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THE CLOSING SCENES OF MALACHI AND JUDE

In comparing these two inspired writings, we find many points of similarity and many points of contrast. Both the prophet and apostle portray scenes of ruin, corruption and apostasy. The former is occupied with the ruin of Judaism, the latter with the ruin of Christendom. The prophet Malachi, in his opening sentences, gives with uncommon vividness the source of Israel's blessing and the secret of their fall. "I have loved you, saith the Lord." Here was the grand source of all their blessedness, all their glory, all their dignity. Jehovah's love accounts for all the brighter glories of Israel's past and all the brighter glories of Israel's future. On the other hand, their bold and infidel challenge, "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" accounts for the deepest depths of Israel's present degradation.

To put such a question, after all that Jehovah had done for them from the days of Moses to the days of Solomon, proved a condition of heart insensible to the very last degree. Those who, with the marvelous history of Jehovah's actings before their eyes, could say, "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" were beyond the reach of all moral appeal. Therefore, we need not be surprised at the prophet's burning words. We are prepared for such sentences as the following: "If then I be a father, where is My honor? and if I be a master, where is My fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests that despise My name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised Thy name?" There was the most thorough insensibility both as to the Lord's love and as to their own evil ways. There was the hardness of heart that could say, "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" and "Wherein have we wronged Thee?" And all this with the history of a thousand years before their eyes — a history overlapped by the unexampled grace, mercy and patience of God, a history stained from first to last with the record of their unfaithfulness, folly and sin.

But let us hearken to the touching remonstrances of the grieved and offended God of Israel. "Ye offer polluted bread upon Mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted Thee? In that ye say, The table of the Lord is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts... who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? Neither do ye kindle fire on Mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand. For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of the Lord is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even His meat is contemptible. Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame and the sick; thus ye brought an offering; should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord."

Here then we have a sad and dreary picture of Israel's moral condition. The public worship of God had fallen into utter contempt. His altar was insulted, His service despised. As to the priests, it was a mere question of money. As to the people, the whole thing had become a weariness, an empty formality, a dull and heartless routine. There was no heart for God. There was plenty of heart for gain. Any sacrifice, however maimed and torn, was deemed good enough for the altar of God. The lame, the blind and the sick, the very worst that could be had, such as they would not dare to offer to a human

governor, was laid on the altar of God. And if a door was to be opened or a fire kindled, it must be paid for. No pay, no work. Such was the lamentable condition of things in the days of Malachi. It makes the heart sick to contemplate it.

But, thanks and praise be to God, there is another side of the picture. There were some rare and lovely exceptions to the gloomy rule — some striking and beautiful forms standing out in relief from the dark background. It is truly refreshing in the midst of all this venality and corruption, coldness and hollowness, barrenness and heartlessness, pride and stoutness of heart, to read such words as these: “Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name.”

How precious is this brief record! How delightful to contemplate this remnant in the midst of the moral ruin! There is no pretension or assumption, no attempt to set up anything, no effort to reconstruct the fallen economy, no affected display of power. Here is felt-weakness and a looking to Jehovah. This is the true secret of all real power. We need never be afraid of conscious weakness. It is impressive strength that we have to dread and shrink from. “When I am weak, then am I strong” is ever the rule for the people of God — a blessed rule, most surely. God is to be counted upon always. We may lay it down as a great root principle that, no matter what may be the actual state of the professing body, individual faith can enjoy communion with God according to the very highest truth of the dispensation.

This is a grand principle to grasp and hold fast. Let the professing people of God be ever individuals who judge and humble themselves before God, who can enjoy His presence and blessing without hindrance or limit. Witness the Daniels, the Mordecais, the Ezras, the Nehemiahs, the Josiahs, the Hezekiahs, and scores of others who walked with God, carried out the highest principles and enjoyed the rarest privileges of the dispensation, when all lay in hopeless ruin around them. There was a passover celebrated in the days of Josiah such as had not been known from the days of Samuel the prophet (2 Chr. 35: 18). The feeble remnant, on their return from Babylon, celebrated the feast of tabernacles, a privilege which had not been tasted since the days of Joshua the son of Nun (Neh. 8: 17). Mordecai, without ever striking a blow, gained as splendid a victory over Amalek as that achieved by Joshua in the days of Exodus 17 (Esther 6: 11-12). In the book of Daniel we see earth's proudest monarch prostrate at the feet of a captive Jew.

What do all these cases teach us? What lesson do they tell out in our ears? Simply that the humble, believing and obedient soul is permitted to enjoy the very deepest and richest communion with God, in spite of the failure and ruin of God's professing people and the departed glory of the dispensation in which his lot is cast.

Thus it was in the closing scenes of Malachi. All was in hopeless ruin, but that did not hinder those who loved and feared the Lord from getting together to speak about Him and to muse upon His precious name. True, that feeble remnant was not like the great congregation which assembled in the days of Solomon, from Dan to Beersheba, but it had a glory unique to itself. It had the divine presence in a way no less marvelous though not so striking. We are not told of any “book of remembrance” in the days of Solomon. We are not told of Jehovah's hearkening and hearing. Perhaps it may be said, there was no need. Be it so, but that does not dim the luster of the grace that shone upon the little band in the days of Malachi. We may boldly affirm that Jehovah's heart was as refreshed by the loving breathings of that little band as by the splendid sacrifice in the days of Solomon's dedication. Their love shines out all the brighter in contrast with the heartless formalism of the professing body, and the corruption of the priests.

“And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not. For behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings; and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts.”

We shall now briefly glance at the epistle of Jude. Here we have a still more appalling picture of apostasy and corruption. It is a familiar saying among us, that the corruption of the best thing is the worst corruption. Hence it is that the Apostle Jude spreads before us a page so very much darker and more awful than that presented by the prophet Malachi. It is the record of man's utter failure and ruin under the very highest and richest privileges which could be conferred upon him.

In the opening of his solemn address, the apostle lets us know that it was laid upon his heart “to write unto us of the common salvation.” This would have been his far more delightful task. It would have been his joy and his refreshment to expand upon the present privileges and future glories wrapped up in the comprehensive folds of that precious word “salvation.” But he felt it “needful” to turn from this more congenial work to fortify our souls against the rising tide of error and evil which threatened the very foundations of Christianity. “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you and exhort you that ye should *earnestly contend for the faith* which was once delivered unto the saints.” All that was vital and fundamental was at stake. It was a question of earnestly contending for the faith itself. “For there are certain men crept in unawares who were before of old ordained to this condemnation; ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This is far worse than anything we have in Malachi. There it was a question of the law, as we read, “Remember ye the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.” But in Jude it is not a question of forgetting the law, but of actually turning into sensualness the pure and precious grace of God, and denying the Lordship of Christ. Therefore, instead of dwelling upon the salvation of God, the apostle seeks to fortify us against the wickedness and lawlessness of men. “I will therefore,” he says, “put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, He hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.”

All this is most solemn, but we cannot dwell upon the dark features of this scene: space does not allow it. Besides, we rather desire to present to the Christian reader the charming picture of the Christian remnant given in the closing lines of this most searching scripture. As in Malachi we have amid the helpless ruin of Judaism, a devoted band of Jewish worshipers who loved and feared the Lord and took sweet counsel together, so in Jude, amid the more appalling ruins of Christian profession, the Holy Spirit introduces a company whom He addresses as “Beloved.” These are “sanctified by God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.” These He solemnly warns against the varied forms of error and evil which were already beginning to make their appearance, but have since assumed such formidable proportions. To these He turns, with the most exquisite grace, and addresses the following exhortation, “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal

life.”

Here we have divine security against all the dark and terrible forms of apostasy — “the way of Cain, the error of Baalam, the gainsaying of Core, the murmurers and complainers, the great swelling words, the raging waves, the wandering stars, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.” The “beloved” are to “build themselves up on their most holy faith.”

Let the reader note this. There is not a syllable here about an order of men to succeed the apostles, not a word about gifted men of any sort. It is well to see this and to bear it ever in mind. We hear a great deal of our lack of gift and power, of our not having pastors and teachers. How could we expect to have much gift or power? Do we deserve them? Regretfully we have failed and sinned and come short. Let us own this and cast ourselves upon the living God who never fails a trusting heart.

Look at Paul's touching address to the elders of Ephesus in Acts 20. To whom does he there commend us in view of the passing away of apostolic ministry? Is there a word about successors to the apostles? Not one, unless indeed it be the “grievous wolves” of which he speaks or those men who were to arise in the very bosom of the Church, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. What then is the resource of the faithful? “I commend you *to God and to the Word of His grace*, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”

What a precious resource! Not a word about gifted men, valuable as such may be in their right place. God forbid we should in any way depreciate the gifts which, in spite of all the failure and sin, our gracious Lord may see fit to bestow upon His Church. But still it holds good that the blessed apostle, in taking leave of the Church, commends us not to gifted men, but to God Himself and the Word of His grace. Hence it follows that, let our weakness be ever so great, we have God to look to and to lean upon. He never fails those who trust Him. There is no limit whatsoever to the blessing which our souls may taste, if only we look to God in humility of mind and childlike confidence.

Here lies the secret of all true blessedness and spiritual power — humility of mind and simple confidence. There must on the one hand be no assumption of power, and on the other, we must not, in the unbelief of our hearts, limit the goodness and faithfulness of our God. He can and does bestow gifts for the building up of His people. He would bestow much more if we were not so ready to manage for ourselves. If the Church would but look more to Christ her living Head and loving Lord, instead of to the arrangements of men and the methods of this world, she would have a very different tale to tell. But if we, by our unbelieving plans and our restless efforts to provide a machinery for ourselves, quench, hinder and grieve the Holy Spirit, need we marvel if we are left to prove the barrenness and emptiness, the desolation and confusion of all such things? Christ is sufficient, but He must be proved, He must be trusted, He must be allowed to act. The platform must be left perfectly clear for the Holy Spirit to display thereon the preciousness, the fullness, the all-sufficiency of Christ.

But it is precisely in this very thing we so remarkably fail. We try to hide our weakness instead of owning it. We seek to cover our nakedness by a drapery of our own providing, instead of confiding simply and entirely in Christ for all we need. We grow weary of the attitude of humble patient waiting. We are in haste to put on an appearance of strength. This is our folly and our grievous loss. If we could only be induced to believe it, our real strength is to know our weakness and cling to Christ in absolute faith from day to day.

It is to this most excellent way that the apostle Jude exhorts the Christian remnant in his closing lines. “Ye, beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith.” These words set forth the responsibility of all true Christians to be found together instead of being divided and scattered. We are to help one another in love, according to the measure of grace bestowed and the nature of the gift

communicated. It is a mutual thing — ”building up yourselves.” It is not looking to an order of men, nor is it complaining of our lack of gifts, but simply each doing what he can to promote the common blessing and profit of all.

