are ever seen, but not in language that makes the sinner feel the work and glory are his. We love because loved (1 John 4. 19), and come because drawn (John 6. 37, 44).

But there is another picture. This message concerns two, not only one. The Lord Jesus not only reveals grace but shows up the character of self-righteousness. He hated this. Far sterner words are used for the religiously proud than for those who were manifestly sinners, albeit His forgiving word ever emphasized that NO sin was excused. "Now ('but') His elder son was in the field." He had seen nothing, and heard

nothing. How different was the readiness of the Father, and of those who rejoiced with Him. As the ninety-nine knew nothing of the one sheep found, so the “just persons which need no repentance” are absent from the praise meeting (“Rejoice with Me”). Their standpoint is quite distinct from the Lord’s. And thus the penetrating question comes to us, “Are God’s interests ours? Do we love what He loves?”

The elder son was in the field, not in the house: he was occupied by himself and with himself. He was not with the Father, nor had the Father sent for him. His presence was not necessary: his absence was not felt. Everything is complete without him, and as he comes and draws near (physically, for his heart remained distant, as if in the far country) he heard “music and dancing.” These two terms are helpful. “Music” is from two words “voice” and “together,” and is the English term “symphony”: its emphasis on harmony is seen by the use in Matthew 18. 19 (“agree”). “Dancing” alludes probably to a circle (how blessed the “Centre” here), and is the source of the English word “chorus.” When Christ is the Centre (Rev. 5. 6), the harmonizing is beautiful. As we have seen, in connexion with the word “merry,” we must divest our minds of all the present-day accompaniments of these words. The child of God should have no fellowship with the world and its evil pleasures: the very thought should be intolerable.

The elder son did not enter, nor did he even ask for the Father. “He called one of the servants”: that was all. Then “he asked what *this* meant.” And soon his character is revealed. Sudden surprises will draw out what we really are. The answer was given by the servant with joy: we cannot mistake its note of gladness. The attitude of “Rejoice WITH ME” in verse 6 is illustrated here. And “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (verse 10). Do we also make manifest our delight in the work of the Lord by the way we speak? I do not mean merely “delight in our work for the Lord”: there is a danger of lurking pride in this connexion. It is important that our whole manner should be in harmony with the will of God,—not only bare willingness, but positive delight. “Thy brother is come and thy Father hath killed (sacrificed) the fatted calf because He hath received him safe and sound.” Obviously the Antitype excels the type, but though no further sacrifice is NOW to be made, joy in the work of Christ is increased whenever we see its fruit, in souls brought “home.”

It is worthy of notice that the Father is emphasized throughout: He appoints the Sacrifice, and all Scripture emphasizes this, for salvation is not wrought because wicked hands took the Lord Jesus, but because "it pleased the Lord to bruise Him." Observe, too, the words "He hath received him": it is blessed to be received, when we might have been shut out and rejected. And the silence as to the cuts and bruises of the "found" sheep is in harmony with the word "safe and sound"; for when the Lord delivers from the wrong place, He grants an inner work as well, and there is a new life. Thus "salvation" has a wondrously full meaning. True, the man on the Jericho road had gaping wounds, but these are no longer *mentioned* when he reached the inn. There must be a breaking down, but He Who tears heals and He Who smites binds up (Hos. 6. 1). How real and complete is the work of our God.

4

What was the effect on the one who heard? Alas, "he was angry." Solemnizing is the word "*but*." The message that ought to have awakened joy only stirred up the feelings of wrath, yet this was no fault of the message. We might render "He was angered": the evil heart still uses the very record of mercy to increase sin. But the loving heart delights in that wherein God delights. What is our *inner* attitude to everything of God? The heart affects the action, "He WOULD NOT go in." The wrong was in the will: there was a will at variance with God. Such is the "will" that men call "free."

And now we reach a wonderful display of God's long-suffering. "But his Father came out and entreated him." We cannot but think of the Lord's dealings with Israel. How patient He was. We read the words once more, "Lord, let it alone this year also." And this principle shines out in so many Scriptures. We remember Cain and how self-willed he was. When his offering was rejected, instead of being humbled, to confess his sin, he "was very wroth, and his countenance fell." Yet God gave a testimony of the gospel, obscured in the usual translation. "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted (lifted up)?" That is the first alternative; i.e. if there were personal righteousness. "And if thou doest not well (here then is the only alternative for the sinner, and the fact that Cain's gift was not accepted shows that he had no right to come in any other way of his own) a sin offering lieth to the open door" (Gen. 4. 7). In thus speaking, God encourages us to declare His gospel to all conditions of men. We remember too the message of old sounded forth "Come; for

all things are now ready." We cannot give the *promises* of the gospel to those who are indifferent: they are for the thirsty, the heavy-laden, the broken-hearted. But we should be in living earnest to all. It is for us to "go out," as in this verse and Matthew 22. 9, and to speak to those whom we find, that such may be brought to our precious Saviour.

Do we misuse the sovereignty of God, and *forget* the intensity of a gospel messenger? Do we hold back, and forget that God uses means? There is a deep lesson for us, (although the first application may be to Israel), in the words "and intreated him." The invitation was to enter: but the proud hearer remained outside. Yet salvation by grace levels all. None can enter on any self-appointed foundation.

What was the elder son's answer? It is introduced with the painful word "But." "Lo, these many years do I serve Thee, neither transgressed I at any time Thy commandment." No sense of sin, and this is the more remarkable because at the very moment he was transgressing the plainly revealed will of the Father. The "Lo" ("see") of self-confidence, and almost blame to any who did not "see," followed by the stress on "so many years" are saddening. How easy it is to be blind to one's own need, as the Pharisee in the temple (Luke 18. 11). O that we may be contrasted, and have a true concern for others, and a joy in their salvation, and a realization of our own unworthiness. Psalm 119 brings together the Lord Himself and His commandment many times, even as this verse, but how different is the standpoint. Only One *always* did those things that please the Father (John 8. 29): "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1. 9).

After the boast of self-confidence came the words, "Thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." Here is the unintended revelation of character. He did not want the Father's company: he wished something for, and with, his own friends. The same attitude has already been seen in verse 12. The friends of the younger son were in a far country, but the friends of the elder, though apparently near, were equally "outside." The Shepherd had His friends (verse 6), and the Father had said, "Let US eat, and be merry (rejoice)," but how contrasted are "my friends" in this sad verse. Ah, it is for us to ask ourselves, "Do I find joy in my Father's presence: are my friends His?" John 15. 14 will help us, searchingly, in this deeply important subject. We learn that seeming obedience to commandments may be strict,

at least in many points, and yet the harmony of love may be lacking.

The precious sacrifice—the fatted calf—had no attraction for this “son.” The welcome of the returned son awakened no echo in his heart. The Pharisees and Scribes who murmured (verse 2) are not the only ones portrayed. There are many to-day who find no pleasure in God’s way of salvation, though they are busied with religion, or ritualism, or human organization of “Christian work.” Is God’s plan ours? Are His interests ours? Is His will our will is His joy our joy?

It would have been deplorable had the objection finished thus, but he persisted, and went yet further. When once the mouth is opened in sin, it is easy to go on. How different from the language of verse 21. There the Father interrupted; it is not so here. “But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.” “This thy son” disassociates the speaker: how searching is the reproof of verse 32 “this thy brother,” in connexion with his *dead* condition, happily changed. The words of complaint were, indeed, true: he had devoured the living with harlots :they were of old his friends, but the tense is precious, it is past. So in Romans 6. 17, “God be thanked that ye WERE the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine whereto ye were delivered” (margin). The true complaint reminds of Zechariah 3. Satan had a strong case against Joshua, but grace is stronger. “The Lord That hath chosen Jerusalem” deals with brands plucked out of the fire by mighty love. Verily such was the prodigal son, and such were you and I: but where sin abounded, grace overflowed (Rom. 5. 20). Glory be to God.

The fatted calf had indeed been sacrificed for the one brought back. The statement was true, but how sad the attitude which found an objection against God’s mercy. Latent pride was made evident, for what have we which we have not received? Jonah prayed in an evil way when he said “Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish; for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful” (Jon. 4. 2). How differently Moses used almost the same words (Num. 14. 18) and he had power in intercession. Our hearts cannot but rejoice in the infinitely more precious One sacrificed for us.

And now we read an answer that was meant to warn the hearers, and to humble any who rightly saw themselves. “Child, thou (emphatic) art ever with Me.” Was not this the claim of the objector? He maintained he had never gone

away, and yet he did not choose to be *with* the Father at the feast, or even *in* the house. Nor did he hesitate to emphasize a second feast *with* his own friends. Such is the inconsistency of a self-centred life. But he is taken on his own ground, as those of verse 7. It is a solemn thing to profess to love God, unless we really love Him. "All My things are thy things." What does this mean? The rich bounty of verse 12 is recalled. Religious Israel had received God's abundance—"to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service (of God) and the promises" (Rom. 9. 4). What could have been done for God's vineyard that was not done (Isa. 5. 4)? The commonwealth of Israel had the covenants of promise, not, however, to possess away from God, but in loving dependence on Him. Hence the order of the words. The things were first His, and then theirs. Such was the dispensational privilege: and, as the next chapter shows, the goods were also entrusted to them in a stewardship of responsibility. But sin spoiled all. Hence Christ spoke at first of "My Father's House" (John 2. 16), but finally of "your house" (Matt. 23. 38). It was left to them, and left to them *desolate*.

We turn from the thought of men's failure, and rejoice in the Perfect One, Who spake of the temple of His body (John 2. 21). That life was ever well pleasing unto the Father, and it is, therefore, fitting to see the precious contrast of John 17. 10, "And all Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine; and I am glorified in them." This *adjectival* form "My" occurs more in John's gospel than in all the rest of the New Testament. Especially should we notice "He shall receive of Mine, and shall shew unto you: all things that the Father hath are *Mine*: therefore said I, that He shall take of *Mine*, and shall show unto you" (John 16. 14, 15). Our blessed Lord never desired to be outside the Father's presence or will (Acts. 2. 25). He came down to do the Father's will, and all His people were given to Him by the Father (John 6. 38. 39). Hence the delightful unity of "hand" in John 10. 28, 29 (cf. verse 30). Where the First Adam failed, the Last Adam failed not: and, where Israel, the nation, were faulty He was without fault. As usual, this parable becomes a foil, to display the glory of Christ.

And what is the message to us, in our everyday life? Do we realize this wondrous possession of that which belongs to God? "I have given them the words which Thou gavest Me, and they have received" (John 17. 8). Do we possess our

possessions? "All things are yours" is the startling message of 1 Corinthians 3. 21.

What shall we desire? Shall we seek something else, or "the things which are above where Christ is" (Col. 3. 1)? "He That spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8. 32). Shall we turn aside to the things that are behind (Phil. 3. 13), the fashion of this world which passeth away (1 Cor. 7. 31), the shadow instead of the substance (Col. 2. 17 with Gal. 4. 9), to the things which are given unto the Gentiles (Rev. 11. 2), and which belong to a world which is crucified to us? Or shall we not rather seek to walk with God as Enoch did (Gen. 5. 22, 24)? It is possible. Why should it not be?

And there is one more verse in the chapter. "It was meet that we should make merry and be glad." Again we need a caution as to the blessed distinction from the modern English meaning of merriness. The *double* stress on rejoicing is found as in Psalm 32. 11, Revelation 19. 7, and many passages. The word "meet" is hardly strong enough. It is the "must" of John 3. 7, 14. There is a holy "must" as to this joy, and God will not be alone in it. This climax is emphatic. The attentive reader will see that this fellowship in joy is three times before us, "Rejoice with Me" (verse 6), "Rejoice with me" (verse 9), "Let us eat and be merry" (verse 23). The Shepherd seeks it, the woman (a figure of the church) seeks it, the Father seeks it. One of the great lessons of this chapter is our delight in God's delight, because of our heavenly standpoint. It is not enough to be saved personally. Have we a heart-harmony with God's will. "It was necessary!" Observe that here, however, the plural is not repeated in the Greek. The literal rendering is, "It was meet to have made merry and been glad." This omission and the past tense are alike impressive. The one addressed, namely, the elder son, was outside and remained outside. He had no joy in the Father's joy. Religious pride becomes self-centred, and exalts one's own activity, and knows nothing of fellowship with God, and of heartfelt gladness because of grace. And where do *we* stand in this matter?

The closing words show God's tenderness. They are unanswered, even as His closing words to Jonah. It would be solemnizing to collect the "last words" of Scripture conversations, and particularly to see the unanswered ministry of Divine longsuffering. There is a peculiar emphasis here on

the patience to Israel, and the absence of all haste as to a dispensational change. We recollect the slowness of departure of the Shekinah glory in Ezekiel.

“For” is impressive. If God quickens, gratitude is the only logical attitude. “This thy brother”, an important reminder, and also an answer to the reproach of verse 30 “This thy son.” That was a refusal to recognize relationship: so the Pharisee drew away from the outcast. He “was dead and he lived.” Observe the order. We call to mind “I kill and I make alive” (Deut. 32. 39, cf. Hos. 6. 1). Verily he had felt his death, “I perish here with hunger.” But after the smiting (cf. the man on the road to Jericho, note also Rom. 7. 9), he lived. “You hath He quickened” (Eph. 2. 1, 5). The life was as real as the death had been: the finding was as certain as the lost condition previously. And thus the two closing thoughts are “living” and “found.” So great is the change for one born from above. Position and condition are alike transformed altogether, and more than “transformed,” for “if any one is in Christ, there is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5. 17). Thus the reader will judge why we prefer not to speak of the message of the “prodigal son.” ’Tis the found son, even as the found sheep and found silver. The Shepherd declares the fact in the beginning, and here the Father Himself speaks. It is not a mere feeling of the son. And the passive tells of grace, for though he “came,” there was grace that drew. We do not read that any one went to seek him, but the Father says he “was found.” The glory belongs to God and the house shall be filled (Luke 14. 23) with those who are found and brought. Thanks be unto God for the very last word of this chapter—“He was found.” It is personal, it is definite, it ascribes all the glory to the Finder, it shows the position of the one blessed. And there is no thought of losing afterwards. The scattering of the sheep is viewed as past: “keep” is the Divine word (Jer. 31. 10). Eternal life is given (John 10. 28), and blessedness within the house is the glorious climax, even as in Psalm 23. 6, and John 14. 2. Thanks be unto God for such a salvation, and for all, from all nations, of whom God Himself has said, “He was found,” “She was found!”



**No. 5. FREE.**

*“Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the Man That is My Fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts: smite the Shepherd.”*

*Zechariah 13, 7.*

*“I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep.”* *John 10. 11.*

# THE PARABLES OF THE LORD JESUS

Outline Studies for His believing people, who feel the solemnity of the times, and look for His Coming.

## THE SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP.

*“Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou That leadest Joseph like a flock; Thou That dwellest between the cherubim, shine forth.”* *Psalm 80. 1.*

*“Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one flock, and one Shepherd.”* *John 10. 16.*

**T**HE Parables, like the Types, are full of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Having experienced and enjoyed a little of their inexhaustible fulness, I desire to share, with others of His beloved people, the food that He has graciously provided. A book on all the parables is in prayerful preparation,\* but this forerunner is herewith sent forth in faith, and dedicated to the Lord's service.

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Suggestions and questions are ever welcome, for there is ever a fulness beyond all that any of us realize, and it should be our privilege and joy to learn more of our Lord Himself and of His words, while, in the enabling of the Holy Spirit, we await His return and pray expectantly, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus,"

PERCY W. HEWARD.

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\* Portions are issued in "The Student of Scripture" monthly. Further particulars and current issue gladly sent.

# PARABLES OF THE SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP.

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THROUGHOUT the Holy Scriptures there is an emphasis on the Shepherd. The first book reminds us that “the Stone of Israel” is Himself the Shepherd (Gen. 49. 24), and the last book reveals, remarkably, the Lamb, not only as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Rev. 5. 5), but as the One Who is in the midst of the throne and Who will feed, or *shepherd* His flock (Rev. 7. 17). Every book of Scripture glorifies Him Who for our sakes died and rose again. And, if the law gives this witness, so do the other parts of the Old Testament (i.e. the prophets and the psalms, Luke 24. 44). “Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the Mighty Man That is My Fellow, saith the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 13. 7), “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou That ledest Joseph like a flock; Thou That dwellest between the cherubim, shine forth” (Ps. 80. 1). Nor is this precious emphasis surprising when we realize the intimacy and love between the eastern shepherd and his flock. He is no drover. The sheep are his possession and his delight, known to him, and cared for by him, and dependent on him. The camel is not beloved by his master, and, though the horse and the ass may attain to this privilege, it is not a flock, nor is there the same simple dependence. Well can we understand why the Holy Spirit has employed this figure, or (shall we not rather say?) arranged nature itself to give a figure of the Good Shepherd and of those dear to Him. Moreover, the first believer, Abel, was a shepherd, and not only is Jacob so marked, but Moses in the desert, and later, David, the king who particularly prefigures the Messiah, is ever regarded as the SHEPHERD-king. And accordingly a nation without leadership is described as sheep without a shepherd (Num. 27. 17, 1 Kings 22. 17, cf. Matt. 9. 36), and when Israel’s leaders caused them to wander, and fed them not, God’s holy and stern rebukes were sounded ten times in Ezekiel 34, leading up to the unveiling of one shepherd (Ezek. 34. 23), even David, raised from the dead to serve in loving fellowship with the great “One Shepherd” of Whom Ecclesiastes 12. 11 and John 10. 16 alike remind, when the foolish and idol shepherd, Antichrist, is laid low (Zech. 11. 17).

The way in which the Lord Jesus described Himself as

the Good Shepherd twice in one chapter (John 10. 11, 14) makes a background for the words "that Great Shepherd of the sheep," and "the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls" (Heb. 13. 20, 1 Pet. 2. 25). And He will soon appear as the Chief Shepherd to the joy of the faithful under-shepherds (1 Pet. 5. 4). How can we mention His Coming without asking, "Are we looking for that blessed Hope, as those that LOVE His Appearing?"

And, again, another question seems ever important, with its personal and searching note, "Dear reader, are you one of His sheep?" How needful it is to be sure that there is a living relationship to the Lord Jesus by His precious blood. There is much religion without salvation, and there are many who profess who have not been born again.

There are at least five recorded parables of the sheep in the gospels. Matthew 12. 11, 12, 25. 31-33, Luke 15. 3-7 (cf. Matt. 18. 12,) John 10. 1-6 10. 7-18. The first is very short, nor is it an ordinary "parable," but in it the Lord Jesus unmasks the hypocrisy of those who attacked Him and, at the same time, reveals, His own personal love to individuals. And truly Israel's lost sheep had fallen into a pit, even as they were represented by the man with the withered hand which could not be lifted in prayer and praise, (and by the other sick ones), whom the Lord had just healed. The moral and spiritual diseases are the more deadly, but how real is His deliverance. So in this chapter, surely the Lord Himself is the One Who, as Owner of the sheep, of whom He took hold, brings up out of the pit, and sets in a precious and rich pasture. Somewhat similar is the unveiling of grace in Psalm 40. 2, "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock and established my goings." Happy are those who have such an experience. The Pharisees dared to confuse this with the forbidden work, and business, which made self the centre of the broken Sabbath. How delightfully the Lord Jesus made His Father's will His constant Centre, rejoicing in the true blessing of those whom He delivered.

The parable of Matthew 25 was the last spoken, and we will ponder it, by God's grace, at the end. The simple yet powerful message of Luke 15. 3-7 (cf. Matt. 18. 12-14) is one panel in the threefold "LOST . . . FOUND" of that chapter. In it we see again the Lord's ownership and right, His love and interest, His work and joy. There is a deep, personal note, as to both the Shepherd and the sheep. The

ninety nine are left in the wilderness (we do not read "the fold"), and the one is not brought thither, nor restored to them, but carried to the house, the home. And then a meeting of joy is the Shepherd's own delight. Surely this parable is meant to stir our heart. Do we joy in His joy? And do we realize how completely the work of salvation is His? Though our gracious Lord uses His redeemed, it is important sometimes to remember that HE finds, and HE brings, and that the calling together is after He has done the work.\*

John 10 comes next before us. Will the believing reader take the passage and prayerfully meditate on it, going through it twice or more? It is so important that notes on Scripture should not take the place of Scripture itself. The writer desires that there should be a personal experience of the power of the Lord's words, even before any part of this brief commentary is read. And it is well to see the context. Chapter 10 reads on from chapter 9. The once-blind man was "cast out." Graciously the Lord Jesus was overruling to bring unto Himself. "Out" suggests "into," and immediately after 9. 34 we have "Dost thou believe *into* the Son of God?" And this brings us to 10. 4, "When He *putteth forth* His own sheep, He goeth before them." It is the very same word "cast out." He leads to *Himself*, But, please, take the passage yourself first, with prayer, before starting a single further paragraph, even if it means a day's waiting. It will not be delay.

\* \* \* \*

And now it will be fitting to pursue our studies together. Is it not clear that there are two parables? Verse 6 indicates this. What words are common to both? And are there any contrasts? For example:—

Verses 1-6.

Verses 7-18.

- |                          |                             |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| The door (1)             | The Door (7)                |
| A thief and a robber (1) | Thieves and robbers (8, 10) |
| The Shepherd (2)         | The Shepherd (11, 14)       |
| "Hear His Voice" (3)     | "Hear My voice" (16)        |

Much more might be said, but it is possible some will now be prepared to see Divinely appointed contrasts of standpoint. In the first parable the Shepherd comes: in the second, He is already there at the outset. In the first, He enters by the door, in the second, He Himself is the Door. In the first, the thought is leading OUT, and there is no suggestion of

\* The reader is referred to the fuller notes on the parable of Luke 15 (gladly sent on application).

coming back; but in the latter there is a going in and out. The porter is unmentioned in the second, the wolf in the first. The "fold" is not before us in the second until it is mentioned as the place "out of" which some sheep have been brought ("not of this fold" 16): the added statement is "One *flock* and one Shepherd," quite a different word.

Thus we behold the Lord Jesus coming to a "fold," and being welcomed by one who is rejected by the thieves and the robbers, who were evidently Israel's ungodly leaders (cf. Zech. 11. 5). The Holy Spirit's ministry may be thus suggested, but particularly He worked among Israel through prophets, and, in welcoming the Lord Jesus, THROUGH JOHN THE BAPTIST, whose baptism typified the way out from Judaism (the porter keeps the door, for the way *out* also). This the Pharisees and lawyers refused (Luke 7. 29, 30). Christ Himself was revealed to John at this "door" (John 1. 30-34). The true sheep heard His voice, a precious thought throughout the gospel (e.g. 5. 25, 10. 27, 5. 28), and He called them by name. His work was individual, not national (Isa. 49. 5). It is remarkable how many the Lord Jesus called personally by name, and His ministry with some commenced thus (e.g. 1. 42).

It is clear now that the first parable gives our Lord's own ministry among Israel, when He came unto His own, and they received Him not, but as many as received Him, even "the poor of the flock" were led to a new relationship (John 1. 11, 12). They were in the "fold" at the commencement,\* but He did not leave them till He led them *out*. This was His purpose as John 10. 3 indicates. He led them out to Himself. He did not come to establish Judaism. Various circumstances were overruled in the gracious outworking of this His purpose, and the driving out of John 9. 34 becomes thus more definitely understood. The way in which many clung to Judaism, we

\* The word is used for the high priest's "palace" or "court" in Matthew 26. 3, 58, 69, Mark 14. 54, 66, Luke 22. 55. John 18. 15, and for the Roman "hall" in Mark 15. 16. The other occurrences are Luke 11. 21, Revelation 11. 2. It is thus remarkable that the chief use is for ISRAEL'S high priest, and in the last passage we have **Jerusalem**, and its dispensational setting aside. This entirely harmonizes:—No "court," no "fold," now, but worship in the holiest (cf. John 4. 21). Even Luke 11. 21 confirms, when we see the added message of the unclean spirit going out (verses 24-26) together with Matthew 12. 43-45, "Even so shall it be also unto THIS wicked generation." Israel's court and Israel's house are left desolate (Matt. 23. 38), but how blessed is THE house of 1 Peter 2. 4, 5,—where all is living, just as we have seen the Door becomes Living, even the Lord Jesus Himself.

see in the Acts (e.g. 21. 20): how slowly even the apostles were freed from certain customs (e.g. 10. 28), hence the "CASTING out" of John 10. 4. But (precious words) "He goeth before them," words that He Himself associates with His resurrection, and with Galilee of the Gentiles (Matt. 26. 32), having, it would seem, their fulfilment in Matthew 28. 18-20, where, possibly, the "above five hundred brethren at once" heard His resurrection message and commission. How encouraging is the thought that we have not a religion, nor a system, but Himself, and He, Who died for us, is the Centre, and attraction for His redeemed people. Well may the next parable commence, not with the door of a fold, but with HIMSELF as the Door. Everything has become LIVING.

This present unveiling of the wondrous fulness of blessing, through the work of the Lord Jesus, needs continual emphasis. Life and incorruption are now brought to light through the gospel (2 Tim. 1. 10), and the righteousness of God is now manifested (Rom. 3. 21). The old-time saints were "sheep," even as the Lord's people to-day; but a new experience is now granted. Galatians 4 explains this very clearly. The infant is in the *family*, but he does not realize "sonship." All attempts to divide the people of God are distressing. All the redeemed are united by the work of Christ (Eph. 1. 10). But many things were not revealed before (Matt. 13, 16, 17). How grateful should we be for our present privileges as well as our prospect. The type of baptism, (in contrast with that of circumcision under the law), sets forth the new creation. In like manner the law is written on the heart in the new covenant (2 Cor. 3. 3): the appointed type in the old covenant was with regard to tables of stone,—internal for the Ark alone. Another very remarkable foreshadowing is provided in the Cities of Refuge. The general outline of grace there, and the intense call to the troubled sinner to "flee," because of the reality of wrath, and of the avenger of blood, are ever deeply important in gospel testimony. But we observe a TWO-FOLD deliverance in that wondrous type. The cities gave a certain restraint, as the very word "refuge" signifies. They delivered, and the man was safe, but he must abide therein "unto the death of the high priest which was anointed with the holy oil" (Num. 35. 25). He dare not claim his "possession" till after that death (Num. 35. 28, 32). Afterwards he was entitled to have all, and "his own house" is specially mentioned (Jos. 20. 6). There we see that the old-time saints were preserved with a view to the work that would

put away their sins,\* but they could not realize the possession belonging to the heir, in accord with the Spirit of sonship. But now, through the death of our adorable Lord, all who are “in Him” are encouraged to enjoy His fulness:—“All things are yours” (1 Cor. 3. 21). So long as the man was in the city of refuge (see Num. 35. 26, 27), there was a conscience of sin (i.e., a legal consciousness); but now believers have boldness to enter into the holiest (Heb. 10. 19, 20, see verse 2). What manner of persons ought we to be! The leading out from the “fold” in John 10 gives the same thought. After that we find the words of freedom, not licence,—“Shall go in and out, and find pasture” (cf. Gal. 5. 13).

The one true Shepherd of the sheep in John 10. 2 is clearly the Lord Jesus. Observe His uniqueness. The sheep belonged to Him alone. The porter did not claim them. John rightly said, “He That hath the bride is the Bridegroom” (John 3. 29). All the favoured nation should have recognized the Sent One, but the gospel makes us acquainted with *two* distinct interpretations of “His own” (John 1. 11, 13. 1). The saddening condition of the nation generally could not alter God’s purpose. Hence the heart-searching declaration “Why do ye not understand My speech? even because ye cannot *hear* My word: ye are of your father the devil” (John 8. 43, 44). And again, “Ye believe not, because ye are not of My sheep, as I said unto you” (John 10. 26). There is no universalism here. The true sheep heard Him aright: every one of them, as we have seen, was personally called. It is so still (2 Tim. 1. 9). Though we were not found in the fold of Judaism, and though the circumstances to-day seem somewhat distinct, the same principle ever stands. There must be a personal relationship to a personal Saviour. He Himself, and not a religious organization, must be the One to Whom we are gathered. Christendom has blurred the typical teaching, and introduced the theory of a “fold,” and often exalted an “ism,” instead of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. We shall frequently find (as Galatians 4 and Colossians 2 alike indicate) that the human heart craves to introduce “the strengthless and poor rudiments” (Gal. 4. 9), as a substitute for the “fulness” in

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\* A leaflet on Romans 3. 25 may help. The Holy Spirit’s unveiling of truth is ever in harmony, and this fact is a witness against error, and an evidence of full and verbal inspiration. It has well been said that none who study the types are “Higher Critics,” and herein is a striking condemnation of their “criticism.” A dispensational parallel with John 10 may also be found with regard to the veil. The priests were in the family before the veil was rent, but they could not have “access” nor realize the glory of God’s presence.

Him, in Whom are all “ riches,” and Who is the “ Power ” of God. This is illustrated by man’s stress on “ it ” and on “ a religion.” Something “ seen ” is sought, with elaborate buildings and ceremonies of the flesh, instead of a simple walk by faith, the faith of the Son of God (Gal. 2. 20), Who “ goeth before,” even our Forerunner (Gal. 2. 20, Heb. 6. 20). Possibly some may think this is explained at too great length, but it is of the deepest importance, not only affecting our appointed dispensational position, but setting forth the purged conscience of a believer, and the heavenly calling, with all the definite separation from the world embraced therein. Ah, beloved reader, how is it with you? Is it that “ He goeth before ”? His last words in the same gospel, repeated in gracious emphasis, are “ Follow thou ME ” (John 21. 19, 22).

The sheep are said to follow the Shepherd BECAUSE “ they know His voice.” The voice includes the word, but also the tone. One may be a “ student of theology,” and a preacher, with considerable ability, and yet not “ hear His voice.” Not only is this “ hearing ” at the commencement of the Christian life. We have seen it as the continued characteristic, and the crown. The substitution of other human ideas, obscuring this Divine standpoint, must ever hinder the witness which God’s dear children should be unitedly in the world. “ Profession ” is easy. “ Church-membership,” and activity in religious societies, may be a natural inclination. The test, as in John 14. 21-24, is still a spiritual attitude to the words and will of Him Who bought us. When one finds a disregard, for example, of His own words as to baptism, and the lame excuse that baptism is “ not necessary to salvation,” and the unwillingness to talk over these things, or to allow such ministry in conventions, lest there be controversy, and a hindrance of “ the unity,” we come to realize how far those who bear the Name of the Lord Jesus have often gone from His standpoint as to unity, and how loud is the call for revival and for simple willingness to hear His voice. The bewildered sheep of to-day are bewildered through those who ought to represent Him. But we are anticipating the second parable. However, as a new “ Christendom fold ” has been made, there is the need for an undelayed and godly coming out from the organizations of men, that we may reach the true position our loving Lord has appointed. Hence such exhortations may not be in vain, if affectionately repeated, and personally applied by the Holy Spirit.

“ But a stranger will they in no wise follow; on the contrary, they will flee from him ” (5). The word “ stranger ” denotes

“ belonging to another,” and is found in Matthew 17. 25, 26, Acts 7. 6, Hebrews 9. 25, 11. 9, 34. Those who belong to the Shepherd CAN humbly speak in His Name to the sheep, when in harmony with Him. How important to catch His tone, and to “ speak as the oracles of God ” (1 Pet. 4. 11). John 10. 5 has often impressed my heart. I have looked around, and “ wondered.” Why are so many children of God held awhile in many distressing errors? The promise of God cannot be broken. The thought has come, “ This passage will be fulfilled finally: they SHALL be brought back.” This is true, thanks be unto God (2 Pet. 3. 9). But my heart has been brought to realize that though the same characteristic should EVER be found among beloved children of God, this statement is in the FIRST PARABLE, and has graciously received a precious fulfilment. The SECOND parable deals primarily with the present time when our Lord is in the glory ever interceding that all His own may be eternally kept in salvation (Heb. 7. 25), but the MINISTRY for the sheep is largely entrusted to His servants, the pastors of the sheep in Ephesians 4. 11-13 (cf. 1 Pet. 5. 1-4), and these have not always represented Him aright. They have sometimes MISrepresented His words, and His voice. and, as we shall see, the hireling has come in among them, and the scattering of John 10. 12 is the sad result.

But the holy principle of the first parable remains, and SHOULD be illustrated, and any contrast is a call to humbling. It is for us to ask ourselves personally, “ Do I hear His voice? Do I refuse to follow strangers? Do I FLEE from them? ” What holy horror of evil doctrine, and association there should be. The intensity of fleeing for refuge (Heb. 6. 18) should be followed by the fleeing from strangers. And each one who seeks to minister to the sheep should ask himself, “ Is my ministry ‘ belonging to Him,’ and do I faithfully hear the word at His mouth, and keep to His word and His tone? Am I a shepherd of His appointment, simply exalting the Chief Shepherd, or am I, in any measure, a hireling? ” There is no passage of Scripture which is not heart-searching.

And so the last sentence of the parable emphasizes again, albeit negatively, the same thought, “ For they know not the voice of strangers.” These priceless words, first fulfilled when the Lord first brought His own out from Judaism, are ever to be before our hearts. We should experience a holy discernment, as with Israel’s priests; and, to enjoy this, so much depends on our spiritual food, and abstaining from “ attractive ” error, that which would please the flesh (cf. Lev. 10. 9, 10). The discernment of 1 John 2. 27 is all-important and associated

with a godly walk and a godly growth (Heb. 5. 12-14). This is possible in the Holy Spirit by Whom we are anointed (2 Cor. 1. 21, 22), and if His "leading" is not thus recognized—and "leading" is not a matter of impulses, or a claim "I was led to do this," but a whole-hearted willingness for the will of God, and a perception of that which belongs to our Lord Jesus (John 16. 14, 15)—if His leading of the humble believer is not desired, then is He not grieved (Eph. 4. 30)?

Sorrowfully we should read verse 6. "They understood not." Ignorance of these "things" was the fruit of ignorance of Him. "They knew Him not" (Acts 13. 27). And is there not the same ignorance to-day? But He did not leave them, "He still taught the people knowledge" and He Himself was the "One Shepherd" (Eccl. 12. 9-11). And thus we read, "THEREFORE said Jesus unto them again." His introduction is the doubled "Verily, verily," emphasizing His own Name, for the word is "Amen" (Rev. 3. 14), and laying impressive stress on the truth, when so many chose a lie (cf. the reiterated "Martha, Martha," etc., of gracious warning). The second parable has the explanation at the very outset. And the repeated words "I am" give us at once the key. Christ is Central: He says "I AM the Door of the sheep," and "I AM the Good Shepherd." Could one who was created speak thus, and remain humble? Impossible. The language of the Lord Jesus ever unveils His essential Deity (cf. "I am" in 8. 58, "Before Abraham *became*, I am"). And we likewise see the standpoint of the parable. There is no introductory mention of a fold, nor of a door-keeper. CHRIST IS EVERYTHING. There are no sheep HERE till He is mentioned first. They were, in the previous parable, to be found in the fold. But here He is the Cause of all. "He goeth BEFORE THEM" in this sense also: "On this Rock I will build My Church" is a parallel in another striking context.

What is the meaning of "the Door of the Sheep"? Does it signify a Door FOR them? Yes, but much more. He is not only the Door whereby they come, and the One through Whom all going out and coming in, as to food and service, are possible, but He is "the Door OF the sheep," i.e. they, and not a sheepfold, are united to Him, with the will of God written on their very hearts that they may be a separated, living people, not by human expedients, nor by organization, but by vital and inseparable union with Himself. And none except His sheep are **now** united to Him. There were evidently others apart from "His own sheep" in the fold. We shall see afterwards

another aspect, even the sheep in the field, and “scattered.” But that is not the first thought. Eternal security in living relationship to the Lord Himself, must have the pre-eminent place. Let us ever emphasise this Divine order. Christ is the Alpha and Omega of this parable, and so it begins with “I am” and ends with “One Shepherd.”

The Lord Jesus is not only contrasted with the sheep, in that they depend on Him, and He can meet all the need, but also He is again contrasted in verse 8 with “thieves and robbers” (cf. verse 1). “Now Barabbas was a robber” (John 18. 40), and men came out against the Lord of Glory as if He were a robber (Matt. 26. 55). But THEY were the robbers: HE was, indeed, the Giver, and the gift was His life. The contrast will help to explain the startling words: “All that ever came before Me.” Any who took the position of the “Door” were usurping the glory of the Lord Jesus. Those who pointed to Him, and told of His coming (Acts 3. 24), were by no means robbers: they were sent (see John 3. 28, note 1. 30 also). All the prophets, and finally, John led to the Lord Jesus. THEY never claimed the sheep for themselves: to do this was robbery (note Ezek. 34. 2, Zech. 11. 5). How blessed is the privilege of claiming a soul FOR THE LORD, and helping “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1. 17). But the wish of the human heart is ever to attract to self (Acts 5. 36, 37, 20. 30).

“The sheep did not hear them.” Thus are we again reminded that there are many who are NOT His sheep. The characteristic of the sheep is ever the same: they hear the Shepherd’s voice. None other can meet their need. Once again would we humbly ask ourselves, and all who read,—“Have we heard the voice of the Son of God (John 5. 25), and are we now seeking ever to hear Him obediently (Matt. 17. 5, John 10. 27)?”

Repetitions in this parable are remarkable. We have noticed “Verily, verily,” and we shall soon observe, “I am the Good Shepherd” more than once (verses 11, 14). Likewise we have “I am the Door” in verse 9 as well as 7. Both verses and verb are important. He is the Door as to salvation and the Door as to service (cf. the twofold “rest” of Matt. 11. 28-30). Salvation is the first need. “By (through) Me if any man enter in.” Here we are all viewed as “without,” at the beginning. This marked contrast with the first parable should have shown believers the distinction. One may be born in the “fold” of a religion as Judaism was, but one must be born again to come INTO the sphere of salvation. And Christ

is the only Door. "Any man." The study of "comparative religions" is vain for the needy sinner. There is no competitor with the Lord Jesus. God allows of no alternative. Many tell us that, if any keep to that to which they have been brought up, it will be well. This is a delusion. Christ IS the Door. The present tense "I am" is important. Apart from Him there is no salvation at all. And this is a personal matter: "HE shall be saved." The tense gives us the certainty, for none look to Christ in vain. "And shall go in and out." There is a sphere, though it is not a mere fold. Activity is important, and it is not only in one part of the life: "in and out." We need to wait, we need to work: we need pasture, we need service. "Seed to the SOWER" and "bread to the EATER" (Isa. 55. 10) are, alike important. And all who are the Lord's, will, in the way of His will, "find pasture." He never stints them. He Himself found pasture in doing the will of the Father, and finding the lost (John 4. 32-34). There was no selfishness in His perfect life. And He calls His own to find what He gives them (Ps. 23. 2) in their glad accord with His will. At first, all the "finding" is His (Luke 15. 4, 5). He finds us. And then in the response of love, we find Him (John 1. 45), and find what He has provided for us—rest and joy, and food, and all. How graciously our Lord wishes us to enjoy salvation, yea, to enjoy Himself. "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy." If there were those who came before Him with evil purposes, they are not absent to-day (cf. 2 Pet. 2. 1). Their object is an absolute contrast with that of Christ, as this verse sets forth. He brings life: the thief aims at death. But will the thief succeed? That is the question. We at once call to mind the words, "To seduce, if it were possible, even the elect" (Mark 13. 22). The Lord Jesus said in John 14, "I go TO prepare a place for you," and, "If I go AND prepare a place for you." "To," "And": little words, but how much they signify when together. He ACCOMPLISHES His PURPOSE. We remember, too, God's plan worked out through Abraham, "They went forth TO go into the land of Canaan; AND into the land of Canaan they came" (Gen. 12. 5). But the enemy often fails in his purpose, and always fails when he seeks to kill Christ's sheep. He cometh TO steal, TO kill, TO destroy. All the three words are answered by verse 28. Destroy? Nay, "they shall never perish." Kill? How can it be? "I give unto them eternal life." Steal? "Neither shall any man pluck them OUT OF MY HAND." The Shepherd-Owner shall never be defeated.

But the aim is a deadly one, and the adversary leaves no scheme untried, his subtlety is described as "all-working" (2 Cor. 11. 3, lit.). The righteous are saved, but it is along a pathway of difficulty (1 Pet. 4. 18, lit.). We can never rightly turn God's grace into a mere dogma. We need to be prayerful, against thief, and wolf, and whatever shall come (Acts 20. 31). These repeated words emphasize the intensity of Satan. He longs to "devour" (1 Pet. 5. 8), and were it not that our Lord ever lives to make intercession (Heb. 7. 25), we might well tremble. It is not written, "Greater are ye than he that is in the world"; but "Greater is He That is in you than he that is in the world."

Tell me, when has a sheep been stolen from the Lord Jesus? John 10.28,29 gives the answer: the mightier than David will deliver, if need be, out of the lion's mouth (1 Sam. 17. 35). When has eternal life died? Never. Who among those given to Christ has perished? Not one. But there ARE perils, as we shall soon see once more, and to make light of the danger, and of our dependence on Him, is to raise a doubt if we are His sheep at all. Physical life is in God's hands, but He USES the air: spiritual life is in His covenant purpose, but He USES His holy word and prayer. Feed on the Scripture and call on His Name, if you would endure to the end, and enjoy the promises.

"I am come that they might have life." Without Him we have death. This is plain from such verses as John 3. 16, 36. 5. 24, 6. 53. The whole gospel emphasizes such a thought. "Life" is through faith in His Name (20. 31). He came with this object. The Holy Spirit's references to the purpose of Christ and the purpose of His death\* must impress us. "The Son of Man is COME to seek and to save that which was lost": "the Son of Man CAME not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many": "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus CAME into the world to save sinners." "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

"And that they might have it more abundantly." "Abundantly." Our loving Lord delights that His people should have riches. It is out of His fulness that we have received, and grace for grace. Never will the words be forgotten, "He giveth MORE grace." The prayerful reader may have noticed that "it" is here in italics. "That they might have that which is overflowing"—something extra (the same word in Matt. 5. 47, Rom. 3. 1, 2 Cor. 9. 1). Pasture as well

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\* Leaflet gladly sent.

as life, righteousness and not only reprieve, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and His anointing, as well as the gift of life. Our Father desires us to enjoy the riches of His grace, and our Lord says, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved" (Song 5, 1). Are we possessing our possessions? We are not only "living" in a "fold." We are, like the manslayer after the death of the high priest, enriched with an inheritance. In the new covenant the law is written on the heart, and the freedom is that of a will coinciding with God's will. His pleasure has become our pleasure, and our Lord came to make this possible.

Everything is for Him and therefore we at once turn to the word "I am." The pronoun is emphatic, the verb likewise is emphatic, and certainly the noun is emphatic, and the adjective also is emphatic; (literally, "The Shepherd, THE GOOD ONE"), and everything exalts the Lord Himself. Is it not so in all the parables? He lovingly brings us to Himself. No created being could thus have made Himself Central, and set forth Himself as both Door and Shepherd. There was, and is, no room for a rival, no opportunity for another.

The thoughtful reader will soon see we are not overstating the case: far otherwise, we are *understating* it. When we rightly say, "I am the Good Shepherd" is twice sounded forth, we have only mentioned a part of the evidence. Look again at verse 11. Why not, "I am the Good Shepherd, and give My life for the sheep"? Why must the word "Shepherd" be here repeated, so that the stressed words are amazingly before our eyes, and before our hearts (verses 11—translated "give"—15, 17, 18 twice). He deliberately "placed," and laid down, His own life "for" His SHEEP, and bore judgment, that they might have life "more abundantly." Thus is He seen as the absolute contrast with the thief, and with the wolf. Yet it is not said that He gives His life when the thief and wolf come. Doubtless the figure implies that such would be against Him, but the silence of Scripture is ever important. And it is well to notice every word. Certainly He met the thief, but this would not have secured our salvation. Far otherwise, if the Shepherd were thus killed, the foe would plunder the sheep. And as to the wolf's intrusion this seems to be after the Shepherd has strangely gone away; one of those remarkable parabolic hints of the present dispensation, leading up, as we shall see, to the unveiling of our Lord's Return. Blessed be God, our Shepherd did not merely suffer under the enemy's attack. That would have been love to the sheep, but it would not be salvation. He laid down His life voluntarily, this is the point of the Divine

emphasis, in the fulfilment of the plan of the Father, as the One obedient unto death in redeeming love to His own. And so the gift of Himself for the sheep not only unveils His love, but, as other Scriptures show, He met the enemy who had the might of death, and despoiled him of his might (Heb. 2. 14), by a work that satisfied God's claims for all the sheep (verse 18). Thus this passage not only shows His suffering (a) as the One attacked, but more (b) as the One Who willingly loved, and (c) as the One Who accomplished whatever was needed for the SALVATION of the sheep (cf. verse 9). The same three-fold thought is found in Isaiah 53.

The more we look at the words, the more we see their fulness. The word "thief" implies that those here mentioned do not belong to Satan, they have been blessedly given to Christ (John 6. 37). Yet they are not as ordinary living sheep: they have need of LIFE (John 10. 10) and this life through His death (cf. John 6. 33), Accordingly where the Shepherd is before us in Hebrews 13. 20 His blood is the blood of the everlasting covenant, and, in the precious blending of figures, He, Who is both Priest and Sacrifice, is seen as the LAMB as well as the Shepherd Who leads in Revelations 7. 17. Thus He uses a striking expression as to His own soul, "I have AUTHORITY to lay it down" (John 10. 18). Why "authority"? In general, we behold the Father's purpose; but particularly we realize that, as the Obedient One, He could not take away His own unforfeited life. Yet in voluntary SUBSTITUTION FOR SINNERS He could make manifest the "authority" received to do what was otherwise impossible. Howbeit, inasmuch as His life was not personally forfeited, nay, rather, He was the only One entitled to life (Rom. 10. 5), He had "authority" to TAKE His soul again, and His resurrection displayed His perfection and His finished work (Rom. 4. 25).

"For the sheep": what music there is in these words. A great number are His own, and His work was a DEFINITE covenant work for them. There is no vagueness as to the precious blood of Christ. Salvation is secured. He will not fail, nor be discouraged, nor will His sheep be lost (John 10. 28, 18. 9). Human theories as to a redemption which does not redeem are not to be found here. There is no mere attempt or experiment in the work of Christ. Many sons shall be brought to glory (Heb. 2. 10). Well may we rejoice if we are His. Ah, dear reader, can you thankfully say, you are of His sheep? Then do you not BELONG to Him in every way, and is this manifest in your daily life?

"But the HIRELING." It is very remarkable that as soon as the Shepherd's death is mentioned, we have the sad history of man's failure. The Shepherd is sitting between the Cherubim, raised in glory (Ps. 80. 1, 110. 1), but the sheep are still on earth. Israel's shepherds failed of old (Ezek. 34), will there be the unveiling of a like failure? Alas, many parallels are before us. The enemy is not the only hindrance: those who profess to care for the sheep prove unworthy of their trust. How definitely this speaks to our own hearts, whatever responsibility is given to us. Are we "faithful in that which is least"? The hireling here is responsible, or *professedly* responsible, to the Shepherd. As in Luke 15 the sheep are the self-righteous, so here, the description may be according to the hireling's claim, for Scripture does not suggest that the Lord Jesus appoints such: He has given some to be "shepherds" (Eph. 4. 11, 1 Pet. 5. 1-4). Alas, it is sadly possible for a believer to allow something of the hireling-spirit. O that all commercialism, and all self-love, may be laid low in the Lord's work. This passage does not indicate that there will be no true pastors, but it does give Christ's foreshadowing of the present age, with its lack of godly care for the sheep, and with its commercialism, seen in the buildings which are viewed as desirable "places of worship," and in the sad emphasis on salaries. The work of the Lord should ever be a faith work. Everything should be on "faith lines," or shall we say, "on the line of His will, in simple faith"? The scattering of the sheep generally is attributed by our Lord Jesus to the lack of a shepherd's heart. The hireling is not antagonistic, but he thinks of himself first, and what he can "get." This attitude has ruined godly testimony. How contrasted with the standpoint of God's servant Paul when willing to have imparted not the gospel of God only but himself also to the Thessalonian believers (1 Thess. 2. 8, cf. 2 Cor. 12. 15), and when he travailed in pain a second time that "Christ might be formed" in the children of God throughout Galatia (Gal. 4. 19). Herein we see the spirit of a true shepherd.

"And not the shepherd." These added words not only state a truism: they remind us that Scriptural under-shepherds act in their Lord's Name, and seek to look at things from His standpoint. The hireling thinks of wages: the shepherd loves the sheep. The question is ever before us,—The LORD JESUS AND HIS INTERESTS, or SELF and its interests: which must be called central in our life? It matters not what the "hire" is: it need not be money: reputation may be an

equal snare. To Peter the Lord put the question, "Lovest thou Me?" and then gave the command, "Feed My sheep." This is ever the test of love to Him. The sheep were not given to Peter, and yet the words spoken of the hireling ("Whose OWN the sheep are not") did not apply to him, for he was viewed as fully attached to his Lord, and HIS interests. Are we?

Revival will be marked by ministry that exalts Him. Ephesians 4 is clear as to this. It is important to ponder, in the light of this verse, the thought of "a paid ministry." Is it wrong? Has not the Lord approved that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel (1 Cor. 9. 14), and is there not some parallel in the words "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour" (1 Tim. 5. 17)? We are convinced that the one taught in the word should "communicate" unto him that teacheth in all good things (Gal. 6. 6), but let us remember that the present day college arrangements (often "higher critical"), and the idea of an ordination to "administer sacraments," with the usual title of Reverend, or of "Doctor," in theology, are quite an innovation on New Testament order. And should we not return to the simpler will of God, and trust Him on the lines of His own words that there may be "teachers," as His gifts, and that godly recognition may be given to such (1 Thess. 5. 12, 13), including the supply of earthly needs (Phil. 4. 15, 16)? Is it not possible to go back to the Scriptural precedent, with more confidence in the unfailing wisdom of our Lord, and would not this help to remove the whole theory of a "profession," with large "salaries" in SOME cases, and an elaborateness which does not harmonize with pilgrim simplicity, and with a place outside the camp, where our rejected Lord is (Heb. 13. 13)? We do not refer only to episcopal palaces, but to organized nonconformity, and if godly men seem to be found in many positions, their godliness does not justify innovation. Some who, in various denominations, seek after much of God's truth, and who may be reading these pages monthly with prayerful interest, may at first think, "The writer does not know MY small income, nor does he sympathize with my problems." Will such lovingly accept our testimony that we rejoice in love to Christ wherever it is, but we desire for such dear, exercised souls (whom we love), and for ourselves a fuller conformity to the Lord's own will, and a fuller separation from the circumstances and principles that give opportunity to the "hireling" attitude.

It is not easy to be faithful when some who help as to the salary are worldly: there are many fetters. One may seek to be definite and uncompromising, but the position is necessarily a temptation. Should we step *into* it? Should one not seek the way out from it? Is not the Lord "sufficient" for every need?

It is important to see that the power of the wolf is through the "hireling." And the scattering of the saints is seen to be a fact. "The wolf catcheth them and scattereth the sheep." The thief cometh "TO steal," but cannot. Preservation is dependent on sovereign grace. "The wolf . . . scattereth": this is the sphere of OUR responsibility. No one can "snatch" out of our Lord's HAND (verse 28, 29), but the wolf catcheth or "snatcheth" (the same word) in THE FIELD. Thanks be unto God, we are in His hand, AS WELL AS in the field; but do we not long after love's unity among the sheep as a witness on earth (John 13. 35, note 17. 21, 22)?

Behold our Lord's definite prophecy of the condition of His people while He Himself is in the glory. The Shepherd is not viewed as being WITH His sheep the whole time, in the sense in which He was, and will yet be, among them. The spiritual blessedness of Matthew 18. 20, and 28. 20 must never be forgotten, but the words "TILL He come" have a real meaning. O beloved friends, WE are left here, responsible for our Lord's interests. May we not compare the "taking care" till the Good Samaritan should return (Luke 10. 35), and the stewardship in the parables of the Pounds and Talents? His Coming is ever before us.

True, "we" cannot now unite all the scattered sheep in "the field." This refers to the world (Matt. 13. 38), and the wheat and tares are together TILL the period of harvest, but a local assembly is never viewed as the "field," and the "house" should have fellowship in the truth. Do we seek and expect this? Then let us beware of everything of the hireling spirit. One is "afraid" to stand against the wolf if one's own interests are prominent. We should "stand," not "flee," in the evil day (Eph. 6. 13).

We would plead with children of God not to treat these suggestions lightly, or as a generalization. We grieve over the hasty and harsh words often used against "a hireling ministry." Many a "salaried" believer has shown more love to the Lord than his critics, and than many who have claimed to live by faith. Indeed, it is very important that we should be kept from ALL boasting, and also from a nominal faith that in-

directly “advertises and asks.” As for ourselves we, too, long to be humbled. If a “self-desire” for reward, even at the Judgment Seat of Christ, lays hold of us, is there not the “hireling-spirit”? and should not the attitude of 2 Corinthians 13. 7 be much more fully felt? Beloved fellow believers, preachers or not preachers, we are ALL responsible to know what 1 John 3. 16 means. Do we love the sheep if we say words that scatter them, or sow discord among brethren (Prov. 6. 19), or if we are careless about the spiritual condition of others who are misled? The attitude of Cain led to a statement which searches us in a very different context (Gen. 4. 9): children of God are members one of another. Do we help one another, or “flee,” and “leave the sheep”?

The enemy would ever hinder that which exalts the Lord Jesus, and we call to mind the words, “I know that after my departing shall grievous WOLVES enter in among you, not sparing the flock: also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20, 29, 30). Nor can we be unmindful of the parallel, with Satan disguised as an angel of light, where we read, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matt. 7. 15). The enemy will try in every way to obstruct the Lord’s work, and the sheep need all the help possible. Every view of the present dispensation is solemnizing, whether we think of the Holy Spirit’s unveiling of the early years in the epistles, or of the general course in the prophecies of Christ, or of the time of the end in the Book of Revelation. The righteous are saved along a path of difficulty (1 Pet. 4. 18), but they ARE saved, and the “many sons” SHALL be brought to glory, but let us be lovingly concerned for His glory in the path thither. There is no statement of the wolf snatching the carefully-shepherded flock. Godly “taking care” for a church of God (1 Tim. 3. 5) is graciously honoured.

The verse ends with the words “scattereth the sheep.” Herein is the limit: the wolf can go no further. No wild beast can kill a single one belonging to Christ. Such absolute precision in God’s use of language reminds us again of the verbal inspiration of Scripture; and, illustrating the prophetic nature of the parables, lovingly guards us against the common, but erroneous, thought that, “Every point must not be pressed.” The tendency to deny inspiration practically, while holding it theoretically, is very harmful. Let the fruit of our study be much more reverence, in the enabling of the Holy Spirit, and

let it also be, (rather let us say, "therefore be"), more loving concern for the immediate bringing together of the Lord's scattered sheep, in preparation for the fuller revival He has graciously promised to welcome His near Coming.

Verse 13 continues in connexion with "the hireling." It is very evident how deeply the Lord felt concerning this. The earlier Scriptures (Ezek. 34) have already shown the same attitude, and the fullest recorded example of imitating the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 11. 1) in the New Testament presents the exact contrast with the spirit of the hireling (1 Cor. 9. 18, 1 Thess. 2. 5-9, &c., &c.). "But the HIRELING fleeth because he is an HIRELING": the repetition of the descriptive word is impressive, and the language used states an important principle. What we "do" is the fruit of what we "are." In like manner, "Out of the abundance of THE HEART the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12. 34), and as a man "thinketh in his HEART, so is he" (Prov. 23. 7). It is well to be searched. What "are" WE in reality? The question is not only "What are our actions on special occasions?" "Being" includes more than "doing." If one "IS" a hireling, the hireling-attitude comes out. God IS love, and His love must appear. He gave and gives. The Lord Jesus said, "I AM the Good Shepherd," and was not His shepherding love graciously displayed? Nor has He changed. His sheep can depend on Him.

Of the hireling we read "And careth not for the sheep." Yet more forcibly, "There is not a care to him concerning the sheep." The same expression is found in a very blessed contrast in 1 Peter 5. 7 "For there is a care belonging to Him concerning you."\* Yes, the unforced love of our gracious Father, and of our tender Shepherd should awaken our confidence, and love. And next we should ask ourselves, Have those of us who know Him learnt to feel the same innate "care" for His own? Paul said of Timothy, "I have no man likeminded, who will naturally (genuinely) care for your state: for all seek their own (the attitude of the hireling), not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Phil. 2. 20, 21).

Every emphasis on the failure of men leads up to the contrasted glory of Christ, so this passage continues "I am the Shepherd, the Good One, and know My sheep, and Mine know Me" (literally). The word "know" means far more than acquaintance (see 2 Tim. 2. 19), but it does include a

\* The same word is helpfully, and searchingly, used in John 12. 6, note also Luke 10. 40.

personal intimate acquaintance with each one, so that the Lord Jesus will not allow any to be missing. To the hireling the sheep are simply "a flock": to the Shepherd each one is precious. Ah, dear troubled believer, the Lord Himself knows you and takes an interest in you, and the driven away, and broken and sick are the very ones for whom He specially cares (Ezek. 34. 16, cf. 1 Cor. 12. 22, 23). How real is His love. Have you and I the right response to it?—"AND MINE KNOW ME." As with love, so with knowledge, His is first (1 John 4. 19), but ours should be second.

Absence of fruit dishonours the root. Do we KNOW Him—not to boast of this (Gal. 4. 9), but with the love that fears to grieve Him (1 Cor. 8. 3, 2 Pet. 3. 18)?

"As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father" (verse 15). "According as" would be a precious study in the gospel according to John, and the epistles (e.g. 14. 31, 15. 9, 10, 12, 17. 2, 11, 14, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23; 1 John 3. 2, 3, 7, 4. 17). The mutual love and knowledge of the Father and the Son are here strikingly before us. The inner and intimate knowledge is seen as perfect, and we call to mind such words as "in the bosom of the Father," and, with regard to the blessed unity in the days of His flesh, "the Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things that Himself doeth" (John 5. 20). Into the intimacy of this knowledge none can intrude. "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him" (Matt. 11. 27). It is a mercy that we have a privilege by revelation (see also Matt. 16. 17, Gal. 1. 16). And the two thoughts of John 6. 45, 14. 6 are precious "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father *cometh unto Me*," "No man *cometh unto the Father but by Me*." The added words in John 10. 15 associate the death of the Lord Jesus with this perfect knowledge. This was the will of the Father, but it was equally the joy of the Son, and thus was there no difference of love or purpose. A created being could not have presented the sacrifice, without making the love and gift of God the lesser, and without diminishing our wholehearted gratitude to God, but the Deity of our beloved Lord shines out in all His voluntary covenant obligations, and we behold the inseparable oneness of His love with the Father's. It is all so wonderful. KNOWING absolutely, and KNOWN absolutely, He laid down His life for the sheep, and thus our redemption is absolutely secured.

There can be no uncertainty: there were no unknown factors: contingency cannot come in to mar grace.

But may we not also link verse 15 with 14? "According as" does not only mean the degree, but it can, in certain contexts, indicate the ground and character of the knowledge. Thus we have the Shepherd knowing the sheep, and the sheep knowing Him, in accord with the Father's knowledge of Him, and His knowledge of the Father:—a beautiful fourfold knowing, and ours is through His. Is it not ever so? Ah, we should never have been brought to know Him, had there not been His own work. Our knowledge, moreover, takes its character from His: it is marked by love, and nearness. We may know a man by sight, but we know our Shepherd's heart. Do we not wish to know Him more, with the spontaneous confidence of a timid sheep?

"I lay down My life for the sheep." We have already thought of these words, but cannot think too much of them. Verses 11, 15, 17, 18 have been read, all having the same message. The Son of God loved, and gave HIMSELF (Gal. 2. 20). Twice in Ephesians 5 is this Divinely emphasized (verses 2 and 25). Do we show forth the fruit of His work? "Who gave *Himself* for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto *Himself* a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Tit. 2. 14). What manner of persons ought we to be!

Observe the language used by the Holy Spirit, "I *place* My soul." "Covenant" is from the same root, and in 1 Peter 2. 6 we have the firmly *placed* Foundation Stone. There was a definiteness, and there is a certainty, in the work of Christ. He Who set His face like a flint (Isa. 50. 7, cf. Luke 9. 51) will not fail (John 6. 39, 40). The word "soul" reminds of Leviticus 17. 11, "The *soul* of the flesh is in the *blood*, and I have *given* it to you upon the altar to make an atonement upon your *souls*." Praise be unto God, His soul was given for ours, and in the precious symbolism of the Lord's Supper, we see the two tokens of His sinless body and of His precious blood, in the soul (Deut. 12. 23). He withheld nothing. He *would* do everything for the sheep, even for those "given" to Him.

The practical bearing of such love is seen in 1 John 3. 16. "We ought to lay down our souls for the brethren" (cf. Rom. 16. 4). Not that we bear God's judgment. Our sphere is not on the altar (Lev. 2. 12), but outside the camp, *bearing* His reproach (Heb. 13. 12, 13). The Holy Spirit definitely distinguishes. In atonement He was alone. But the life of a

believer is to be transfigured. The twofoldness of our Lord's work is seen in 1 Peter 2. 21-25, and our privilege to "follow His steps," and to be rejected is set forth: but He alone "bare our sins in His own body." Onesidedness is ever the attempt of the enemy: full orb'd truth shows our full redemption, but ever has a practical note. The current denial of atonement is the setting aside of the only way whereby we, as redeemed ones, can follow His precious example.

"And other sheep I have." The loving interest, the intense interest of the Lord Jesus in His people, saved from all nations, ever shines out. He delighted to speak of them. And the many "anticipations" of Gentile believers, in the Old Testament, are before us—in the Gentile brides of Isaac, Joseph and Moses, in the deliverance of Rahab, and the inclusion of "Ruth the Moabitess," and the promise to Ebed-Melech, in the references to the "stranger," in such verses as Zechariah 6. 15, and in the blessing to the Gibeonites "the Nethinim" especially. "I have": the Lord's possession is marked out, yea, even before they are brought (John 6. 45, 17. 9, 10). Ephesians 1. 3 stands sure. "Which are not (out) of this fold": no relation to Judaism, and not brought, via Judaism, as the proselytes of old (Ex. 12. 43-45). Thus the term "sheep" is not limited to Israel, nor to Israelite believers. "Them also I must bring." The word "those" comes from the root of "there": it sometimes emphasizes distance, as in verse 6 where it may suggest the moral distance of those in spiritual darkness. But we rejoice in verse 16: we were far off, but are made near by the blood of Christ. The "must's" of redemption in this gospel are very precious, e.g. 3. 7; 14. And how beautiful are the two which suggest the salvation of Gentiles (4. 4, and 10. 16). The Lord Jesus will not fail, nor be discouraged. Hence there is the Divine "bringing," and we call to mind Luke 15. 5, 6, and also Hebrews 2. 10. Redeemed ones shall not be left halfway. There is no room for boasting: we "came" because we were "brought" (1 Pet. 2. 25). "And they shall hear My voice." God's grace ever works within: we were not dragged in our state of death, but were caused to love the Shepherd. The beginning is ever linked with hearing His Voice (John 5. 25), and the continuance in the same (John 10. 27).

O that our daily attitude may illustrate this. The true sheep in Israel's fold recognized the Shepherd's "voice," and the same characteristic is to be found in His people from the Gentiles. Such are attracted to Him, not to a fold, a religion,

or a system. Here is a helpful principle, and test for our love, "And there shall *become* one flock." This is the precious assured goal: but faith should ever seek to enjoy miniature anticipations (Eph. 4. 3). The enemy hates the unity of God's children, but our Father delights in it (Ps. 133. 1-3). The enemy would seek to substitute a Babylonian unity and friendship with the world (James 4. 4). May we be separated to the Lord, in the work of the Holy Spirit. It is very strange that the A.V. renders "one fold." The word is quite distinct, and is never so rendered elsewhere, and can only mean a flock, a living unity—a precious collective singular noun, containing the very same letters as the next word "Shepherd." Nor is this strange, we live because He lives, and all we have is from Him.

This glorious future is not uncertain: the "One Shepherd" is the Cause and Guarantee, if we may so express it. This thought has been before us in the Old Testament (Eccl. 12. 11). Various passages Psalm 23. 1, 80. 1, Jeremiah 49. 19 come to mind, and Zechariah 13. 7 reminds us of His atoning work. Yes, the prophecy of Jacob is clear. Every blessing is "by reason of the Name of the Shepherd" Who is also "The Stone of Israel" (Gen. 49. 24). And it is deeply interesting to see that as there will be the united blessedness of the heavenly and earthly Jerusalem, in the day when both the saints of the high places, and the people of the saints of the high places are exalted, the unity will be manifested throughout, and David too, raised from the dead, shall be the shepherd of a united people (Ezek. 34. 23, 24), under the One Who is essentially David's Lord (Ps. 110. 1), though He became his Son (Matt. 22. 45). Nothing of disunity among the risen saints, or among Israel (Isa. 11. 13), will mar "that Day."

And thus the climax in John 10 is the Lord Himself, and with His Name the parable ends. Yet the thought of the sheep is resumed in verse 27 "My sheep hear My voice and I know them, and they follow Me." We have already felt the force of these words, but it is well to hear them again and again, and ever in union with verse 28. "The sheep of His hand" are never to be plucked thence, and such are also the obedient "people of His pasture" (Ps. 95. 7), who "follow" Him. So the stones *in* the house itself are also the priesthood in 1 Peter 2, and those who become the "habitation" which Ephesians beautifully unveils are responsible, as the members of "the household of God." This twofoldness is emphasized throughout.

Life in the body is not viewed apart from the responsibilities of its “members,” and the branches in the True Vine, engrafted by grace, are bidden to “go and bring forth fruit” (John 15. 16). Have we not already seen that the Door of “the sheep” implies their inseparable and living relationship to Him? But they also “go in and out.” If I am deeply grateful that none shall snatch me from His hand, I must not misuse grace to forget “following” Him. Have I not two positions: in His hand and at His feet (Deut. 33. 3)? As soon as my “following” becomes the ground of confidence, I am misusing it, and failing to “follow.” The precious blending is again seen in Hebrews 5. 9 (“the *Author of eternal salvation* unto all them that obey Him”), and Isaiah 40. 11 speaks of His bosom AND His leading, though the thought is slightly different there. Grace never makes responsibility less important, nor does obedience make grace less necessary. The Holy Spirit reveals all in perfect proportion.

And thus those who were as sheep going astray, but are now returned to the Shepherd, and Bishop of their souls (1 Pet. 2. 25), utterly unlike the washed sow of 2 Peter 2, are called to rejoice in Him, and to manifest their true character at all times. Alas, there are still wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matt. 7. 15), and the fruitful life is the test (Matt. 7. 16). Moreover, till the Great Shepherd comes back (Heb. 13. 20, 21), even the Chief Shepherd, He has given under-shepherds to feed the flock of God (1 Pet. 5. 2), and this thought is precious throughout, nor is it omitted from the ministry of Paul, as some have imagined. Acts 20. 28 leads us to Ephesians 4. 11 where “Shepherds and teachers” are given because the members of the body are their Lord’s sheep. And thereby this beautiful figure shows us once more the importance of right relationship and food, and spiritual quietness (Ps. 23. 2), and the love and gentleness which should be manifested among the children of God, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And now we come to Matthew 25. 31-46. The *parable* itself is very brief, and the unveiling of the *King* is entwined. Ezekiel 34 seems to be brought before us by the Lord Jesus, though the twofold emphasis there on false shepherds who were actually no shepherds at all (cf. Zech. 11), and on a separation between cattle and cattle, and between strong and weak, seems somewhat distinct. The *principle* of separation is ever prominent in the Holy Scriptures. As in so many parables, two classes are found here, and only two. There are, in like manner, the wheat and the tares, and the two sons—not more—and the

two, not three, classes of virgins. The good and corrupt fish are severed, and the two ways of Matthew 7, with their two goals, may also be remembered. From the time of Cain and Abel do not we see this at all times, and is not its solemn message to unsaved souls of the deepest importance? Upon those who are "in Christ" is there not the responsibility to make known His one salvation?

The fulfilment of Matthew 25. 31 is "when the Son of man shall have come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him" (cf. Mark 8. 38). The contrast with His present sitting in heaven is seen by means of Revelation 3. 21 (cf. Ps. 110. 1). Our Lord will come in holy and righteous judgment. Who then are the "nations" to be gathered before Him?

There is no suggestion of godly *nations* as such: the address, in verses 34 and 41 alike, is definitely personal, and all the actions recorded illustrate this. The first saved nation is Israel (Isa. 60. 22): in spite of the rejection at first (Acts 3. 26). Where we read of "all the nations" blessed in Abraham (Gen. 22. 18) there is a precious promise, for fulfilment as Revelation 5. 9 shows. In like manner "Go ye therefore and teach (disciple) all the nations" in Matthew 28. 19 at once passes to the baptism of believing individuals (cf. Mark 16. 16). Romans 1. 5, 4. 17, 18, 16. 26 will illustrate this. The contrast (cf. the word "world"), is often with Israel. But who then are these persons? What does the Lord Jesus say concerning them? The sheep (in Matthew 25. 31-46)

- (a) "have been blessed"—this is fundamental;
- (b) are to inherit a long-prepared kingdom;
- (c) have shown love to those characterized as His "brethren";
- (d) do not seem to understand the revealed principle of Matthew 11. 4 and Acts 9. 4;
- (e) have apparently lived through a time of persecution for God's dear children;
- (f) are not reckoned as particularly sharers in suffering that persecution.