The reader will notice the four things which we are exhorted to do, namely “Building,” “Praying,” ”Keeping,” ”Looking.” What blessed work is here! Yes, and it is work for all. There is not one true Christian on the face of the earth who cannot fulfill any or all of these branches of ministry. Indeed every person is responsible so to do. We can build ourselves up on our most holy faith, we can pray in the Holy Spirit, we can keep ourselves in the love of God, and while doing these things we can look out for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It may be asked, “Who are the beloved? To whom does the term apply?” Our answer is, “To whomsoever it may concern.” Let us see to it that we are on the ground of those to whom the precious title applies. It is not *assuming* the title, but *occupying* the true moral ground. It is not empty profession, but real possession. It is not claiming the name, but being the thing.

Nor does the responsibility of the Christian remnant end here. It is not merely of themselves they have to think. They are to cast a loving look and stretch forth a helping hand beyond the circumference of their own circle. “And of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.” Who are the “some?” and who are the “others?” Is there not the same beautiful undefinedness about these as there is about the “Beloved?” These latter will be at no loss to find out the former. There are precious souls scattered up and down amid the appalling ruins of Christendom, “some” of them to be looked upon with tender compassion, “others” to be saved with godly fear, lest the “beloved” should become involved in the defilement.

It is a fatal mistake to suppose that, in order to pluck people out of the fire, we must go into the fire ourselves. This would never do. The best way to deliver people from an evil position *is to be thoroughly out of that position myself*. How can I best pull a man out of a morass? Surely not by going into the morass, but by standing on firm ground and from there lending him a helping hand. I cannot pull a man out of anything unless I am out myself. If we want to help the people of God who are mixed up with the surrounding ruin, the first thing for ourselves is to be in thorough and decided separation. The next thing is to have our hearts brimful and flowing over with tender and fervent love to all who bear the precious name of Jesus.

Here we must close, and in doing so we shall quote for the reader that blessed doxology with which the apostle sums up his solemn and weighty address. “Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.” We have a great deal about “falling” in this epistle -Israel falling, angels falling, cities falling, but blessed be God, there is One who is able to keep us from falling, and it is to His holy keeping we are committed.

THE SYMPATHY AND GRACE OF JESUS

(Read carefully Matthew 14: 1-21 and Mark 6: 30-44)

In these two parallel scriptures we are presented with two distinct conditions of heart which both find their answer in the sympathy and grace of Jesus. Let us look closely at them and may the Holy Spirit enable us to gather up and bear away their precious teaching!

It was a moment of deep sorrow to John's disciples when their master fell by the sword of Herod,

when the one on whom they had been accustomed to lean and from whose lips they had been accustomed to drink instruction, was taken from them after such a fashion. This was indeed a moment of gloom and desolation to the followers of the Baptist.

But there was One to whom they could come in their sorrow and into whose ear they could pour their tale of grief — the One of whom their master had spoken, to whom he had pointed and of whom he had said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” To Him the bereaved disciples betook themselves. We read, “They came and took up the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus” (Matt. 14: 12). This was the very best thing they could have done. There was not another heart on earth in which they could have found such a response as in the tender, loving heart of Jesus. His sympathy was perfect. He knew all about their sorrow. He knew their loss and how they would be feeling it. They therefore acted wisely when “they went and told Jesus.” His ear was ever open and His heart ever prepared to soothe and sympathize. He perfectly exemplified the precept afterwards embodied in the words of the Holy Spirit, “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” (Rom. 12: 15).

Who can tell the value of genuine sympathy? Who can declare the value of having one who can really make your joys and sorrows his own? Thank God! we have such an one in the blessed Lord Jesus Christ. Although we cannot see Him with the bodily eye, yet can faith use Him in all the preciousness and power of His perfect sympathy. We can, if only our faith is simple and childlike, come from the tomb where we have just deposited the remains of some fondly-cherished person, to the feet of Jesus and there pour out the anguish of a bereaved and desolate heart. We shall there meet no rude repulse, no heartless reproof for our folly and weakness in feeling so deeply. Nor any clumsy effort to say something suitable, an awkward effort to put on some expression of condolence. Ah! no; Jesus knows how to sympathize with a heart that is crushed and bowed down beneath the heavy weight of sorrow. His is a perfect human heart. What a thought! What a privilege to have access at all times, in all places and under all circumstances, to a perfect human heart! We may look in vain for this down here. In many cases, there is a real desire to sympathize, but a total lack of capacity. I may find myself, in moments of sorrow, in company with one who knows nothing about my sorrow or the source thereof. How could he sympathize? And even though I should tell him, his heart might be so occupied with other things as to have no room and no time for me.

Not so with the perfect Man, Christ Jesus. He has both room and time for each and all. No matter when, how or with what you come, the heart of Jesus is always open. He will never repulse, never fail, never disappoint. If we are in sorrow, what should we do? We should just do as the disciples of the Baptist did, “go and tell Jesus.” This is the right thing to do. Let us go straight from the tomb to the feet of Jesus. He will dry up our tears, soothe our sorrows, heal our wounds and fill up our blanks. In this way we shall be able to enter into the truth of Rutherford's words when he says, “I try to lay up all my good things in Christ and then a little of the creature goes a great way with me.” This is an experience which we may well covet. May the blessed Spirit lead us more into it!

We may now contemplate another condition of heart as furnished by the twelve apostles on their return from a successful mission. “And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught” (Mark 6: 30). Here we have not a case of sorrow and bereavement, but one of rejoicing and encouragement. The twelve made their way to Jesus to tell Him of their success, just as the disciples of the Baptist made their way to Him in the moment of their loss. Jesus was equal to both. He could meet the heart that was crushed with sorrow and He could meet the heart that was flushed with success. He knew how to control, to moderate and to direct both the one and the other. Blessings forever be upon His honored name!

“And He said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat” (Mark 6: 31). Here we are conducted to a point at which the moral glories of Christ shine out with uncommon luster and correct the selfishness of our poor narrow hearts. Here we are taught with unmistakable clearness that to make Jesus the depository of our thoughts and feelings will never produce in us a spirit of haughty self-sufficiency and independence, or a feeling of contempt for others. Quite the reverse. The more we have to do with Jesus, the more will our hearts be opened to meet the varied forms of human need which may present themselves to our view from day to day. It is when we come to Jesus and empty our whole hearts to Him, tell Him of our sorrows and our joys, and cast our whole burden at His feet, that we really learn how to feel for others.

There is great beauty and power in the words, “come ye yourselves apart.” He does not say, “Go ye.” This would never do. There is no use in going apart into a desert place if Jesus is not there to go to. To go into solitude without Jesus is but to make our cold, narrow hearts, colder and narrower still. I may retire from the scene around me in chagrin and disappointment, only to wrap myself up in an impenetrable selfishness. I may fancy that my fellows have not made enough of me and I may retire to make much of myself. I may make myself the center of my whole being and thus become a coldhearted, contracted, miserable creature. But when Jesus says “come,” the case is totally different. Our finest moral lessons are learned alone with Jesus. We cannot breathe the atmosphere of His presence without having our hearts expanded. If the apostles had gone into the desert without Jesus, they would have eaten the loaves and fishes themselves, but having gone with Jesus they learned differently. He knew how to meet the need of a hungry multitude, as well as that of a company of sorrowing or rejoicing disciples. The sympathy and grace of Jesus are perfect. He can meet all. If one is sorrowful, he can go to Jesus; if he is happy, he can go to Jesus; if he is hungry, he can go to Jesus. We can bring everything to Jesus, for in Him all fullness dwells, and, blessed be His name, He never sends anyone away empty.

Not so, regretfully, with His poor disciples. How forbidding is their selfishness when viewed in the light of His magnificent grace! “And Jesus, when He came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.” He had gone to a desert place to give His disciples rest, but no sooner does human need present itself than the deep flowing tide of compassion rolls forth from His tender heart.

“And when the day was now far spent, His disciples came unto Him and said, This is a desert place, and now the time is far past: send them away.” What words from men who had just returned from preaching the gospel! “Send them away.” Ah! it is one thing to preach grace and another thing to act it. It is well to preach, but it is also well to act. Indeed, the preaching will be worth little if not combined with acting. It is well to instruct the ignorant, but it is also well to feed the hungry. The latter may involve more self-denial than the former. It may cost us nothing to preach, but it may cost us something to feed, and we do not like to have our private store intruded upon. The heart is ready to put forth its ten thousand objections, “What shall I do for myself? What will become of my family? We must act judiciously. We cannot do impossibilities.” These and similar arguments the selfish heart can urge when a needy object presents itself.

“Send them away.” What made the disciples say this? What was the real source of this selfish request? Simply unbelief. Had they only remembered that they had in their midst the One who of old had fed “600,000 footmen” for forty years in the wilderness, they would have known that He would not send a hungry multitude away. Surely the same hand that had nourished such a host for so long a time could easily furnish a single meal for five thousand. Thus faith would reason, but unbelief darkens the

understanding and contracts the heart. There is nothing so absurd as unbelief and nothing which so shuts up the bowels of compassion. Faith and love always go together, and in proportion to the growth of the one is the growth of the other. Faith opens the floodgates of the heart and lets the tide of love flow forth. Thus the apostle could say to the Thessalonians, “Your faith groweth exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.” This is the divine rule. A heart full of faith can afford to be charitable; an unbelieving heart can afford nothing.

Faith places the heart in immediate contact with God's exhaustless treasury and fills it with the most benevolent affections. Unbelief throws the heart in upon itself and fills it with all manner of selfish fears. Faith conducts us into the soul-expanding atmosphere of heaven. Unbelief leaves us enwrapped in the withering atmosphere of this heartless world. Faith enables us to hearken to Christ's gracious words, “Give ye them to eat.” Unbelief makes us utter our own heartless words, “Send the multitude away.” In a word, there is nothing which enlarges the heart like simple faith, and nothing so contracting as unbelief. Oh! that our faith may grow exceedingly so that our love may abound more and more! May we reap much permanent profit from the contemplation of the sympathy and grace of Jesus!

What a striking contrast between “Send the multitude away” and “Give ye them to eat.” Thus it is ever. God's ways are not as our ways. It is by looking at His ways that we learn to judge our ways — by looking at Him that we learn to judge ourselves. In this lovely scene Jesus corrects the selfishness of the disciples, first by making them the channels through which His grace may flow to the multitude, and secondly, by making them gather up “twelve baskets full of the fragments” for themselves.

Nor is this all. Not merely is selfishness rebuked, but the heart is most blessedly instructed. Nature might say, “What need is there of the five loaves and two fishes at all? Surely, the One who can feed such a multitude with the loaves and fishes, can as easily feed them without such an instrumentality.” Nature might argue thus, but Jesus teaches us that we are not to despise God's creatures. We are to use what we have with God's blessing. This is a fine moral lesson for the heart. “What hast thou in the house?” is the question. It is just that and nothing else that God will use. It is easy to be liberal with what we have not, but the thing is to bring out what we have and with God's blessing, apply it to the present need.