There is no mention of *believers* here, before the Judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5. 10), nor do we find the *dead* raised up as in Revelation 20. 12 before the great white throne. It is not for us, therefore, to confuse these distinct subjects.

That there will be a time of special persecution for God's dear people just before, (and at), the ending of this age is clear, and the special attempt to hinder eating and drinking by the mandate of Revelation 13. 17 would emphasize the words "I

was an hungered" (cf. Rev. 7. 16). Who will be found on earth in the time of that great tribulation? Does not Daniel 7 speak of (a) the saints of the Most High, and (b) the people of the saints of the Most High (verses 21, 25, 27)? Are there not, moreover, (c) Gentiles from all nations who at the beginning of the Lord's kingdom will serve Him (Zech. 8. 20-23), and (d) some far off, who have not heard His fame, nor seen His glory (Isa. 66. 19), as well as (e) the army of Antichrist (Rev. 19. 19), and (f) others who have received the mark of the beast?

Hence we can understand the emphasis on God's sovereign grace. Neither Revelation 13. 8 nor 17. 8 suggest that only believers will be preserved from worshipping the Beast. Election rather than "faith" is here especially emphasized. This would seem absolutely fitting, if there are those included who do not yet know the Lord, and yet are held back from doing that which *must* be punished eternally (Rev. 14. 9, 10), though unconscious "why," till afterwards. Thus all Scriptures agree, and we see how Satan's plan is frustrated, and the glory of God's grace shines out once more, emphasizing anew the precious undying words, of One Who shall see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied, "that the saying might be fulfilled which He spake, Of them which Thou gavest Me I should lose none" (John 18. 9, cf. 6. 37). Glory be to God!

5 This key fits the lock. It explains the beautiful words "having been blessed." The "for" of Matthew 25. 35 is evidential, not causal, just as in Luke 7. 47 where the whole point is love because of forgiveness, not forgiveness because of love (verse 42). The power of restraining grace is glorious. We call to mind Romans 11. 4, "I have reserved to Myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal": this does not suggest that Elijah was ignorant of many witnesses for God's truth, but that there was "a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. 11. 5), who had been kept back from idolatry. God's restraining hand is seen in Genesis 20. 6, and may we not see it in the mercy that watched over Saul of Tarsus (1 Tim. 1. 16)? The language of John 10. 16 is helpful ("sheep" before they are brought), and there is much hidden in the order of the words in Jude 1 "preserved, called."

Now we realize why these "sheep," who have manifested kindness to God's people, and refused the mark of the beast, are quite ignorant of the intimate relation of the Lord Jesus to His members. Everything harmonizes, and we thank God that He can use whom He pleases, as in Acts 28 (note Prov. 21. 1).

Everything is before His eyes, subject to His power, and within His knowledge. Those who are graciously called "His brethren" are evidently those of whom Matthew 12. 50 speaks (cf. Heb. 2. 11). Thus we see believers, in living relationship to Him, suffering under Antichrist, yet some preserved, for the period has been made short (Matt. 24. 22, *not* shortened from the revealed 1260 days), albeit others are slain (Rev. 6. 11, 12. 16, 17, 20. 4). "As for God, His way is perfect," and our times are in His hand.

It is enjoyable to realize that the same word is used for those redeemed in Matthew 25 and John 10. We are quite conscious that the Holy Spirit can use similar figures with different meaning, but He condescends to make this clear, and when the same picture, or type, is employed for those who are alike blessed, we may be sure there is a definite purpose, and that we shall find a helpful parallel. And are not those who will be preserved from identifying themselves with Antichrist, even though they know not Christ as Lord, nor His gracious restraining at the outset, loved with the same love that led our Lord to Calvary for us, and will not the exceeding riches of God's grace be seen in a united people to all eternity?

Meanwhile, we wait the return of the 'Great Shepherd of the sheep (Heb. 13. 20), and long that, instead of the hireling spirit, there may be more pastoral love of under-shepherds, subject to the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5. 4) in our own hearts, and in the hearts of others. The intensely practical meaning of these parables, and all Scripture, both as to our gratitude to the Lord, and our relation to one another, can never be overlooked. How precious should be the unity of saints, and how real our use of the Lord's pasture day by day. Psalm 23 is not only for childhood's learning but for sainthood's experience. The Holy Spirit makes Holy Scripture living.

The believer's path is not easy. Children of God are still sent forth as sheep in the midst of wolves (Matt. 10. 16), and thus are very dependent on continual miracles of grace, the more so as Matthew 7. 15 is not without saddening illustrations. But Hebrews 1. 14 reminds us of our Father's watchful care. Everything needful is provided, and have we not proved the constant faithfulness of "the Shepherd and Bishop" (or Overseer) of our souls (1 Pet. 2. 25)? But He, Who graciously uses many "means," condescends to employ "one another." Hence the important threefold restoration of Peter in John 21, with its various words for sheep and lambs, indicates the deep and loving interest we should have in the differ-

ent temperaments and conditions of different children of God, that all may be helped forward, and shepherded and fed aright. How real is the emphasis on the supply of the true *food*: there is no pasture to compare with the words of God. Do we feed aright, and lead others to the same precious supplies?

In the Book of Revelation our beloved Lord is revealed rather as the *Lamb*, and His death is prominently before us as the One Sacrifice for His covenant people; but the Lamb Himself has there the ministry of the Shepherd, and feeds, and leads, in chapter 7. 17 (cf. Ps. 28. 9). Thus His sheep will not cease to look to Him, nor will His shepherding love vary, though their need, and the valley of the shadow of death, and the wild beasts of earth will no more be found. Glory be to God that nothing will change our relationship to Him though earth's trials will be past. Eternity will illustrate His love, but will never exhaust it. Praise and joy and readiness to do His will, without one flaw, will be our blessed response. May these meditations on Scripture be used by the Holy Spirit to bring more into this attitude to-day.

*“ If any man speak, as the oracles of God ; if any man minister, as of the ability which God giveth, that GOD IN ALL THINGS MAY BE GLORIFIED through Jesus Christ, to Whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever, Amen.” 1 Peter 4, 11.*

No. 6. FREE.

*“A Certain Man made a great Supper and bade many: and sent His Servant at Supper Time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now Ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse.”*

*Luke 14. 16-18.*

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# THE PARABLES OF THE LORD JESUS Concerning Feasts

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*“Go out into the Highways, and Hedges, and compel them to come in that My House may be filled.”*

*Luke 14. 23.*

*“Write, Blessed are they which are called into the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.”*

*Revelation 19. 9.*

# THE PARABLES CONCERNING FEASTS.

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**T**HE emphasis on hospitality was ever to the front in the East: we notice this as soon as Abraham received the heavenly Visitors, nor was it otherwise with Lot. Moreover, God has always given instruction by means of the body which He has created, and He has appointed the way in which we receive its nourishment, in order to afford many typical lessons as to the taking, enjoying, and assimilating of His precious truth, which thereby becomes part of ourselves. Accordingly from Genesis 1 onward He mentions food; for example, immediately after the fall, and the flood, instructing both Adam and Noah concerning it, and linking it, moreover, with Israel's exodus, and with the new covenant alike. We may be sure there are deep spiritual lessons. O that we, while pondering the Scripture, may partake with joy thereof, and receive His teaching into our very being.

The Lord Jesus was pleased to speak of eating in various parables. Some have been already considered, as those of the contrasted old and new wine in Luke 5, and the friend at midnight in Luke 11. 5-8, and a feast was prepared for the welcomed son, the prodigal, or rather the lost one who was found. Shall we now meditate on the Lord's message regarding *places* at a wedding (Luke 14. 7-11), and the parallel, yet contrasted, feasts of Matthew 22. 1-14 and Luke 14. 12-24? Afterwards the lessons of Matthew 24. 45-51 and of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25. 1-13) may be used to God's glory in our lives.

In accord with the Lord's order, we would ponder Luke 14. 7-11 before the later "invitation" parable. Naturally we should be inclined to reverse. But only as the condition of humility here before us is illustrated can we rightly understand the following Scriptures. How definitely our Lord gives a similar message in Luke 18. 14, which should be read with 16. 15. Do we think anything of ourselves, either as to the first welcome, or as to our service after salvation? O that it may not be so. The Lord Jesus always searchingly beheld "*how*" men acted (Luke 14. 7). We cannot be too lowly in manner, because of lowliness in heart. So much literature to-day tends to another standpoint, and one is painfully conscious of the constant need for God's inner reproofs against

self being lifted up. It is not for us to say what "place" is ours. The lowest or last, room, or place, should be the one taken. Paul knew something of this as he wrote "less than the least of all saints" (Eph. 3. 8). This was not mock-modesty. He knew he had received instruction and responsibilities beyond many, but he also knew that, to whom men commit much, of him they will ask the more. Hence he could not even begin to commend himself. Only the Lord can analyze and weigh up His people and their service: "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come" (1 Cor. 4. 5). If only we could realize our unworthiness more without excusing our failures, there would be richer blessing. The spirit of pride is stronger than we are aware.

There is a "threefoldness" in Luke 14, as in chapter 15, so we must not overlook the message of verses 12-14. How definitely is the peril of self-seeking set forth a second time, and thus we reach the record of the great *supper*, which has so often provided a gospel message. Thanks be unto God for the precious words "Come; for all things are now ready." But do they not remind us of Matthew 22. 4 where we have a *breakfast* or early *dinner*? May not this come before us first, and the *supper* after? We can be sure that the Lord Jesus indicates some distinction. Let our prayerful study be deep, but let it be full of that love to our Lord, and to souls, which buys up the opportunity to "bid to the marriage."

The King made the feast for His Son. This was His object: He had none other. No one else was joined with His Son. How many parables set forth the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus. The previous context (in ch. 21: there are no chapter breaks in Scripture) leads up to this the more emphatically—the Heir and the Headstone. The first invitations here are with a view to His glory. There are not two dinners. Our joy (and there is joy) is ever wrapped up in *His* exaltation. The servants were first sent to *call* those who had been *called*: the same word is repeated: this would seem to refer to Israel, to whom the law (and the prophets) had given a preparatory message, and thus we see that this also was with a view to Christ (John 15. 46). The servants of verse 3 are distinguished from those before and after. We are not told the time of their ministry: if the singular were used we should think of John the Baptist inasmuch as from his ministry the definite and open invitation began (Matt. 3. 2, 11. 13, Luke 16. 16), although the prophets led up to this (Acts 3. 24, 1 Pet. 1. 10, 11). It is true that in one parable there is often a two-

foldness, and He Who was Son took upon Himself the form of a Servant, and Himself witnessed, confirming and amplifying the testimony of John (Matt. 4. 17, see John 3. 11 with 32). This might make the words "Again He sent *other* servants" of verse 4 easier to understand, interpreting with regard to the apostles' message, *after* the sacrifice was killed, and all things were made ready, which we observe is not stated in verse 3. But if the testimony of those whom the Lord sent out before His death (Matt. 10. 7) is included in verse 3, the "other servants" would seem to refer to the ministry of such as Stephen and Paul, and those who were rejected among Israel till the very judgment of verse 7 came upon Jerusalem (1 Thess. 2. 16). We put both thoughts before God's dear children: He may grant us further help, as we wait: it is so important not to hasten to conclusions.

Let us observe that a difference of interpretation in such a matter is quite distinct from a difference of doctrine. Both thoughts *may* be included here: both are in harmony with Scripture truth: there is no antagonism between them: the only point is "What is the special application of this verse?" It is well to be kept humble before God as to every detail.\* But whoever the servants were in verse 3 they were sent to Israel (note Matt. 10. 5, 6, 15. 24), and the twice-called ones still refused. "They were not willing to have come." The verbs used, and the tenses also, emphasize a sad condition of heart. There was an attitude of "will," and it continued fixedly against the tender words of welcome. Such is man, even amid religious ceremonies, and though outwardly earnest. How much we need God's work on, and in, our "wills" (Ps. 110. 3, note John 5. 40).

"Again He sent forth other servants."

This was plainly a further definite witness. We are slow to realize the mercy whereby God sent especially to Israel after the rejection of His beloved Son. This is before us in Acts, even in more distant parts (13. 46, 28. 28), and Romans 1. 16

\*It is helpful to ponder with Matthew 21. 34-37. Thereby we see God's longsuffering and continued witness (Jer. 25. 3). The parable of the householder does not begin with "The Kingdom of heaven is like." It is earlier in fulfilment, for the coming of the Lord is viewed as **last** here (hence the wider term "Kingdom of God" in verse 43: how exact is the language of Scripture). The two detachments of servants here **may** indicate the former and latter prophets (Zech. 1. 4): in this way chapter 22 follows very searchingly. O that we may respond to all God's testimony, and that we may not have the hardness of heart here unveiled.

illustrates. The message here recorded was addressed to those bidden. We are not to draw hurried inferences, and assume the Gentiles were forgotten, or that the message of Matthew 28. 18-20 is different. The Lord Jesus was speaking to Israel, and showing the tenderness that would be long suffering to Israel. The taking away of the kingdom (Matt. 21. 43), and stewardship (Luke 16. 2), and of God's house (Matt. 23. 38), long preceded the actual scattering and burning. We remember how the Shekinah glory of the Lord waited in the visions of Ezekiel. "Behold, I have prepared My dinner: My oxen and fatlings are killed, and all things are ready." The words "prepared" and "ready" are from the same root: this emphasis is important: all is God's work. When He makes aught ready it *is* ready. We call to mind, "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed" (Jer. 17. 14, contrast 51. 9). How blessed is His perfect work. As the many sacrifices in the types pictured but one Saviour, may it not be so here? Is it strange that when the personal appreciation of His work is before us, as *that* varies, there are different sacrifices? The work *before* God and in its fulfilment of His claims is one. But when a type is employed, that must fail, and why not indicate this in number as well as character? "Come unto the marriage." A renewed word of invitation, and an emphasis on the purpose. That remains unchanged: the Son must, as ever, be exalted. The "other servants" had the one message (see Acts 19. 4, 26. 22, 23), but the testimony to Israel first (Acts 3. 26) could now include the fact that everything was finished and prepared. Yet Luke 16. 31 was solemnly illustrated.

But there was a remnant (Rom. 9. 6, 11. 5), and it is important to see that God's purpose stands, and the last verse of this very parable indicates this (Matt. 22. 14). But how clearly the failure of man as to all outward "calling" makes evident the need for the inner call of sovereign power (Rom. 8. 30), and how grateful we should be that this has reached unto us. Yet the rejection by man does not make our preaching unnecessary. God keeps on sending (Jer. 25. 4). Those who hold back from gospel responsibilities because of man's ruined condition, or by misusing the grace of God in election, are quite out of harmony with the Lord Jesus. Those called to preach the gospel of peace must go, whether men hear or forbear. And observe the character of their message. God Himself indicates this. It begins with "Behold": there is a dignity and a definiteness. Men *ought* to give attention. "I have prepared" shows authority, in sounding forth the message

from God and His words. The blessedness of the gospel must be declared, and its sacrificial basis. We are not merely to preach law and judgment, but ever to emphasize the work of Christ on Calvary. And then a definite invitation, yea, a command is given in His Name. Nor is the mode of ministry changed in approaching the Gentiles (9). We do not preach to the elect as elect, but to sinners as sinners. The hearers are accountable to "come." But it is not for us to modify the gospel entrusted to us, in another way. The "pearl-promises" of the gospel are not to be scattered. The fact of the sacrifice is asserted but we do not add, "It is for you, whether you come or not." The Holy Spirit will apply. We are to say "Come," and we have no doubt that all who come will find the feast is for them, but if we affirm that all who hear are within the substitutionary work of Christ, we deny that it is really substitutionary for any. Though the desire in adding may be to glorify and enforce His work, (cf. those who did not obey His instructions, Matt. 9. 31), we dishonour Him when we lean to our own understanding. Is it not sufficient to proclaim that God's appointed sacrificial work has been fully done, and that all is ready, and to say "Come"? This is definite, and our manner should be one of love and earnestness, but let us never degrade the work of Him for Whom the marriage is made. The guests are His. All is for His glory and joy, and He shall yet see of "the travail of His soul."

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"But they made light of it, and went their ways." This is emphasized by Christ in Luke 14 also. A man does not need to be an atheist to be against the Lord. The awful sin of indifference must never be overlooked. And this has a further thought for our own hearts. Where is our fervency regarding the gospel? It is sad if the hearers make light, but they are unsaved. Is it not still sadder if saved ones make light, and neglect the giving of the invitation. I do not refer only to public preaching and special occasions. Are we putting aside the feast which has cost our Heavenly Father so dear, and are earthly home ties and business and pleasures forcing the gospel into a secondary place? It is so easy to see this sin in "broader" so-called churches, with concerts and social evenings, but this passage shows merchandise and farm may hinder those who hear, and is it not sadly possible that necessary things, right in their place, are not always subordinate to the will of God? Are we not often too comfortable? Do we not run to our own houses, and is not God's house lying waste

(Hag. 1. 4, 10). O beloved fellow believers, do we not need revival, with its intensity? I feel it as I write, and you will feel it as you read, but let us pray for grace to do more than feel. Making light is easier than we think: a partial disregard: a making of first things second (Matt. 6. 33) is robbing God (Mal. 3. 8). The peril of right things in the wrong place is very real. Observe the difference between Zechariah 7. 6 and 1 Corinthians 10. 31. The farm is beautiful: it is a reminder of faith in God for daily food. But it may stand in between us and the Lord. The word "his" here is important: it denotes "our own," and we see the holy contrast in Acts 4. 32. Every part of our life comes up for *review*. This not only concerns gospel testimony, but our own prayer life, worship, the assembly, and its privileges, weekday meetings, etc., etc. O that we may not spurn our Lord's delight in His people. The harlot cares nothing for the Bridegroom: the bride should love Him intensely. But in Song 5. 2 she kept Him outside, and so is it in Revelation 3. 20. May we never cruelly undervalue what is dear to Him.

The "remnant" were outwardly opposed. They "took His servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them." We think of Stephen, and the pleasure of Jews in the death of James. "I was outrageous" says Paul (1 Tim. 1. 13), using the noun from the same root. Here we see what the Lord's servants must be willing to expect, in the present dispensation. Do men of Israel or of the Gentiles make an attack on any who read these lines? Do not feel embittered. Remember the words, "Father, forgive them," and how Stephen prayed. The marvellous thing is that we are not suffering more. Is it partly our own fault through compromise? Are we willing to die for Christ? There is no thought of a saved nation, till the Lord Jesus thus blesses the remnant on His return (Rom. 11. 26). There is no thought of uncertainty, and a presentation to Israel, with the thought all *might* repent. But yet the message was given, and is to be given. 1 Corinthians 15. 30, 31, 2 Corinthians 11. 24, and 1 Thessalonians 2. 14-16 should speak to our hearts.

Now the King acts. It is important to see His patience. But sin cannot be excused. A holy wrath of One Who is inflexibly holy is not to be likened to human temper. Retribution is righteous. The King "sent forth His armies": observe He did not send the servants of verse 3, nor even those who ministered (another word) in verse 13. Armies were under His control. But did not the Romans burn Jerusalem? Un-

doubtedly. Here we see God's controlling authority, "The powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13. 1). We call to mind, "O Assyrian, the rod of *Mine* anger, and the staff in their hand is *Mine* indignation: *I will send* him against an hypocritical nation." How important is this that believers may have simple confidence in God: earth's history is not mere chance. The theory that God is not acting at all, in the present time, confuses two thoughts. Luke 21. 22 is quite clear that there can be "days of vengeance" even in the dispensation when grace is so strikingly manifested. This corrects many errors in prophetic interpretation, and helps us regarding God's manifest dealings with Israel. But the King's *Son* did not act: He sits. "The wrath of the Lamb" does not come till "that Day." Scriptural language is perfect.

The murderers were destroyed. The Son of God had been slain earlier (Acts 3. 15, 7. 52). Would the nation repent? Alas, when prophets and apostles were sent, some of them also were slain (Luke 11. 49, 50). And so, after *forty* years' waiting, the city where many were murderers (Isa. 1. 21) must be laid low, and over a million perished therein. Who could write the horrors of that siege? "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." "Their city": no longer *His* city. Compare "Your house is left unto you desolate." Before, it was "My Father's house." But Zion *shall* be redeemed, and become the city of truth. Yet now it is still trodden down by the nations: the redemption will be when the Redeemer comes to Zion. "The times of the Gentiles" or "nations" will fully run out. There is no failure nor haste in God's plan, in God's chronology. Meanwhile, the King's *Son* still sits "until" (Ps. 110. 1). He takes no action, and it is His people's privilege to stand outside all earth's politics and vengeance. They were the slain, not slaying, messengers of verse 6, and no resistance came from them. And they continue their testimony, as verse 8 shows. Verse 7 does not belong to them. They have the gospel of peace, and the gospel of peace alone.

"Then saith He to His servants, The wedding is ready." It is delightful to realize that the wedding was not destroyed. Even as "the way of the tree of life," when Adam sinned, it was "kept." There was no defect on the King's part. No usual wedding breakfast is held waiting for years! This thought, full of encouragement, should be first on our hearts before the difficulty. The word "then" looks as if verse 8 historically succeeds the burning. Is it so? This word does not always mean "after that": it may denote "at that time."

Is then the time that of the war, or that of verse 6, the seventh being parenthetical? When we realize that some years elapsed after the death of such as Stephen and James, and the *breadfast* was still spread, we are conscious that time is *not* reckoned here as we count it, but rather from God's standpoint. The open rejection by Israel *led up* to the destruction of Jerusalem, and to the preaching of the gospel among the Gentiles. But the armies were not despatched at once, while the principle of Acts 13. 46, 51 was evidently soon applied. This would show that we have here the *two* results of Israel's refusal in different spheres, one brief, the other for a long time. Moreover, the present tense in verse 8 must not be overlooked. It is not found in verse 7: it may denote the quick action of the King after verse 6, or its continuance still. "He keeps on saying." Both thoughts are helpful. Certainly the historical fulfilment did *not* leave the proclamation to the Gentiles till after the solemn year "70," though, blessed be God, the awful events then, (prophesied even in Deuteronomy 28), did not hinder the *continued* gospel to all nations. Thus this passage illustrates Acts 3. 26 and 28. 28. And the holy wrath of the King was shown in warning (1 Thess. 2. 16) before the consummation in the destruction of the city and of the house left to Israel "desolate." Neither verse 7 nor verse 8 can be possibly taken as a matter of a few days, but they describe two parallel "histories," the first one as Luke 11. 49-51 sadly foretold. But the message of the King to His servants emphasizes His invitation still going forth to-day. O that we may hear His voice, and fulfil our loving responsibility.

"The wedding on the one hand *is* ready, on the other hand they which were bidden (have been called) *were* not worthy." How striking the contrast and the tenses: no fault in the marriage, all the fault is in men. Called, called, called—but not ready, nor "worthy." Again Acts 13. 46 comes before us. Can we congratulate ourselves that we were worthy? Nay. "Worthy is the Lamb That was slain." The principle of Deuteronomy 9. 5 applies to us when we read these lines (see Rom. 11. 19, 20). We cannot be too humble.

"Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find bid to the marriage." Those who have "Come" (Matt. 11. 28) are to go. The message is to all nations (Matt. 28. 20). Wherever there is a "tongue" there is a gospel (Rev. 5. 9). The expression "highways" has been rendered "thoroughfares of the highways," "partings of the highways," and "crossings of the highways," i.e. wherever there is a way

out, or across—a holy encouragement to go everywhere, for every available road is to be sought. And “as many as ye shall find” implies every available person is to be approached and invited. There is no question as to race, religion, respectability, or antecedents. The “colour” question does not come in here. The gospel is world wide, and we are to “bid,” or “call,” for it is the same word. It is not for us to give, not for us to “offer,” not for us to promise, not for us to decide, not for us to reason; we are simply to call and invite, yea, and command (for such is the call), in God’s Name. Are we doing this? Do we “find,” or do we wait till *men* come? Do we invite to *our* meetings, to hear us, to exalt man, or is the marriage feast dear to our hearts? The glory of Christ is all-important. The feast is for Him.

“*Those* servants went out.” They were obedient. They had, as we have seen, nothing to do with the war, theirs was the message of mercy to all,—any of Israel met are still to be invited as part of “*all nations*.” There is still one feast, one gospel, one invitation and, thanks be unto God, one welcome.

“They gathered,”—the invitation brought many together. The “finding” did not make them acceptable, the fact they were thus “found” was sufficient for the messenger. A different finding was that of the Shepherd when He placed on His shoulders. “Both bad and good.” These words are simple, in connexion with an earthly feast, but in the light of casting out of one who came in his own robe, and of Luke 14. 21, may not the bad be the ones who knew their need, and the “good” those who thought themselves rich? Certainly before God there is “none righteous, no not one,” and Luke 14. 13 confirms this thought.

Does an unsaved soul read these lines? There is no hindrance in sinnership, but there is a deadly peril in pride. Do not think you are “good”: the one who regarded himself as possessed of something was thrust out. How blessed is grace to a lost sinner. We cannot discriminate, we are to invite all, but do not ignore the message “All things are ready.” You have nothing, and can bring nothing. God sees the heart, we do not, but we would, in love’s faithfulness, seek to warn against all deceiving of oneself. None can deceive God.

“And the wedding was furnished with guests.” There is the thought of a great number. And, blessed be God, He has provided for many. The wedding was *filled*, literally. We think of the further filling of Luke 14. 23 from which none are cast out! But it is marvellous to think that now the gospel

feast, the breakfast, leading up to the Supper of "that Day," with its rich food because of *the Sacrifice*, remains spread. It is not yet finished. The first century and the twentieth are alike in the welcome. The gospel is to be partaken: it is to refresh: it is to become part of the very lives of those who receive, and who receive in fellowship one with another, and in love to the King's Son, and to His glory, as this parable shows.

"And when the King came in." Yes, He came in: He was not unmindful. He came in with a purpose, not to see the feast, (He knew that was rightly prepared), but to see the guests, and to behold the attitude of each one. Observe that we have the King throughout. He made the feast, He sent the servants, He was angry, He sent His armies, He came in. The King's Son is awhile not mentioned. Why? The Lord Jesus is now acting in a special way, seated on the heavenly throne to intercede for His own. He is not sending armies, nor is He "casting out" in judgment. He will soon arise, but at the present He waits. This, we remark once more, does not hinder God the Father's continual exercise of supreme authority. Hence there can be definite acts of holy wrath in a day of salvation without changing the *character* of that day. God's silence (Ps. 50. 3) does not mean that He has abdicated. This helps very definitely when some believers cannot understand the events of Revelation 5 and 6 until the 6th seal, in man's day. Yet they must acknowledge, as we have seen, the days of vengeance of Luke 21. 22 were permitted in this dispensation (cf. 1 Thess. 2. 16). And so the King came in. The King's Son *will* come, but at present He waits. When His bride is prepared, He will come. The feast is ready for a completed number of ready guests. How perfect the unveiling of Scripture.

The guests were seen. They could not escape His searching eyes (Ps. 11. 4). One man is singled out. Why? Has he opposed the invitation as those who made light of it? At first we answer readily, "Quite the reverse: he has come." What then is his guilt? O how definite is God's emphasis on the *commission* of sin linked with, and contained in, *omission*. He has *not* been clothed with a wedding garment. The Holy Spirit's wording implies that he never had this robe. The thought is deeply solemn. He was "there," He wished to be "there," but in his own way. The wedding garment was provided: all were to be alike. No one was to come, like Adam and Eve, in fig leaves of self-righteousness. There was to be no patchwork: God allows of no mixture, no compromise. The robe

of Isaiah 61. 10 must be possessed, or it is impossible to partake of the feast. *All* things are ready, not only the food. It is not necessary to commit robbery or murder, to be lost. The omission of entrance into the ark meant judgment in the days of Noah: the omission of coming to Christ means judgment to-day. The garment is a gift, but it must be possessed, and it must be worn. It is worthy of notice that he who had not "*on*" (the tense implies it was never on) had not the garment at all (cf. verses 11 and 12). How blessed it is to be "sitting and clothed," and in our right mind (Mark 5. 15).

The question is plain, as in Genesis 3. 9, 11. God gave space for a repentant answer, even to Cain on the second occasion (Gen. 4. 9 after verse 6). "Friend": not the word of John 15. 14, James 2, 23, but rather of Matthew 20. 13; 26. 50, and only in this gospel. It is a courteous mode of address, and remarkable from the King, but not indicative of the intimacy which the Lord Jesus has graciously associated with the other word (John 15. 15). There was an opportunity to confess pride or wilfulness, carelessness or neglect. "*How* camest thou in hither?" We should have expected the question "Why?" But the distinction is important. "How?" might at first appear to imply, "How couldst thou have so despised the gift?" But it seems rather to suggest that he had entered apart from the door. We at once call to mind John 10. 1. Those who acknowledge "the Way" must recognize "the Righteousness of God." There are many unappointed ways "into" the Marriage Breakfast, but only one appointed Way into the Supper. Not all are brought to realize their danger and guilt now: not all are unmasked. But the King *can* act even here, and give a warning. May it not be that this is recorded to deter others, that they may not presume? How blessed is the contrast of Philippians 3, "That I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by (on) faith." Reader, is this gift yours? You cannot enjoy the gospel feast unless you have a complete Saviour. And God Himself has appointed the figure of a robe, with its unity and beautiful texture, with a purpose. And a robe is to be seen, even more than we ourselves are seen. O how perfect is the Divine wisdom in the choice of every type and symbol.

"And (rather, *but*) he was speechless." No word of repentance. And no word of excuse was possible. Here we have a striking anticipation of the future, when every mouth will be stopped, and all the world be brought in guilty before God (Rom.

3. 19, Rev. 20. 12). In humbling, yet refreshing, contrast we read of boldness in the day of judgment (1 John 4. 17), and the words of the psalmist ring out, "My tongue shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness," "My tongue shall talk of Thy righteousness all the day long" (Ps. 51. 14, 71. 15, 16, 24). If the Lord Himself has thus opened our lips, our gratitude may well resound here and now. We dare not be silent. Speechless or praiseful—which are we?

"Then said the King to the servants." The word "then" is impressive. The critical moment was now past. The opportunity of confession did not remain indefinitely. As with Cain, and with Jezebel in Revelation 2, it was not taken. We can well realize how some tender soul will misconstrue this, and conceive that his, or her, time has passed. Ah, dear reader, the fact that you are still here to mourn, and that you are concerned as to whether your time is over, is a refreshing proof otherwise. The devil would seek to torment those whom he cannot lull to indifference and sleep. But God's tender mercy spares you, and He does not send these tormenting thoughts.

"The servants" are distinguished from those of verses 3 and 4 (and from the armies of verse 7). A different word is used. As in Matthew 13. 30 (distinguished from 27), there may be a reference to angelic ministrations. Discipline is indeed entrusted to an assembly of God (1 Cor. 5), but not the binding of hand and foot. Of old the priests of Israel were dedicated to God on ear, hand and foot (Ex. 29. 20), and the laver was then used to cleanse the hands and feet that followed an obedient ear. The cleansed leper was likewise anointed (Lev. 14. 14, 17), and the ear was always first. We can neither *do* nor *walk* to God's glory till we *hear* His voice. This man had refused to hear. Hence the binding of hand and foot. The hand had chosen his own clothing, the foot had come his own way. Both were bound. And the removal was complete. The true light is ever in God's presence. In contrast is the outer darkness, found also in Matthew 8. 12, 25. 30. 2 Peter 2. 17 and Jude 13 come to mind. Our beloved Lord does not overlook sin, nor veil realities. It is cruel to modify truth, or extenuate sin. The two ways and two goals are ever set plainly before us. How frequently is the great antithesis seen in the parables. There is no *via media*: no third alternative is possible. Men are either saved, or lost. Though there are distinctions in glory, and in judgment, there are only two places.

And then occur words which show clearly the unchanged character of those who are condemned. "There shall be weeping

and gnashing of teeth.” Once are they found in Luke (13. 28), and six times in Matthew. Apart from the two passages already mentioned (8. 12, 25. 30), we observe 13. 42, 50. 24. 51. Thus a sevenfold witness gives a sevenfold warning. The reality of pain and consciousness, and the fact of continued opposition are all emphasized. There is no hint of repentance, and the same word “ shall be ” bears its definite testimony. “ There ” reminds us of a real place in contrast with the same word in verse 11. The attempt of the enemy to hide these certainties is only part of his plan to “ deceive ” the whole world. It is our responsibility to give a trumpet call, that some, awakened by God’s grace, may seek Him while He may be found. “ Universalism ” is a delusive snare of the devil.

“ For many are called, but few are chosen ” is the impressive conclusion, looking back to verse 9 as well as verses 3 and 4. The invitation is world-wide. Some utterly disregard the call. But now we see it is not enough to heed the outward message, and give a respectful attention to the gospel. How many are “ apparently ” impressed. The stony ground hearers are still numerous. Many, yes, many indeed are called, but this does not prove they are saved. In an earlier chapter “ many ” and “ few ” are seen in the broad way and the narrow. It is easy to remain in the broad way, though called. A parallel passage in Luke (13. 23, 24) reminds us that “ many ” will speak of the Lord’s presence and teaching (verse 26), and yet will be outside the closed door in that Day. O that the word “ many ” may ring in our ears. *Nominal* “ Christian countries ” are before us, and the wealth of Christendom’s profession, but where is the humble and contrite heart which God does not despise? It is possible to be among the “ many ” and to come, expecting the feast, but with something of one’s own, some “ robe ” of self, some confidence in the flesh. The sinner *must* take the position where God places him, and own he is utterly lost, and can give nothing, do nothing, bring nothing. It is not enough to hear the voice of a man. God’s voice must be acknowledged in the heart, and when, in mercy, this humble attitude is taken, we own our unworthiness, and ascribe all glory to Him, even for the fact that our eyes are opened to see our filthiness and need (Rom. 11. 7). We may not understand all His way, but we cannot omit unqualified praise for *absolute* grace. And, thanks be unto God, if we are reminded of the large number whose profession is only outward, there are some who are truly saved. “ Few ” tells of grace reigning, and the little flock is a reality. And, gathered from all lands, they will be, all together, a great multitude that

no man can number. And those who are “ called and chosen ” show the fruit of God’s gracious work, with the precious effect set forth in Revelation 17. 14, “ called, and chosen, and faithful.” May this, by mercy, be our characteristic, in the enabling of the Holy Spirit, day by day.

And now, with the Lord’s enabling, we are more prepared to meditate on the feast of Luke 14. 16-24. There are many parallels with Matthew but also contrasts, and we may be sure each distinction has a Divine message for us. Shall we notice some?—

- (1) The thought of a King and of judgment is not specially before us in Luke 14 (“ a certain man ”).
- (2) Different servants are not sent, but ONE throughout.
- (3) The attitude of defiance is not recorded: only “ polite ” indifference, and the sad, sad emphasis of other things first. (Let the practical application and searching in our own life be ever felt).
- (4) Those **led in**, (not only led together), are “ the poor and maimed and lame and blind ”; none others.
- (5) Instead of one seat being emptied, **one** place, till then empty, must be finally occupied. (There is no plural “ them ” in verse 23, but the italicized type shows a human addition).
- (6) A gracious “ compulsion ” is here mentioned.
- (7) The “ house ” is then seen as “ filled.”