So also in the gathering up of the fragments. The foolish here might say, “What need of gathering up those scattered crumbs? Surely the One who has wrought such a miracle can have no need of fragments.” Yes, but we are not to waste God's creatures. If in the using of the loaves and fishes we are taught not to despise any creature of God, in the gathering up of the fragments we are taught not to waste it. Let human need be liberally met, but let not a single crumb be wasted. How divinely perfect! How unlike us! Sometimes we are stingy, at other times extravagant. Jesus was never either the one or the other. “Give ye them to eat.” But, “Let nothing be lost.” Perfect grace! Perfect wisdom! May we adore it and learn from it! May we rejoice in the assurance that the blessed One who manifested all this wisdom and grace *is our life*. Christ is our life, and it is the manifestation of this life that constitutes practical Christianity. It is not living by rules and regulations, but simply having Christ dwelling in the heart by faith — Christ the source of perfect sympathy and perfect grace.

“LOOPS OF BLUE”

(EXODUS 26: 4)

In contemplating the structure of the tabernacle in the wilderness, we may observe what an important place was assigned to the “loops of blue.” By means of them and the “taches of gold,” the curtains were joined together and the manifested unity of the whole structure preserved. These loops and taches might seem to be very insignificant and unimportant, but without them, there could have

been no unity. The curtains, however beautiful in themselves, would have hung apart from each other, and thus one grand feature of the manifestation would have been lost.

Looking at the tabernacle as a figure of Christ, as surely we may, we can easily trace the beauty and significance of those “loops of blue and taches of gold.” They typified that perfect unity and consistency in the character and ways of “the Man Christ Jesus” which were the result of His heavenly grace and divine energy. In the life of the blessed Lord Jesus, and in all the scenes and circumstances of that life, we not only see each distinct phase and feature perfect in itself, but also a perfect combination of all those phases and features by the power of that which was heavenly and divine in Him. The curtains of the true Tabernacle were not only beautiful in themselves, but they were beautifully combined — exquisitely linked together by means of those “loops of blue and taches of gold” which can only be discerned and appreciated by those who are in some measure instructed in the holy mysteries of the sanctuary.

And let me add that what is true of the divine Living Word is equally true of the divine written Word. The spiritual student of Holy Scripture will readily discern the “loops of blue and taches of gold.” This is only what we might expect. The Living Word is the divine embodiment of the written Word, and the written Word is the divine transcript of the Living Word. Hence, we may look for the same heavenly unity, the same divine consistency, the same rare and exquisite combination in both the one and the other. It would be pleasant and profitable to trace the various illustrations of the loops and taches through the Word of God, but I have merely time and space for a brief fragment. I will give an example or two from the written Word which may lead my reader to study the subject for himself.

In 1 Corinthians 16 we have a lovely and practical illustration of our subject. Verse 13 says, “Quit you like men, be strong.” Here we have one fine feature of the Christian character — that manly strength which is so desirable. But this, if taken by itself, might easily degenerate into a rough, rude, high-handed way of dealing with others, the very opposite of what we find in our divine Exemplar. Hence the Spirit in the apostle forms a loop of blue, and by means of a golden tach links on to this manly strength another feature which is so needful — love. “Let all your things be done with love.” Most precious combination! Strength and love. Love and strength. If you untie this heavenly loop you will either have a high, haughty, inconsiderate style, or a soft, pliable, enfeebled mode of acting which will sacrifice everything for peace and quietness.

Again, look at that noble definition of pure religion given at the close of James 2. There the apostle uses the loop and tach to connect together the two phases of divine religion. “To visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction” is looped with unspotted separation from the world. In other words, active benevolence and personal holiness are inseparably linked together. Untie the loop and what have you got? Either a sort of benevolence which can go hand-in-hand with the most intense spirit of worldliness, or a rigid pharisaic separation without a single generous emotion. It is only the presence of that which is heavenly and divine that can secure true unity and consistency of character. Let it never be forgotten that true Christianity is simply Christ reproduced by the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian. Dry rules will never do. It must be Christ in all.

CHRIST AND HIS YOKE

(MATTHEW 11: 28-30)

“Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

In this precious and well-known passage we have two points which are very distinct and yet intimately connected — Christ and His yoke. First, we have *coming to Christ* and its results. Secondly, taking His yoke and its results. “Come unto Me and I will give you rest.” “Take My yoke and ye shall find rest.” These things, being distinct, should never be confounded, and being intimately connected, they should never be separated. To confound them is to dim the luster of divine grace; to separate them is to infringe upon the claims of divine holiness. Both these evils should be carefully guarded against.

Many there are who hold up before the eye of the “heavy laden” sinner, the yoke of Christ as something which he must “take on” before his burdened heart can taste of that blessed rest which Christ *gives* to “all” who simply “come unto Him” just as they are. The passage before us does not teach this. It puts Christ first and His yoke afterwards. It does not hide Christ behind His yoke, but rather places Him, in all His attractive grace, before the heart as the One who can meet every need, remove every weight, hush every guilty fear, fill up every blank, satisfy longing desire. He is able to do as He says He will, even to “give rest.” There are no conditions proposed, no demands made, no barriers erected. The simple, touching, melting, subduing, inviting, winning word is “Come.” It is not “Go,” “Do,” “Give,” “Bring,” “Feel,” or “Realize.” No, it is, “Come.” And how are we to “Come?” Just as we are. To whom are we to “Come?” To Jesus. When are we to “Come?” Now.

Observe, we are to come just as we are. We are not to wait to alter a single jot or tittle of our state, condition or character. To do this would be to “come” to some alteration or improvement in ourselves, whereas Christ distinctly and emphatically says “Come unto Me.” Many souls err on this point. They think they must amend their ways, alter their course or improve their moral condition before they come to Christ. In point of fact, until they really do come to Christ they *cannot* amend or alter or improve anything. There is no warrant whatever for anyone to believe that he will be any better an hour, a day, a month or a year hence, than he is this moment. Even were he better, it would not on that account be worth the wait. The word is, “*Today*, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts” (Heb. 3: 15). “Behold *now* is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6: 2).

There is nothing more certain than that all who have ever tried the self-improvement plan have found it an utter failure. They have begun in darkness, continued in misery and ended in despair. Yet, strange to say, in view of the numberless beacons which are ranged before us to warn us of the folly and danger of traveling that road, we are sure at the first to adopt it. In some way or another, self is looked to and worked upon to procure a warrant to come to Christ. “They, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10: 3). Nothing can possibly be a more dreary, depressing, hopeless task than “going about to establish one's own righteousness.” Indeed, the dreariness of the task must always be commensurate with the earnestness and sincerity of the soul that undertakes it. Such an one will sooner or later have to give utterance to the cry, “O wretched man that I am!” and also to ask the question, “Who shall deliver me?” (Rom. 7: 24). There can be no exception. All with whom the Spirit of God has ever worked, have in one way or another been constrained to own the hopelessness of seeking to work out a righteousness for themselves. Christ must be all; self nothing. This doctrine is easily stated, but oh, the experience!

The same is true in reference to the grand reality of sanctification. Many who have come to Christ for righteousness have not practically and experimentally laid hold of Him as their sanctification. But He is made of God, unto us, the one as well as the other. “But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption: that according as it is written, He that glorieth, *let him glory in the Lord*” (1 Cor. 1: 30-31). The believer is just as powerless in the work of sanctification as in the work of righteousness. If it were not so, some

flesh might glory in the divine presence. I could no more subdue a single lust or trample under foot a single passion or gain the mastery over a single temper, than I could open the kingdom of heaven or establish my own righteousness before God. This is not sufficiently understood. Hence, many true Christians constantly suffer the most humiliating defeats in their practical career. They know that Christ is their righteousness, that their sins are forgiven, that they are children of God, but they are sorely put about by their constant failure in personal holiness, in practical sanctification. Again and again they experience some unhallowed desire or unsanctified temper. Again and again they are compelled to retire with shame and confusion of face. A person or a circumstance crossed their path yesterday and caused them to lose their temper. Having to meet the same today, they resolve to do better, but sorrowfully, they are again forced to retreat in disappointment and humiliation.

It is not that such persons may not pray earnestly for the grace of the Holy Spirit to enable them to conquer both themselves and the influences which surround them. This is not the point. They have not yet learned *practically* — how worthless the mere theory — that they are as completely “without strength” in the matter of “sanctification” as they are in the matter of “righteousness,” and that as regards both the one and the other, Christ must be all; self nothing. They have not yet entered into the meaning of the words, “Come unto Me and I will give you rest.” Here lies the source of their failure. They are as thoroughly powerless in the most trivial matter connected with practical sanctification as they are in the entire question of their standing before God. And they must be brought to believe this before they can know the fullness of the “rest” which Christ gives. It is impossible that I can enjoy rest amid incessant defeats in my practical, daily life.

True, I can come over and over again and pour into my heavenly Father's ear the humiliating tale of my failure and overthrow. I can confess my sins and find Him ever “faithful and just to forgive me my sins, and to cleanse me from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1: 9). *But we must learn Christ as the Lord our sanctification* as well as “The Lord our righteousness.” Moreover, it is by faith and not by effort that we enter into both the one and the other. We look to Christ for righteousness because we have none of our own, and we look to Christ for practical sanctification because we have none of our own. It needed no personal effort on our part to get righteousness because Christ is our righteousness, and it needs no personal effort on our part to get sanctification because Christ is our sanctification.

It seems strange that, while the inspired apostle distinctly tells us that Christ is “made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption,” we nevertheless should attach the idea of personal effort to one out of the four things which he enumerates. Can we guide ourselves in the ten thousand difficulties and details of our Christian course by our own wisdom or discernment? Surely not. Should we make an effort? By no means. Why not? Because God has made Christ to be our “wisdom.” Therefore it is our precious privilege, having been brought to our wits' end, to look to Christ for wisdom. In other words, when Christ says, “Come unto Me,” He means that we are to come unto Him for wisdom as well as for all else, and we cannot come to Christ and to our own efforts at the same time. No, so long as we are making efforts, we must be strangers to “rest.”

The same holds good with respect to “righteousness.” Can we work out a righteousness for ourselves? Surely not. Should we make an effort? By no means. Why not? Because God has made Christ to be unto us “righteousness,” and that righteousness is “to him that worketh not” (Rom. 5: 5).

So also in the matter of “redemption,” which is put last in 1 Corinthians 1: 30 because it includes the final deliverance of the body of the believer from under the power of death. Could we by personal effort deliver our bodies from the dominion of mortality? Surely not. Should we try? The thought is impious. Why? Because God has made Christ to be unto us “redemption” as regards both soul and

body, and He who has already applied by the power of His Spirit that glorious redemption to our souls, will before long apply it to our bodies.

Why then should “sanctification” be singled out from the precious list and be saddled with the legal and depressing idea of personal effort? If we cannot by our own efforts get “wisdom, righteousness and redemption,” are we any more likely to succeed in getting “sanctification?” Clearly not. Have we not proved this times without number? Have not our closet-walls witnessed our tears and groans evoked by the painful sense of failure after failure in our own efforts to tread with steady step and erect carriage, the lofty walks of personal sanctity? Will the reader deny this? I trust not. I would certainly hope he has responded to the call of Jesus, “Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” It is vain to “labor” in our own strength after sanctification. We must come to Jesus for *that* as well as for everything else. And having come to Jesus, we shall find that there is no lust which He cannot slay, no temper that He cannot subdue, no passion that He cannot overcome. The self-same hand that has cancelled our sins, that guides us in our difficulties and that will soon deliver our bodies from the power of death, can give us complete victory over all our personal infirmities and besetments, and fill our hearts with His sacred rest.

It is immensely important to have a clear understanding of the question of sanctification. Many have gone on “laboring and heavy laden” for years, endeavoring to work out in one way or another, their sanctification, and not succeeded to their satisfaction, for who ever did or ever could? They have even been tempted to question if they were ever converted at all. Many, were they to tell “all the truth,” could adopt as their own, the mournful lines of the poet,

“’Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causeth anxious thought,
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I His or am I not?”

Such persons have clear views of gospel truth. They could with Scriptural accuracy tell an inquirer after righteousness how, where and when he could get it. And yet, if that self-same inquirer were to ask them about their own state of heart before God, they could give but a sorry answer. Why is this? Simply because they have not laid hold of Christ as their sanctification as well as their righteousness. They have been endeavoring, partly in their own strength and partly by praying for the influences of the Holy Spirit, to stumble along the path of sanctification. They would deem a person very ignorant of “the plan of salvation” if they found him “going about to establish his own righteousness,” but they do not see that they themselves exhibit ignorance of that “plan” by going about to establish their own sanctification. Truly if in the one case it is a sorry righteousness which is worked out, so in the other case it is a lame sanctification. For if it be true that “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags,” it is equally true that all our sanctifications are as filthy rags.

Whatever has the word “our” attached to it must be altogether imperfect. Christ is God's righteousness and Christ is God's sanctification. Both the one and the other are obtained by simply coming, looking, clinging, trusting to Christ. I need hardly say, it is by the power of the Spirit and through the Holy Scriptures that Christ is applied to us, both as our righteousness and our sanctification. But all this only takes the matter more and more out of our hands and leaves us nothing to glory in. If we could conquer an evil temper, we might indeed think ourselves clever, but since we are not asked to pick up a feather to add to our righteousness or our wisdom or our redemption, so neither are we asked to pick up a feather in order to add to our sanctification. In this as in those, Christ

is all, self nothing. This doctrine is easily stated, but oh, the experience!

Will anyone say that the writer is doing away with sanctification? If so, he may just as well say that he is doing away with “righteousness,” “wisdom” or “redemption.” Who will contend for self-righteousness, self-wisdom or self-redemption? Who but the man that contends for self-sanctification? Who is likely to attain and exhibit the more elevated standard of personal sanctity? Is it the man who is perpetually floundering amid his own imperfect struggles and cobweb-resolutions, or he who is daily, hourly and momentarily clinging to Christ as his sanctification? The answer is simple. The sanctification which we get in Christ is as perfect as the righteousness, the wisdom and the redemption. Am I doing away with “wisdom” because I say I am foolish? Am I doing away with “righteousness” because I say I am guilty? Am I doing away with “redemption” because I say I am mortal? Am I doing away with “sanctification” because I say I am vile? Yes, I am doing away with all these things so far as “I” am concerned, so I may find them all in Christ. This is the point. All — all in Christ!

Oh! when shall we learn to get to the end of self and cling simply to Christ? When shall we enter into the depth and power of those words “Come unto Me?” He does not say, “Come unto My yoke.” No; but “come unto Me.” We must cease from our own works in every shape and form, and come to Christ, come just as we are, come now. We come to Christ and get rest from and in Him before ever we hear a word about the “yoke.” To put the yoke first is to displace everything. If a “heavy laden” sinner thinks of the yoke, he must be overwhelmed by the thought of his own total inability to take it upon him or carry it. But when he comes to Jesus and enters into His precious rest, he finds the “yoke is easy and the burden light.”

This conducts us to the second point in our subject — “the yoke.” We must keep the two things distinct. To confound them is to tarnish the heavenly luster of the grace of Christ and to put a yoke upon the sinner's neck and a burden upon his shoulder which he, being “without strength,” is wholly unable to bear. But they are morally connected. All who come to Christ must take His yoke upon them and learn of Him, if they would “find rest unto their souls.”

To come to Christ is one thing; to walk with Him or learn of Him is quite another. Christ was “meek and lowly in heart.” He could meet the most adverse and discouraging circumstances with an “even so, Father.” The Baptist's heart might fail amid the heavy clouds which gathered around him in Herod's dungeon; the men of that generation might refuse the double testimony of righteousness and grace as furnished by the ministry of John and of our Lord Himself; Bethsaida, Chorazin and Capernaum might refuse the testimony of His mighty works — a torrent of evidence which one might suppose would sweep away every opposing barrier. All these things and many more might cross the path of the divine Workman, but being “meek and lowly in heart,” He could say, “I thank Thee, O Father — even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight.” His “rest” in the Father's counsels was profound and perfect, and He invites us to take His yoke, to learn of Him, to drink into His spirit, to know the practical results of a subject mind, that we may “find rest unto our souls.”

A broken will is the real ground of the rest which we are to “find” after we have come to Christ. If God wills one thing and we will another, we cannot find rest in that. It matters not what the scene or circumstance may be. We may expand a list of things to any imaginable extent, in which our will may run counter to the will of God, but in whatever it is, we cannot find rest so long as our will is unbroken. We must get to the end of self in the matter of will as well as in the matter of “wisdom, righteousness, sanctification or redemption,” else we shall not “find rest.”

This, my beloved reader, is deep, real, earnest, personal work. Moreover, it is a daily thing. It is a continual taking of Christ's yoke upon us and learning of Him. It is not that we take the yoke in order to

come to Christ. No. We come to Christ first, and when His love fills and satisfies our souls, when His rest refreshes our spirits, when we can gaze by faith upon His gracious countenance and see Him stooping down to confer upon us the high and holy privilege of wearing His yoke and learning His lesson, we find that His yoke is indeed easy and His burden light. Unsubdued, unjudged, unmortified nature could never wear that yoke or bear that burden. The first thing is, "Come unto Me and I will give you rest." The second thing is, "Take My yoke upon you and ye shall find rest."

We must never reverse these things, never confound them, never displace them, never separate them. To call upon a sinner to take Christ's yoke before he has gotten Christ's rest, is to place Christ on the top of Mount Sinai, the sinner at the foot of that Mount and a dark impenetrable gulf between. This must not be done. Christ stands in all His matchless grace before the sinner's eye and pours forth His touching invitation, "Come," and adds His heart-assuring promise, "I will give." There is no condition, no demand, "no servile work." All is the purest, freest, richest grace. Just, "come and I will give you rest." And what then? Is it bondage, doubt and fear? Ah! no. "Take My yoke upon you." How marvelously near this brings us to the One who has already given us rest! What a high honor to wear the same yoke with Him! It is not that He puts a grievous yoke upon our neck and a heavy burden upon our shoulder which we have to carry up the rugged sides of yon fiery Mount. This is not Christ's way. It is not thus He deals with the weary and heavy laden who come unto Him. He gives them rest. He gives them part of His yoke and a share of His burden. In other words, He calls them into fellowship with Himself, and in proportion as they enter into this fellowship they find still deeper rest in Him and in His blessed ways. And at the close, He will conduct them into that eternal rest which remains for the people of God.

May the Lord enable us to enter more fully into the power of all these divine realities, so that His joy remain in us and our joy may be full. There is an urgent need of a full, unreserved surrender of the heart to Christ and a full, unreserved acceptance of Him in all His precious adaptation to our every need. We want the whole heart, the single eye, the mortified mind, the broken will. Where these exist, there will be little complaining of doubts and fears, ups and downs, heavy days, vacant hours, restless moments, dullness and stupor, wandering and barrenness. When one has got to the end of himself regarding wisdom, righteousness, holiness and all beside, and when he has really found Christ as God's provision for *all*, then, but not until then, he will know the depth and power of that word "*rest*."

"Now, then, my Lord, my Way, my Life,
Henceforth, let trouble, doubt, and strife,
Drop off as Autumn leaves:
Henceforth, as privileged by Thee,
Simple and undistracted be,
My soul which to Thy scepter cleaves.
At all times, to my spirit bear
An inward witness, soft and clear,
Of Thy redeeming power:
This will instruct Thy child, and fit,
Will sparkle forth what'er is meet,
For exigence of every hour.

Thus, all the sequel is well weighed;
I cast myself upon Thine aid,
A sea where none can sink,
Yea, in that sphere I stand, poor worm,
Where Thou wilt for Thy Name perform
Above what'er I ask or think.”

THE DIVINE ANATHEMA

“If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha” (1 Cor. 16: 22).

The position which this solemn anathema occupies is truly remarkable. In the course of his lengthened epistle, the apostle had to rebuke and correct many practical evils and doctrinal errors. There were divisions among the Corinthians. They were puffed up one against another. There was fornication among them. They went to law one with another. There was gross disorder at the Lord's Supper. Some of them called in question the grand foundation truth of the resurrection of the dead.

These were grave errors and formidable evils — errors and evils which called forth the sharp and stern reproof of the inspired apostle. But when at the close he pronounces his solemn “Anathema Maranatha,” it is not directed against those who had introduced the errors or practiced the evils, but against “any man” who loves not the Lord Jesus Christ.* This is well worthy of serious thought. The only security against all manner of error and evil is genuine love to the Lord Jesus Christ. A man may be so strictly moral that no one could put his finger upon a single blot in his character or a single stain in his reputation. Yet underneath that strict morality, there may be a heart as cold as ice, so far as the Lord Jesus is concerned. Again, a man may be so marked by a spirit of noble benevolence that his influence is felt throughout the entire sphere in which he moves, and all the while, his heart may not have a single pulsation of love to Christ. Finally, a man may possess in his understanding, a perfectly orthodox creed and he may be devotedly attached to the ordinances and observances of traditional religion, and be wholly without affection for the adorable Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It may even happen that all these things — lofty morality, noble benevolence, sound orthodoxy and devoted attachment to religious forms, exist in one and the same individual, and that individual be wholly void of a single spark of genuine affection for the Lord Jesus Christ, and as a solemn and startling consequence, stand exposed to the burning Anathema of God the Holy Spirit. I may be moral through love to self. I may be benevolent through love to my fellow. I may be orthodox through a love of dogmas. I may be religious through a love of a sect. But none of these things can shield me from the merited judgment which is denounced by the Holy Spirit against “any man,” no matter who or what, who “loves not the Lord Jesus Christ.”