Though the King is not mentioned, the background is, “ Happy is he who shall eat bread in the **kingdom** of God.” Omission and a different relative emphasis do not imply necessarily an entire contrast. Holy authority and anger are seen in this parable also (verse 21). But the thought here is the blessedness of being in the “ house,” and thus “ the Master of the house ” is the Divine description. The expression “ gospel of the kingdom ” tells of grace, and “ the gospel of the grace of God ” never excludes the kingdom (Acts 20. 24, 28, 31), nor are there two gospels (Rom. 1. 16), but each word is Divinely chosen in each context.

Correspondingly here we have in the first verse, and the last also, the word “ supper,” and this suggests “ the marriage *supper* of the Lamb ” though the wedding is not mentioned. A sad contrast therewith is seen in “ I have married a wife.” It is important never to misuse the silence of Scripture. “ His Son ” is before us in Matthew 22, not here, but surely the gospel feast

is ever with reference to our beloved Lord Jesus. In Matthew He draws our attention to our responsibility in the ministry of truth exalting Himself: here the emphasis, we shall see, is particularly on the Holy Spirit's secret and mighty work, in drawing, bringing, and compelling poor, lost sinners. This deeply encouraging aspect, found in John 3, is more rarely explained. And observe that our acceptability and acceptance "in Christ" and our bridal relationship to Him are not primarily our meditation here, but rather our utter unworthiness and unfitness, and the fulness of constraining grace that brings us within, according to the purpose and power of covenant love. And how sweet is this to the heart, when we have seen something of our ruin and nothingness. And it is blessed to realize that though from the *breakfast* one is seen to be cast out, none are cast out from the SUPPER, nor does the work of the Holy Spirit permit of any failure or undoing. It is a treasure of grace to find in one parable one view, and in another something distinct, yet related. All parts of truth are needed. Even so Luke 15 shows us the found sheep, and the found son, but does not contain the bride, nor the virgins. Our Lord Jesus has many names for His many glories, and His redeemed are the body, the bride, the branches, and so forth,—every figure of nearness being graciously claimed, that we might have a strong consolation and joy.

In all our prayerful study it is important that the experimental and practical aspects should be prominent. All the unveiling of grace is to lead us to devotion. When we see what God has done for us, how grateful our hearts should be, and how concerned for others, who are still outside, and see no beauty in Him Who is altogether lovely, and desire not to partake of that which His finished work has so fully provided. There is thus a blending of joy and sorrow in our study, for there are myriads still who with one consent begin to make excuse.

Myriads?—Ah, "all" are seen as doing this here, although "many" were invited. Only three are mentioned, but they are sad samples. Not one of the "many" who were "called" really came (verse 24). Yet, thanks be unto God, the supper, said to be great, shall not be lost to all. There was, (rather let us say), there **is** room for **many**, and, as the house **shall** be filled, "many" will yet partake. Thus we behold at once the two "many's," and God's witness against universalism which is ever before our hearts.

*Many* were called. How definitely the Lord Jesus emphasizes this in both parables. And let us ever remember, that, though men refuse, they must be called. Accordingly at the out-

set God preached the gospel to Cain (Gen. 4. 7 lit.), and we read that it was His Spirit which was “judging” among men in the days of Noah (see Gen. 6. 3, with John 16. 8-11, Heb. 11. 7 and 2 Peter 2. 5). This gives light on 1 Peter 1. 11 with 1 Peter 3. 18, 19, and we realize that the witness in the power of the Spirit of Christ was rejected. So is it in Luke 14, where the One Who is able to “compel” gives the message. This invitation, yea, command (“Come,” see Matt. 28. 18), must be distinguished from the inner, quickening work of the Holy Spirit. This is strong evidence that we must not confuse the different parts of His ministry, nor must we hold back the message because men do not hear (Exek. 2. 5). We are not sent to preach to the elect, but to sinners. God’s grace in “bringing,” when men despise, does not release us from our privilege and responsibility of testimony. It is important to see Romans 9 is joined with Romans 10, and in the latter we find not only the privilege of fervent prayer for souls, but also, “How shall they hear without a preacher?” Yea, the same chapter reminds us that God Himself says, “All day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people” (Rom. 10. 21). O that we may never use human logic against tenderness or against obedient service.

The “hour” of the supper seems to remind us of John 5. 25. It is a mercifully prolonged hour. How definitely the longsuffering of God “waits.” The previous invitations are not described: we do not know who gave them: we think of God’s many messengers, and the way such were treated. But here there is the emphasis on the One Servant. Must not **this** remind of the Holy Spirit? His perfect fulfilling of a covenant plan is marked, and His unfailing power. Thus the *two* parables would seem to suggest together our Triune God. How tenderly the Holy Spirit becomes One serving. This is implied by John 14. 26, 16. 7. A striking type with a different aspect, even the finding of the Bride, is found in Genesis 24. Is it not blessedly true that our ministry of inviting should be in the Holy Spirit, and likewise that when the guilty are brought in, He is the One Who has worked? Herein we see our privilege, but the victory is His, and thus the glory is never ours, but the joy is ours too (Luke 15. 6). How definite and impressive is the simple word “Come.” How different will soon be the utterance “Depart.” “Come”: we cannot use the word too often. “Come”: it is as music to our own hearts. There is a place, there is a Person to Whom we have “come.” The gospel is not vague and indefinite. “Come,” not to do, but because “all things are now ready.” We could not prepare the things, nor ourselves. How graciously

complete is the gospel. The message of Matthew 22 through the servants is like to the message of Luke 14 from One Servant. But in both the attitude of men is saddening. In contrast with the "all things" of love we see the "all men" of self will. "They all with one consent began to make excuse," "All we like sheep have gone astray." How solemnizing is the unveiling of Scripture, and how true. Were not we by nature even as others? How blessed is the contrasted unity of Acts 4. 32, and the promised blessing of Zephaniah 3. 9. But neither passage is universal.

They "began." Here is man's beginning (Gen. 11. 6), and how sad is his goal. They began by "asking" that they might be let off, "asking themselves aside,"\* as the word is. Adam at the first "heard aside" (Rom. 5. 19), and "fell aside" ("offence" Rom. 5. 18), and thus sin is ever "aside" from God's way. But there is nothing in "excuse" to suggest outward rebellion: politeness, yet equally guilt. Something else preferred to God's invitation. This speaks to our own hearts, for even we, as believers, sometimes neglect prayer and God's words, and other things enter in (Mark 4. 19). O that we may respond to the voice of our Beloved, and be ever ready for that which God has graciously made ready. Let us not *ask* for ourselves, but *answer* to that which is both from, and for, Himself, and our real joy will be in His joy. We rob ourselves when He is not first: but let our object not become our happiness alone "in that Day." O that we may have the love united with gratitude, to delight His heart.

And what are the three excuses which our Lord has singled out that we too may be warned of the unchanging tactics of the enemy? Remarkably they concern merely ordinary things, business and the home. Nor is this strange. Satan's first attack was on the home. And are we not reminded of the words, "As it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man: they did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all"? And yet more striking is the parallel when the next verse is added, "Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot: they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they builded, they planted" (Luke 17. 26-28). Everything may be made the enemy's opportunity. Let us beware as to ordinary things that they are in the right position, and proportion, and with the right purpose.

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\* The same word is found in Hebrew 12. 19, 25.

“ The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground.” A usual action, in Palestine, and for an agricultural people. But the lessons are many. The ground was earthy, and earthly things must never hinder the heavenly. Esau’s morsel of meat has many parallels. The contrast of Acts 4. 34-37 is very impressive. But what about ourselves? Have we never bought a book, a newspaper, or something for worldly adornment, that has taken us away from the Lord’s call? It is easy to judge others, but do we judge ourselves? We realize how blessed it is to seek a heavenly country, (but are we ever seeking?), and the “ground” that has been bought for us (Heb. 11. 16, Matt. 13. 44)? In Luke 14, the purchaser adds, “ I have **need** to go out, and see it.” Observe the emphasis on “ a need,” and going “ out ” (contrast Matt. 25. 1). “ Seeing ” is often a peril. Dinah “ went out to *see* the daughters of the land ” (Gen. 34. 1). It is refreshing to think of Moses, who “ endured, as seeing Him Who is Invisible.” “ Seeing it ” :—ah, no, let us, like Jacob, be concerned to “ go and see Him ” Who is the Greater than Joseph (Gen. 45. 28, 1 John 3. 2). May there not be a further thought either that the purchaser had bought without seeing, in worldly *speculation*, or that the answer was a paltry excuse? Do we not also feel that when we have once set our eyes on that which is not, we easily continue to seek earthly things (Prov. 23. 5)? Let every word awaken our glad, spiritual contrast.

“ And another said.” The word implies, “ another of another kind.” There were differences in character, but before God there was the oneness of indifference. A “ thing ” instead of the Lord Jesus! Some treasure of earth instead of the treasure of the gospel. The enemy does not deceive all in the same way: he has many baits, but one object.

“ I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them.” Again an ordinary thing, but again we observe the peril of money. And in each case goods were increased. Gain was an attraction (Jas. 4. 13), oxen were sacrificial animals: there was nothing like the possession of the two thousand swine, but there was “ something ” instead of the Lord. Job had five hundred yoke of oxen, yet God was Central in his thoughts. In the present dispensation of “ strangers and pilgrims,” however, we need to be peculiarly on our guard lest we “ prosper ” and become world-like. What have we bought to-day? this week? this year? Will it help us spiritually? What have we *given*? The yoke of oxen were for ploughing, and there was no unequal yoke (Deut. 22. 10), but the Call of God was not heard. The very number “ ten ” is suggestive: O that our “ fellowship ” may be spiritual. “ I

request thee, have me excused.” Exactly the same words, as if to indicate that this was the formal and conventional language of courtesy, or to show us how one imitated the other. Nothing of antagonism: nothing of outward sin: but the great sin that puts God’s will aside. The *first* commandment was “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God,” and He must ever be first, and that which is of Him can never rightly be put in the second place. All else must depend on Him, or everything becomes in confusion.

The personal “I request *thee*” shows that the gracious ministry of the One Who comes to call is definitely rejected. In *this* way the Spirit of God can be resisted. We observe moreover the literal rendering, “Have me, one having been excused.” “Having” usually implies possession. Here it is, “Have me, as one *not* possessed,” and the tense implies a sad permanency: “having been excused, and *remaining* so.” And thus it became (verse 24). How solemn was the cold and deliberate action. But have we no parallels in our own lives? How blessed is a contrasted willing response to His will. O that our souls may not fail when our Lord speaks (Song 5. 6). “Excused”—“*asked* aside”: we remember Luke 22. 31, “Satan *asked* you out” (lit.), and those here mentioned choose the “asking” that is against God. Blessed be His Name for those who are in His hand, and whom Satan shall not obtain.

“And another (of another kind) said, I married a wife, and because of this I am not able to have come.” Marriage is honourable in all (Heb. 13. 4), and this relationship should be a picture of Christ and the church. But, alas, how easily may privileges be misused. A wife instead of the Lord’s call. Such an one is not “an help, meet for” a man. Adam, alas, chose his wife instead of God’s commandment. Earthly relationships must always be secondary (Matt. 10. 37). Abraham had to learn this: he hesitated in Haran till his father was dead (Acts 7. 4, see Luke 9. 59), but, later, there was no hesitation as to his only son whom he loved. He made haste, and delayed not (Ps. 119. 60). The reference to the wife here may suggest Deuteronomy 20. 7, and 24. 5, and the intense urgency of the gospel. How important too that marriage should ever be in the Lord, and the godly wife have delight to be where a godly husband is, in obedience to the Lord’s “call.” Never think of marriage unless there is closest union of heart, in love to the Lord. It is beautiful to see that when God called Abraham “alone,” Sarah was evidently included (Isa. 51. 2). “Because of this (fact, not this person), I cannot come.” Strong words are used in each case, “must needs” and “cannot.” Hereby we learn how easy it is to persuade oneself

there is a real hindrance. Our Lord's solemn answer to the "cannot" is the threefold "cannot" of verses 26, 27, 33. "I come" or "I cannot," dear reader, what is it with you? First, with regard to coming to Christ, and secondly, with respect to time for Him, His will, His work? We "can" do much more for Him when we love Him much.

"And the Servant came, and showed His Lord these things." Observe there was no bringing at first, no compelling on this occasion. The refusers were told of the feast, the command, the invitation: that was all. And everything was recorded. Do we bring everything to God? All our trials, our joys or sorrows? How much we should be blest if this were our continual practice, and godly habit. "Then the Master of the house being angry said to His Servant: Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and maimed and blind and lame." Sin cannot be excused. Here is God's holy anger against sin: and how great is the sin of despising His love, and belittling the gospel message.

The going **out** was to bring **in**. There was a holy quickness: thanks be unto God, there was no delay: how important that our feet too should be shod with the alacrity of the gospel of peace (Eph. 6. 15). Broadways and narrow ways alike were to be visited.

But how marked is the distinction from Matthew 22. None are viewed here as "good" or "fit." Indeed the Holy Spirit uses the definite article "the" only once for the four descriptions, and this may suggest even more than the likeness of all, in one class, as unworthy. It seems to imply that all four disabilities are regarded as together in one person, and possibly in **every** one. And this **is** so, spiritually. It is not that some are blind, yet they can carry others, who see; nor is it that some who are maimed are nevertheless able to pay for another to assist them. Eyes, hands and feet are all affected, and the sinner has "nothing, to pay." But on such a dark background, much darker than that of Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 9), the kindness of God shines forth, for a **Greater**-than-Jonathan's sake. Our adorable Lord claims poor unworthy ones for His own guests (cf. Luke 14. 13, 14). There is no **personal** recommendation in us. But **He** healeth all our **soul** diseases, and thus, in that Day there will not be the added words of 2 Samuel 9. 13, "lame on both his feet!" Yea, our hearts rejoice, for even now are we a new creation, and the good work has been begun in us (Phil. 1. 6). But when we were brought, we had nothing, God justifies the

ungodly (Rom. 4. 5), and gives everything in and with His beloved Son (Rom. 8. 32).

It is a joy to observe that these brought to see they had nothing were like the one on Jericho's road: they had no excuses. We do not read of their activities or help. They are not said even to speak. The silence is impressive. Grace is manifested in its fulness. As we have before noticed, a parable does not show the whole of the truth. As the parallel visions of Daniel and Revelation give different aspects, so it is here. We remember Luke 15: we see the Shepherd's work at first, but the inworking of repentance in the lost son is not forgotten. Our will does not save us, nor is it "of him that willeth," but God does not work against our will. He never works **upon** without working **within**. "Drawing" is not "dragging."

The Servant was willing to go quickly, willing to do everything exactly as the words of verse 21 set forth. He had no antipathy to the despised ones, who were so lovingly welcomed for the feast that others had ungratefully despised. "Lord, it is done as Thou hast commanded." "It has become"—a beautiful word (as in Rev. 16. 17, 21. 6), implying that the result remained. And is not this our joy, if we are among those thus brought within? We rejoice in the power that drew us, and made us willing. Nor would we overlook the manner of address. Do we not learn reverence? Service is in blessed dependence. It is our privilege, and responsibility, to bring everything to God for his gracious guidance and appointment. The harmony with His will which is befitting, and the unwillingness to act without His word, must surely be recorded for a pattern.

6 "And yet there is room." The word signifies "a place," as in verses 8 and 9. Thus we see the definite concern that there should not be even one empty seat. The Lord Jesus shall see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied (Isa. 53. 11). His work shall not be in vain. This wondrous "Servant" was interested in "one" as well as many. The two aspects are very precious, and we need to learn and illustrate the same attitude. Luke 15, and the **one** lost sheep must come to mind, and our beloved Lord's personal dealing (e.g. in John 3 and 4). The Holy Spirit never despises one soul. Do we? O for more love.

And so the one place **must** be occupied. It must be given to yet another, brought by the same Servant. None come of themselves: none were fetched by another. Various servants shared the earnest labour in Matthew 22; but it is not the aspect unveiled here. And **how** will this last one be brought? In wondrous wisdom and grace, our beloved Lord has outlined thereby

another part of truth. “ And the Lord said unto the Servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel to come in, that **My** house may be filled.” We can naturally understand the usual translation, inserting the word “ them,” but in italics, indicating that the Holy Spirit has not given it in the original. He had, and has, a purpose. The stress on “ highways and hedges ” would, at first, **seem** to suggest several persons at least. But the second word occurs in Matthew 21. 33, Mark 12. 1, and Ephesians 2. 14 (“ partition ”), and this indicates “ a fence.” It occurs in the Septuagint of Numbers 22. 24, and the root-verb is found in Romans 3. 19 and Hebrews 11. 33, for “ stopping ” the mouth. Now we see the solemnizing, yet encouraging, witness. The one sought out on this occasion evidently fled away from the road, yea, entrenched himself, but grace conquered. The **two** parts of God’s truth are, as ever, deeply important. In the experience of some, the sense of need and helplessness seen in verse 21 may appear the more prominent, though they sorrowfully own that, as no parable or type gives the whole unveiling, they also were active in their sins. The unsaved soul is not only “ dead in trespasses and sins,” he is also terribly alive in evil, with an unholy will and character. In the salvation of others, the **victory** of grace over natural rebelliousness is most marked. It is evident that the sinner fights hard, but must be laid low. The kicking is vain (Acts 26. 14). The Stronger than the strong takes possession in love and might (Luke 11. 21, 22). And this part of God’s truth is much needed to-day. The highways were left, a barrier was sought, or raised, yea, barriers; but fences could not, and cannot, hinder God’s election (John 6. 37, 10. 16). Now we understand the word “ compel,” and why it is the **One** Servant here Who employs His gracious compulsion. **We** can preach, and pray, and live, and take away stones from the tomb, but we cannot thus constrain and quicken. Blessed be God, He works thus; for our beloved Lord shall not fail, nor be discouraged, and thus “ the grace of our Lord ” is “ exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” The sinner is led in a blessed triumph:—

Compelled by grace,—each fence destroyed,—  
 To fill the empty place,  
 We know free mercy unalloyed,  
 And only sing of **grace**.

Yes, there is no room for boasting. It is shut out (Rom. 3. 27). Election is not a dead letter: the covenant is not broken:

the Lamb's Book of Life is not mutilated (Rev. 17. 8:—in ch. 22. 19 it is "the **tree** of life").

Are we sufficiently grateful for the mighty mercy which snatched us as brands plucked out of the fire (Zech. 3. 2), and proved once again that the gospel is the **power** of God unto salvation (Rom. 1. 16)? Are we tired of showing forth His praises (1 Pet. 2. 9)? O that it may never be so. There is no music to compare with the music of the "new song" of redemption!

We have seen that the language used implies that the sinner may go from one fence to another: he may fight and fight on awhile, but there is a definite contrast here with the Holy Spirit's declarative work in verse 17, and with the general call of the gospel. Are we not thereby encouraged to continue in prayer, and loving earnestness for those who seem defiant? We are not forbidden to pray: let us pray on. But one may answer: "Here we see only the work of God: we cannot accomplish anything." Dear believing reader, have we not realized in all the types that God gives one part of truth? The Passover lamb did not love, but did not "the Lamb of God" love exceedingly? The priest, altar and sacrifice were all needed together to show something of His fulness. In like manner Noah AND the ark, Isaac AND the ram, and the Manna AND the Water from the Rock in the next chapter, were united to reveal more of our precious Saviour, and His salvation. And we must not read Luke 14 without Matthew 22. The Holy Spirit has written both. True, the work of **bringing** is His, but He works much through us, even as we see Christ preached through Noah (1 Pet. 3. 19, 20, 2 Pet. 2. 5). And thus, though we ascribe all the glory to God, it is our privilege to be in harmony, and to seek "the poor, and maimed, and halt, and blind," and to be in loving earnestness for those who resist, never despairing. "Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6. 9).

"**My house**": precious words. The order of nouns and pronouns in Greek gives a special emphasis. The house belonged to God: He has joy in the gathering of His redeemed: here we have "the hope of **His** calling." Do we not remember, too, how the King made a feast for **His Son**, and that the Master of the house will say, "Enter thou into the joy of **thy Lord**"? "All things were created by Him, and **for Him**" (Col. 1. 16, cf. Rom. 11. 36). And how delightful it is for us to have this bright expectation. We, the unworthy, shall be in **His** house. We who deserved to be in His prison shall dwell in His glory. "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house: they will be still

praising Thee ” (Ps. 84. 4). “ One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple ” (Ps. 27. 4). How much it meant to Mephibosheth to hear the repeated words; “ Mephibosheth . . . shall eat bread alway at my table ” (2 Sam. 9. 7, 10, 11, 13); but to us there is a fuller, far fuller richness, “ in Christ Jesus.” And the same emphasis (by position) is found in the added words “ My supper.” Ah, dear, believing reader, this is not merely a commentary to help you to give an address. God has entrusted us with more than brains and a tongue. We have a heart, and long to love Him more. Think of His love to Thee, O my soul. Thou art brought into His banqueting house, and His banner over thee is love. Canst thou doubt Him? Canst thou have any misgivings as to the final issue? Nay. He Who has begun such a work will finish it. Rejoice in Him, and let thy wishes for the world’s feasts and friendships be set aside, since it has pleased Him to make thee His. Thou wast poor and wretched, yea, didst thou not seek to hide behind fence after fence? But His love would not be disappointed, and His covenant could not be broken; and now has He sweetly compelled thy love, so that thou joyest in that which thou wishedst not, and that which thou wishedst has become to thee unsavoury. He has made thee His, and made thine inner affection to respond to Him. Is He not worthy of all thy love?

“ For I say unto you, that **none** of those men which were bidden shall taste of My supper.” The “ for ” is very impressive. No seat is left for them: if they “ repent,” and call, it will be too late: “ the sorrow of the world worketh death.” Behold, the covenant plan: every seat shall be filled, but there shall be none in excess, standing and unable to find a place. There will be no unexpected ones in the glory. There is no mere chance: “ He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.” “ **Those** men ”—they are now far off. They were “ bidden ” or “ called,”—but they responded not. We have been more than bidden. O the wickedness of men: **none** that were called came (Isa. 53. 1). O, the grace of God: the house is filled. **Why** have I come? I was more than called: I was brought: boasting is shut out. These words are among the many strong utterances of our Lord Jesus to shut out all dependence on man. Any preaching of the gospel that tones down the message to cause a natural acceptance is an utter failure (1 Cor. 2. 5). Grace is grace, both free and mighty. But some one will say (cf. 1 Cor. 15. 35), Why then preach? God has appointed. It is not fitting

for men to argue against God's words. True, He could bring without us, but "it pleased God by the foolishness (in man's esteem) of the preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1. 21). Keep to the gospel—God will use it: but never trust to the preacher, or the preaching, or to those who hear: let there be full confidence in Him.

"Shall **taste** of My supper." Not only shall we eat, but we shall taste. There will be an appetite, and we shall enjoy His marriage supper. Ah, do we not even now enjoy grace? Yes, but the banquet will be yet sweeter then, when our spiritual senses will have nothing around to hinder their blessed participation. He "tasted death" (Heb. 2. 9), that we might taste the supper, and eat and drink with Him at His table in His Father's and His kingdom (Matt. 26. 29, Luke 22. 30). There will be no lack then (John 2. 3), and truly the best has been "kept," for the half has not been told us. The riches of His grace excel all words. The provision will verily be "according to the state of the king" (Est. 1. 7). And do not we even now have blessed anticipations, and is not His fruit sweet to our taste to-day (Song 2. 3)?

Partaking, by grace, of the gospel feast even now, and looking forward to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, let us now seek grace to meditate on Matthew 24. 45—51. We know what it is to "eat" spiritually (Ps. 119. 103, Jer. 15. 16). the body does not partake of "words," but the heart cannot live aright without a joy in "every **word** that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Believers, too, are to minister wholesome food to one another. How impressive is the statement of Proverbs 10. 21, "The lips of the righteous feed **many**." Is this, by grace, our privilege? Again, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt" (Col. 4. 6) has the same message, and Ephesians 4. 29 might be rendered "to the building up of the need." Men often talk of foods that "build up the constitution." Are we concerned EVER to help one another thus, and **not only** in meetings (1 Pet. 4. 11)?

Herein we see the privilege of ALL children of God, in the power of the Holy Spirit, but it is undoubtedly true that God calls some to special responsibilities. "Feed My sheep" was a gracious command (cf. 1 Pet. 5. 2). In like manner, we have in Matthew 24, the "faithful and wise servant," entrusted with the care of other believers. Such guidance and direction must specially include the provision of suitable spiritual food. How important this is. If a mother gave her children no food, but only sought a "home" that was "spick and span," it would be no

home at all. What would be the value of elaborate apparel, without food? And the children of God need nourishment. They cannot be energetic, nor grow, without food. Shall we offer them stones (Matt 7. 9), or husks (Luke 15. 16)? How empty and unsatisfying is the "diet" which Higher Criticism and worldliness offer. And how much poison is often presented as if it were food, or mingled therewith. Let us remember, moreover, rhetoric is not food, and argument is not food, the need is God's own truth. That which is precious nourishment, (as at Israel's passover time), must be full of reminders of the Lord Jesus. A servant who does not give that which is pure and rightly prepared, at the suited season, is unfit. The Holy Spirit's emphasis on "stewardship" is parallel. Do we expect and pray for this, and that the Lord may raise up such equipped brethren?

Verse 46 shows that loving service is in view of the Lord's Coming. This is always important as to a believer's attitude, but in such a context does it not also encourage us with the thought of revival, and that there will be "households" spiritually, and brethren (somewhat parallel with the "angels" of assemblies in Revelation 2 and 3), lovingly ministering among saints, in the last days? May it be ours to expect this revival, leading up to the Coming of our Lord, and to "continue in prayer" for this token.

The added context shows a solemnizing contrast. An "evil servant" is possible, and sin has an abiding place in his heart. Like to the evil shepherds of Ezekiel 34, and Zechariah 11, he feeds himself, not spiritually, but carnally, and indulgently. O that we may hate selfishness, and be afraid of the flesh. How solemn will be the unmasking of a hypocrite. The judgment is so worded that it speaks deeply to **all**, even believers, without denying the eternal salvation of God's dear children. Hypocrites will be lost, but must we not also ask ourselves, "Am I in any measure hypocritical?" Let us never "eat and drink with the drunken." Let us ever look for our Lord, and enter into the happiness of verse 46, desiring the reward, to His joy, which is at once described, "Verily I say unto you, That He shall make him ruler over all His goods" (cf. Luke 16. 10-12). Our gracious Lord is preparing and training His redeemed for His kingdom. Luke 22. 28, 29 and 2 Thessalonians 1. 4, 5 are among the many passages that impress this. And as the Lord's Day is a foreshadowing of the Day of the Lord, and the Lord's Supper of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and each little **Scriptural** gathering an anticipation of the great gathering together unto Him, so the present feeding on His truth through the ministry

of any of His gifts (Eph. 4. 10, 11), and through those who by reason of time in God's family are able to be teachers (Heb. 5. 12), is an appointed preparation for the holy and spiritual feasting "in that Day." Here is a call to a godly condition, that the responsibility of speaking as the oracles of God may be felt, and that there may not be an admixture of that which will please the flesh, or show off ourselves, or manifest carelessness as to "the finest of the wheat." Those for whom Christ poured out His blood are worthy of our fullest love and attention. It is sadly noticeable that the one who indulges self smites: how tender are those who are called of God (Heb. 5. 2), although they will not gratify the unhealthy taste which may sometimes loathe the manna, and seek, alas, the dainties of Egypt, and the sweetmeats of human doctrines.

Thus we find that all these parables have a message for our hearts, and not only a passage for interpretation. And it is well that we should ever read Scripture with this realization. And strikingly we find in most of them a contrast,—the two sons, the two ways, the wheat **and** tares, and, here, those in the feast and those without. The solemnity of truth is often forgotten. There is always a reminder of judgment. Many forget this, and the indifference of this age is reflected among the children of God. We speak and act as if God will not do what He has said He will do. And this may well be our meditation as we approach another passage which has spoken searchingly to many of our hearts. I refer to Matthew 25.

There were no chapter breaks in the original Scriptures, except in the Psalms, and, for example, implied in the acrostics of Lamentations. We often lose much through not reading on,—for example Isaiah 52. 15 to 53. 1 and John 7. 53 to 8. 1. So Matthew 25. 1 at once follows 24. 42-51, and here are the nuptials, which may suggest to us a feast, even the feast of that Day. It is true that this is not the special point **mentioned**, and we ever realize the relative emphasis and silence of the Lord Jesus. But as our subject is "Parables **connected** with feasts," and the Holy Spirit emphasizes elsewhere what will take place when the Bridegroom comes, we may, with this preface, ponder the searching message of these verses in their context. "Then" (Matt. 25. 1) seems to indicate a special time, and may it not refer to a contrast with the general history of Christendom, and with the sad unveiling of the harlot in Revelation 17 and elsewhere? There must be a revival: and must there not be a going forth to meet the Bridegroom? But—solemn thought—even then all will not be truly children of God. O dear reader, how this speaks to

you, and to me,—yet not to terrify, but to search and purify us, and our motives. All here are characterized as virgins, and there is evidently a similarity in their profession. All have lamps, and all go out. The position and profession are not distinguished. But, alas, some have no oil. A lamp without oil! It seems so “foolish” to be without oil. And that is the very word the Lord Jesus uses. Every part of the preparation except the oil. So strange to overlook this, and yet have not we sometimes, in earthly things, overlooked that which is all-important? Something else has occupied us, or we have been in a rush and flurry, and have started on a journey, it may be, without money, or without that which we need. But such errors are small compared with the one before us. And the five foolish made the same mistake. This is the one and only matter mentioned. How deep is the meaning. From a human standpoint, we might say, “Oil is not absolutely necessary: it is possible to grope in the dark: the Bridegroom will bring light when He comes: and, indeed, one lamp will do for two, and five lamps will surely suffice for the whole party.”

Such natural reasoning is Divinely set aside. Each one must have oil. Without oil there is no readiness. We think of oil in the tabernacle, and in anointing with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1. 21, Ps. 92. 10). We remember the emphasis on the lit lamp in Matthew 5. 15, and call to mind Zechariah 4 with the explanation of verse 6, “not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord.” Thus the message comes, with a searching force and fulness, to our own hearts. Have WE experienced the work of the Holy Spirit, and have WE the oil?

We observe the number “ten”: it suggests fellowship, as with the ten strings (Ps. 33. 2), and the ten servants of Luke 19. 13. But the TWO classes are found here, albeit the special emphasis is not on OUTWARD wickedness, but on manifest FOOLISHNESS. The saddening fact that the foolish were with the wise, neither conscious of their own need, nor detected by the others, gives one needful aspect. The equally saddening fact is that the wise slept awhile, as if they too were foolish. Surely the Holy Spirit’s record is to speak to our hearts. The tendency to assume that the foolish had SOME oil, but not enough, is Divinely answered. We do not read “they took no oil in their vessels,” but “took no oil WITH THEM.” Even in their lamps, there was none. Some will ask, “How then could there be a temporary lighting?” It was evidently temporary in the extreme sense, the flickering of an oil-less wick (verse 8). That was all. That alone fulfils Christ’s words.

We may not understand the expression, "Go ye rather to them that sell." It may contain the "contrast" message of the parable, and intensify the thought of despair in such a case. An error in earthly things may often be rectified in a shop, but a spiritual omission will be then too late for remedy. We read "they went to buy," but not "they went and bought." They returned, but Scripture is silent as to their possessions. Ready ones had already gone in: all who were ready went in, and all who went in were ready. Can we find a single Scripture for the theory that Christ will come again to an unready people? Revival is promised. This "intervening event" is often forgotten, and it is not true love to the Lord, and His Coming, to put it aside. The marriage reminds of Revelation 19. 7, 8. "The door was shut" brings Luke 13. 24, 25 before us. The preaching of Christ's Coming to professing Christians must ever be with this deeply solemn message. The other virgins came. They said, "Lord, Lord," even as those found in Matthew 7. How they will come, and where, I do not know. There is much that awaits knowledge, but this does not hinder heart-application. As soon as desire to "know" the fulfilment of each word side-tracks the realization of our Lord's loving warning we are in peril. "I know you not" suggests again Matthew 7. 23 "The Lord knew them that are His," "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them." It is blessed indeed to be known to Him. And the proof is found in the added words, "and they FOLLOW Me." Yes, this is the test. And in view of the danger of deceiving our own selves, the Lord Jesus said, "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour." Does not this come to our hearts in His word to us still? "Watch therefore" is found in 24. 42 also, and we behold the climax in Mark 13. 34, 35, 37, "He commanded the porter to watch," "Watch ye therefore," "And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." Do we long for the Lord's Coming? Do we sing about the Marriage Supper of the Lamb? Do we speak of this theme to one another? Let us be sure that by grace we have THE OIL, and that we are among those who FOLLOW Him, and who are, as His sheep, known to Him, that we may never hear the amazing and anguish-awakening words, "I know you not."

Thus our hearts realize that all the messages of our Lord are searching and practical. The fact that they were spoken long ago has not altered their present full value. The Holy Spirit applies them to-day in living power. There is ever an encouragement: there is ever a warning. The "feast" is now, not only in the type of the Lord's Supper, but in the partaking of "the

Bread of Life,” and in the sitting down under our Lord’s shadow. O that it may be with great delight (Song 2. 3). And the prospect is certain, and precious, even to sit at His table in His Kingdom (Luke 22. 30). It is well to ruminare and meditate on God’s thoughts, and to enjoy the promises of our Lord, for we can never enjoy them, nor Himself, too much, if we are His, and seeking to please Him. Parables are not instead of realities, not greater than realities, but only faint foreshadowings of the full realities. How rich, and how blest are all who are “in Christ Jesus.” The emphasis on food in connexion with spiritual things throughout Scripture shows how our Father delights in the delight of His people, and how all our blessings are to become part of our very being, with their rich and eternal fruit in our lives, to the praise of the glory of His grace. And our hearts say, “Amen and amen.”





No. 7. FREE

*"When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."* Romans 5. 6.

*"Behold, what manner of love."* 1 John 3. 1.

# THE PARABLES OF THE LORD JESUS

Outline Studies for His believing  
people, who feel the solemnity of  
the times, and look for His Coming.

- (1) The Good Samaritan
- (2) The Pharisee and the Publican
- (3) Associated with Houses
- (4) Two Brief Messages  
Concerning Plants

*"He is despised and rejected of men; . . . It pleased the Lord to bruise Him . . . He bare the sin of many."* Isaiah 53. 3, 10, 12.

*"Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time."* Hebrews 9. 28.

**T**HE Parables, like the Types, are full of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Having experienced and enjoyed a little of their inexhaustible fulness, I desire to share, with others of His beloved people, the food that He has graciously provided. A book on all the parables is in prayerful preparation,\* but this forerunner is herewith sent forth in faith, and dedicated to the Lord's service.

Copies will be supplied as the Lord enables. Our dependence is simply on Him. Hence no financial straits should hinder poor believers from ASKING for whatever copies they need. Such are equally beloved in Christ Jesus. If others, accepted in Him, send fellowship in expenses, it is received gladly in His Name, if without any thought of compulsion or purchase, but only because they feel thus guided by our adorable Lord.

Suggestions and questions are ever welcome, for there is ever a fulness beyond all that any of us realize, and it should be our privilege and joy to learn more of our Lord Himself and of His words, while, in the enabling of the Holy Spirit, we await His return and pray expectantly, " Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

PERCY W. HEWARD.

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\* Portions are issued in "The Student of Scripture" monthly. Further particulars and current issue gladly sent.

# PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

(LUKE 10. 30-37).

THE background is not the brightest. A ruler had stood up, daring to tempt the Lord Jesus, and then, when he had been answered in perfect wisdom, the natural tendency of the human heart to cavil and to defend self had been manifested. "But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?" Thus we learn once more the nature of our own "will." Self thinks of self, and there is a wish at the root of actions. They are not merely the fruit of circumstances. Men are accountable. "A wish": ah, how much this means. What kind of wishes have we? How many arguments and attitudes are affected by the will (John 5. 35, 40). How often we have all failed to see certain things, albeit they were clear, because of our will. How blessed is a will in subjection to the Lord. "If any one will to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7. 17).

Self-justification is deadly. We call to mind the words of Luke 16. 15, "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men," and chapter 18. 9, "He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." This threefold witness in one gospel is of the deepest importance still. Happy are those who have been brought to judge themselves, and to know the grace of God, believing "on Him That justifieth the ungodly" (Rom. 4. 5). The simple type of baptism was intended to bring this vividly before men: hence those who were rightly baptized declared God righteous and themselves unrighteous (Luke 7. 29, 30). The lawyer in this chapter had no such thought: he felt he could stand his ground. We think of the one who said "All these have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?" (Matt. 19. 20). And are there not dangers for us, even after we have believed in the Lord? Is there not a tendency to self-defence? Do we not sometimes think that we have obeyed the Lord's will more fully than we have? And is there not a semi-conscious contrasting of ourselves with others? Did not Job need to learn this lesson, and is not his history written "for our learning" (Rom. 15. 4)? One great need to-day is humiliation, and a realization that our acceptance is only in the work of Christ, and that we need His constant intercession (Heb. 7. 25). If there were more humility, there would be more unity and power.

But the Lord's love shines out here. In answer to mistakes, He ever displayed truth. His response to man's cruel temptation was ever a pearl. And thus we have this parable, rich in its unveiling of His own perfect character, in its unfolding of the way of salvation, and in its description of the church, and the privileges of saints, and in its bearing on the details of everyday life as well.

"A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers." "A certain man": he is not named, we do not read he was a priest or Levite or lawyer. Behold, the beauty of grace: it deals with sinners *whatever* they are. And, behold, further, the reality of love, that we are bidden to illustrate, in the light of verse 37. How often kindness is limited, and on the line of pleasing ourselves. But love reaches to the unlovely. Yet the very vagueness is not a generalizing; there is an individual man. And the personal love of Christ to personal sinners is still our joy.

The man "went down." The route from Jerusalem to Jericho may fittingly be thus set forth. In about 20 miles it drops over 3,000 feet. And the sinner's path is a going down, ever deeper. And what two cities could be more strikingly chosen? There existed a road between them, and it was infested with robbers,—but that is not all. Jerusalem was the place that God Himself chose, and the habitation of peace, as its very name implies. Jericho, on the other hand, was the city that God laid low first, and on which a special curse rested. "Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho" (Jos. 6. 26). And it was in the days of one who "did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel than all the kings of Israel that went before him" that a man rose up, and dared to build the city, and received the awful reminders of God's judgment (1 Kings 16. 34).

Thus the sinner ever leaves God's choice and centre for that of man: yea, leaves God's dwelling place, and with his back toward it hurries onward to the curse. And it is to a traveller that grace comes, and it is to such that we are still to show tenderness, remembering we were even such by nature (Eph. 2. 3).

He "fell among robbers." It seemed a sad loss, but what if this was meant for his fall and rising again (Luke 2. 34)? He was stopped on the way to Jericho, as Saul on the way to Damascus. At first we may think of untoward circumstances, and how often God uses these. A heavy illness, a great loss, or something else which seems against a man may lay him

low, and thereby he may receive the ministry of gospel grace to which beforehand he was blind. How wondrous are God's ways, and how we would thank Him for His dealings to bring lost sinners to Himself, yea, and to bring us nearer in experience, though we do not always understand His way at first (Ps. 77. 9).

The rendering "thieves" is not sufficiently expressive. These were highwaymen, who would use force. Thus they are mentioned in designed antithesis with the tender Samaritan, and it is remarkable that, four times over, the Lord Jesus is thus contrasted. Two robbers were crucified with Him (Matt. 27. 38), and Barabbas was a robber (John 18. 40). Men came out against Him as against a robber (Matt. 26. 55), but in reality all that were before Him were thieves and robbers, utterly different from the Good Shepherd (John 10. 1, 8). And it is sadly true that the exponents of Judaism illustrate this attitude. We see their work in Matthew 23. 3, and recollect it was a lawyer to whom Christ was speaking. Yet we cannot but feel we have only discovered illustrations: the interpretation has not been reached. Let us take the spiritual viewpoint, and we see the man's condition. Were his possessions good, or only good in his own esteem? May it not be that we have the key here? Call it, if you will, a contrast parable. The robbers, in the story, came to a living man, and robbing him of good, left him half-dead. In the spiritual counterpart, the holy law of God, which has a right to judge, comes to a man on the way to the curse, and takes from him that which he thinketh he hath, and leaves him a convicted soul,— "dead" in his consciousness, for the first time, *because* quickened to "feel dead" by the mercy that thus brings him to an end of himself. From this standpoint the law robs, but from God's there is an entire contrast. It is not surprising to find such a thought in a book which speaks of the friend who will not rise and give, and the unjust judge,\* that on this background our hearts may praise for grace. And in this connexion it is well to ponder Matthew 24. 43, and Revelation 3. 3, 16. 15.

Of a truth the holy law of God strips a man, revealing the vanity of all Adam's fig leaves and filthy rags (Isa. 64. 6). And the stripping is not all, there is wounding, for law is judicial. Salvation is not a comfortable change of situation, after an easygoing profession. The unclean spirit can go quietly out of the house, but it remains his. When the

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\* See booklet on Contrast Parables.

Stronger than the strong comes, there is victory, and victory means warfare. The unploughed rocky ground may be joined to a hearing of the word "anon with joy," but God works deeply. He says, "I wound, and I heal" (Deut. 32. 39). There are deep wounds, and the sinner is at his wit's end. There seems to him no hope. The robbers went away, and the contrasted law of God, (in its plural form, for he is smitten and convicted of various sins by various commandments), causes him to feel the afterwards of stern judgment. The man is left, but grace has not lost sight of him. His plans are broken: his only hope now is mercy. Jericho is out of the question as a journey, and, blessed be God, out of the question as a goal.

But grace is not manifested at once. The sharp terrors are followed by a season of despair, it may be, as Paul was three days blind. It is true that not all experiences are the same; and Luke 14. 23 is distinct from 21. But the normal working of God lays greater stress on a sense of sin than most are willing to acknowledge to-day. Many are now encouraged before they truly feel their guilt, and the wound is healed slightly (Jer. 6. 14). This is the doctrine of men, and it is a peril.

By chance a certain priest came down that way, that is to say, *he* had no purpose of mercy. Indeed, he was on the same perilous journey, and was, alas, unstopped. Jericho was, at this time, a city of the priests, and we know how many such, in the midst of their ritual, chose the way of the curse. That was our Lord's warning. How solemn is the witness against confidence in head-religion.

The priest saw the man, but went by on the other side. He was no neighbour, for an Israelite was to help even as to the ass of his enemy (Ex. 23. 4, 5). True Judaism had no room for personal spite or indifference, although many have taught otherwise, in failing to see the fact that the Address on the Mount brings a believer outside judicial self-defence and outside a share in natural and national self-protection, and shuts one up to God and His grace. A deeper thought lies beneath the words: the priest could do nothing. Religious forms cannot deal with one who is ruined. Yea more, the words ring out, "What the law could not do," and "The law made nothing perfect." "But God" (Eph. 2. 4): ah, He Himself knew what He would do. But, first, the Levite followed. He became at the "place" but could not deal with the *person*.

There was a “likewise” in his journeying, and a “likewise” in his attitude and powerlessness. The leaders of Israel failed. On the so-called passover tables are still found three loaves, to picture priest, Levite and Israelite. The last seems counted by them of lower degree, as it were before God, and yet it is for this one, not for the priest and Levite, that mercy here shines out. We think of the younger sons in Genesis and the parables, and realize grace to the undeserving. Behold God’s witness to those who have confidence in the flesh. The priest and Levite went on, we do not read of any hindrance, but He Who says, “I will bring the *third* part through the fire” (Zech. 13. 9), manifests such lovingkindness here. How this must speak to our hearts, that every mouth may be stopped, and that we may emphasize the seeking of the Lord by lost and hopeless sinners in their utter need.

“He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away” (Luke 1. 53).

“But a certain Samaritan.” He is able to meet “a certain man.” Yet is He not *naturally* related. Nor is He beloved: “the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans” (John 4. 9). But this one came on purpose to have dealings. He is not said to come “by chance”: there is a gracious plan. Nor is He going *down*. The words “as He journeyed” imply He was in the “way”: yes, He was here to make the way, and to be the Way unto the Father, and thus to blessing, and not to the curse (John 14. 6). Each word has its force. It is no accident that the verb is linked with One alone.<sup>1</sup> He “came.” We call to mind other verses: “Christ Jesus *came* into the world to save sinners,” “He came unto His own,” “The Son of man is *come* to seek and to save that which was lost,” “the Son of man *came* . . . to give His life a ransom for many.” And so He came, not to the place but to the person, as the Shepherd in Luke 15. 4. He came and saw with the eye of pity (Ezek. 16. 6). O the mercy of the next word “He had compassion on him.” Where else is it used? In Matthew 9. 36, 14. 14, 15. 32, 18. 27, 20. 34, Mark 1. 41, 6. 34, 8. 2, 9. 22, Luke 7. 13, 15. 20, invariably of God the Father (in parables) and of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Have we not read once already that He “came,” but now again it is written “Having *come* to him, He bound up his wounds.” Why this two-fold emphasis? Is it not in

<sup>1</sup> True, the priest was “in **that** way” but this intensifies the contrast. The Samaritan is not associated with “that” way, though He was there, the Cause of a new way, in, and by, Himself.

holy contrast with verse 32?—"Having *come* and having seen, he *came aside* over against him." What a difference between "coming aside" (and passing on), and "coming *to*." And has not our gracious Lord come to *us*, as Ephesians 2. 17 shows? There is no unfinished work in the Gospel.

The wounds were real: and they were not healed unwisely. They were not *removed* at once, but tenderly bound up. A sinner must still feel what he has deserved, even while he begins to realize grace more and more. The bound up wounds are still wounds: they are healed in a way that exalts the crushed out olive oil, and the wine of the gospel. The Holy Spirit's ministry of the work of Christ, and the richness of love may be intended by the former (Rom. 11. 17), and redemption by the blood of Christ may be typified in the latter. For is not the Lord Jesus the True Vine? And if fermented wine pictures the blood of sinners in Isaiah 63. 1 ("dyed," "fermented," lit.), is it strange that Christ's pure blood should, as the new unchanged wine of Luke 5. 37, be here emphasized? Naught else could meet the need: nothing that the man possessed or did, could contribute an iota: salvation is by grace, and it is "without price" because all the price has been borne by Another.

And He never stints. There is indeed a pouring, in wondrous grace. O the wealth of Christ's work. When the rock was smitten the waters ran as a river. When the five thousand were fed, they were all filled, and there were baskets over. Yet was nothing lost. And thus is it with the fulness of Christ. "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." Think it not strange that the death of Christ is here implied. Is it not found in the Seed Corn That died, and thus bore fruit? Is it not revealed in the One Who sold all that He had? Is it not implied in that all the first branches of the True Vine have been mysteriously removed in John 15 ere the grafted in branches, there alone found, are before us? Is not the death of the Lord intended in the killing of the sacrifice for the lost, and then found, son of Luke 15? Why should we be surprised that His finished work is ever before us, and that the parables, as the types, are full of Him? Without His death we should have nothing: but, through His death we have everything.

The gracious Samaritan has now accomplished much. Need He do more? Assuredly He will complete His own work. The rescued man will not be left where he is. His position must be changed as well as his condition. And therefore he is lifted

up, and carried. The lost sheep is placed on the Shepherd's shoulders, and likewise this poor robbed and spoiled man (Isa. 42. 22) is set on the Samaritan's "own possession." Doubtless animals were thus described, but the Holy Spirit omits a word that signifies by derivation, a beast, and chooses another word, referring to that which "belonged" to the One Who showed mercy. There may also be the thought of His *acquiring*, for it was through a real work that He made it possible for sinners to be thus delivered. The poor, maimed, halt and blind of Luke 14. 21 are "brought," and here, too, is a gracious and mighty bringing. Instead of Jericho, the place of welcome, the inn, is reached. Again the Holy Spirit's perfect wisdom in the use of words shines out. This noun is found nowhere else. A study of the derivation of unusual terms in Scripture would be rich in results. Two words are here combined, "all" and "welcome." Here is the place that "welcomes all," for sinners are saved from all nations in the "world" (John 3. 16, Matt. 8. 11, Rev. 5. 9), and the lawyer needed this Divine reproof of his proud Judaism. Beautiful is the wealth of grace, but there is no universalism that embraces every individual: souls of all classes are saved, without distinction, but not without exception.<sup>2</sup> Be concerned then as to yourself, if you see your need of Christ, and "strive to enter in at the strait gate." Grace never excuses carelessness, and delay.

What a "welcome" awaited the one brought, for an assembly is to receive, since Christ has received, to the glory of God (Romans 15. 7), and to bind and loose what has been *already* bound and loosed in heaven (Matt. 18. 18 with Acts 10. 13). A gathering of God's beloved people is to have an open door, not for the world, but for broken-hearted sinners whom the Lord brings, in grace. A "welcome" is seemly, because were we not recipients of the same love, and have not we been given a place (Jos. 20. 4), with the prospect of the place prepared in John 14. 2, 3? The assembly is not to be a sect: it is not to be a home of bickering: it is to have a warm heart for Christ's redeemed ones, and to "take care" of them till He returns.

How precious is that command "Take care of him," but we must not go too quickly. We read *first* that He "took care of him" (verse 34). His care precedes ours. This word suggests 1 Peter 5. 7. It is rather remarkable that the exact

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<sup>2</sup> A booklet "The All's of Scripture" gladly sent.

form occurs only here, and in 1 Timothy 3. 5, with regard to a house of God. And the related adverb is found alone in Luke 15. 8, where the ministry of the assembly, in the power of the Holy Spirit, is described. Why is there this centralizing of thought on the privilege of a gathering unto the Lord? It is no mere chance. Ah, dear fellow believers, God has a high standard for "a church of a living God" (1 Tim. 3. 15): He is living, and still works among His beloved people. Let us expect such assemblies to His glory.

The Lord has taken care of us. This characteristic of grace is ever before us (John 17. 12), and now the Holy Spirit represents Him, but works through the "joints and bands" (Col. 2. 19). Do we thus seek to represent our Lord to one another? It was on "the morrow" that He gave this passing message. We think of the morrow with respect to our Lord's resurrection, and His gracious interest in His people ere He ascended, seen in the last chapters of the gospels, and in Acts 1. Are His wishes dear to us, and do we seek to do His will?

What mean the two silver pence which He brought out as He uttered the words "Take care"? Is not silver a picture of redemption? Have we not seen this in the foundation sockets of the Tabernacle? (Ex. 30. 11-16, 38. 27). We have already observed this was on "the morrow." Is it surprising therefore to behold a reference here to the "two days" of the present dispensation (Hos. 6. 2), with the Divine hint of 2 Peter 3. 8, with a view to the glory of that Day? Blessed be His Name, our glorious Saviour provides everything for the whole journey to the assembly and then for the *whole* time of waiting until He comes. And this time is to be spent in the gathering place, where the welcome was first found. There is no call to severance, disunion, or isolation. How blessed is the constant encouragement to *abide* in Him, and in His will.

7

How thoughtful was "the Good Samaritan." No detail escaped his notice. But our Lord Jesus is more wonderful, in every way, than any type. He wishes His people to have every need supplied till He comes again. But observe His desire that they should be expecting Him, and not be occupied with a looking for "something else." He has paid the full expense of salvation, and paid everything, till "the redemption of the purchased possession" is manifest. The two pence are not given to the one rescued: he is not merely to look after

himself. The Lord works through the assembly, though it is freely granted that every type falls short, and we have individually many precious personal dealings with Himself. But "one another" is a message from Him.

The practical lesson must never be forgotten. We are often selfish through thoughtlessness. It may be in little things. We may have had an umbrella taken by one walking together, to hold over us, and then lifted right away from covering us. Such details remind of our own failures, so unintentional, but so real. We wish well, and say kindly words; but do not *act*, that they may be fulfilled. When the words "Take care of him" are lovingly uttered here, the two pence have been given. James 2. 16 is not a dead letter, in the searching light of Isaiah 58, with its linked promise ("then" verse 9).

But this is not all: "*and whatsoever thou spendest more.*" There is no promise unless there is a "spending," and this involves love's activity. Do we "spend"—yea, are we spent also (2 Cor. 12. 15) for one another? What are we now spending for the spiritual needs of those whom the Lord has bought and brought? Observe "whatsoever": this word is singular, and shows our Lord's loving interest in each item; but it is a "plural-singular" and implies an expected willingness to do much. And He promises to honour such love. Not that His reward is always seen at once. We may need to "spend," and feel the spending, till He come again. Then will the fruit be manifest. He will not be in debt. He will remember; He will "give back." This is the characteristic of "that Day."

But what if we spend less? What if we fail to use what He has given us for His own? The thought is searching, for "trusteeship" means so much. The spender, and the spending, and the one for whom all is spent have one object in view. He is coming back. Are we willing to live, and to act in view of this? Is His promise sufficient for us? He has never broken His word, and never will (Matt. 24. 35).

But how can we spend more? What have we which we have not received (1 Cor. 4. 7)? Humility realizes this, but we do have that which we have not received *specifically* for the use of others. Also we can be "selfish" with blessings, and keep them to ourselves. Moreover, there is the *physical* aspect of selfishness. It is precious to remember we can do more than the direct, definite appointment of our Lord in any one matter, albeit *not* more than we ought, nor more than the principle

of giving all to Him includes. 1 Corinthians 9. 15 illustrates this. Paul "spent more" than many in his love that laboured so as not to be "chargeable." This was not a "necessary" thing, but a "free will offering" because the love of Christ constrained, and he wished to give a witness. That which he gave was first "received," and he gave it in the power of the Holy Spirit Whom he had received, and in the devotedness of the new life received. But he was not definitely bidden so to do: this is a key to much. The omission would not have been a sinful omission in itself: undoubtedly when he felt the gracious leading of the Holy Spirit it would have been wrong to wish otherwise, and it is because of sinful failure in our walk with God that we oft miss gentle and gracious hints to spend more, but our Father gives, as with Israel of old, a gracious outlet for free will offerings as well as appointed responsibilities, which are parallel with tithes and usual sacrifices (1 Cor. 9. 17-19). Does this thought attract our love to see what we can spend "more" for our brethren because of our love to Him? We see that our devotedness to Him is shown by our devotedness to them. What does my brother need? It may be in material things. It is certainly the case in spiritual things. Love overlooks neither. "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward His Name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb. 6. 10). Rewards at the Judgment Seat are a reality, not for self-glory, but for His joy. Thus the climax words here are, "I will give thee back." How precious is the personal note—"I," "thee." A Greater than Paul has given this promise, with His own hand, as it were, with an emphasis on the word "I."

And now comes the searching application, "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was (has become) neighbour to him that fell among the thieves?" The questioner is himself questioned. He himself must answer to his own conviction. Will he, as David, apply the parable to his own humiliation (2 Sam. 12. 13), and shall we? He acknowledged the fact, but did he feel the reproof? The Holy Spirit is silent.

"Which now of these three?" Three are before us, but only One was Neighbour,—rather He *became* "Neighbour." All was in love. He came where the man was. All others failed. Thanks be to God, we behold the glory of His beloved Son everywhere in Scripture. It was His love that brought Him to die for us, and we see that His gracious coming to deliver us, in the Father's will, was the fulfilling of the law found in

His heart (Ps. 40. 6-8). He loved the Father perfectly, and loved those to whom He had made Himself near ("neighbour"). The lawyer had asked "Who is my neighbour?" The Lord Jesus transfers the thought. The One Who shows the love "*became* Neighbour." A very deep principle is included. We must not wait till others come to us: love seeks the lost sheep. It is ever so. Grace overflowed, and overflows.

The unfolding of the gospel is thus, as ever, of the fullest practical meaning. The ethics of the gospel are far more than those of the fathers or of a Confucius. "The grace of God . . . hath appeared *teaching* us," and believers are to walk in love, as Christ also hath loved them (Eph. 5. 2). It is all so wonderful. And then comes the command, "Go, and do thou likewise." It is not enough to wait, "Go." The "doing" should have been manifest among Israel, but it was not so. Priest and Levite alike failed. Only when we come to Christ have we a "likewise," which implies that His work is first, and ours is in the power of the new creation. Do we thus experience the joy of manifesting what His love means to us? The One Who "showed mercy" to us bids us show mercy. It is even so in Matthew 18. 33 "Shouldest not thou also?" This is God's will. Ah, it is "THE mercy," and the verb denotes doing and making. He has made that which He gives. Again we behold His glory.

The obedience lovingly appointed to His people is in the continuing tense, and this is God's plan for us. Do we practise the will of God? The parable suddenly closes, and while we praise God for His overruling of the unwise question of the lawyer, and wonder what his action was, let us never forget that the first point is ever, "What is my response?" It does not need much knowledge to make a critic of others, but it needs great grace to be a critic of oneself, and to rejoice that the searching hand of God has free course in our hearts and lives (Heb. 4. 12 with 2 Thess. 3. 1). May it be so, to His own praise and glory.

## THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

IT is a privilege to pray to our Father, and we might well ponder together the parables that encourage and urge prayer. We have thought of two, that emphasize importunity—the only parables laying such stress on this remarkable attitude—in the “ Contrast ” Parables. We have seen that God is entirely different from the one in bed with a closed door (Luke 11. 5-8), and likewise with the unjust judge (Luke 18. 1-8). Both passages remind us that those redeemed by the precious blood of Christ are blessedly related to Him. Another help as to prayer is immediately added in Luke 18. 9-14. The whole context shows the meaning and power of real prayer. Hence it is deeply important to realize that there is a counterfeit. Is it not always so? Copper coin is not normally forged. The enemy hates godly prayer (Jas. 4. 7, 8). He has many ways of hindering, and Pharisaic pride is the paralysis of prayer.

Only those “ in Christ ” can draw near to God as their Father. Israel had, of old, a blessing of privilege, and were, typically, God’s people. Alas, the unfruitful fig tree, the self-esteeming son, and the unrighteous steward show the need for a work within.

“ Two men went up into the temple to pray.” How different were the two men of Acts 3. In those days the temple of God was to be His house of prayer (Matt. 21. 13): there was no sin in the going up, but there was no merit or virtue in so doing. Outward worship without the heart was, and is, vain (Isa. 29. 13). May this fact ever impress us, and may all God’s truth speak to our hearts. They went up “ TO pray,” but we do not find that they both prayed in the true meaning of that word.

“ The one a Pharisee.” The Pharisees emphasized prayer. and made long prayers (Luke 20. 47). We think, and would think sorrowfully, of Matthew 6. 5. It is easy to say words: O that our hearts may pray (2 Sam. 7. 27). “ And the other (of another kind, Greek) a publican (taxgatherer).” An entire contrast, in the nation of Israel: the publicans and sinners were classed together. How graciously the Lord chose one of His apostles, writing the first gospel in our New Testament, from this class, whereas the last of the apostles, writing more books than others, was “ as touching the law, a Pharisee ” (Phil. 3. 5). God’s grace brings together: how great the difference from the unjustified one in Luke 18.

It is solemn to realize that there are still many who say prayers without praying. And what is the ground of this self-

made religion? Observe the introduction, it is the testimony of the Holy Spirit “ which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.” Prayer is, in Hebrew, self-judgment. Self-confidence is the opposite of genuine prayer. Prayer ever begins humbly and continues humbly. How real is the contrast between Isaiah 66. 1 and 2. How blessed was the beginning of the work of grace in the other “ Pharisee ” of whom we have thought,—“ Behold he prayeth ” (Acts 9. 11). Truly he had been brought to the ground spiritually as well as physically. The result was “no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3. 3). And this is no mere negative. The positive words “boast in Jesus Christ” **precede**. So is it ever with acceptable prayer. This message still speaks to our heart every day of our believing life. We never advance beyond lowliness without backsliding. Observe, too, that self-confidence not only sets aside the Lord Jesus, but is wrong toward others: the sad word “ despised ” is before us. O that we may be kept from this attitude. Such verses as Ephesians 3. 8 and Philippians 2. 3 are beautiful contrasts that are written to teach us the beauty of Christian humility. They do not set forth “ mock modesty, ” but a consciousness of grace, and of personal unworthiness, comparable with that of John the Baptist, yet never ignoring stewardship and responsibility (1 Cor. 15. 10). The translation might, possibly, be improved, but the English words are sufficient to exercise our hearts aright.

“ The Pharisee having stood was praying (continuance, perhaps repetition) these things toward himself.” Standing is often Scripturally helpful (Mark 11. 25), but it is a vanity without a right heart (Matt. 6. 5). We have seen this: do we realize it? Do we pray in our prayer (Jas. 5. 17 margin)? “ To, or toward, himself ” is a remarkable and unexpected expression. There was no real devotion toward God (contrast Phil. 4. 6). As soon as “ self ” becomes the centre, or aim, of anything, whether it be salvation, service, prayer, or an assembly, everything is wrong.

“ God ”: both prayers began alike in word, but the after words clearly show that the TONE must have been quite distinguished. There seems a coldness with the Pharisee. The word “ God ” alone may easily have this. With the publican there was a sense of God’s majesty, and an intensity of dependence on Him was entwined, but his very concern would hold him back from the word “ My ” “ I thank Thee.” Is it not well to give thanks? Should not this attitude be at the beginning (Col. 1. 3, 1 Tim. 2. 1)? Yes, but this only indicates how easy it is to deceive oneself, whenever there is pride. How contrasted was

the prayer of one who had been a Pharisee:—" I thank MY God through Jesus Christ FOR YOU ALL " (Rom. 1. 8), or, if he thanked God with regard to himself, " I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, Who hath enabled me . . . who was before a blasphemer . . . and the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant " (1 Tim. 1. 12-14). In the sad recorded prayer of Luke 18, we have negatives and positives, but they all centre around self. Not one word of confession of sin, not one hint of God's saving mercy to the undeserving. " I am not as the rest of men: " Ephesians 2. 3 comes to mind, with 1 Corinthians 4. 7. It is so important to realize GRACE all the while (1. Cor. 15. 10). It is true that a believer is not now as " the rest " or " left " ones (same word, Rom. 11. 7). But the change of " a new creation " humbles to the dust, and he owns that in his flesh dwelleth no good thing, and that grace makes him loathe himself (Ezek. 36. 31), and yearn for others (Rom. 9. 3).<sup>\*</sup> How easy it is for the flesh to use the language of praise to make a pinnacle for oneself. Another saddening example of misuse of right words is found in 1 Corinthians 1. 12 " And I of Christ." It is vain to say " I thank God," or to exalt the name of Christ, if SELF is large. It is also a sin to misuse prayer to tell of the failures of others, under the guise of praying for them, as if we were better. O for grace to discern the subtle attempts of the enemy to hinder, and counterfeit, spiritual power in spiritual prayer.

" Extortioners,"—evidently a first hint as to the tax gatherer: and then the attack becomes more open. So we see the peril if once we open our lips in pride. Sin may grow more quickly than the gourd in Jonah 4, " Unjust "—but he himself went down to his house UNJUSTIFIED. " Adulterers "—the Pharisee looked on outward sins alone: his words would link the other with manifest evil.

We need to deplore and confess, the inward sins of our own heart, and to seek grace, and power, and victory. " Or even as this tax-gatherer: " we see the goal of sin; and it includes an entire blindness to grace and to that which brought God joy—" one sinner that repenteth." No longing for a soul to be saved. no thought " How is God working in him? " The callousness of the elder brother in Luke 15 affords a parallel, but have we always a tender heart for souls, and an expectation that He will work in the most " unlikely " ? " I fast twice in the week " : the prayer changes from the negative to the positive, but it retains its " I." How different are the petitions of the appointed

\* A leaflet as to the misunderstood first part of this verse gladly sent.

“ disciples’ prayer ” in Matthew 6. 9-13. God is only before us once in Luke 18. 11, 12—and then merely as an introduction. Thus we may deceive ourselves that the words about ourselves are permissible; but it is sinful to “ thank God ” unless we are humbled, and FEEL that all is by GRACE. How “ unfeeling ” this “ prayer ” was. “ Every one that exalteth ” himself, is our Lord’s comment. “ Ye fast for strife,” says Isaiah 58. 4: the Pharisee gave up outwardly, but indulged his pride inwardly (cf. Col. 2. 23). “ Self-denying ” may be the opposite of denying self. “ I give tithes of all that I possess ”: again we see the externalism,—just as in the first part. We think too of 1 Corinthians 13. 3: but here the Pharisee emphasized “ all ” that he had. He retained nine-tenths, and his prayer ENDED with the word “ I possess ”: And both his actions were mathematical: he spoke of “ twice ” and a tenth. Nothing more, nothing of love, nothing of confession of sin, nothing inward, nothing of devotion and adoration. But how would our prayers appear if the Lord analyzed them, if the Lord translated them, if the Lord recorded them? We observe the absence of petition: he did not once feel his need: the “ prayer ” was all biography,—and that from a false standpoint! And such prayer never reached beyond himself. Again we hear the words: “ prayed thus to himself.”

“ And the publican.” Thanks be to God the parable is not finished. The Pharisee was first: the tax-gatherer did not hurry: his unworthiness may have kept him silent at first, but he did not remain silent. Grace opened his lips (see Rom. 3. 19). His prayer was much shorter: less than a quarter of the words. The beginning was, “ God ”: but surely the tone was quite different. The tax-gatherer felt his NEED of God: the Pharisee spoke as if God had a need of him.

But before we come to the prayer we must realize the Lord’s gracious unveiling of the attitude and manner. And this is far longer than the prayer itself, and intentionally precedes it. Must not the condition of the pray-er affect the whole of the prayer? The tax-gatherer stood even as the Pharisee, but “ afar off.” It is not good to follow afar off, but at the beginning there must be the consciousness of Isaiah 59. 2. The one who was trusting “ on ” himself dared to draw near, but he was not made nigh (Ps. 138. 6). HE reminds us of those whose eyes and mouths are lofty (Ps. 73. 7-9, Prov. 30. 13, Isa. 37. 23), but the publican “ would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven,” feeling indeed that he deserved hell. “ He was not willing ”: he wished to be able to do so, as his prayer indicates, but he was not willing

to assume or claim anything in his own name. How different is the unwillingness of John 5. 40. Alas, the Pharisee's disdainful eyes were on the publican, but THAT ONE disdained himself. Both looked down on the sin of THE ONE, but to judge oneself is blessed, to despise another is evil. The publican WAS a sinner: the Pharisee had a ground of fact, but facts are easily misused, even as truth out of proportion is distorted. Do not let us flatter ourselves that because something is true we can use it as we will. Motive may spoil everything. Forgetfulness of another fact may ruin all. Stealing of a position that is not ours may vitiate the whole. The Pharisee was not appointed judge: he, too, was a sinner.

Yet one further description is found:—He “smote (was smiting) upon his breast”; in pained acknowledgment of deserved judgment. Do we ever find so full a portrayal of the accompaniments of prayer from the lips of our beloved Lord? Why the emphasis? “To this man will I LOOK, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word.” Yes, the Lord delights to see a deep work within. How vain is much profession of Christ to-day. How few seem to have such an experience as this. A broken and contrite heart God does not despise (Ps. 51. 17). Salvation is no rocky-ground joy. The ploughing has been real where the wheat grows. We notice feet, eyes and breast—the whole man—confessing unworthiness. But grace is for the unworthy. Our hearts learn that attitude in prayer is by no means unimportant. True, a redeemed and believing one is not to come with a sense of doubt, but are we not oft times careless, and irreverent, and unfeeling? It is well to see how the body shows what is within the heart, and how the Lord notices the body and its members. Kneeling and lifting up holy hands were not mere externals to God's servants of old.

“Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief” cried one troubled, and it may be observed that the accepted prayer is introduced with the word “saying,” and not as the Pharisee “was praying.” Did this dear, troubled soul feel as if his prayer was “UNprayer,” and not worthy of the name? But God treasured it. How was he brought to this condition? We do not know. Never give up a soul, with human reasoning. Who would have expected so real a breaking down as we behold here? It was personal. We read of no mass movement. Look for God's individual work: expect it.

And now we reach the prayer. After the personal cry to God, the ONE petition contains (in Greek) four words, (1) “Be merciful (2) to me (3) the (4) sinner.” The first emphasizes

mercy, and propitiation or atonement, for such is its derivation (cf. Prov. 16. 6). And this is the beauty of prayer, it ever acknowledges the work of Christ. The first recorded approaches unto God are before us once more. Cain was like the Pharisee, but Abel as the tax-gatherer: he brought a sacrifice. Solomon's prayer in 2 Chronicles 6 was on a platform the size of the altar of burnt offering (13). This was no accident. How could we pray without the blood of the Lord Jesus? The second word is personal: but it is not the "I" of the Pharisee, it is the "to me" of a humbly dependent one. And thereby he puts aside all looking at others, and their failures. The soul is occupied with God, the suppliant thirsts for God, and His grace. "A," in the translation, should be "the." "The sinner" is full of humility, and yet of confidence. "A sinner" is general: many will acknowledge they are sinners, "so are others," "we are all sinners." But "the sinner" indicates that he did not look at the rest, as the Pharisee. It indicates, moreover, that he claimed the SACRIFICE as for himself, for was not the hour of prayer the hour of the temple burnt offering? How beautiful is this appropriating. And thus the prayer finished. "I possess," said one: "the sinner," said the other. And the "possessor" was without righteousness, whereas the ungodly one was justified (Rom. 4. 5), for the Lord Jesus at once adds, with a solemnizing preface, "I tell you this man went down to his house justified."