{*The word "Anathema" signifies anything devoted to death; and "Maranatha" signifies the Lord comes to judgment.}

This is a deeply solemn and most seasonable word for the present moment. Let the reader deeply ponder it. Let him remember that the only basis for true morality, the only basis for divine orthodoxy, the only basis for “pure religion,” is love to the Lord Jesus Christ. Where this love does not exist, all is cold, sterile and worthless, all exposed to death and judgment by the “Anathema Maranatha” of the Holy Spirit. If the heart be really touched with the vital spark of love to Jesus, then every effort after pure morality, every struggle against our hateful lusts, passions and tempers, every opening of the hand of genuine benevolence, every sound and truthful principle, every act of devotion, every pious

aspiration, every fervent breathing, every outgoing of the soul, is precious to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. All is fragrant with the perfume of that dear Name which is the theme of heaven's wonder, the center of heaven's joy, the object of heaven's worship.

My beloved reader, should we not “love the Lord Jesus Christ?” Should we not hold Him dearer to our heart than all beside? Should we not be ready to surrender all for Him? Should not our bosoms swell with emotions of sincere attachment to His Person in heaven and His cause on earth? How could we trace Him from the bosom of the Father to the manger of Bethlehem, from the manger of Bethlehem to the cross of Calvary, and from the cross of Calvary to the throne of the majesty in the heavens — how could we “consider” Him as “the Apostle and High Priest of our profession” — and not have our whole moral being brought under the mighty constraining influence of His love?

May the Holy Spirit so unfold to our souls His matchless glories and peerless excellencies, that we may “count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.”

“Jesus, I love Thy charming name;
'Tis music to mine ear,
Fain would I sound it out so loud,
That earth and heaven should hear.
Yes, Thou art precious to my soul
My transport and my trust:
Jewels to Thee are gaudy toys,
And gold is sordid dust.
All my capacious powers can wish,
In Thee doth richly meet:
Nor, to mine eyes, is light so dear,
Nor friendship half so sweet.
Thy grace still dwells upon my heart,
And sheds its fragrance there;
The noblest balm of all its wounds,
The cordial of its care.”

THE TWO ALTARS

(EXODUS 20: 24-26)

“An altar of earth thou shalt make unto Me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings and thy peace offerings, thy sheep and thine oxen: in all places where I record My name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.”

If anything could enhance the value or add to the interest of this passage of Scripture, it is the context in which it stands. To find such words at the close of Exodus 20 is something which must strike the thoughtful reader. In the opening of this chapter we find God speaking from the top of Mount Sinai and laying down the law as to man's duty toward God and his duty toward his neighbor. This law is

published amid thunderings, blackness, darkness and tempest. “Thou shalt do this” and “Thou shalt not do that.” Such are the terms in which God speaks from the top of the fiery mount. Thus is He compelled to erect around Himself and around His rights, certain barriers to keep man off. And in the same way, has man to be kept from infringing the rights of his fellow.

Thus much as to the opening of Exodus 20. There are no such words here as, “I will come unto thee.” Quite the reverse. The word was, “Beware lest thou come unto Me.” See Exodus 19: 12, 24. It was impossible for man to get to God by way of law. The barriers that were placed around that mount were insurmountable to man. “By works of law shall no man living be justified.” Under the law there is no possible way of access to God. “Keep off” is the stern utterance of the entire legal system — the expression of the very spirit and character of the whole Mosaic economy. Nearness and liberty are unknown under the law, and cannot possibly be enjoyed by anyone on legal ground.

Hence we may safely say with reverence that Jehovah was not at home on the top of Mount Sinai. It was not natural to Him to surround Himself with barriers. He was forced into that position by the legality of the human heart. Israel had taken upon them to say, “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do” (Ex. 19: 8). It was this that caused Jehovah to place Himself at a distance so that man might be tested and the offense might abound. He had just said to the people, “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now, therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine.”

To what “covenant” does He here refer? To the covenant made with Abraham — the covenant of grace. There was nothing of man's doing in this covenant. It set forth what God would do for Abraham and his seed, what He would give them and what He would be to them. It was on the ground of this covenant that Jehovah could say to Israel, “I have brought you unto Myself.” But the very moment Israel undertook to say, “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do,” we hear the command issued to “set bounds about the mount” that the people might be put at a distance.

However, this was not according to the loving heart of the God of Israel. It did not suit His nature and character to place Himself at a distance from His people. They had compelled Him to retire within the narrow enclosures of mount Sinai and to surround Himself with clouds and darkness, thunderings, lightnings and tempest. Man had undertaken to *do*, and he must be put to the test. “The law entered that the offense might abound.” Again, “By the law is the knowledge of sin.”

It is not our intention in this short article to dwell upon the subject of “the law.” We have merely referred to it to bring out the striking contrast between the opening and the close of Exodus 20. It would seem as though God were in haste to come down from the top of that dreadful mountain in order to meet man at “an altar of earth” — the place of grace — the place where man's doings are displaced by God's. “An altar of earth thou shalt make unto Me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings and thy peace offerings, thy sheep and thine oxen: in all places where I record My name, I will come unto thee and I will bless thee.”

What a contrast! It is as though He had said to them, “You cannot come to Me if I remain on the top of this mountain, but I will come unto you. If I remain here I must curse you, but I will meet you at an altar of earth and bless you.” Blessed be His Name, He delights not in cursing. Hence He would not record His Name on Mount Sinai, the place of distance and darkness where He could not come unto His people and bless them.

How blessedly all this tells out what God is! This teaching about the altar is like a ray of divine light piercing through the gloom which surrounded Mount Sinai, and shining on the spot where God

would record His Name, where He could meet His people in all the fullness of blessing.

And let the reader note the character of the offerings referred to in verse 24. We have “burnt offerings and peace offerings.” Not a word about sin offerings and trespass offerings. Why is this? Surely this is the very place in which we should expect to find these latter introduced. But no. We have the burnt offering — the type of Christ surrendering Himself in life and in death to do the will of God. And we have the peace offering — the type of Christ as the Object on which the worshipper feeds in communion with God. And not a word about the sin offering or trespass offering. Why? Is it that these are not needed? Far be the thought! They lie at the very foundation of that altar where God and the worshipper meet. The sin offering is the type of Christ bearing the judgment of God against sin. The trespass offering is the type of Christ bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. *These form the foundation of all worship.* But they are omitted in Exodus 20: 24 because we have here the nature and character of the worship in which God delights, a worship in which the soul is occupied with Christ in the very highest aspect of His Person and work. This is what we have in the burnt offering, wherein Christ is seen making atonement, not merely according to our need, but according to the claims of God — not merely according to the measure of the hatefulness of sin, but according to the measure of the preciousness of Christ to the heart of God.

What a striking contrast between the opening and closing lines of Exodus 20! What lessons are here for our hearts! What a rebuke to all our legal tendencies! We are all prone to be occupied with our doings in some shape or form. Legality is natural to our hearts. And let us remember, it was this that forced Jehovah (to speak after the manner of men) to take up the position in which we find Him in Exodus 19 and 20. Abraham did not know God in such a position. It was not as a lawgiver that God revealed Himself to the father of the faithful, but as a God of grace, as a God of promise. There were no thunderings and lightnings, no blackness, darkness and tempest surrounding the Blessed One when He appeared unto Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees, or when He partook of his hospitality in the plains of Mamre. It was always God's delight to have His people near Him, enjoying the precious fruits of His grace, rather than afar off, reaping the bitter fruits of their works. This latter was simply the result of man's legal utterance, “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.” Up to the fatal moment in the which these words were spoken, God had been speaking and acting in the same unqualified grace toward the seed of Abraham as He had toward that favored patriarch himself. But when Israel undertook to *do*, it was needful to put them thoroughly to the test. This was done by the law.

But, it may be asked, was it not always God's purpose to give the law? Was it not necessary? Is it not designed to be the abiding rule of man's conduct — the statement of his duty to God and man, the divine summary and embodiment of his righteousness? To all this we reply, Most surely God knew from the beginning what He would do. Moreover, in His infinite wisdom He overruled man's legal folly and made use of the law to raise the great question of righteousness and prove whether it was possible for man to work out a righteousness which could be accepted. But what was the result? Did man ever get righteousness by keeping the ten commandments? Never. “By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight, for by law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3: 20). Again, “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for the just shall live by faith” (Gal. 3: 10-11).

What, then, was the object of the law? Why was it given? What was its effect? “The law entered that the offense might abound” (Rom. 5: 20). “Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions” (Gal. 3: 19). “The law worketh wrath” (Rom. 4: 15).

Thus Scripture answers our three questions in the plainest possible manner. Not only so, it settles the entire law question in such a way as to remove every difficulty and every cloud from the mind that will submit absolutely to the authority of the Word.

When we sat down to pen this brief article, we had no thought whatever of entering on the domain of theology. It was merely our purpose to present to the heart and mind of the reader the striking lesson taught by the two altars in Exodus 20 — the altar of earth and the altar of hewn stone. In the former we have the very spirit of the dispensation of grace; in the latter the spirit of the dispensation of law. God wanted man to be near Him. Therefore He would have an altar of earth. In other words, man was to approach God without any efforts or doings of his own. “If thou wilt make Me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone (or, as the margin reads, “build them with hewing”): for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto Mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.”

Oh! that men would only consider these things! How little are they understood! Man will be doing. He will lift up his tool in the building of his altar; the result is pollution. He will ascend by steps; the result is discovered nakedness. Thus it must be because man is a sinner and his very best works can only issue in pollution and nakedness.

One thing is certain. *God does not record His Name in any place where man's doings are set up as the basis of worship.* This truth shines with heavenly luster on every page of the sacred Volume, and it shines where we should least of all have expected to find it — at the close of Exodus 20. It is something perfectly wonderful, amid the thunderings of Mount Sinai, to catch such heavenly words as these, “In all places where I record My name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.” These are words of purest grace, words flowing from the very heart of God, words expressing the very nature and character of God. “I will come unto thee.” Precious words! May they sink down into our hearts and there abide! May it be our aim and object ever to be found worshipping in that place where God records His Name, and where, instead of the nakedness and pollution which ever mark the efforts of man, we have the infinite preciousness of the grace of God and the fullness and excellency of Christ in His Person and work!

CLOVEN TONGUES

(Acts 2: 1-11)

It will greatly enhance the grace of this lovely passage of Scripture to bear in mind what it was that rendered the cloven tongues necessary. In Genesis 11 we have the inspired record of the first grand effort of the children of men to establish themselves in the earth, to form a great association and make themselves a name. And all this, be it remembered, without God. His name is never mentioned. He was not to form any part of this proud and popular scheme. He was entirely shut out. It was not a dwelling place for God that was to be erected on the plain of Shinar. It was a city for man, a center round which men were to gather.

Such was the object of the children of men as they stood together on the plain of Shinar. It was not, as some have imagined, to escape another flood. There is not a shadow of foundation in the passage for any such idea. Here are their words, “And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” There is no thought here of escaping another flood. It is sheer imagination without any Scripture basis. The object is as plain as possible. It is precisely similar to all those great confederacies, associations or masses of flesh that have been formed on the earth from that day to this. The Shinar Association could compete with any association of modern times, both in its principle and

object.

But it proved to be a Babel. Jehovah wrote *confusion* upon it. He divided their tongues and scattered them abroad. In a word, divided tongues were sent as the expression of divine judgment upon this first great human association. This is a solemn and weighty fact. An association without God, no matter what its object, is really nothing but a mass of flesh, based on pride and ending in hopeless confusion. “Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces” (Isa. 8: 9). So much for all human associations. May we learn to keep clear of them! May we adhere to that one divine association — the Church of the living God, of which a risen Christ in glory is the living Head, the Holy Spirit the living Guide, and the Word of God the living Charter!

It was to gather this blessed Assembly that the cloven tongues were sent in grace on the day of Pentecost. No sooner had the Lord Jesus Christ taken His seat at the right hand of power, amid the brightness of heaven's majesty, than He sent down the Holy Spirit to publish the glad tidings of salvation in the ears of His very murderers. Inasmuch as that message of pardon and peace was intended for men of various tongues, so the divine messenger came down prepared to address each “in his own tongue wherein he was born.” The God of all grace made it plain — so plain that it cannot be mistaken — that He desired to make His way to each heart with the sweet story of grace. Man, on the plain of Shinar, did not want God, but God on the day of Pentecost proved that He wanted man. Blessed forever be His holy Name! God had sent His Son and man had just murdered Him. Now He sends the Holy Spirit to tell man there is pardon through that very blood which He had shed, for his guilt in shedding it. Matchless, marvelous, overwhelming grace! Oh! that it may subdue our hearts and bind us to Him who is its source, its channel and the power of enjoyment! The grace of God has far surpassed all the enmity of man. It has proved itself victorious over all the opposition of the human heart and all the rage of hell.

In Genesis 11 divided tongues were sent in judgment. In Acts 2 divided tongues were sent in grace. The blessed God of all grace would cause each one to hear of full salvation, and hear of it in those very words in which his infant ears had hearkened to the earliest whisperings of a mother's love — in “his own tongue wherein he was born.” It mattered not whether the language were soft or harsh, refined or barbarous, the Holy Spirit would use it as the vehicle for conveying the precious message of salvation right home to the poor heart. If divided tongues had once been given to *scatter* in judgment, they were again given to *gather* in grace — not now around an earthly tower, but around a heavenly Christ — not for the exaltation of man, but for the glory of God.

It is worthy of notice that when God was giving the law from Mount Sinai, He spoke only in one tongue and to one people. The law was carefully wrapped up in one language and deposited in the midst of one nation. Not so the gospel. When that was the burden, God the Holy Spirit Himself descended from heaven in cloven tongues to send the soul-stirring tidings far and wide over the whole world and convey them “to every creature under heaven” in the very dialect wherein he was born. This is a great moral fact. It comes down upon the heart with uncommon weight and power. When God was speaking in terms of requirement and prohibition, He confined Himself to one language, but when He was publishing the message of life and salvation, pardon and peace through the blood of the Lamb, He spoke in every language under heaven. When *man's duty* was to be declared, God spoke in one dialect, but when *God's salvation* was to be published, He spoke in every dialect under heaven.

This surely tells a tale. It declares plainly which is more in harmony with the divine mind, law or grace. Blessed be His Name, He delights in grace. Law and judgment are His strange work. He has pronounced the feet of those who publish the gospel to be beautiful. Of those who desired to be

teachers of the law, He said, "I would they were even cut off that trouble you." Thus His acts and His words show the bent of His loving heart towards poor unworthy sinners. He has left nothing undone, nothing unsaid, to prove His perfect willingness to save and bless. Therefore all who die in their sins will perish without excuse, and those awful words will echo through the regions of eternal gloom forever and ever, "I would, but ye would not!" Reader, think of this! Are you yet in your sins? If so, we earnestly beseech you to flee *now* from the wrath to come. Accept the message of pardon now sent to you in your own language wherein you were born, and go on your way rejoicing.

In conclusion, we might add that Genesis 11, Acts 2 and Revelation 7: 9-17 form a very lovely group of scriptures. In the first, we see divided tongues sent in judgment; in the second, divided tongues are given in grace; and in the third, divided tongues are seen gathered in glory. Well may we say, "Thy testimonies are wonderful, therefore doth my soul love them."

ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS

(READ PSALM 67)

It would help to give clearness and definiteness to missionary effort to keep fully before our minds God's original purpose in sending the gospel to the Gentiles, or the nations. This we have stated in the most distinct manner in Acts 15, "Simeon hath declared," says James, "how God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name."

Nothing can be simpler than this. It affords no warrant whatsoever for the idea so persistently held by the professing church that the whole world is to be converted by the preaching of the gospel. Simeon knew that such was not God's object in visiting the Gentiles, but simply to take out of them a people for His name. The two things are as distinct as any two things can be. Indeed, they stand in direct opposition. To convert all the nations is one thing; to take out of the nations a people is quite another.

The latter, not the former, is God's present object. It is what He has been doing since the day that Simon Peter opened the kingdom of heaven to the Gentile in Acts 10. And it is what He will continue to do until the moment so rapidly approaching in which the last elect one is gathered out and our Lord shall come to receive His people unto Himself.

Let all missionaries remember this. They may rest assured it will not clip their wings or cripple their energies. It will only guide their movements by giving them a divine aim and object. Of what possible use can it be for a man to propose as the end of his labors something wholly different from that which is before the mind of God? Ought not a servant seek to do his master's will? Can he expect to please his master by running directly counter to his clearly expressed object?

Now, clearly, it is not God's purpose to convert the world by the preaching of the gospel. He only means "to take out a people." True it is, blessedly true, that all the earth shall yet be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. There is no question as to this. All Scripture bears witness to it. To quote the passages would literally fill a volume.

But the question is, how is this grand and glorious result to be brought about? Is it the purpose of God to use the professing Church as His agent or a preached gospel as His instrument in the conversion of the world? Scripture says No! with all emphasis and a clearness which ought to sweep away every doubt and difficulty.

Let it be distinctly understood that we delight in all true missionary effort. We heartily wish God's speed to every true missionary — to everyone who has left home and kindred and friends and all the

comforts and privileges of civilized life to carry the glad tidings of salvation into the dark places of the earth. Further, we desire to render hearty thanks to God for all that has been accomplished in the fields of foreign mission, though we cannot approve the mode by which the work is carried on, or the great root-principle of missionary societies. We consider there is a lack of simple faith in God and of subjection to the authority of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. There is too much of mere human machinery and looking to the world for aid.

But all this is beside our present mark. We are not now discussing the principle of missionary organization or the various methods adopted for carrying on of missionary operation. The point with which we are occupied in this brief paper is this: will God make use of the professing Church to convert the nations? We don't ask whether He has done so? Were we to put the question thus, we should receive an unqualified negative from the ends of the earth. What! Christendom convert the world! Impossible! She is herself the darkest moral blot in the universe of God and a grievous stumbling-block in the pathway of both Jew and Gentile. The professing Church has been at work for nearly 2000 years and what is the result? Let the reader take a glance at a missionary map and he will see. Look at those patches of black which set forth the dismal regions over which heathenism bears sway. Look at the red, the green, the yellow, setting forth popery, the Greek church, Islam. And where is — we say not true Christianity — but even mere nominal Protestantism? That is indicated by those tiny spots of blue which, if all put together, would make but a very small fraction indeed. And as to what this Protestantism is in its best condition, we need not now stop to inquire.

But is it the revealed purpose of God to make use of the professing Church in any way to convert the nations? If it be so, we admit at once that, in spite of the most discouraging appearances, we must believe and hope. We freely grant that the true way in which to test any principle is not by results, but simply by the Word of God.

What say the Scriptures on the great question of the conversation of the nations? Take the lovely psalm that stands at the head of this paper. It is but one proof, but it is a most striking and beautiful one, and it perfectly harmonizes with the testimony of all Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. We cannot refrain from giving it at full length to the reader.

“God be merciful unto us and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us. That Thy way may be known upon earth; Thy saving health among the nations. Let the people praise Thee, O God; let all the people praise Thee. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for Thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Let the people praise Thee, O God, let all the people praise Thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.”

Here, the simple truth shines before us with remarkable force and beauty. It is when God shall have mercy upon Israel, when He shall cause His light to shine upon Zion — then and not until then — will His way be known upon earth, His saving health among all nations. It is through Israel and not through the professing Church that God will yet bless the nations.

That the “us” of the foregoing psalm refers to Israel, no intelligent reader of Scripture needs be told. Indeed, the great burden of the Psalms, the prophets and the entire Old Testament, is Israel. There is not a syllable about the Church from cover to cover of the Old Testament. Types and shadows there are in which — ,now that we have the light of the New Testament — we can see the truth of the Church prefigured. But without that light no one could find the truth of the Church in Old Testament Scripture. That great mystery was, as the inspired apostle tells us, “hid” — not in the Scriptures, for whatever is contained in the Scriptures in no longer hid but revealed — but “hid in God.” It was not

and could not be revealed until Christ, King rejected by Israel, was crucified and raised from the dead. So long as the testimony to Israel was pending, the *doctrine* of the Church could not be unfolded.

Hence, although at the day of Pentecost we have the *fact* of the Church, yet it was not until Israel had rejected the testimony of the Holy Spirit in Stephen that a special witness was called out in the person of Saul, to whom the doctrine of the Church was committed. We must distinguish between the *fact* and the *doctrine*; indeed it is not until we reach the last chapter of the Acts that the curtain finally drops upon Israel and Paul the prisoner at Rome, fully unfolds the grand mystery of the Church which from ages and generations had been hid in God, but was now made manifest. Let the reader ponder Romans 16: 25-26; Ephesians 3: 1-11; and Colossians 1: 24-27.

We cannot attempt to go fully into this glorious subject here; indeed, to refer to it at all is a digression from our present line. But we deem it needful just to say thus much so the reader may fully see that Psalm 67 refers to Israel; and seeing this, the whole truth will flow into his soul that the conversion of the nations stands connected with Israel and not with the Church. It is through Israel and not through the Church that God will yet bless the nations. It is His eternal purpose that the seed of Abraham, His friend, shall yet be preeminent in the earth and that all nations shall be blessed in and through them. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, In those days it shall come to pass that ten men shall take hold, out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech. 8: 23).

There is no need to multiply proofs. All Scripture bears witness to the truth that God's present object is not to convert the nations, but to take out of them a people for His name, and further, that when these nations shall be brought in — as they most assuredly shall be — it will not be by the instrumentality of the Church at all, but by that of the restored nation of Israel.

It would be an easy and a delightful task to prove from the New Testament that, previous to the restoration and blessing of Israel and therefore previous to the conversion of the nations, the true Church of God, the body of Christ, shall have been taken up to be forever with the Lord in the full and wonderful communion of the Father's house. So the Church will not be God's agency in the conversion of the Jews as a nation, any more than in the conversion of the Gentiles. But we do not desire at this time to do more than establish the two points above stated, which we deem of much interest and importance in reference to the grand object of missionary operations. When missionary societies propose for their object the conversion of the world, they propose a great mistake. And when Christendom imagines that she is to be God's instrument in converting the nations, it is simply a delusion and an empty conceit. Hence, let all who go forth as missionaries see that they are ruled in their blessed work by a divine object and that they are pursuing that object in a divinely-appointed way.