We have read the two prayers. There were only two. There is no third "division": there is nothing in between as to salvation. We think of the many parables of the TWO classes, the TWO sons, the TWO ways, the wheat AND the tares, the ten virgins, five and five. Ah, dear reader, to which are you like? Permit loving plainness:—Have you ever prayed the tax-gatherer's prayer? You cannot begin anywhere else. God does not want forms. God does not seek rhetoric. Have you ever prayed broken-heartedly thus?—or are you still UNjustified? Though these pages are primarily for believers, we would fervently bring before any unsaved reader the VITAL NEED. Will it be useless repetition to enumerate the parallels, and then the contrasts? First they both

- (a) went up
- (b) to pray,
- (c) and said, "God."

but the contrasts are far greater:—

**The Pharisee—**

Prayed toward himself.  
Spoke of self as good.  
Mentioned others disparagingly.

**The Publican—**

Smote upon his breast.  
Said not one good word of self.  
Mentioned no one else.

### The Pharisee—

Ignored atonement.  
Made no confession.

Began each clause with "I".

### The Publican—

Pleaded atonement alone.  
Confessed not only sins, but himself as **the** sinner.

Only said, "Be **Thou** merciful."

What is the summing up of the Lord Jesus? He Who knows the heart, and Who has the right to speak as to justification, has given us the searching words, "I TELL YOU, that THIS man went down to his house justified rather than the other (THAT one)". One moment, ere we go further. Do we acknowledge what HE tells us? We remember "BUT I say unto you," and often times "Verily, verily I say unto you." "THIS one": the one near: the Pharisee was THAT one, removing afar off, and outside as the elder son in Luke 15. "This one" is a precious contrast with "this publican." He was TOO CLOSE to the Pharisee, but the Lord rejoiced in the nearness. Two went up, two went down,—but how different. He went down not as one who was just by his own works, but justified, and the tense used implies a fixity. Observe the three occurrences of this root—

- (a) "Trusted in themselves that they were righteous."
- (b) "Unjust" (unrighteous).
- (c) "Justified."

And so is it to-day. There are those who look to their own righteousness, and there are those who rejoice in the righteousness of God upon faith (Phil. 3. 9): and which are you and I?

If the Lord Jesus says "Justified," who can disannul? We read Roman 8. 33, 34 with simple confidence. But the words "rather than THAT ONE" are solemnizing. If there was one justified, there was one unjustified, as with the two thieves, and the added explanation shows that the Pharisee is no isolated example. "For EVERYONE that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Why is the word "everyone" linked with one statement? Does it suggest that such are ever the majority? How much better to be "humble" than to be "humbled." A sad future awaits those who trust in themselves. "Whom He justified, them He also glorified" tells of the contrasted future exaltation, but surely the justification is itself a holy height of blessing. And the Lord's declaration is very definite. The path of humiliation is ever the path of blessing. If we have owned our sins, and ever rest upon the work of the Lord Jesus, there is a certainty of delight, but in no other way can His salvation be experienced. Profession, accuracy, religion and activity are all vain: how great is the need for a holy breaking down. Meetings, excitement and all else, without this, are futile. And is there not the same need for God's

dear children afterwards? The whole life of faith must be one of lowliness, or it will not be a life of prayer, with the fulfilment of God's encouraging words in 1 Peter 5. 6. The Lord Jesus spoke this parable indeed to those of a certain CHARACTER, but His message has been written that we may not become like to such, but that we may constantly receive His loving warning, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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## SOME PARABLES ASSOCIATED WITH HOUSES.

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**I**F we seek to classify the priceless parables of our Lord Jesus we find their fulness. If we enumerate those that set forth His wondrous love and redemption, and those that tell of His Coming again, and those that speak of our lost condition, the message of the Good Samaritan will be in all our lists. And, for another example, those parables which tell of prayer contain, entwined, an unveiling of our close relation to our Father. Nor is this strange: We cannot isolate grace and service, we cannot separate the Lord's loving work in the past and the future. All parts of truth are united, and the words of our Lord are fuller than we have ever realized.

A "house" is often before us, and we think of the Householder of Matthew 13. 27, and call to mind also the Shepherd who brings the lost sheep home, no longer lost, nor to be lost, and recollect how each part of Luke 15 displays the final blessedness of the redeemed within the house. The marriage feast and the great supper have a like reminder, and again the man to whom the Good Samaritan became the "Near One" comes before our praiseful notice. He has found a dwelling place with all its restfulness and provision. These parables have already been studied.

But there are some others which we would now prayerfully ponder, as we desire to have at least an outline-fulness of our wondrous theme. We think of Matthew 7. 24-27, the climax of the Address on the Mount, and the somewhat similar message (for our Lord emphasized His teaching by repetition), at the close of Luke 6.

There are two builders, and only two. The essential difference, moreover, is two-fold; but remarkably the two blessed

characteristics are viewed as together, or both absent. We should have expected, after the reference to the one who "heareth these sayings of Mine and doeth them," a special stress on the act of building, but at once the FOUNDATION comes in view, and it is not A rock but THE Rock, the only parallel in this gospel being 16. 18, where the meaning is clear to our hearts. What then do we learn from Matthew 7? If we have the right Foundation we should be characterized by hearing and doing our Lord's words (cf. John 10. 27), AND if we do not hear and do, we cannot, however devoted our language may appear, be right as to the Foundation. It is impossible to exalt the Person of Christ and to ignore His words. His own utterances with regard to this at once appeal to our hearts:—"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed OF ME AND OF MY WORDS," "If ye love ME keep MY COMMANDMENTS," "He that loveth ME not keepeth not MY SAYINGS," "If ye abide in ME, AND MY WORDS abide in you." Before our study goes forward, let us pray for grace to FEEL the power of this message.

"Hearing and doing": how blessed is the link. Israel said, "All that the Lord hath said we will do, and we will hear" (Ex. 24. 7, Heb.). May not this suggest one cause of after-failure? "They waited not for His counsel." We need to "Keep on hearing" all the while, that we may have the true freshness of doing His will in His way. We read of His heavenly servants, "Bless the Lord, ye His angels, that excel in strength, that DO His commandments, HEARKENING unto the voice of His word" (Ps. 103. 20).

It is sadly clear that the instructions of the Lord Jesus on the Mount have been largely forgotten. It is there that we find His instruction against oaths on the part of those who acknowledge Him, and against the use of judicial force on their part, though they fully recognise that, in another sphere, "the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13. 1). The pilgrim path for believers has been overlooked. Had Matthew 5-7 been laid to heart, worldly success and state churches would alike have been impossible. Numerical greatness, as of the mustard tree, may attend the disregard of His commandments, but "the least" is not small to those who are His (Matt. 5. 19), and the attitude has a tremendous effect, even if "one" command is set aside, with regard to "the kingdom of the heavens." "I say unto you" should be music to those for whom He gave His life-blood. The inwardness and the heavenliness of the Address on the Mount can never be obscured. Socialism knows nothing of the ground of these ethics, that are more than ethical. Only

“ the poor in spirit ” who as “ the poor of the flock ” in Zechariah 11. 11 wait on Him, and know the word of the Lord, can understand aright. Such have been taught by grace, that He Himself is the Rock-Foundation of all their obedience even as of their everlasting salvation. Yes, as in all the parables, CHRIST IS CENTRAL, and we would ever see and glorify Him.

Can we do without hearing? Reading is not enough. Though this may not be the primary thought here, we feel how definitely we need the living accent of the Holy Spirit, as He takes of the things of Christ. Then our response will be a “ doing ” which is likened to wise **building**. On the ground of His Person and work we shall carry out His will in a way that will abide (cf. John 15. 16), and we shall receive the reward “ in that Day.” A house is not a mausoleum: it is for living occupation. Often we think of a temple and God’s indwelling, and likewise of our enjoyment. The stress on “ HIS house ” here would seem to emphasize this aspect, though not excluding the former. The testing here indicated may refer to present trials, which show reality (cf. Matt. 13. 21), but its fulfilment appears to be in the future (cf. 1 Cor. 3. 15). Only that which is in accord with our Lord’s words will then stand. We may have much activity, and apparent success, but all is vain, except living and loving obedience (1 Sam. 15. 22). Rain, rivers, and winds give a searching test. It is no mere amusement to live. We should be concerned to build well. There is no jerry building when the Lord’s words are rightly taken to heart. But the stability is not here associated with a commendation of the building. “ FOR it was founded (it had been established) on the Rock.” The glory belongs to Christ. Our attitude in that Day is seen in Luke 17. 10, 19. 16, 18. “ Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory.”

The sad alternative is linked with hearing. But there is only a physical listening by the unwise, whether among those who were with Christ in the days of His ministry or those who attend the testimony of the truth to-day. As in Matthew 25, we see the UNWISDOM of disobedience. Its sinfulness is oft emphasized, but the grace of our Lord shines out in the use of this word of warning, “ A foolish man.” Though we are among the redeemed, is it not possible that as to some parts of Scripture even we illustrate this unwisdom? Are we growing up into Christ in all things? Is our obedience all-round? If not, to the extent that we thus fail, our work will be destroyed in the coming day. Only that which is in accord with His words can be recognized. “ His

house ” is the expression again in verse 26, but it will prove neither temple, nor dwelling place, only a ruin. Does not this speak searchingly to us? The opinions of man, with everything of man, are likened to the shifting sand. How appropriate is the picture. There is none other rock except the Lord Jesus. And let us observe that the same testing, whether present or future, shows the unsatisfactory character of the whole. We do not read “ for it was founded on the sand,” inasmuch as the Lord would here emphasize the failure of the building as well. That which is made of disobedience can never be well pleasing. Yet HOW MUCH is so done, and the building appears awhile to be right, until it is tested. So much is erected, for it is not a matter of a few bricks, the fall of it is “ GREAT.” How vain is “ success ” that is but for a few moments, until the Lord tests.

The parallel passage, though not spoken on the same occasion, in Luke 6 makes the “ witness ” two-fold. And in that context also we find the emphasis on those who say “ Lord, Lord.” He does not seek our lip-expressiveness but our loving devotedness. There are some added thoughts. The wise builder “ digged deep.” Does not this indicate a personal experience of the Lord Jesus and what He is? It may also indicate the unwillingness to be content with anything of men that obscures and hides Him from view. “ Could not SHAKE it ” is the precious statement here. We, who receive a kingdom unshaken, are thus refreshed. All true obedience will not merely “ pass ” the test. There will be a completeness. Here some manuscripts emphasize the manifestly right mode of building. The Lord is well pleased to record the beauty and accuracy of true obedience.

The contrasted builder is here described as “ without a foundation.” That which is of sand is not worthy of the name. He who looks to self, or others, looks to nothing. How **quickly** such a house will fall. And again we are reminded that much is so erected, for a “ great ” ruin is seen. Moreover, this word may imply that the breaking down is complete. Nothing at all is left. O that we may not thus build!

Surely we need to apply the words ourselves, and then with loving earnestness to bring them before others. How much to-day is being built up on “ church-arrangements ” which are not the Lord’s commandments, with baptism and the Lord’s Supper corrupted. How great will be the ruin. Christendom has a sad future. Why should we not go back to the will of our Lord now? THAT is faith’s inference from these parables. And grace shines out continually. Thanks be unto God there is THE Rock on which we may build, and the Lord’s words

wherewith we have the precious material. Let us not mix them with aught else. As the Sower soweth the WORD, and as the food is God's truth, so must the building be without any admixture. It is deeply important to keep to His will alone.

Two brief parables concerning houses are found in Matthew 12. "How can one enter into a strong man's house and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house." The context shows the meaning. Satan's power is emphasized (verse 26), and he is the prince of "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2. 2). Salvation is not a gliding into a better life. The enemy fights hard for his citadel. The strong man is strong, but there is One stronger. If we see in the binding an anticipation of Revelation 20. 2, and also a special reference to the Lord's ministry among Israel, in casting out demons, and manifesting "the powers of the age to come" (Heb. 6. 5), we seem to have one key to the passage. But inasmuch as there are parallels in all Satan's tactics, may we not also think of the flesh in the natural man, in fellowship with the evil one, and the Lord's mighty work in laying low when He claims one of His own redeemed? How blessedly should we experience the fruit of this, if we are His, for our bodies have now become the temple of God. The parallel in Luke 11. 21, 22 speaks of a "palace" or "court," and refers to the strong one as armed, and then "overcome." The emphasis on overcoming in 1 John and Revelation 2 and 3 will help in a prayerful Bible study. It is clear that God's work is deep, and with a conflict. We are brought to the judgment of the old life: a mere profession belongs to the rocky-ground hearer. The house is taken with might: it becomes our Lord's spoil. As in Isaiah 53. 12, He delights to share with His own. And the record in Luke continues to explain what this means. All the armour is taken, that "the strong man" may have right to nothing. And then the spoils are divided. Does this indicate that the Lord takes something directly for Himself, and gives us the responsibility of other possessions, even our members which were the weapons of the enemy, but which He gives us the privilege of "presenting" (Rom. 6. 13)? He does not compel, but "divides," that we may bring, with love's willingness, what He has given to us? Or does the dividing go beyond the members or "weapons," and indicate that He gives to several a share in the blessing that attends the salvation of a soul, for we are joined together. The sister who has lived in the power of Christ, in the same house, receives a portion: the brother who has shewn the grace of Christ in the same business

house or workshop is likewise encouraged: and the brother who ministered the Word, whereby the sinner was brought to the Saviour, is not overlooked.

It is clear that the old possessor is laid low. His right is denied, as to any member or weapon. What manner of persons we ought to be after salvation, and how contrasted with the world! These weapons had been those wherein the strong man had "trusted." How solemn it is to realize this use of the members previously against the Lord (Rom. 6. 19). May the change be ever manifest, and the victory be ever continued in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The second parable in Matthew 12 comes in verses 43-45. The unclean spirit is here said to GO out of a man, not to be cast out. There is no work of mighty grace. We thus discern that reformation is no proof of regeneration. Evil spirits can voluntarily leave their dwelling without surrendering their fearful tenancy. It is easy to be deceived in these matters, and for the person himself to be deceived. Do not let such words be mistaken. They are not written that tender souls may be burdened, and ask "Am I saved after all?" There is no suggestion of universal uncertainty. It is blessedly possible to know we have eternal life (1 John 5. 13) and the evidences are not intricate, nor requiring skill to unravel. The simplest Christian may rest in peace wherever there is the blessed token of childlike love to the Lord and His words, and a hatred of sin. "Great things" are not necessary. Be joyful, dear tender believer, you who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, who desire the sincere milk of the Word, and who are sometimes troubled that your witness is not clearer and bolder. The Lord sees the little things, and your fear of grieving His Holy Spirit is precious in His sight. It is well to be tender, and to remain tender, and to feel the searching power of this parable, but the attitude of loving concern is a sure sign of God's work in the heart.

Observe that we read first about the unclean spirit. The human occupant of the house is unmentioned. He is not one who has become conscious of Satan's domain, and sought deliverance. The spirit has gone out at personal choice, and "he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none." The language used seems intended to show the miserable condition of such spirits. No satisfaction comes into their existence, yet there is no thought of repentance. A foreshadowing of eternal restlessness in hell may well alarm the sinner who, choosing his own way, can only be with the devil and his angels. If any reader is in this sad state, may it not be that God will use these words

to cause concern? How blessed to seek the Lord while He may be found, and to know redemption by the precious blood of Christ, poured out for sinful men. Fallen angels have no Redeemer, but a burdened soul among men receives to-day a gracious welcome. "Dry places" would seem to remind us of the fear of the spirits in Luke 8. 31, and of the special place of punishment in 2 Peter 2. 4, together with Revelation 9. 14, and 20. 13, where some beings, distinguished from those who have bodies AND souls (and therefore given up by death AND hades), are brought from the sea (cf. Job 26. 5, which may be rendered, "The Rephaim are agitated from under waters"). No rest is found: the like words are seen in Revelation 14. 11. How blessed is the invitation to the heavy laden sinner in Matthew 11. 28. Grateful indeed should we be, who have fled for refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ, and have found in Him our Resting Place and our All.

"Then he saith, I will return unto my house, from whence I came out; and when he is come he findeth it empty, swept and garnished" (verse 44). No thought of sorrow for sin: this spirit is ever unclean and unholy. His plan is self-made. He asks no permission: he retains, as it were, the key of the house. Yet how many love to have it so, and to remain under slavery in "the authority of the darkness" (Col. 1. 13). The house is different in appearance, but not in reality. It is empty, but he still says "mine," swept, but he still says, "mine," garnished, but he still says "mine." Empty: Christ is not there: the Holy Spirit has not waged the warfare: the heart is at leisure (so the word implies) for the unclean spirit to come back. It is swept: some manifest forms of sin may have been cleared away, but nothing pleasing to God takes their place. One can give up drinking and swearing, without being saved. It is blessed when, as a result of grace, not only these things but smoking, and worldly fashions and amusement and other manifestations of the flesh, are excluded, but THAT is quite different. THAT is "fruit,"—living, beautiful, and precious. The manner and motive are quite distinct. The house here is garnished, or adorned: there may be the decorations of respectability, yea, of reform, yea, further, of religion itself, but the house remains as it was. The cleansing is not by the precious blood of Christ, and there is nothing of living faith. A man may turn over a new leaf without a new life, and some of his great "changes," produced in movements where the precious blood of Christ is set on one side, are foreshadowed in this searching parable. May we, as Christian workers, not be deceived thereby, but ever emphasize "Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

The unclean spirit seeks company. He goes again but quickly comes, having received to his side, (a word of fellowship, occurring in Matt. 24. 40, 41, John 14. 3 also), seven other spirits, more wicked than himself. Here is the resurrection, as it were—"eight" suggests this—of open evil in the life. We notice that there are differences of wickedness not only among men but among spirits, for "wickedness" is positive and active. The nature of all is bad, but some are more defiant in their rebellion against God. The explanation by the Lord Jesus, "Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation" is full of meaning. We behold Israel, delivered from their first captivity, which was associated with idolatry, no longer seeking such idols, yet not purified before God. Their worship remained "in vain" while they taught "for doctrines the commandments of men." Their religiousness, culminating in the traditions of the Talmud, has only caused a proud iniquity, and the swept and garnished people will largely become the followers of Antichrist. Thanks be to God, He will preserve HIS remnant, who will yet experience Zechariah 12. 10; but "this wicked generation," in the first application about the year 70, and in the fulfilment at the end of the age, continues unchanged, and no fruit is found on THEIR fig tree henceforward for ever (Matt. 21. 19). The blessing is of the remnant, not in nationalism but in Christ. A professedly baptized Paganism, from the days of Constantine, illustrating the whore and her daughter in Revelation 17 has the same saddening history, and will fall under the same spell of the deceiving Antichrist (2 Thess. 2. 7-12). And the individual application is deeply important. Reformation without regeneration may only lead to an evil relapse, and a climax of iniquity. Well may we understand the words of Mark 9. 25, "Dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and **enter no more into him,**" and then give thanks unto the Father, Who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light, Who hath delivered us FROM THE AUTHORITY OF THE DARKNESS, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love (Col. 1. 12, 13). Salvation is no half-work, but a mighty deliverance through the mighty Holy Spirit, and those who are brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light, are ever encouraged to show forth His praises (1 Pet. 2. 9). How many who read these lines have this inexpressible privilege? "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift" (2 Cor. 9. 15).

## Two Brief Parables concerning Plants.

**M**ARK 4. 26-29 is brief, but the passage contains much. It is almost unique, in that Mark alone records. The link is with the Sower,—between that parable and the mustard seed, even as the wheat and tares in Matthew 13,—all referring to the vegetable “kingdom.” But how contrasted is the sleeping here! Yet the “man” is not said to be the owner, as in Matthew 13. 24: as he does not “know,” we do not behold the Lord Jesus here. It is not necessarily strange to read of believers engaged in harvest service (Matt. 9. 37, 38, John 4. 37, 38), though in the ending of the age the reapers are the angels (Matt. 13. 39). Do we not notice the Lord’s emphasis on our dependence (Jas. 5. 7)? It is a privilege to sow, but we cannot give the increase (1 Cor. 3. 6). Indeed it is appointed unto us to be restful, even as the husbandman sleeps, with holy consciousness that God works, and there shall be fruit. But we must not omit to sow—“in the morning” (Eccl. 11. 6) and “beside all waters” (Isa. 32. 20), knowing that our “labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15. 58). Nor must our restfulness mean that we “leave” all *after* the sowing. We would “rise” regularly, though we cannot give life to the seed, nor always be examining it. We must look after the field, and follow up the Lord’s service entrusted to us with the good seed. The earth, or ground, bringeth forth fruit, AND the seed brings fruit: the two aspects are important. In our experience there must be (a) the *message* mixed with (b) *faith*, which is in the “ground” of our heart (Heb. 4. 2). Thus we have the gospel bringing forth fruit, *and* the persons, in Colossians 1. 6, 10. The gradual increase—“spring and grow up”—is helpful. There should be *steady* progress in our lives, and we should expect it in others.

This is God’s gracious work, when there is no worm, or other hindrance. The seed is living, and there will be “fruit.” The word “of itself” only occurs elsewhere in Acts 12. 10: “automatic” is derived therefrom. None can manufacture fruit, nor “work it up” with human enthusiasm. How many methods to-day are used, as substitutes for God’s plan in nature, and to “force” growth. (This very word is in use.) May our hearts be concerned to avoid this spiritually, though we use appointed means (Luke 13. 8, 1 Cor. 3. 6). “God is Faithful.” “First the blade,” that is, the grass. It is beautiful, but there is no fruit. Our hearts want something more. Thanks be to God, His work, (through the precious seed), does not cease

with the grass, any more than with the leaves of the tree. Next "the ear," and then "the full corn in the ear," the word "corn" in harmony with that which was originally sown, even as we are to be like our Lord (John 12. 24). The Lord delights in the "full corn." We call to mind the contrast in Genesis 41. 6, 7. O that we may have a fulness, because we have received, and still receive, out of Christ's fulness (John 1. 16). There is no emptiness in Him, nor in our corn when we depend on Him. "The harvest has set in." There is an object. The ripe corn is held less tightly in the earth (contrast the trees, which, in the Feast of Tabernacles, speak rather of Israel's earthly calling), it is willing for the burning of persecution, and thus its golden glory, and true usefulness are increased. How helpfully this speaks to us of the Lord's Coming and of the *reviving* soon, which is on our hearts.

"He knoweth not how." Who can understand all the gracious work of God? But we can trust Him. It is blessed to be conscious of our limitations, and to be confident He will not fail. Day by day His work goes forward. It is the Spirit That quickeneth, and the secret, constant growth which is "the increase belonging to God" (cf. in another sphere, Col. 2. 19) is our joy. O that it may be our personal experience, to His glory in that Day, yea, in some measure, to-day also

Matthew 24. 32 is well known. We might have studied it with Luke 13. 6-9 and 21. 19.\* Would not the fig tree solemnly suggest Israel when, as here, *no fruit is mentioned*? This is the more remarkable because encouragement seems here promised: the branch is "tender," an attractive word. The leaves should lead on to fruit, but suddenly the silence comes. Is the nation's awakening here before us,—when did it take place, or is it to come? Observe in verse 33 the Kingdom of God is not mentioned: the subject of the verb is not given. Is there not a reason for this? A careful study of Matthew 24 will show that, when "the end of the age" is before us, the words "that" and "those" are used. "This" and "these" refers to the beginning (Matt. 24. 8 with verse 3). "*These* things" are mentioned in verse 33, and "that day" with an emphatic "but," in 36. Verse 32, too, begins, after 31, with "but," so it is not strange to go back again to the beginning,† and have we not the literal generation (forty years as in Psalm 95) up to the destruction of Jerusalem? Thus Christ's prophecy was

\* In Booklet 3 on The Parables.

† Cf. "parallel" chapters in Daniel and Revelation.

exactly fulfilled: "My words shall not pass away."

The nation had leaves, and there seemed much enthusiasm, and awhile possibly a willingness to co-operate with professing Christians, (in accord with the many thousands who believed, Acts 21. 20). But was this nationalism *fruitful*? No, there was no repentance, there was no recognition of the Deity and the atoning death of the Lord Jesus, and thus the nation took up arms and was laid low in the revolt, followed by the dispersion and captivity, more than twenty-five times longer than that linked with the worship of idols. What was the awful cause? Did it "begin" in the year 70? Surely the Jewish tradition that the scarlet wool failed to turn white on the day of atonement *forty years previously* preserves a reminder of God's longsuffering, and a witness against themselves, a witness that God waited "a generation." Hence the rejection of the Lord Jesus was the real cause of the long captivity. O that some of Israel might have their eyes opened to see this amazing evidence, and to seek the Lord while He may be found (Isa. 55. 6).

The special point before us just now is that the "nationalism," seen in the united revolt, had no "fruit," and could not reverse the solemn sentence of Matthew 21. 19. Only the remnant according to the election of grace, in the Olive Tree of Romans 11, and thus in living union with Christ, has fruit. The warning had been given in Matthew 24 yet the majority heeded it not, and judgment fell.

Luke 21. 29-33 contains many similar words, but, as the parable of the marriage breakfast in Matthew 22 and the supper in Luke 14 are distinguished, so is there further instruction here. We have often noticed a twofoldness, e.g. "in the day that thou eatest" in Genesis 3 spoke of a literal day, and 1000 years as to the body. Is not "this generation" here used morally (as in Phil. 2. 15, the same word), and not for a period of years? Is not the *addition* of "the Kingdom of God" in Luke clear evidence? The same evil generation remains, the world is not improved, nor improving. God is saving and calling people *out of it*.

Israel's national awakening is seen in Zionism, in the use of Hebrew, and in Palestinian events, a sign of the times. May we not see an illustration of Jeremiah 16. 16 in European affairs? Everything encourages *us* to say, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." But is there "fruit" among Israel as a nation? Many have spoken well of "Jesus of Nazareth," but have such sought Him as their Lord and Saviour? Thanks be to God for

individuals, but with most the general loosening of ghetto bonds, awakening of interest and willingness to hear the gospel, and to read the New Testament, are not linked with the *gracious* mourning yet to be seen in the remnant (Zech. 12. 10).

But why "all the trees"? These words are not in Matthew: they were not fulfilled in the year 70. Have we not Christ's remarkable prophecy of the "nationalism" found everywhere *to-day*, and seen in "tariffs," and financial arrangements, and in the prohibition of employment to those of other lands, and yet more manifest in dictatorships and the exaltation and deification of the *state*? In *this*, fascism and communism are alike. "All the trees" have *some* shooting forth: there is "nationalism," but there is no fruit, there is nothing *for God*. And it behoves us, if we are children of God, with a heavenly calling, to stand aloof from all politics, and worldliness, and to be concerned to bring forth fruit, that we may live in the light of "the kingdom of God." The nations are not Christian, and they will not become "the Kingdom of God," but *the* King of kings will be exalted. Meanwhile let us, His redeemed ones, His pilgrims, the members of the holy nation of Matthew 21.43 and 1 Peter 2. 9 ask for grace, that, in the Holy Spirit, we may ever seek God's kingdom first (Matt. 6. 33) and have more fruit to present to our Lord, the Greater than Solomon (Song 8. 12) as we look to see Him face to face (Phil. 3. 20, 21).

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**No. 8. FREE.**

*“O Lord, truly I am Thy servant . . . Thou hast loosed my bonds.”*                      *Psaln 116. 16.*

*“Who then is a faithful and wise servant?”*  
*Matthew 24. 45.*

*“A servant of Jesus Christ.”*        *Romans 1. 1.*

# THE PARABLES OF THE LORD JESUS

Outline Studies for His Believing  
people, who feel the solemnity of  
the times, and look for His Coming.

*Some Parables of Service.*

*“He called His ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy while I am coming.”*                      *Luke 19. 13.*

## CONCLUDING FOREWORD.

**W**HEN this series was begun in 1931, the words were written, "The Parables, like the Types, are full of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ." Have we not delightfully found this to be so? And are not our hearts thankful? Has there not been some warming of heart as we have seen HIM (Luke 24. 32)? And now we reach, not the end of the subject, by any means, but the end of our present series. To God be all the glory! May His children receive food by the gracious ministry of the Holy Spirit, and may the fruit be seen in a consistent and ever growing Christian life. The need to-day is not more head-knowledge and religion, but likeness to Christ, and a daily walk that adorns His doctrine, in the power of the Holy Spirit. May this be more than our desire, even our characteristic, though we would seek the self-denial of John the Baptist (John 3. 30), and a parallel with the unconsciousness of Moses that his face shone (Ex. 34. 29).

We had thought to rearrange and reprint, but the outlay of the Lord's money, in this work of faith, would be too great. Widened Missionary responsibilities in various lands are of fuller urgency. The important thing is to use any material the Lord has graciously enabled, although in eight booklets instead of one volume. We are binding some booklets together: probably some would desire these, and we welcome early application. We shall, in accord with the principle the Lord has lovingly impressed upon us, not arrange for selling, but simply welcome the fellowship in expenses of those who rightly illustrate the attitude of 2 Samuel 24. 24. But poorer believers are just as welcome to write: the work is the Lord's, not ours.

The indexes will, we trust, facilitate use. Our longing is that the result may be a fuller consciousness of the inspiration and fulness of Scripture, and of the food therein, and the gracious blending of doctrine and practice, of guidance in our every day life and dispensational teaching, while we patiently, and yet expectantly, wait for our soon coming Lord.

PERCY W. HEWARD.

## SOME PARABLES OF SERVICE.

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THE privilege of serving God and of doing His will is very great. Again and again is this brought before us in Holy Scripture. How many parables show us the opportunities His children have received. The one forgiven the debt of 10,000 talents was called to show grace among his fellow servants. The servants in the field of Matthew 13. 24-30 were rightly concerned as to the tares, and rightly told everything to the Householder, for His decision. When the poor man graciously hindered from reaching Jericho was brought to the inn, the words "Take care of him" show the privilege of loving interest in "one another." And so we might well continue, showing that many parables of service have already been our meditation. Those which tell of "fruit" have surely a definite message in this connexion.

But now we would study prayerfully the Parables of the Pounds and the Talents, and also notice Matthew 24. 45-51, and Mark 13. 34-36, concluding with a different aspect in Matthew 20. 1-16.

Matthew 25. 14-30 and Luke 19. 12-27 have much in common. It is deeply interesting to see how, as in connexion with the feasts of Matthew 22 and Luke 14, and the addresses, moreover, of Matthew 5-7 and Luke 6, the Holy Spirit causes the gospels to supplement and explain one another, even by their contrasts. There is but **One** to Whom the servants are responsible. He is viewed in both cases as going away, but going away with the thought of returning. At once we realize our adorable Lord, and see our privilege to live in the light of His Coming. Is it not always so? The porter is ever to watch, the one appointed to give meat in due season (Matt. 24. 45) is never to say "My Lord delayeth His Coming," the one who takes care in Luke 10. 35 has the words ringing in his ears, "When I come again," and the field is with a view to the harvest. Yes, all service is in the light of the near Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are responsible to Him, and shall soon see Him. The **personal** interest of our Lord, and our responsibility to Him personally, suggest such a striking contrast with impersonal eastern theories, and with the "religion" of unsaved ones among us to-day. He is to be personally served and personally expected, and both parables indicate the possibility of faithfulness

that will bring Him joy. He has not set us an impossible task. Yet both indicate the dread contrast of possible unfaithfulness, in language that twice searches us, showing there are those who are but professing servants, yet not expressing this in language that will permit any reader to say, "I am a true believer, THEREFORE this does not concern me." Doctrine is ever presented practically (and devotionally) in Scripture, never theoretically, or treatise-fashion. This is of the utmost importance, and gives us a model, and a gracious warning. In both parables, moreover, we have the solemnizing investigation of "that Day." How much this means to us personally!

But now let us further look at each separately, pondering and feeding on the exact words of the Holy Spirit in recording the parables of Christ. There is no need to add the italicized words in Matthew 25. 14. The Lord has expressed Himself otherwise with a purpose. "Watch ye therefore, for ye know not the day, neither the hour, for, as a Man travelling away, He called His Own servants." The two portions are joined. We are not only to be virgins, but responsible stewards of whatsoever is entrusted to us. Absence of watching is not only unreadiness, it involves positive unfaithfulness to our Lord. He has ever emphasized His travelling away. We have observed this in the Good Samaritan, it is implied in John 10. 12, and in John 15 the Root is not seen, but the branches represent Him. Nor can we forget the words "Ye do show the Lord's death till He come." This is by no means against Matthew 28. 20. If we, as children of God, can enter within the veil, and draw nigh, and yet be strangers and pilgrims here, it is surely not amazing that such words are used of our glorious Lord. Hence we are encouraged to go forth UNTO HIM, without the camp, bearing His reproach (Heb. 13. 13). But I grant it is a mystery, known only to faith. The servants are His own, for are we not bought with a price (1 Cor. 6. 19, 20)? No other one has a right to those who bear His image and superscription, and no man can serve two masters (Matt. 6. 24). It is blessed to have heard His call, giving life as to Lazarus (John 5. 24, 25), but let us not forget His further call, entrusting us with His own possessions. Our minds turn to John 17. 8 and 22, nor can we forget Ephesians 4. 8, with 1 Corinthians 4. 7. Let us realize that the Lord Jesus is the great Possessor: we have nothing in our own right. We are simply trustees for Him. He has "given aside" (as the word is), and handed down to us, that which we are to guard (1 Tim. 6. 20) and use, to His glory. It is remarkable that the word is the one used for "traditions" (1 Cor. 11. 23, 2 Thess.

2. 15, 2 Pet. 2. 21, Jude 3 may helpfully illustrate). Not that we would limit to the precious possession of the words of the truth, for, in one sense, that is EQUALLY given to all. Here we have an emphasis on different privileges, as we see in Ephesians 4. 11, 12. Certainly we are not apostles, and most are not teachers, but have we not all received SOMETHING from Him? And everything is precious as the word "talent" implies. How are we using THIS? It is not for us to be careless, nor to employ anything for ourselves, nor to despise what we do possess, because it is not something else, and thus to envy another, but, in simple and devoted love, to occupy with whatsoever our Lord has entrusted to us, however large or small it be, as in His presence, until we see Him face to face. We are each personally responsible to Him.

Individual cases are here brought before us, though He has many more talents than eight, and servants than three. The silence of Scripture is impressive. Have some less than one? It matters not; a shekel, yea, a bekah, yea, a grain, or gerah, can be used for Him. It is not the size of the trusteeship, but the fact. In like manner, it was not the size of the widow's gift that decided its true value. And, conversely, it is not the size of "a" sin before men that should be our primary concern, but the FACT of the sin before God.