A HEART FOR CHRIST

(Read Matthew 26)

In this solemn chapter we have a great many hearts revealed. The heart of the chief priests, the heart of the elders, the heart of the scribes, the heart of Peter, the heart of Judas. But there is one heart in particular, unlike all the others, and that is the heart of the woman who brought the alabaster box of very precious ointment to anoint the body of Jesus. This woman had a heart for Christ. She may have been a very great sinner, a very ignorant sinner, but her eyes had been opened to see a beauty in Jesus which led her to judge that nothing was too costly to be spent on Him. In a word, she had a heart for Christ.

Passing over the chief priests, the elders and the scribes, let us look at the heart of this woman in

contrast with the heart of Judas and the heart of Peter.

Judas was a covetous man. He loved money — a very common love in every age. He had preached the gospel. He had walked in company with the Lord Jesus during the days of His public ministry. He had heard His words, seen His ways, experienced His kindness. But, sadly, though an apostle, though a companion of Jesus, though a preacher of the gospel, he had no heart for Christ. He had a heart for money. His heart was ever moved by the thought of gain. When money was in question, he was all alive. The deepest depths of his being were stirred by money. “The bag” was his nearest and dearest object. Satan knew this. He knew the special lust of Judas. He was fully aware of the price at which he could be bought. He understood his man, how to tempt him and how to use him. Solemn thought!

Be it observed that the very position of Judas made him all the more fit for Satan. His acquaintance with the ways of Christ made him a fit person to betray Him into the hands of His enemies. Head knowledge of sacred things, if the heart be not touched, renders a man more awfully callous, profane and wicked. The chief priests and scribes in Matthew 2 had a head knowledge of the letter of Scripture, but no heart for Christ. They could at once hand down the prophetic roll and find the place where it was written, “Thou Bethlehem in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come a Governor that shall rule My people Israel” (v. 6). All this was very well, very true and very beautiful, but they had no heart for this “Governor,” no eyes to see Him. They did not want Him. They had Scripture at their fingertips. They would have felt ashamed, no doubt, had they not been able to answer Herod's question. It would have been a disgrace to men in their position to exhibit ignorance, but they had no heart for Christ. Hence they laid their Scriptural knowledge at the feet of an ungodly king who was about to use it, if he could, for the purpose of slaying the true Heir to the throne. So much for head-knowledge without heart-love.

It is not that we would make little of Scriptural knowledge. Far from it. The true knowledge of Scripture must lead the heart to Jesus. But there is such a thing as knowing the letter of Scripture so as to be able to repeat chapter after chapter, verse after verse, yes, so as to be a sort of walking concordance, and, all the while the heart be cold and callous toward Christ. This knowledge will only throw one more into the hands of Satan, as in the case of the chief priests and scribes. Herod would not have asked ignorant men for information. The devil never takes up ignorant or stupid men to act against the truth of God. No; he finds fitter agents to do his work. The learned, the intellectual, the deep-thinking are used, provided they have no heart for Christ.

What saved “the wise men from the east?” Why could not Herod — why could not Satan — enlist them into his service? Oh! reader mark the reply. *They had a heart for Christ.* Blessed safeguard! Doubtless, they were ignorant of Scripture. They would have made but a poor hand of searching for a passage in the prophets, but they were looking for Jesus — earnestly, honestly, diligently looking for Jesus! Herod would eagerly have made use of them if he could, but they were not to be used by him. They found their way to Jesus. They did not know much about the prophet who had spoken of the “Governor,” but they found their way to the “Governor” Himself. They found Him in the Person of the Babe in the manger at Bethlehem. Instead of being tools in the hands of Herod, they were worshippers at the feet of Jesus.

Now, it is not that we would commend ignorance of Scripture. By no means! People are sure to err greatly who know not the Scriptures. It was to the praise of Timothy that the apostle could say to him, “From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation,” but then he adds, “Through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3: 15). The true

knowledge of Scripture will always conduct us to the feet of Jesus, but mere head-knowledge of Scripture, without heart-love for Christ, will only render us the more effective agents in the hands of Satan.

Thus it was in the case of the hard-hearted, money-loving Judas. He had knowledge without a spark of affection for Christ, and his very familiarity with that blessed One made him a suitable instrument for the devil. His nearness to Jesus enabled him to be a traitor. The devil knew that thirty pieces of silver could purchase his service in the horrible work of betraying his Master.

Reader, think of this! Here was an apostle — a preacher of the gospel, a high professor. Yet underneath the cloak of profession lay “a heart exercised in covetous practices” — a heart which had a wide place for “thirty pieces of silver,” but not a corner for Jesus. What a case! What a picture! What a warning! Oh! all you heartless professors, think of Judas! Think of his course! Think of his character! Think of his end! He preached the gospel, but he never knew it, never believed it, never felt it. He had painted sunbeams on canvas, but he never felt their influence. He had plenty of heart for money, but no heart for Christ. As “the son of perdition” “he hanged himself” and “went to his own place.” Professing Christians, beware of head-knowledge, lip profession, official piety, mechanical religion. Beware of these things and seek to have a heart for Christ.

In Peter we have another warning, though of a different kind. He really loved Jesus, but he feared the cross. He shrank from confessing His name in the midst of the enemy's ranks. He boasted of what he would do when he should have been self-emptied. He was fast asleep when he ought to have been on his knees. Instead of praying he was sleeping. Then, instead of being still, he was drawing his sword. “He followed Jesus afar off” and then “warmed himself at the high priest's fire.” Finally, he cursed and swore that he did not know this gracious Master. All this was terrible! Who could suppose that the Peter of Matthew 16: 16 is the Peter of Matthew 26? Yet so it is. Man in his best estate is only like an autumn leaf. “There is none abiding.” The highest position, the loudest profession, may all end in following Jesus afar off, and in basely denying His name.

It is almost certain that Peter would have spurned the thought of selling Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Yet he was afraid to confess Him before a servant girl. He might not have betrayed Him to His enemies, but he denied Him before them. He may not have loved money, but he failed to manifest a heart for Christ.

Christian reader, remember Peter's fall and beware of self-confidence. Cultivate a prayerful spirit. Keep close to Jesus. Keep away from the influence of this world's favor. “Keep thyself pure.” Beware of dropping into a sleepy, tepid condition of soul. Be earnest and watchful. Be occupied with Christ. This is the true safeguard. Do not be satisfied with the mere avoidance of open sin. Do not rest in mere blamelessness of conduct and character. Cherish lively, warm affections toward Christ. One who “follows Jesus afar off” may deny Him before long. Let us think of this. Let us profit by the case of Peter. He himself afterwards tells us to “be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist, steadfast in the faith” (1 Peter 5: 8-9). These are weighty words, coming as they do, from the Holy Spirit through the pen of one who had suffered so from lack of “vigilance.”

Blessed be the grace that could say to Peter before his fall, “I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.” Mark, the Lord did not say, “I have prayed for thee that thou mayest not fall.” No; but “that thy faith fail not” when you have fallen. Precious, matchless grace! This was Peter's resource. He was a debtor to grace from first to last. As a lost sinner, he was a debtor to “the precious blood of Christ”; as a stumbling saint, he was a debtor to the all-prevailing advocacy of Christ. Thus it was with Peter. The

advocacy of Christ was the basis of his happy restoration. Of this advocacy Judas knew nothing. It is only those who are washed in the blood that partake of the advocacy. Judas knew nothing of either. Hence “he went and hanged himself,” whereas Peter went forth as a restored soul to “strengthen his brethren.” *There is no one so fit to strengthen his brethren as one who has himself experienced the restoring grace of Christ.* Peter was able to stand before the congregation of Israel and say, “Ye denied the Holy One and the Just,” the very thing he had done himself. This shows how entirely his conscience was purged by the blood and his heart restored by the advocacy of Christ.

Now, one word as to the woman with the alabaster box. She stands forth in bright and beautiful contrast with all. While the chief priests, elders and scribes were plotting against Christ “in the palace of the high priest who was called Caiaphas,” she was anointing His body “in the house of Simon the leper.” While Judas was covenanting with the chief priests to sell Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, she was pouring the precious contents of her alabaster box upon His Person. Touching contrast! She was wholly absorbed with her object, and her object was Christ. Those who knew not His worth and beauty might pronounce her sacrifice a waste. Those who could sell Him for thirty pieces of silver might talk of “giving to the poor,” but she heeded them not. Their surmisings and murmurings were nothing to her. She had found her all in Christ. They might murmur, but she could worship and adore. Jesus was more to her than all the poor in the world. She felt that nothing was “waste” that was spent on Him. He might only be worth thirty pieces of silver to one who had a heart for money. He was worth ten thousand words to her, because she had a heart for Christ. Happy woman! May we imitate her! May we ever find our place at the feet of Jesus, loving, adoring, admiring and worshipping His blessed Person. May we spend and be spent in His service, even though heartless professors should deem our service a foolish “waste.”

The time is rapidly approaching when we shall not repent of anything done for His name's sake. If there could be room for a single regret, it will be that we so faintly and feebly served His cause in the world. If, on “the morning without clouds,” a single blush could mantle the cheek, it will be that we did not, when down here, dedicate ourselves more undividedly to His service.

Reader, let us ponder these things. And may the Lord grant us *a heart for Christ!*

STEPHEN

(Acts 7: 55-60)

There are two grand facts which characterize Christianity and mark it off from all that had gone before. These are, first, Man glorified in heaven, and secondly, God dwelling in man on the earth. These are stupendous facts, divinely glorious and fitted to produce the most powerful effect upon the heart and life of the Christian.

They are unique to Christianity. They were never known until redemption was fully accomplished and the Redeemer took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. Then was seen for the first time in the annals of eternity, a Man on the throne of God. Wondrous sight! Magnificent result of accomplished redemption! The enemy seemed to have triumphed when the first man was expelled from Eden, but the Second Man has made His victorious way into heaven and taken His seat on the eternal throne of God.

This, we repeat, is a fact of transcendent glory. The counterpart, the companion fact is God the Holy Spirit dwelling with and in man on earth. These things were unknown in Old Testament times. What did Abraham know of a glorified Man in heaven? What did any of the ancient worthies know of it? Nothing; how could they? There was no man on the throne of heaven until Jesus took His seat there.

Until He was glorified in heaven, the Holy Spirit could not take up His abode in man on earth. “He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: *for the Holy Spirit was not yet; because that Jesus was not yet glorified*” (John 7: 38-39). “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: *for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you*” (John 16: 7).

Here we have our two facts linked together in the most direct and positive manner: Christ glorified above and the Holy Spirit dwelling in man below. The two are inseparably connected; the latter is entirely dependent upon the former, and both together form the two great distinguishing features of that glorious Christianity revealed in the gospel of God.

It is not our purpose to enter upon any elaborate proof of these truths. We assume them as established. Moreover, we assume that the Christian reader cordially receives and holds them as *eternal* truths and that he is prepared to appreciate the illustration of their practical power and formative influence presented in the history of Stephen as recorded in Acts 7: 55-60. Let us draw near and gaze on the marvelous picture — the picture of a true Christian.