The dispensation is viewed as one, hence the particular apportioning on His going away is mentioned. But the Lord surely has His STEWARDS still. Let us not vainly limit the word, and think only of those who have "money." Whatever we have is as we have seen, and as we would feel, His for Him! One believer may have twice as much as another, but the point is not "What have I in relation to others?" but "What have I from Him, and for Him?" Let this be repeated, and realized, for the message is practical, a message for to-day. The words rendered, "According to his several ability," may have this force. The Lord knows what we are able to bear. But another simple translation is, "According to His (i.e. the Owner's) power." This would suggest a closer parallel with 1 Corinthians 12. 18, and Romans 12. 3 will help us. Thus we find the encouragement, too, to expect grace in the use, since His "power" accompanies.

The special point of "talents" seems to be that they are not "immovable" property, nor are they necessarily used as a whole. A part may be employed in one thing, and another part elsewhere. Moreover, the Holy Spirit suggests "productive" power. "Goods" may be given to be preserved (e.g. furniture,

heirlooms, etc.), but “talents” are to be used in business. Why do we not have the figure of “seed”? Probably because the emphasis here is not primarily on God’s sovereign work and our dependence, though that is ever important, but on our godly activity. Are we lazy, careless, selfish, or are we conscious of the importance of true earnestness, in the Spirit? Thus the one who received five talents “went” and “worked.” There must be a going, there must be a diligence. Spiritual blessings are not to be gained by idly sitting still. True, there must be much time in worship: Ah, when this is present, the life will be proportioned and balanced. The talents ARE productive even as the seed, and they PRODUCE THE LIKE. He who has talents brings nothing but increased talents unto the Lord. He does not invest in something else. May not this give us a gracious warning against new methods, and human rearrangements? Everything should keep to the line of that which God has given. We notice the stress on “gain.” Not earthly gain as in Matthew 16. 26, nor the gain of Philippians 3. 7, but something for the Lord, something to bring unto Him. And in all LABOUR, including godly labour, there is profit (Prov. 14. 23). It is worthy of notice that five talents lead to five more, two to two more. There is thus a beautiful harmony with the Lord’s gift in the climax of blessing. Another reminder that we are dependent throughout on Him. And, be it observed, there is the SAME proportion in each case, followed by the very same words of encouragement. How refreshing to those who own their slender ability and equipment. Nothing is a hindrance except unbelief, and carelessness and self-pleasing.

The servant who received one talent is a beacon. He did not “journey” and work, but “went away” (the verb is quite different from verse 16) and hid. How different from the wondrous hiding of Matthew 13. 44.\* Was it permissible to hide the silver “money”? No, it was the silver of “his lord.” This is the first mention of the metal, and may remind us that the GIFT was linked with redemption. But we do not read that the servant was one of the redeemed. Many are the privileges which unsaved ones also have received, in accord with their position and profession, and the very fact that they feel out of harmony ought to break them down, and bring them to seek Him. We do not

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\* It should be remembered that, in the spiritual meaning, the Divine Owner Himself had hid that treasure with a view to the purchase. There was no attempt to obtain cheaply (far otherwise) that of which another was ignorant.

feel called to say in this connexion if the servant was a believer, or not: the silence of the Lord is meant to search us. What am I doing with my "Lord's money"?—With anything and everything that is His? I have nothing as a personal right: all is a trust.

"But after much time the Lord of those servants cometh." There is no thought of an immediate return. All Scripture harmonizes. But the expression, "My Lord delayeth His Coming" is a sin. He "cometh," not only "will come": the tense calls to a constant readiness. Thus is He often called the Coming One (Heb. 10. 37). "And reckoneth (taketh together account) with them": there will be a reckoning, righteously and holily: nothing is unnoticed. The judgment of works is according to works, though we, in our persons, are saved by grace. "And having come to (Him), he that received the five talents brought to (Him) other five talents, saying, Lord, five talents didst Thou deliver to me; see, other five talents I gained upon them." He comes with joy, and how bright and loving is the response. "But his Lord said to him, Well, servant good and faithful, over a few things thou wast faithful: over many things will I set thee: enter into the joy of thy Lord." The Lordship of Christ is rightly emphasized. The servant is not an equal, albeit he is brought into the very joy which belongs to his Lord. Is it not refreshing to see Christ's delight in His servant's faithfulness, and then the glad share? The great point is "Faithfulness," not "success." The Lord here mentions it twice. "Results" and "publicity" are not before us as the object: are we faithful? Not only was the act faithful, the person is thus characterized. How much this means. Faithfulness recognizes Him, and His words, and rejects all glorification of self. There can be no "goodness" without faithfulness. We recollect a somewhat similar link in Ephesians 1. 1 and Colossians 1. 2. "A few things!" Verily it is so. How small is our stewardship compared with His glory? What are five talents to Him? But yet they are important, because they are His. "A few things": it is well to remember this now, lest we boast. The reward will be far, far greater: there are parallels in the reward, but the fact of a proportion does not mean an equivalent. Then we shall be fitted to be entrusted with much more, without becoming proud. The kingdom will be a kingdom, and will have appointments. Positions are God's purpose, as we shall learn further in the parable of the Pounds.

Read verses 22 and 23 with 20 and 21. Where have we closer parallels? Even the order of words (it is so in the Original)

is the same. Do you not see the beauty of this? The same faithfulness with a yet smaller trusteeship, and exactly the same words of approval. "Well" is not left out, "good" is not omitted: everything is in Divinely beautiful harmony. Few verses are so encouraging to the believer conscious that he does very, very little. Seek after faithfulness! Your Lord will estimate aright: can you not trust Him? The appointment, the many things, and the joy are all there. The Lord delights in a "few things" and in "little things" simply done in love to Himself. How real will the joy be then! No failure, no self-esteem, nor self-dependency. The talents belong to the Lord now, and the joy will belong to Him then, and He is unwilling that His own should not share both. How blessedly will all be brought to us in our line. This parable will soon become history.

"But!" Ah, if only the message could stop before this word! Ah, it does not stop: our Lord has something more for us. How do we begin the study? Is it with the thought, "This is only meant for others"? Let us ever beware of such an attitude. "But the one also having received the one talent having come said, Lord, I knew Thee that Thou art a hard Man, reaping where Thou sowedst not, and gathering where Thou scatteredst not: and having feared, having gone away, I hid Thy talent in the earth: see, Thou hast Thine own!" The rudeness, the callousness, the whole demeanour must surprise. Is it possible? But if actions speak louder than words, what would be our Lord's own summing up even of our present manner toward Him at times? Our love is not always so real as our words in a hymn, or a meeting, might imply. Have we not neglected His will, and even been irritated, and misrepresented Him? It is well to learn too by contrasts what our true attitude should be, even love's recognition that He is tender, and that all is of His sowing. He cannot reap what is not His: the very "sowers" live and have the living seed, because of His life blood poured out. All our service depends altogether on Him, and its fruitfulness also. We can never praise Him too much. Observe that the wicked servant complains of the LORD. Everything begins with failure to trust and praise HIM. If you and I only murmur at "circumstances" we begin to murmur at Him. Let us be warned as to the beginnings of sin.

The first question is NOT, "Who is this servant, a saved one or an unsaved one?" WHY do I want to know the answer to this? Have we not heard the question, "Is baptism necessary to salvation?"—as if almost to suggest a willingness to do more IF necessary to salvation, than IF necessary to obedience and

pleasing God. Surely this is saddening. Our concern must not be “Who is this servant?” but “O that I may be quite unlike him.” This practical application of Scripture in the Holy Spirit, I feel is often lacking in my own life: hence I would affectionately urge it upon beloved brethren also. It is sadly clear that WE sometimes have been “slothful,” and even the word “wicked” in 1 Corinthians 5:13 must be read in the light of “that the spirit may be saved in the day of Jesus Christ,” and 2 Corinthians 2:6-8. Only the flesh will misuse such a solemnizing thought. True, we cannot think it possible that in resurrection, when redeemed ones stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, they will defend their sins on earth, and speak thus against the Lord. This man has not one word of love to Him, and brings no fruit, no service. It is evident that all the good ground has fruit, and EVERY believer will, it seems clear, have praise of God. “Ah,” someone will say, “You are now asserting what you said should be left out.” Rather I sought to show this was not the FIRST point, and I would not wish to deal with it, or, indeed, any point as to eternal salvation, theoretically, or till the FIRST point has been honestly, and humbly weighed—“What warning has my Lord for me in this passage? Am I sinning thus in any degree?” O that there may ever be personal exercise of heart first, yea, and last too. We cannot be too practical, nor too devotional in our meditation on the Scriptures. “I was afraid”: the objector does not say of WHOM (see Mark 8:38). But it is sadly true that the fear of man bringeth a snare (Prov. 29:25), and the same book emphasizes the sin and danger of slothfulness that casteth into a deep sleep. Spiritual sleepiness is ever a peril, as for the disciples in Gethsemane. It is deeply suggestive that Matthew 25 lays stress on omissions. The unwise virgins had NOT oil, those judged in verse 45 did NOT show love to ones of whom the Lord says, “My brethren,” and here the talent was “buried.” We do not read it was misused for open evil. Idolatry and false religions are not the only evils. Surely this also speaks to OUR hearts. Again let us remember that the exposition of a passage is not merely “WHO is this?” but “WHAT is this, which my Lord condemns, that I may hate it, and its beginning in my own life?” Unfaithfulness is a terrible sin. The answer of the Lord Jesus is righteous and stern. Have we not noticed the threefold sternness of this chapter (verses 12, 26-30, 41-43)? He Who spake words of grace, with grace poured over His lips, never excuses sin. The Lord’s description is penetrating. Not only “slothful” but “wicked.” It is wicked to omit obedience, and wicked to have evil thoughts against Him. The man urged

that the Lord grasped for Himself. How different must be our view of His love, and how we desire Him to have all the glory. Then comes the statement, "Thou oughtest therefore to have put My money to the exchangers and then at My coming I should have received Mine own with that which it produced" (that which is "born": "usury" has a technical and quite unholy meaning in modern English, verse 27). God forbade "biting interest" (Lev. 25. 36, 37) of old among Israel, and the words of the Lord Jesus are not encouraging this, nor do they lead us to become financiers, and to be occupied with investments. The perils of which Matthew 21. 12 and John 2. 15, 16 speak still remain, and we are graciously warned not to blend merchandise with the gospel, nor to become those who have "an eye to business," so that we fall into the snare of 1 Timothy 6. 9, 10. But the parable here is definite that we are to use what is entrusted to us unto God's glory, and if we cannot, we should not retain it, but seek to pass it to another, who can use it for our Lord's glory, and that He Himself may receive the fruit when He comes again. This principle applies to everything—time, money, influence, knowledge, ability, spiritual capacity. It is plain that some of these things we cannot hand to another. Then let us remember all those things, and our members, and we ourselves, are not our own (1 Cor. 6. 19). Everything is to be with a view to our Lord's receiving "in that Day." There must be the thought of something for Him, and it must be that which is of the same character as that which He gives, and thus in accord with His own will and with His redemptive work. Silver which is hidden in the earth can produce nothing: how often that which is of earth hinders our heavenly activity and alacrity. May we be more devoted unto Him!

The buried talent is soon taken away. This is not salvation. It is possible to have blessings, and not to be saved. Hebrews 6. 4-6 unveils this, and we recollect Judas, who evidently wrought miracles and preached, even as the others (Mark 6. 7). Such things are no evidence of salvation (Matt. 7. 21-23). Strikingly the talent is given to the one possessing the ten. "Why," we may not be able to say. The servant with five gaining five, the servant with two gaining two, have hitherto been equally commended. But the Lord can in SOVEREIGNTY give extra to whom He pleases. Moreover, faithful service with "more" talents may be commended as peculiarly full of problems, because of the extra tendency to pride. We do not know, we leave the fact, and are willing for our Lord's will. There will be no jealousy in the kingdom. The explanation is sufficient, "For

unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance." For the second time this faithful servant is said to "have": he is a possessor more fully in the kingdom, though without any wish to boast. The character of that Day is "abundance": the Lord will grant an overflow in His rewards. But, as in other Scriptures, there remains the other side, "From him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." The other side! Yes, we find two classes, two positions and two goals, throughout Scripture. How often is this forgotten. There are, moreover, two modes of "having," and Luke 8. 18 may also help us, with its reminder of profession. We only really "have" that which we use for the Lord. But privation is not the only result: there is positive judgment. God does not leave with a bare privation: there is no mere vacuum with Him. This is blessed for His redeemed, but how solemnizing for the ungodly. "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness." There was a casting forth from the feast in Matthew 22. 13, and the attendants here are to carry out a similar command. Separation from the Lord will be a fact (2 Thess. 1. 9). Unprofitable and useless! We think of Romans 3. 12. The beautiful personal contrast in Philemon 11 may well be a type of others "in Christ Jesus." Hence, we cannot create, but "the Lord hath need" of His people, and we can become useful in His gracious condescension. The outer darkness is "outer": the light is in His presence. "**Without** are dogs" (Rev. 22. 15). The Lord speaks of a real PLACE, and the added words impress this. "THERE (in that place) shall be the weeping and gnashing of the teeth." He who began with his own religion, in Genesis, ended with murdering his brother, and with separation from God: and the evil that is first seen in the disregard of responsibility to the Lord has the bitter conclusion of the gnashing teeth. There is no suggestion of unconsciousness, nor of annihilation, and these searching words occur seven times in all, with the Lord's personal emphasis. He alone uses them (Matt. 8. 12, 13. 42,50, 22.13, 24.51, 25.30, Luke 13. 28). Do not profess to be a Christian unless you are, do not take the position of a servant unless you love Him, and are glad to own He is worthy of all. The holy solemnities of that Day will not convict and bring the sinner to salvation: his utterance is heard against the Lord, and even if words are silenced (Rom. 3. 19) there is the gnashing of the teeth. The last view—the last statement!—O that we might feel its power more.

And now we pass to Luke 19. As in Luke 18. 1, 9, there is a special emphasis on the occasion and purpose of the parable.

“ They thought that the kingdom of God should immediately APPEAR.” The revealed fact that it would be in “ mystery ” was strange to the disciples, and the trend of their thoughts is seen after the resurrection in Acts 1. 6. And we should be looking for “ that Blessed Hope.” There have been centuries when some of God’s dear children have been occupied with the mystery-aspect, and have partly forgotten the coming kingdom. The Lord Jesus did not deny the appearing but its **immediateness**. This emphasizes the certainty of a kingdom when He comes back, with His loving appointments. The present dispensation is associated with the “ long time ” of Matthew 25. 19, and the occupying here. We have had time given us to serve.

The “ Nobleman ” here is so described with a stress on birth, “ well-born ” literally; the absolute contrast occurs in 1 Corinthians 1. 28. We think of the glory of the Son of God. “ This is the Heir ” was a true statement concerning Him. He must “ go ” to receive the kingdom. His death was necessary in the eternal purpose, because we were sinners. The “ far country ” reminds us of the heavenly view in Daniel 7. 13, 14. Observe there is no doubt as to His receiving, nor as to His return. How many parables bring “ that Blessed Hope ” into prominence, and all service is in view of His approval. The servants are all His: they are in this way contrasted with Him: we recollect Matthew 21. 33-38. The number “ ten ” seems here intended, as in the Ten Virgins, to suggest a complete company, and fellowship. How blessedly are believers united. Here a very small trusteeship is given: only “ a pound,” and all are treated alike. There is much to humble us, and that is helpful. It is remarkable that whereas one parable shows equal proportion of fruit with different gifts, here we see different proportions in the result, with the same “ capital.” Hence the emphasis on personal loving activity with that which is small. Let us realize we cannot be trusted with too much: let us remember how little is our largest act of service before Him: let us never despise the tiniest trusteeship, but earnestly “ occupy.” The word “ pound ” only occurs here (seven times) in the New Testament. The Hebrew root would suggest a **portion**—in our Lord’s appointment. Thus we do well to remember there are other servants as well. Do we pray for our brethren in this connexion? This is not salvation. We cannot be viewed as “ trading ” with that and increasing it: but there are associated privileges and responsibilities, and in one sense, all believers are alike—that which they have is His, weighed by Him, and to be used for Him. It is important, at times, to lose sight of the diversities of ability and so forth, and

to remember " I am His and all I have is His." One message is given to all. There is nothing of self as the trusteeship, nor of human admixture, nor of dual responsibility. The one privilege is to receive from Him and to use for Him. " Occupy." The word implies true activity, and reality. It may suggest, by the Greek middle form, that we are to be busied in the service, our whole being engaged. A word from the same root occurs in 2 Timothy 2. 4: " the affairs of the life." Though we might engage in earthly duties, everything is to be unto the Lord (Col. 3. 24) : there is to be no entangling. " Till I come " is a beautiful thought. 1 Corinthians 11. 26 is partly parallel, and John 21. 22, 23 must come to mind. But the expression here seems still stronger, " In the time in which I am coming," while I am coming. How precious is this to our awakened hearts. The Coming of Christ is always His hope as well as ours, His expectation, His object. " Surely I come quickly," " Behold I come quickly " : observe how the Holy Spirit gives us the present tense (not, " I will come ") with an emphasis on the certainty and the nearness alike. Christ is " the Coming One." Deeply important is the thought that our activity is in view of His return, to test all our service. His eyes are as a flame of fire, and love never excuses sin. And will not our love to Him give us the same standpoint? Let us love Him too much to offer slipshod " service," and disobedient self-will. The same message is given to each servant. None should forget His Coming. How central is it in the epistles. " Watch YE therefore " is to every man in the house (Mark 13. 35) : " I say unto all, Watch " (verse 37).

But His citizens hated Him, and sent a message (embassy) after Him, saying, " We WILL not have This One to reign over us." There are citizens as well as servants. They are more distant. The meaning is surely clear. The Lord Jesus will reign at Jerusalem, where He was rejected. Israel ought to have received Him, but they did not, nor did the sign given to that generation (Matt. 16. 4), in His death and resurrection, result in their repentance. They dared to send an embassy after Him: the book of Acts and the attitude of Pharisees, rulers and priests there, will sadly illustrate. The rebelling " will " of John 5. 40 was maintained: how terribly is sin seen in the " will." Blessed be God, the remnant will yet return to the mighty God (Isa. 10. 21). How needful it is to be concerned about our " will," and to realize the grace that still lays hold of sinners, though their will is at first opposed (Rom. 9. 16). Never be discouraged in prayer for souls throughout this present life,—at least till they receive the mark of the beast.

And it came to pass, that when He was returned, having received the Kingdom, then He commanded these servants to be called unto Him, to whom He had given the money, "that He might know how much every man (what any one) had gained by trading" (15). Let us observe our Lord's remembrance and inflexible righteousness. He has not given us the pounds to use for ourselves, or as we "like." There is a definite "command" for the "servants" to be called. The arrangement is not optional. His love is wonderful, and the welcome will be very real for the bride, but in our capacity as "servants" there is not a "free and easy" overlooking of responsibility. The Lord cannot condone laziness in connexion with a "trust," such sin is theft. Carelessness is unholiness, and His own holiness forbids indifference. He will investigate everything: O that we, dear fellow believers, may realize what this means for us. The examination is of each one, personally. The gain is by trading: grace gives, but there is responsibility within the sphere of grace. How are we using all that we receive (1 Cor. 4. 1-5)?

"Then came the first, saying, Lord, Thy pound hath gained ten pounds" (16). Observe the emphasis on the LORD, and on HIS pound. There is no thought of complaint, no self-seeking, no self-esteem, but unforced joy and delight in bringing all to Him for Whom are all things (Rom. 11. 36). Should not this be our attitude more and more now? Should we not be getting ready for that Day? What have we which we have not received? What can we do "without" our Lord? The glory is His. It is observable that whereas in Matthew 25 where the faithful servants gain in like proportion, there is the humble record of personal obedience, "I have gained," here, where the proportion of each is very different, and the gain viewed as much more, (1,000% or 500%), the servant says nothing at all as to himself. "Lord, Thy pound hath gained ten pounds." Where is the word "I"? It is excluded. How much this unveils. The Lord's answer is joyful. He does not leave out the labourer: He, in entire contrast, does not mention the pound! Note, too, He first uses the word "well," then describes the servants as good, next refers to a becoming "faithful," and then gives a reward. What a full answer. Let us meditate on the words of recompense: "Be thou having authority." "Be" and "have" are rarely together. It is plain that the POSSESSION is not the only thought, but the PERSON ("be thou one having"), and HIS enjoyment of that which is lovingly bestowed. The emphasis on continuance too is helpful ("Having"). Indeed everything shows us how the Lord delights in his people's faithfulness. Does

not this stir us up in our zeal and devotedness? And how loving He is, for though rewards may be proportionate (“ACCORDING as his work shall be”), they are immensely beyond the present services rendered. Here is more than compensation for all the rebuffs, and the losses, and the sufferings here. O that we may keep “that Day,” (or shall we not say, “Himself?”) in view. “And the second came, saying, Lord, Thy pound hath gained five pounds.” There is the same love, the same absence of self-exaltation. Will not all believers be united in this attitude then? Here is not “another servant” but “the second.” We think of David’s mighty men, and of those who attained not unto the first three. Did none other reach ten pounds, and did the next only obtain one half? True we do not know about seven servants, but they are after “the second,” and the Holy Spirit gives us much food for thought. “Some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” Thank God for “Thirty,” BUT would we not see more in all our lives? Shall we not provoke one another to love and good works, in the enabling of the Holy Spirit?

The Lord rejoiced in this service also, and there was a rich reward, nor is one word of reproof found. The recompense, moreover, is proportional. It would not be fitting to give this one ten cities, or even six. He does not receive less nor more than five: the reward is not for that which was given but according to the use. But there is a difference. The opening words are OMITTED, albeit “Thou ALSO” links very blessedly. And the unexpected language “Be thou having” is exchanged for that which is more expected. The servant might surely have done more. He is not blamed for the “five,” but could not he have been more enthusiastic? Will not this Divine silence awaken our loving zeal to-day, to buy up the passing opportunity more, and to pray for grace to please our Lord more? The writer feels how poor has been his own response to such a hint, but he ventures humbly to pass on the word of exhortation, valuing the prayers of other children of God for himself also. It is easier to WRITE than to BE: but He giveth more grace.

Our hearts would rejoice if this were the end of the parable. But there is a heart-searching silence as to seven servants. There is no indication that they were rejected. We think of only “one” among the twelve thus, and of “one” in the parable of the talents, But the Lord’s purpose in omission is perfect. What if we are bringing very little to Him after all His love to us? Were the others, after the “second,” and all less fruitful in their labour? Do we “occupy” as we should? Do we realize the kingdom as we might? Such thoughts are not speculation, they are for our

spiritual exercise, that we may glorify Him more Who loved and loveth us unto the end.

And then “ the other ”\* comes, of another kind, as the word implies. Alas, that it is possible to know much of the Lord, and to receive much from Him, and yet to render nothing to Him. Let it be observed that, as in John 15, there is no hint that a branch once united and bearing fruit **becomes** fruitless, and likewise no indication in Matthew 13 that GOOD ground becomes rocky and thorny, and no suggestion that the “ foolish ” virgins at first had some oil which was used up, so here we find no indication of service first, and then the hiding afterwards. While recognising this, our hearts would never draw the sinful inference that past faithfulness guarantees the present. A parable only gives a PART of God’s truth. It calls us to godly concern, and to repentance. Never can I excuse what I AM because of what I WAS, or think I was, but my present life, by the grace of God, is all-important (1 Cor. 15. 10). Backsliding is a heinous sin, even though, by the intercession of our beloved Lord, our faith fails not (Luke 22. 32). Let us beware of any action or thought that may tend toward the slothfulness or unholy language of this wicked servant. His attitude is exactly that of the one warningly portrayed in Matthew 25. The Lord Jesus has a reason for this repeated emphasis. It is doubled that we may never forget. Here the hiding is in a napkin: the word is derived from a root denoting “ sweat ”: we think of Genesis 3 and the toil of true service, till we reach the glory. Luke 22. 44 shows the One Who never failed, and one who followed Christ more closely than most was indeed “ spent ” (2 Cor. 12. 15). Moreover, it has been said that of old many business transactions were made and ratified taking hold of a “ sudar,” or napkin, the word used here. This would bring out the thought of NOT “ occupying.” And what was the root of the sin? It was self’s opposition to the Person of the Lord, and to His sovereignty and right. Matthew 20. 11 comes to mind. The Holy Spirit deals sternly with this attitude in Romans 9. 20. As soon as we blame God’s unsearchable “ ways ” we are on the same evil ground. What if we cannot understand all? Can we not trust? The exercise of faith in God and His perfect ways is deeply important. This distinguishes the spiritual man from the natural. Never let us criticize God. Let us go into the sanctuary (Ps. 73. 17). Again there is the reference to the table of the bank. If one cannot, or will not, use,

\* The word “ the ” may support the suggestion that only one was thus opposed.

should there not be a giving to another? This shows that nothing is a personal possession. Again, there is the transfer, "Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds." Not only will the cities be given, but the fruits of service be retained, "And they said unto Him, Lord, he hath ten pounds," as if to suggest there was no need. The possession therefore is not a matter of need, but in accord with Luke 16. 11, and 2 Corinthians 4. 18. Then comes the Divine principle prefixed with "I say unto you." These words are viewed as uttered in that Day: this intensifies the meaning of such language used by Christ again and again in the days He walked this earth. The two classes are "every one which hath," and "that hath not." There is much wrapped up in such words. In which class are we found? At first we wonder at the added expression "that which he hath not," but all Scripture illustrates this, "They seeing see not; and hearing they hear not" (Matt. 13. 13). It is possible to come without coming (John 6. 24, 37, with 5. 40), to be in the vine without a vital and abiding union (John 15. 2). Observe Luke 8 .18, "that which he seemeth to have." A son, a virgin, a branch by profession, but not so before God. Judas was chosen for apostleship (John 6. 70)\*, but can we find him among those to bring forth "fruit" in John 15. 16? And, further, the principle applies to us all, in its measure. How much is there that we "seem to have," yet have not inwardly. Let us be humbled.

The problem may again be raised—Is this the Judgment Seat of Christ? I hesitate to write with a light dogmatism, knowing how small is all our knowledge. Some have thought that there will be a raising of certain unbelievers for "shame" WHEN our Lord appears. Daniel 12. 2 does not seem to me to assert this, but may rather signify "these,"—and "those" who are not raised! If, however, there were this special shame for some, then the stress in Revelation 20. 6 would apparently be on the word "part," or "portion," the inheritance of the redeemed, and "the rest" would literally be the "left ones" in verse 5. I almost feel this would be forced. Rather, it seems to me, our beloved Lord would exercise our hearts more by drawing no line here between the Judgment Seat of Christ, and the further holy fulfilment of Revelation 22. 12. We do well to remember that in Genesis 3. 15 the two bruising are mentioned together, though the latter is not yet fulfilled, and so is it with

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\* Contrast "grace and apostleship" in Romans 1. 5, so 2 Peter 3. 18 "grace and knowledge," distinct from 2 Peter 2. 20-22.

many prophecies of the two Comings of Christ, and with Acts 2. 18 and 19, at the BEGINNING and END of this dispensation. 2 Peter 3. 10 illustrates as to "the day of the Lord," its introduction and its close. Nor is this strange from God's standpoint (Ps. 90. 4). And the added immediate reference to the enemies in Luke 19, and the fact that there are no time marks, and that, as in Matthew 25, the wicked servant is last, and that no other servants who are believers are brought before us after, would seem to confirm this.

The practical, spiritual and heart-searching value of such seeming indefiniteness is real. We are held back from misapplying truth, and from a merely mental view of salvation. And the perfection with which the Divine language refuses to let us settle down, and yet states nothing against the revealed plan, and the order of events elsewhere in Scripture, becomes an additional manifestation of its perfect inspiration.

The enemies remain enemies. It is solemnizing to see "His citizens," and yet His enemies. We remember John 1. 11, and call to mind 1 Thessalonians 2. 15, 16. Psalm 110. 1 contains a deeply important unveiling of truth: how blessed is the contrast that grace records, "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son" (Rom. 5. 10). The human "will" is again before us in the words, "they **would** not that I should reign over them" (see Rom. 9. 16, lest we should boast of ourselves). "Bring hither" sounds forth as a full opposite to Luke 9. 41, and 15. 23. Our beloved Lord was led as a lamb to the slaughter (Acts 8. 32), and His blood was poured out, but then His enemies will be led, and we think of the unholy blood of His foes in Isaiah 63. 1-4, and the fulfilment of 2 Thessalonians 1. 8, 9. Of no nation do we read so definitely concerning blessing as Israel (Rom. 11. 26), yet the judgment on Judas, and this holy wrath on "His citizens" must make clear there is NO universalism. Only the remnant returns (Isa. 10. 21), and only those who are reserved are pardoned (Jer. 50. 20). "Slay them before Me" is not without its parallel in Revelation 14. 10. Our hearts are caused to realize the righteousness of retribution, and that Matthew 25. 41 is the utterance of One Who CAME not to judge the world (John 3. 17, 12. 47), but Whose word **will** judge, with inescapable holiness, at the last day (John 12. 48). Surely these thoughts must cause us to marvel that we are saved, and yet that we are so ungrateful, and call us to fuller concern and zeal that we may preach Christ and Him crucified, by lip and life, and warn sinners to flee from the wrath to come.

At once the parable closes “ And when He had thus spoken, He went before.” The suddenness is impressive and meant to be impressive. Fuller details are not given, but the events, associated with His Coming back, were before Him, and are brought together without dates, or indication of intervals, but in their right order, that we may realize their moral import. There is no suggestion of the world becoming better, or of the age being gradually christianized. The future is associated with glory and blessing, yet also with wrath.

Reader, unless we receive these messages in their spiritual power, as a word of the Lord to our hearts, our study of the parables is in vain.

Matthew 24. 45-51 sets forth **principles** of deep importance, and is also (may we not say?) a prophecy of conditions just before our beloved Lord comes again? Like chapter 25. 1-13, (with which the word “ then ” links it), this passage solemnly reminds of TWO attitudes toward the Lord. May we not notice a similar twofoldness throughout the parables? The wheat AND the tares, the fruitful AND fruitless branches in John 15 come to mind. And is not this contrast manifest in all Scripture, from the days of Cain and Abel, where we see man’s religion and God’s salvation? Thanks be to God, there will be servants “ found ” doing their Lord’s will when He comes (verse 46). This is our joy, our expectation, and our refreshment, and (may we not add?) our personal desire. The singular, “ That servant,” is important: there should be an individual obedience to the Lord. And “ so doing ” is simple, but impressive. Love loves to be simple, and to “ do ” just what He has “ said.” “ Find ” suggests 1 Corinthians 4. 2, and 2 Peter 3. 14, which are equally associated with our Lord’s Coming. May not the word “ find ” indicate His seeking, and also the Judgment Seat of Christ? Even to this day men speak of the “ findings ” of a court. How will our service appear before His holy eyes? The word “ blessed ” is, (as in Matthew 5. 1-11), rather “ Happy,” and denotes experienced blessedness, and the entering into the joy of the Lord which has often been impressed upon us. But O that we may be concerned about His joy even now, for the Holy Spirit ever leads to devotion and attachment to Christ Himself.

This prophecy contains a parable. Verse 45 presents a “ faithful and wise servant ” in his stewardship. It is put in question form as in Luke 12. 42 to awaken a humble searching of our “ ways ”—“ Am I faithful? ” The question of Peter (Luke 12. 41) and the context would seem to indicate that, as with the parable of the leaven, and so many of our Lord’s words,

there was a repetition for emphasis. How much we all need this. "Faithful" is the first word (again reminding of 1 Cor. 4. 2, and Eph. 1. 1, 6. 21), showing a responsiveness to the Lord's words and will. Faith always leads to faithfulness. And then the description "wise," or prudent, indicates, even as chapter 25. 2, a right attitude of the mind. How unwise is our own way, as well as sinful. The servant has much scope for personal love and activity, but he is ever a "servant," he is responsible to the Lord, and gladly subject. He has been "set" or "made to stand over," as the word rendered "ruler" indicates. May we not question the appropriateness of the English word "ruler" in the light of Luke 22. 25? Not that all are "equal" in the service of an assembly: there are diversities of gifts and of positions, even as we find in the members of our "body." Yea, there is godly "rule," but the word "rul-ER" seems to imply more than this. The loving care of **stewardship** is before us: the "household" is to be fed and guided aright: everything belongs to the Lord: He is the Owner. The emphasis on a "house" in Scripture is remarkable, whether we think of 1 Timothy 3. 15, or a church "according to a house." Unity and simplicity are graciously appointed. The special object is "**meat** in due season," and this word denotes "nourishment," as in Luke 12. 23, Hebrews 5. 14, etc. The food must be of the right **kind** as well as at the right **time**. Are we sufficiently concerned that everything should be not only eatable, but sustaining, unmixed, without adulteration, pure, wholesome, nourishing food because "as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4. 11, Matt. 4. 4)? The doctrines of men cannot be thus described. But as the laver, in the tabernacle court, representing the assembling the assembly, was made to contain the water (of the Word, Eph. 5. 26) alone, so the ministry pleasing to God is that which He Himself has provided. We must "sit" at our Lord's feet, as Mary, if we would "stand" in approved service. This passage, being prophetic as well as parabolic, would encourage our faith as to the reviving that is associated with the near Coming of our Lord Jesus. We recollect that, after the "foundation of apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2. 20), we find in Ephesians 4 "evangelists . . . pastors (shepherds) and teachers . . . till we all come into the oneness of the faith" (verses 11-14). It does not seem a forcing of the words to link up thus; and will not shepherds "feed" the flock? Even though the plenitude of "gifts" in the early church may not be so manifested to-day, may we not expect and pray for the gracious provision of some brother in each gathering the Lord will enable (as in Revelation 2 and 3)? Thus the last view of

assemblies in the past and this view of the "future" would seem to coincide; but there is nothing of a one-man clerisy, nor of human organization. The responsibility is to the Lord Jesus, and the supply of food is in view of His Coming. Are we seeking earnestly for gatherings after this pattern? Or should we be surprised if God granted them? Further, if we have not a special responsibility of ministry in meetings, let us remember the lips of the righteous feed many (Prov. 10. 21, 22. 11), and every believer is to feed others by conversation in harmony with the Lord (Eph. 4. 29, Col. 4. 6). We dare not put aside the principles of His truth, and say we are "waiting" for revival. As in other Scriptures, and particularly the parables of the Talents and Pounds, which we have pondered, the service unto the Lord's people is unto the Lord (cf. Luke 10. 35), and He will remember "in that Day." The impressive words, "Verily I say unto you," precede the setting "over all His goods." Faithfulness in that which is least is all-important. How are we all acting as to HIS OWN WORDS, and the needful food of His beloved people thereby? No other form of activity dare be substituted. "Success" in all else will bring no joy to Him, no reward unto His praise when He comes again. "So doing" is limited to the supply of His food. How needful is daily nourishment. Ah, dear "isolated" believer, this **principle** has a message to you as well. How are you and I personally dealing with the precious gift of the words of God? Do we feed thereon, as the Holy Spirit applies? The first parable (The Sower) views everything in connexion with the "Word." Each kind of ground is characterized in connection therewith. Nothing, **nothing**, **NOTHING** can take the place of "the Word of the Lord" (1 Pet. 1. 25).

Even as there was one who misused a talent, and at least one who hid the pound, so we find the searching contrast here. True, there is not a definite statement. But "if" is sufficient to speak to our hearts, in the power of the Holy Spirit. And the word "bad" is before us, as "wicked" in Matthew 25. 26. How "bad" it is to prove untrue to our privileges, and trusteeship of whatever may be granted to us. The sin begins in the heart: likewise in Matthew 15. 19. Yea, even among believers this is the peril (Heb. 3. 12): hence the exhortation to keep our heart with all diligence (Prov. 4. 23), and the striking change of words in Job 2. 10 from 1. 22, followed, alas, by 3. 1. All forgetfulness of the nearness of the Lord's Coming is perilous. Strangely the mistaken belief that the Day of the Lord had set in produced a similar "selfishness" in Thessalonica (2nd Epistle ch. 2). But is it strange? "Self" is ever the enemy. It is

the "Lordship" of Christ which is here forgotten, although the words "My Lord" may be used. The **love** of this present age takes the place of **loving** His Appearing (2 Tim. 4. 8, 10), and with the failure to love Him, the failure to love His redeemed is linked (2 Chron. 16. 10, see Matt. 22. 38, 39). "Smiting" among believers, or professing believers, with the tongue (Jer. 18. 18) has been sadly prevalent in history. Hence the holy words "no striker" in 1 Timothy 3. 3. Whether our special temptation be openly in this way, or another, let us be humbled, remembering that sarcasm and cold unkindness can "smite." O for the love of the Lord's loved ones (John 13. 35). The brother placed "over" any to supply nourishment is not the master: other believers are his "**fellow**servants": "all ye are brethren" (Matt. 23. 8). The peril of Matthew 18. 28 is ever impressed upon us by the gracious ministry of the Holy Spirit. Sin is ever entwined with sin. He who should feed others with truth is seen here feeding himself, and upon that which is the **reverse** of "nourishment" inasmuch as it causes "drunkenness,"—another of the passages whereby the Lord Jesus sets aside any "alcoholic" parallel with (or type of) Himself or His words.\* And the bearing of this on our attitude is deeply important. The spirit of self-indulgence here reminds us of our own constant danger, and that the scattering of the sheep came in at the outset, through the spirit of the "hireling" (John 10. 12).† The hireling wants **something for himself**: is thus, in measure, like to the **thieves** and **robbers** of the same saddening passage. All are entirely contrasted with the Good Shepherd Who "giveth." But true under-shepherds must follow Him (John 21. 15-19). There will be no room for a hireling ministry in revival: a hireling ministry, in the past, has produced Christendom and a "professionalism." How searching is every word of the Lord Jesus. Sad indeed is the fellowship which the bad servant seeks and finds. He leaves the smitten saints for the companions who are drunken (cf. Jas. 4. 4, in connexion with verse 11), even as the "elder brother" of Luke 15 has his "friends." In drunkenness there is no discernment, and do we not see this in the past history of Christendom also? But though the Lord does not come at once, He will come. And He will come unexpectedly (contrast Heb. 9. 28 and Matt. 25. 10). The "day" and "hour" are deeply important: everything is planned: a

\* So the "new wine" unchanged in Luke 5. 37-39 **alone** can tell of Him. (Booklet free.)

† "Parables Concerning the Shepherd and His Sheep" gladly sent.

godly continuance of readiness should characterize the Lord's redeemed. The awful "portion" here is contrasted with the inheritance of His faithful ones. The one who has chosen to be **with** the drunken shall be inevitably **with** the hypocrites. How striking is verse 51 in contrast with 47. It is a fearful thing to profess to be a servant of Christ without the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8. 9). The exact wording does not "say" if he IS throughout a hypocrite, or doomed, after all, to be set aside with such. Why is this? May it not be lest we should misuse the message, and say, "I am not a hypocrite: I do believe," and so forth? The Lord has in various verses, graciously used indefiniteness in a holy warning, thereby to make it **more definite**, and searching, yea, in the experience of His own also, and to protect them **by the very warning**, from going on, until the solemn threatening therein expressed would need to be fulfilled upon them. His wisdom is thus seen in all these "servant-parables." Grace never leads to laxity. There **are** hypocrites, and the Lord hates hypocrisy. He delights in holy simplicity and frankness of love. And thus the oft-repeated words "There shall be (the) weeping and (the) gnashing of (the) teeth" set forth the unchanged attitude of those who fall under His judgment. Six times in Matthew (8. 12, 13, 42, 50, 22. 13, 24. 51, 25. 30) and once in Luke (13. 28) is this message found, and usually as a climax, after one of our Lord's searching and practical parables. May we have ears to hear, and take heed how we hear.

And Mark 13. 34-36 is another gracious call to service, and again in connexion with the Coming of Christ. We are becoming used to this precious association. The house is His, the servants too are His, and the appointment is His. He knows what He has fitted each one to do. We cannot all do the same service. Nor should we seek this: 1 Corinthians 12. 15-17 is instructive. There is no room for jealousy or rivalry. What has our loving Lord marked out for us? No one is without work: no one should be idle. And just as all possess **one common** life, so there is a further definite privilege at once mentioned here which is expressed in a plural exhortation. We might at first think that "He commanded **the porter** to watch" singled out for this service, even as Israel's temple had a definite company of Levitical porters (1 Chron. 26 1-19, Ezra 2. 42). But we at once hear the call, "Watch YE therefore." And just as the apostle was inspired to repeat "Rejoice," in Philippians 4. 4, so the Lord is pleased to repeat in verse 37, "And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch." Could anything be more emphatic or

more comprehensive? The words “ye” and “you” are not viewed as sufficient. Our beloved Lord would graciously indicate that there must be no limitation to the apostles, nor to the first Christians. It is thus the same aspect that all service is in view of our Lord’s Coming, and with a holy wakefulness. Spiritual sleep is our danger: may our hearts be on the alert, for “we are not of the night, nor of darkness” (1 Thess. 5. 5).

What effect shall our quiet meditation have on our daily walk? The question of the disciples in Mark 13 was concerning times and events, but the Lord Jesus both began and ended with a gracious command, a command affecting the whole attitude, and the daily life. And as we desire that this series of notes should ever direct and attract to the Scriptures, so our heart’s longing is that there may be the living fruit in the experience of each exercised believer, whether writing or reading them. Thus will there be glory unto Him Whose Name we bear. And should we not pray for one another, with this object? Do we pray enough for one another?

And now we come to Matthew 20. 1-16. How many times has the writer looked at, and into, these verses. I would acknowledge that as to all the ministry of the Lord Jesus there is a fulness which my heart longs to learn and apply increasingly, and any precious thoughts, impressed on a reader’s heart, will, indeed, be welcome. It is not my desire to set forth that which I think, but that which stands the test of “all Scripture,” and never to speculate, nor to become one-sided, nor to adulterate His food with any poison. It is so sad to mislead any children of God, and I value prayer that my pen may be kept from this. There may be much truth, but if it is mixed with some error, the effect of the latter may, alas, be more resultful. The holy principle of 1 Peter 4. 11 shines forth: a steward should only give the provided nourishment. It is better to be silent, and to wait, than to hurry and make conclusions, teaching that which is not according to God’s will. How much more grace we all need to “wait.” The parable before us seems to me the most difficult of all. But even this fact may lead to more prayer, humility and blessing. Nothing is hid from our Father.

Thanks be unto God, there are precious general principles in Matthew 20 which are at once strikingly clear, helpful and impressive. So is it with the Book of Revelation. It is not for me to neglect the use of that book till I understand all “the order of events.” Should not my first concern be to prove a “servant,” with cleansed and kept garments, waiting for my Lord, and praying, “Even so, come Lord Jesus.” It is far more

important than we realize to have the practical fruit of Bible study. Referring to Revelation again, if a child of God hesitates as to explaining ch. 13. 18, but seeks to have no “ mark ” of fellowship with iniquity, and realizes the goal of this present evil age, and is concerned in heart to sigh and cry over abominations, and to warn sinners to flee from the wrath to come, has he not learnt more from Revelation than one who may offer varied personal applications of the solemn number 666? I do not suggest forgetfulness of “ wisdom ” or of “ understanding ” in counting: this is graciously appointed: but much more is written as to the practical application of truth to ourselves, and not all that is written, by way of commentary, shows “ understanding ” from above.

The parable of the labourers contains deeply important and evident principles, to search **our** ways at once:—

- (1) Reading on from ch. 19, we see the dread peril of **confidence** in “ our own ” giving up for the Lord, and in “ our ” faithfulness, with the despising of others (ch. 20. 12). The attitude of Ephesians 3. 8 is in holy contrast. Pride, pride, pride—ruins all.
- (2) The danger of forgetting **privileges** is set before us. In verse 7 we read, “ Because no man hath hired us.” To whom much is given, from him will more be required. May we not overlook the fact that others have not had the call, and the opportunitites for service, we have received? Dispensational privileges, geographical and historical privileges in a land where the language is committed to **writing**, providential privileges in the loving gift of the Scriptures in our native tongue, etc., home privileges in the possession of beloved parents who have put no hindrance in the way of knowing the words of the Lord, but have, it may be, encouraged us remarkably, from babyhood:—how many blessings we have received! Many in Asia and Africa might use the words of verse 6 relative to our neglect of Christ’s missionary command. Again we see we have nothing to boast.
- (3) The Lord’s desire that we should have implicit confidence in His “ will ” and “ goodness ” (20. 15) is a message to us. Heaven has no room for murmurers: two “ wills ” are impossible there. The elder brother criticized the Father’s freeness of undeserved love. A **Pharisee** always condemns free grace. Are we joyful in our Lord’s joy (Luke 15. 6)? Those whom He calls His “ friends ” should take His standpoint.

- (4) The spirit of the **hireling** produced scattering and confusion at the outset (John 10. 12): and we see here how the Lord condemns it. As soon as we wish to “get” something, we are on wrong lines. If our service is with this object: yea, if we look for the Judgment Seat of Christ with this aim, we are quite out of harmony with our Lord. Find one word of love to the Lord or to others, in the utterance of “the first.” You cannot. Energy and “accuracy” may be attainable without love. 1 Corinthians 13. 1-3 speaks to our hearts.

It is fairly clear, then, that this parable, as the one of Matthew 18. 23-35, was a Divine answer to the attitude which Peter had expressed (see 18. 21, and 19. 27): the Lord has thereby a definite message for **His own**, and this is our first need. Many parables were to the multitude (Matt. 13. 13), and the use of this mode of instruction here to the twelve may suggest they had taken the standpoint of those “without” (Mark 4. 11, note John 13. 33). Any attitude of self-confidence hinders the blessedness of the eyesight of Matthew 13. 16. Yes, it was to **disciples** that this parable was spoken, and it contains some of the very problems found in the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18.

Coming to the exact words, we observe that this is one of the six parables of “the Kingdom of the heavens” that begin with the adjective “like” (the five are in Matthew 13), and four others begin with the verb “likened.” Though all that comes after is to give deep instruction, the emphasis here is on the parallel with “a man that is a householder.” **His** standpoint, therefore, is primarily before us, for He manifests the attitude which befits the kingdom: thus we learn the **purpose** of the message, and the exaltation of the Lord, in His “goodness” to the unworthy. But we must not overlook the word “for.” Is it not a conjunction, “joining” with 19. 30? Chapter and verse breaks are only helpful human expedients for quick reference: I am inclined to regret this one. The Lord Jesus is still dealing with Peter’s “What?” in 19. 27. He has already shown a precious “where” in 19. 28, and a gracious “what” (29), but there is also a warning as to the “where” in verse 30, and now we have His wise parabolic rebuke as to the “what” and “where” together, “**TAKE** that thine is and **GO**” (20. 14): how different from the encouragement to “enter,” in Matthew 25. 21, and to rejoice **with** the Lord. And Peter’s “what” reminds us that he was then answering previous words of the Lord Jesus, relative to the conversation with the rich young man,

who asked “ **What** good thing shall I do, that I may **have** eternal life?” How easy it is to over-estimate our power and our obedience, and to “ have ” earthly things that hinder (19. 22). And now the intimate association of the parable becomes evident, following the reference to the little ones that believe in the Lord (Matt. 18. 5, 6; 19. 14), and “ the Kingdom of the heavens.” There is no merit or self-glory: all the glory belongs to the Lord. Let us observe the young man’s stress on “ goodness,” and the Lord’s twofold reference to the **will**:—“ If thou wilt ” (19. 17, 21). In our present parable we find, in contrast, the Lord’s goodness (20. 15), and this is in connexion with His “ will,”—again twice emphasized (“ I **will** to give,” “ what I **will**,” 20. 14, 15). Was not the young man taken on his own ground, and in accord with his own claim? May not this be some clue to the problem? The disciples had, alas, failed to grasp, “ with **men** this is impossible, but **with God all things** are possible.” Had not Peter thought too much of his “ forsaking all ”? The Lord Jesus showed that the blessings were linked with following **Him**, and forsaking for **His sake** alone. Was there not a meaning in the changed order from Peter’s? The Lord put following **Him** at the beginning. And was there not a further power in the changed wording, “ shall receive ” (see 1 Cor. 4. 7), “ shall inherit ” (because **born** again)? To “ have ” **something, away** from the Father, was the characteristic of the “ lost ” son in Luke 15. 13, and likewise the wish expressed afterwards by the other in verse 29. But the son, when found, was in the Father’s presence. And now we see the bitterness of “ Take that thine is, and go,” in the light of the rebuke, “ Child, thou art ever with Me, and all that I have is thine ” (Luke 15. 31,—the Greek makes the link more impressive).

Are we anticipating too quickly if we ask, “ Are there **further** parables which specially link with this one? ” We would suggest the other parable of two sons in Matthew 21. 28-30, and the Householder immediately following (21. 33-46), and then the marriage for the King’s Son (22. 1-14). In all we have the two classes; and is it not so here? And what do the **two** classes represent, as a rule, in the parables?

Some may suggest, “ There are several classes in the vineyard.” Is it so? Verse 4 says “ **But** they went ” (lit.). There is no statement that they went into the vineyard. Nor is there any indication of this in verse 5. The act of invitation is before us, that is all. And in verses 8-10 any others are not mentioned. **Two** classes, the first and the last, are there seen. And let us observe that the preceding chapter ends with this emphasis—

“ But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first ” (19. 30). And the conclusion of the parable is quite similar, “ So the last shall be first, and the first last ” (20. 16). The parable is actually wrapped up in these expressions: do they not contain a key? Do they not indicate the subject? The Lord’s use of these words on another occasion is in an illuminating context (Luke 13. 30), and the already-noticed parable of the two sons may well come to mind. And the introductory “ **but** ” of Matthew 19. 30 implies a contrast with the blessing just mentioned. There is something to cause heart-searching here. Who are the first that will be last? The “ change ” in “ that Day ” is often connected with judgment (Matt. 8. 12, cf. the principle of Luke 16. 25). Is there not a “ change ” here with a similar message?

If there were the view of position alone, we might connect Luke 14. 9 (“ the last place ”), and think of 1 John 2. 28 (“ and not be shamed away from Him in His presence ”). The added narrative in Matthew 20. 20-28 again leading up to the “ will ” of man (recalling 19. 17) might help in **this** needful application. But the parable seems to include much more. Its interpretation cuts more deeply. The “ last ” in chapter 20. 6 were at first away from the Lord altogether, and may well suggest the position of the Gentiles (Eph. 2. 12). When the first become “ last,” is it **only** that they receive the “ penny ” at the end? Surely not. The termination of the contract is complete, and the word “ Go ” is final, giving, so far as this parable shows, no hint of any further relationship or nearness. Nor can we identify the goal of this parable with the circumstances at the Judgment Seat of Christ, where the graciously bestowed “ rewards ” will be **different**, and definitely according to the work of faith, and labour of love (2 Cor. 5. 10, Rev. 22. 12). This leads us back to the **beginning**. The Householder went out “ early in the morning to **hire** labourers into His vineyard.” The law said, “ This do and thou shalt live ” (Luke 10. 28). But the gospel knows nothing of hiring (Rom. 1. 16, 17). Is it not clear that our Lord Jesus went to the principles of law in the preceding context (Matt. 19. 16-22), and in the parallel of Luke just adduced? May it not be that He went back to the same principles here in warning, because Peter was leaving the ground of grace? Does not the Holy Spirit act thus in Galatians 5. 3, 4, “ He is a debtor to do the whole law: Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are (being) justified (by personal claim) by (in) the law; ye are fallen from grace ” (in doctrine, and realization)? And did not the Lord Jesus deal with the disciples some-

what thus in Luke 22. 36?\* The **parable** is “like” unto the “Man,” but the labourers who **have** fulfilled the conditions are **not** necessarily found in the spiritual counterpart. They may exist in the earthly narrative, and their character, and how they **would** act if they were in the parallel may be portrayed, without any evidence that they are part of the parallel. As with “types,” for example, in the tabernacle, there may well be contrasts to emphasize the Divine teaching all the more.† Here is evidently the ground of law: the thought of the “first,” the morning, the whole day, the agreement, the official “wages,” the bearing of the “burden and heat” throughout, would all indicate this. There is no suggestion of leaving the work in the middle: the steward says nothing as to their failure, the words “labourer” and “hire” are definitely used (verse 8), it is assumed the contract was **carried out**, and we cannot but observe the words “I do thee no wrong” (“I am not unrighteous as to thee”), “Didst thou not agree?” “Take that **thine** is.” Everything indicates “law.” This alone fits the context, and we see that the One Who “wills” to give in grace is the same One Who gave the law. This is important. We wonder the disciples were not ashamed: the passage seems to have this purport, and purpose for us too.

The further goings forth in verses 4 and 5 may partly indicate the ministry of the prophets, not only in time, but in character. The word “righteous” is employed (verse 4): but there is not the same emphasis on an “agreement.” There were definite foreshadowings of grace. The absence of recorded response would remind of Romans 10. 21, yet would not deny that there were many saved by **pure grace** before the Lord Jesus came. Every parable (as every picture) gives only a part-view.§ Those called at the eleventh hour cannot expect any agreement: an older manuscript reading of verse 7 omitting “whatsoever is righteous” would, if sustained, seem to emphasize this further.

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\* Leaflet available.

† “Contrast Parables” are somewhat different: but will help. Write for a booklet containing these.

§ The wheat and tares may illustrate: there is no mention of one of the tares being brought to Christ: any more than the type of fishing, (“thou shalt catch men”), goes further than unveiling the bringing out of the world, and the judgment of the old nature. Thanks be unto God, He goes further and gives a new life (the “fish” of John 21. 6, 11 pass into the “sheep” of verses 15-17, in the spiritual counterpart.



Certainly the whole context shows that such are welcomed apart from law, albeit they do work, since salvation by grace is ever manifest in "faith that worketh by love."

It may be asked—"Did those who heard at Sinai remain throughout the whole period?" That is hardly the point. Is it not rather that Peter was going back to the Sinai standpoint, and introducing merit instead of mercy? He was, therefore, taken on his own ground. Had not the Lord Jesus in love given the command at the first, "Follow Me" (Matt. 4. 19), and "straightway they FORSOOK their nets and followed Him" (Mark 1. 18)? There is a basis-verse: both words are in Matthew 19. 27. Peter was in every sense a "first" one (Matt. 10. 2). But now he seemed to be making the invitation of grace into a contract of **law**. The parable claim to have "borne the heat," and to have "done" all in Matthew 19. 27 is as definite as that of the young man eight verses earlier. Here is legalism: and the disciples, speaking as if salvation were "possible" from self, forgot ch. 19. 25, 26. He Who afterwards turned, and looked upon Peter, "BEHELD" them here: they did not know their limitations. Thus they must be dealt with awhile as those "without," and a parable is given to them, taking them on their own claim, and calculated, as the amazing words of Ezekiel 18. 31, to lead a humble soul to repentance. Let their claim be acknowledged, then have they not won by their works, without the new birth, the entry into resurrection life for the body also (Matt. 19. 17)? But if this glory can be gained without the first fruits of the Spirit, resurrection "life" is no longer "the **redemption** of our body": it has been earned, "Take that **thine** is." The redemption-silver penny no longer tells of "redemption," and so the unquickened one **retains** his own character, and "murmurs" against grace. Ah, we need redemption, we need a **new** life, to take God's standpoint. If a legalist could reach glory he would be miserable, as miserable as the elder son who "would not come in."\* But that such an one does **not** actually reach glory is the testimony of all Scripture, and this parable has striking thoughts on this theme also. Notice that the "last" ones here, after their work, have not **one** word of love, or harmony, with the Householder. **ONE** is addressed, but the Lord emphasizes the plural murmuring and its continuance. This reminds of the "wicked" servant in the parable of the talents and pounds alike. Moreover, the word "Friend" is quite different from that of John 15. 14, and only occurs elsewhere, in

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\* A booklet on Luke 15 will, I think, help. (Free.)

relation to the Lord, with regard to Judas (Matt. 26. 50), and in a parable where the King speaks to the **self-righteous** one, cast outside (Matt. 22. 12). This also is impressive. And the Lord's allusion to an "evil" eye is not only in full **contrast** with His **goodness**, but also in reference to Mark 7. 22, speaking of those who are religious in law, without grace in the heart. If the climax is "Many be called, but few chosen" (as some MSS. read), this would still further illustrate. As we look again and again at the parable we find no evidence that the "first" really know the Lord. How blessed if we are really saved, and, as those who could not boast of their labour, shall receive glory because the Lord "wills" to give. Our little labour of love here, for Him Who redeemed us, gives us no right, no expectation grounded upon ourselves. How forcible is this message. May it reach our hearts, and be fruitful in our lives, as the Holy Spirit applies. When we notice the relative emphasis elsewhere in the words "righteous" and "good" (Rom. 5. 7), we see here that the objection was to grace and its "goodness" (verse 15). Grace reigns through righteousness (Rom. 5. 21), but righteousness **without grace** would condemn us. But alas, the "first ones" here are against free grace. "I am not unrighteous as to thee" seems to imply that their confidence was in their "right" and "rightness" and "righteousness" in contrast with others. The spirit of the Pharisee in Luke 18. 9-14 is not absent to-day, and we need grace that we may never yield to it.

As explained, this parable has caused me more thought than almost any other, and the prayers, and help, of God's beloved children are ever valued. My desire is that nothing may ever mislead His own, by error or grave disproportion. But I am conscious how much fuller is His truth than my perception. Months—I might almost say years—I have hesitated to write on this parable, and have chosen others first,—not with conscious self-will, but seeking to be in God's will, and with a sense of need. Our Father has deigned to encourage before when ministering on this subject, and I do trust that the further encouragement He has given me in the preceding meditations may not be without blessing and fruit in the lives of some who read. Should I not record gratitude to God for enabling, and will He not further bless to His glory? Permit this personal note.

"Difficulties" still remain in Scripture. Is it not so in nature, and are not God's thoughts ever greater than ours (Isa. 55. 8, 9)? If one or two in this parable are pondered, it may be the Lord will use them to our united blessing.



Is not the chief one a prayerful distinguishing **what** is a parallel, and **what** a contrast? The rejected ones, and those who, in that Day, speak against His way, appear always to be those who know Him not. I can find NO Scriptural suggestion of raised believers having **one** word, or wish, or thought against their Lord. As already shown, the key here seems to be that the rich young man had come on the ground of law; and Peter, although among scribes “discipled unto the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 13. 52), had also adopted this. Hence the Lord dealt with his need accordingly, showing the real standpoint of the kingdom of heaven, and that the only ones blest **to remain with the Lord** are those who are brought there without bargain, or merit, and who receive what He gives, because it is His “Own,” and He is “good,” and doeth “good.”

In accord with this, our Lord takes at once His own standpoint in connexion with the dispensation He graciously came to bring, but as He is the same Owner of all, Whose goings forth were from of old (Mic. 5. 2), He is seen as the One Who appointed the agreement of law. Peter, as the rich young man, looked to himself, and the Lord Jesus reckoned back, as it were, his call to the dispensation of law, and then showed how he would be out of harmony with the principles of grace, and of “that Day.” As we know, from other Scriptures, all true believers **will** actually be brought, ere then, to see that all salvation is by grace. But the searching of **heart** is important. This involves the problem that “the kingdom of heaven” is mentioned in verse 1, whereas we might have here expected “the kingdom of God” as in Matthew 21. 43, when including the **previous** period, and God’s dealings with Israel. Yet not only is the description specially linked with the Householder **personally**, but we may see the Lord’s loving reproof, indicating that He was no longer going forth from the standpoint of law. In the “transition” period, this attitude would be possible, though the wording may remain a little difficulty to the understanding, while witnessing to the humbled heart.

The young man in ch. 19. 20 claimed he had kept all. Our Lord did not **deny this** directly, but showed his failure under law in a way that unveiled the nature of the love that would find treasure in heaven, and be in harmony therewith. May it not be somewhat similar here? The Householder does not say that these had borne the burden and heat of the day: it is their own claim, and they are treated accordingly, but at a distance. O that such ministry may have its effect on our daily life, and that we may simply serve on the ground of grace and His will. We are not

told “ the last ” were hired, though, by grace, we feel sure that those who receive grace, show this by good works (1 Cor. 15. 10, 58).

In closing, we repeat there is no evidence that those who “ murmured ” were children of God. Their own words, the Lord’s description in a special word “ Friend ” (“ **Hetairos** ”), and His appointment “ Go,” together, possibly, with the message of verse 16, all give a contrasted view—and yet all professed to serve! The frequency of **contrasts** in parables and types alike, calls to mind the Lord’s dealings with Peter (**on his own ground again**) in Luke 22. 36, and also such verses as Ezekiel 18. 31, written to bring the reader startlingly to realize his failure and danger? I know much more might be said, and am conscious our Father may grant much more ere this is reprinted, and hence the prayer and correspondence of His children are welcome.

Again I would own how much fuller is Scripture than our part knowledge of it (1 Cor. 13. 9).

But whatever we know, or do not know, we know our Lord, and the Holy Spirit’s gracious use of this parable is precious, to keep us from all self-confidence and from seeking the “ first ” place. The blessedness put before us is not the counterfeit of a Pharisee (see Luke 18. 11, 12), but one having a deep and ever deepening harmony with God’s will. Is His eye good? Undoubtedly! We rejoice, and rejoice when the Lord does what **He** wills, and when **He** saves the “ unlikely,” and blesses such at once, and fully, and equally **WITH** those who have known His Name and served Him many years. So shall we hear His own words, “ **REJOICE WITH ME**, for I have found my sheep which was lost ” (Luke 15. 6); and learn the preciousness of “ The **GRACE** of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the **LOVE** of God, and the **COMMUNION** of the Holy Ghost be with you all ” (2 Cor. 13. 14).

## Some Brief Parables of the Lord Jesus.

**O**UR Lord often spoke in a parabolic way (John 16. 25), and even one sentence or one word may be rich in helpful teaching by parallels (or contrasts), either as to nature and grace, or as to history and grace. In Luke 14 He emphasized thrice that there are those that cannot be His learners (verses 26, 27, 33). Only when there is the right condition can we learn of Him, and He illustrated this by three brief messages, alike emphasizing **continuance**. The first brings before us a builder. How much, as we have already seen, concerns "building" in Scripture. Nor is this strange. The thought of a foundation, an orderly arrangement, and a purpose are deeply important. But here we have a **tower**, not a house. The context, too, is military. But the warfare is one of suffering (verse 27), as in 1 Peter 4. 1. The bearing of a cross has just been mentioned. The standpoint of contrast and conflict with the world cannot be taken up lightly. Have **we** counted the cost? Can we carry through? The flesh will soon hesitate, even as the rocky ground hearer "dureth for a while." "Ye did run well" is the searching statement of Galatians 5. 7. It is, indeed, perilous to begin, and then draw back (2 Pet. 2. 20-22). We remember the Lord's **threefold** stress on a similar "counting the cost," and on godly continuance, with regard to discipleship in Luke 9. 57-62. Surely these words should sink deeply into our hearts. If we count on God, we have "sufficient." He will never fail. But it is better that all human impulse, and confidence in the flesh, should be detected at once. The "tower" that is finished reminds of Proverbs 18. 10, and the Lord's Name, a striking contrast with the leaving off to build of Genesis 11. 8, 9, when men said, "Let us make us a name." All Scripture harmonizes. Do **we** count the cost as to God's path, and as to every part of His will? It is well. Dishonour and mockery are aroused otherwise, and this is against the Name of the Lord, when a bold beginning is followed by a giving up. But let not the feeble soul who trusts in the Lord be intimidated. The righteous one "in Christ" shall hold on his way. The Lord will perfect that which concerns us.

The parallel view of a warrior king goes yet further on the same lines. Believers experience a warfare against a very powerful adversary (1 Pet. 5. 8). He has organized forces that double ours; **but** "Greater is He That is in us than he that is in the world" (1 John 4. 4). Unless, however, we have realized our own insufficiency, and weighed up the issue, and so put our simple reliance on One Who **makes us able**, it is vain to go

forward. The conflict needs **the Victor**. We cannot fight, and win, without the whole armour of God, including the sword of **the Spirit** Who Himself leads (Eph. 6. 10, 17). Searching is the alternative to conflict—namely “ conditions of peace ” with the enemy. This language reminds us of the solemn statement when Peter and the other disciples were looking to themselves: “ He that hath no sword let him sell his garment and buy one.” Such words were introduced by the impressive “ But now,” indicating how the disciples had left their **only** safe ground of faith and the Lord’s will, as to true service in this sinful world. It would be terrible to make peace with the enemy, but to try and fight in the power of the flesh is only to bring a more alarming final surrender to the dishonour of the Lord.

The “ so likewise,” or “ so therefore,” of the very next verse makes clear the application. “ Therefore ” alone would have linked, but “ so ” intensifies remarkably. Our victory is through conscious strengthlessness (2 Cor. 12. 9). The renouncing of all for Christ’s sake is the living faith that overcomes. Counting the “ cost,” and seeing if one is “ able ” are the means to bring us to ability in our Lord via realization of our inability (2 Cor. 3. 5, 6). So long as we hold the things of self and earth, the foe will gain ground. While Moses’ two hands were emptied and uplifted, Israel had power. Faith looks on difficulties as opportunities for God (Num. 14. 9, 2 Chron. 20. 17). The hand that is full of earthly things can neither be uplifted in prayer nor hold the weapon God has provided. The intense antithesis is between discipleship or making peace with the enemy of our souls.

The added reference to “ Salt ” again suggests “ continuance.” To be salt, no longer having any savour, is a miserable condition. May it not describe one who professed Christ’s Name, but who failed to count the cost, and has thus broken down in the flesh, and abandoned that which the flesh took up? The word “ salt,” as “ virgins ” in Matthew 25, would well set forth that men are characterized according to their claim and profession. O that we may have a “ reality.”

Again we may see the concentrated fulness of our Lord’s language in Matthew 15. 13. There are many plants, alas, which, like the tares, are **not** of God. It is an unspeakable blessing to be the branch of His planting (Isa. 60. 21): all such He tends, and all such are “ that He may be glorified.” But an uprooting of others will soon take place. We think of John’s parable of the fruitless tree cut down (Matt. 3. 10). There will be drastic measures in holy judgment (Jude 12, 13). Few realize this: they live as if longsuffering were eternal, but it is not. The

thought of a plant implies " life "—with growth and fruit. But what kind of fruit? We have seen that the tares, sown by the evil one, do not set forth the gift of physical life, but of a religious " life of profession." So is it here. The Pharisees were plants of evil: they bore evil fruit. And what are we? Only that which is Divinely planted can be spiritually fruitful. So is it as to the individual: so is it as to the assembly. May we be graciously preserved from all counterfeits.

The passage continues, " Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." Peter soon enquired regarding this " parable " (verse 15). The fact was clear: but what was, and is, the application? The Pharisees were blind: their eyes were not opened, but tightly closed, although they boldly said, " We see " (John 9. 41). They saw no beauty in the One Who came to be manifested to Israel, they knew not the time of their visitation, they discerned not the signs of the times. Yet they were " leaders " (Matt. 23. 16, 23, Rom. 2. 19). How contrasted is the gracious Holy Spirit, Who leads into all the truth (John 16. 13). The people, too, were blind (Matt. 13. 15, Jer. 5. 31), and thus there was progress in sin. There could be but one result. Ahead the Lord Jesus saw not simply a wilderness, but a ditch. The history of Israel illustrated this in the year 70, but the eternal judgment is in view. Hence there was not only a temporary misleading, but a misleading with a fearful end. The goal, a ditch: the condition, fallen. Sin from the beginning is characterized as a fall (" offence " is " **falling aside** " in Rom. 5. 18), and at the climax there is the same bringing down. How blessed is the contrasted standing before the Lord.

Luke 6. 39 gives this parable in another context. Thus would the Lord impress it on our **heart**. O that amongst us the eyes of the **heart** may be opened (Eph. 1. 18), and that those who are privileged to minister His Word among His people may themselves have a true view of His glory, and lead others in the right way, as they themselves are led by the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Jesus continued in Matthew 15 with the solemn thought of defilement by that which comes out from the heart, and then out of the mouth. This also was characterized as a " parable " by the disciples in Mark 7. 17. Its meaning is clear, but its application is deeply important and often misunderstood. Meat does not commend us to God (1 Cor. 8. 8). We are not to be occupied with meats (Heb. 13. 9). The typical arrangements of Leviticus 11 have a **spiritual** parallel now. " Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be

received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer” (1 Tim. 4. 4, 5). Not that we are to indulge ourselves: not that we are to eat in a way that causes others to stumble (Rom. 14. 21): not that we are to partake of food in which blood is retained, or to accept a “ tonic ” which contains blood, for that has NEVER BEEN GIVEN as food (Gen. 9. 4). But the ceremonial arrangements are not applied in the present dispensation (Col. 2. 20 22). The externalism of **modern** Judaism, and of Mohammedanism, is to find a contrast in our deeply spiritual life, so that we are concerned as to every word that comes out of our mouth. Let us realize that thoughts are not merely mental, but “ out of the heart ”: and that words are not merely “ on the spur of the moment,” but the expression of the heart, and a revelation of its condition. The book of Proverbs illustrates this (e.g, 12. 23, 23. 33). How far-reaching is the command, “ Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life ” (Prov. 4. 23). May we obey in the Holy Spirit. It is worthy of observation that the words of our adorable Lord are intensely practical. They show unmistakably the ruined condition of man, and the need for a new life. How graciously He came to die, that such a life might be ours. There is nothing in the gospel to suggest half measures. There is no patchwork righteousness: there is no mere improvement of the flesh. “ If any one is in Christ, there is a new creation.”

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\* All will be readily found, either from this or the textual index, but we feel that "The Son Lost and Found" is preferable to "The Prodigal Son," and so forth. May each description lead to prayerful thought.

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# Notes

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