The principal part of Acts 7 is occupied with a most powerful unfolding of the history of the nation of Israel -- a history stretching from the call of Abraham to the death of Christ. At the close of his address, Stephen made a painful application to the consciences of his hearers, which drew forth their most bitter animosity and deadly rage. “When they heard these things they were cut to the heart and they gnashed on him with their teeth.” Here we see the effect of religiousness without Christ. These men were the professed guardians of religion and the guides of the people, but it proved to be religion versus Christianity. In them we have the terrible exponent of a godless, Christless religion; in Stephen we have the lovely exhibition of true Christianity. They were full of religious animosity and rage: he was full of the Holy Spirit. They gnashed their teeth: his face was like that of an angel. What a contrast!

We must quote the passage for the reader. “But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.”

Here are our two great facts again displayed in a man of like passions with ourselves. Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit and his earnest gaze was fixed on a glorified Man in heaven. This is Christianity. This is the true, the normal idea of a Christian. He is a man full of the Holy Spirit, looking with the steady gaze of faith into heaven and occupied with a glorified Christ. We cannot accept any lower standard than this, short as we may come of it practically. It is very high and very holy. Moreover, we have to confess how very little we are up to it. Still it is the divine standard, and every devoted heart will aspire to it and nothing less. It is the happy privilege of every Christian to be full of the Holy Spirit and to have the eye of faith fixed on the glorified Man in heaven. There is no divine reason why it should not be so. Redemption is accomplished, sin is put away, grace reigns through righteousness, there is a Man on the throne of God, the Holy Spirit has come down to this earth and taken up His abode in the believer individually and in the Church corporately.

Thus it stands. Be it carefully noted that these things are not mere speculations or cold theories. Alas! they may be held as such, but in themselves they are not. On the contrary they are immensely practical, divinely formative, powerfully influential, as we can distinctly see in the case of the blessed martyr Stephen. It is impossible to read the closing verses of Acts 7 and not see the powerful effect produced upon Stephen by the Object which filled the vision of his soul. There we behold a man surrounded by the most terrible circumstances, enemies rushing upon him, death staring him in the

face. But instead of being in any wise affected or governed by those circumstances, he is entirely governed by heavenly objects. He looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw Jesus. Earth was rejecting him, as it already rejected his Lord, but heaven was opened to him, and looking up into that open heaven he caught some of the rays of glory shining in the face of his risen Lord. He not only caught them but reflected them back upon the moral gloom which surrounded him.

Is not all this most deeply practical? Assuredly it is! Stephen was not only lifted above his surroundings in the most wonderful manner, but he was enabled to exhibit to his persecutors the meekness and grace of Christ. In him we see a most striking illustration of 2 Corinthians 3: 18 — a passage of great depth and fullness. “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Lord the Spirit.”*

{* "Beholding as in a glass" hardly conveys the force, fullness and beauty of the original word. The English reader should be informed that the entire clause is expressed by the one Greek word which conveys the double idea of beholding and reflecting. The passage might be rendered thus: "We all, with open face mirroring the glory, are changed ..." The real idea is that the Christian reflects, like a mirror, the glory on which he gazes and thus becomes conformed to the image of his Lord by the powerful ministry of the Lord the Spirit. The whole verse is one of the most condensed, yet comprehensive and magnificent statements of practical Christianity anywhere to be found in the sacred canon. It furnishes a concise commentary on the facts, of which Stephen is a vivid illustration. Would that we all more fully entered into and more faithfully exhibited the power of these things!}

Only see how all this is livingly unfolded in the scene before us. The very highest expression of heavenly Christianity is met by the deepest, darkest and most deadly display of religious resentment. We can see the two culminating in the death of the first Christian martyr. “Then they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit! And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this he fell asleep.”

Here is genuine practical Christianity — living conformity to the image of Christ. Here we see a man so lifted above circumstances, so lifted out of himself as to be able — after the pattern of his Lord — to pray for his murderers. Instead of being occupied with himself or thinking of his own sufferings, he thinks of others and pleads for them. So far as he was concerned all was settled. His eye was fixed on the glory — so fixed as to catch its concentrated beams and reflect them back upon the very faces of his murderers. His countenance was radiant with the light of that glory into which he was about to enter, and he was enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit to imitate his blessed Master and to spend his last breath in praying for his murderers: “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” And what then? He had nothing more to do but fall asleep — to close his eyes upon a scene of death and open them upon a scene of deathless glory, or rather to enter upon that scene which already filled the vision of his enraptured soul.

Reader, let us remember that this is true Christianity. It is the happy privilege of a Christian to be full of the Holy Spirit, looking off from himself and up from his surroundings, whatever they may be, gazing steadfastly into heaven and occupied with the glorified Man Christ Jesus. The necessary result of being thus occupied is practical living conformity to that blessed One on whom the eye is fixed. We become like Him in spirit, in ways and in our entire character. It must be so. “We all, with open face mirroring the glory, are changed into the same image.”

It is of very great importance to see and know that nothing short of this is up to the mark of the Christianity presented in the New Testament. This is the divine standard. We should not be satisfied with anything less. We see in Stephen a man reflecting the glory of Christ in a very positive practical way. He was not merely talking about glory, but actually reflecting it. We may talk about heavenly glory while our practical ways are anything but heavenly. It was not so with Stephen. He was a living mirror in which men could see the glory reflected. And should it not be so with us? Unquestionably. But is it so? Are we so absorbed with our risen Lord, so fixed on Him, so centered in Him that our fellow men — those with whom we meet from day to day — can see the traits, the features of His image reflected in our character, our habits, our spirit, our style? Regretfully we cannot say much on this score. But then, dearly beloved Christian reader, can we not at least say, “Is it our heart's deep and earnest *desire* to be so occupied and filled with Christ that His lovely grace may shine out in us to the praise of His name?” God, in His rich mercy, grant that our eye may be so fixed on Jesus that we too may, in some degree, mirror the glory and thus shed some tiny ray of that glory upon the darkness around!

When the pangs of trial seize us,
When the waves of sorrow roll,
I will lay my head on Jesus -
Pillow of the troubled soul:
Surely none can feel like Thee,
Weeping One of Bethany!
“Jesus wept!” — that tear of sorrow
Is a legacy of love.
Yesterday, today, tomorrow,
He the same doth ever prove.
Thou art all in all to me,
Living One of Bethany!

PETER ON THE WATER

(Read Matthew 14: 22-33)

There are two ways in which we may view the interesting portion of Scripture given above. We may read it from a dispensational standpoint as bearing upon the subject of God's dealings with Israel. Also, we may read it as a portion directly bearing on the subject of our own practical walk with God from day to day.

Our Lord, having fed the multitude and dismissed them, “went up into a mountain apart to pray, and when the evening was come, He was there alone.” This answers precisely to His present position with reference to the nation of Israel. He has left them and gone on high to enter upon the blessed work of intercession. Meanwhile, the disciples — a type of the pious remnant — were tossed on the stormy sea during the dark watches of the night, deeply tried and exercised in the absence of their Lord. But He never for a moment lost sight of them, never withdrew His eyes from them. And when they were brought, as it were, to their wits' end, He appears for their relief, hushes the wind, calms the sea and brings them to their desired haven.

Thus much as to the dispensational bearing of this passage of Scripture, inasmuch as our object is to present to the heart of the reader the precious truth unfolded in the narrative of Peter on the water — truth bearing directly upon our own individual path, whatever the nature of that path may be.

It demands no stretch of imagination to see in the case of Peter, a striking figure of the Church of God collectively or of the individual Christian. Peter left the ship at the call of Christ. He abandoned all that the heart would so fondly cling to, and came forth to walk on the stormy water — a path of faith, a path in which nothing but simple faith could live for a single hour. To all who are called to tread that path, it must be either Christ or nothing. Our only source of power is in keeping the eye of faith firmly fixed on Jesus, “Looking off unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith” (Heb. 12). The moment we take the eye off Him, we begin to sink.

It is not a question of salvation — of reaching the shore in safety. By no means! We are speaking now of the walk of the Christian in this world, of the practical career of one who is called to abandon this world, to give up all that mere nature would lean upon and trust in, to relinquish earthly things and human resources to walk with Jesus above the power and influence of things seen and temporal.

Such is the high calling of the Christian and of the whole Church of God, in contrast with Israel, God's earthly people. We are called to live by faith, to walk in calm confidence above the circumstances of this world altogether, to move in holy companionship with Jesus. It was after this that Peter's soul was seeking when he uttered those words, “Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water.” Here was the point: “If it be Thou.” If it were not He, the wildest mistake that Peter could possibly make would be to leave the ship. But if indeed it was Jesus — that blessed One, that most glorious, most gracious One who Peter saw moving peacefully over the surface of the troubled deep — then, assuredly, the very highest, the very happiest, the very best thing he could do was to abandon every earthly and natural resource to come forth to Him and taste the wonderful blessedness of companionship with Him.

There is immense force, depth and significance in these clauses — “If it be Thou” — “Bid me come unto Thee” — “On the water.” Mark, it is “unto Thee *on the water*.” It was not Jesus coming to Peter *in the ship*, blessed and precious as that is, but Peter coming to Jesus on the water. It is one thing to have Jesus coming into the midst of our circumstances, hushing our fears, allaying our anxieties, tranquilizing our hearts, but it is quite another thing for us to push out from the shore of circumstances or from the ship of nature's devices, to walk in calm victory over the circumstances simply to be with Jesus where He is. The former reminds us somewhat of the Sareptan in 1 Kings 17. The latter, of the Shunammite in 2 Kings 4.

Is it that we do not appreciate the excellent grace that breathes in those words, “Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid?” Far be the thought! These words are most precious. Moreover, Peter might have tasted, yes reveled in their sweetness, even though he had never left the ship at all. It is well to distinguish between these two things. They are very often confounded. We are all prone to rest in the *thought* of having the Lord with us and His mercies around us in our daily path. We linger amid the relationships of nature, the joys of earth, such as they are, and the blessings which our gracious God pours so liberally upon us. We cling to circumstances instead of breathing after more intimate companionship with a rejected Christ. In this way we suffer immense loss.

Yes, we say it advisedly, “*immense loss*.” It is not that we should prize God's blessings and mercies less, but we should prize *Him* more. We believe that Peter would have been a loser had he remained in the ship. Some may deem it restlessness and forwardness; we believe it was the fruit of earnest longing after his much loved Lord — an intense desire to be near Him, cost what it might. He

beheld his Lord walking on the water and he longed to walk with Him, and his longing was right. It was pleasing to the heart of Jesus.

Besides, he had the authority of his Lord for leaving the ship. That word “come” — a word of mighty moral force — fell on his heart and drew him forth from the ship to go to Jesus. Christ's word was the authority for entering on that strange mysterious path, and Christ's realized presence was the power to pursue it. Without that word he dare not start; without that presence he could not proceed. It was strange, it was unearthly, it was above and beyond nature to walk on the sea, but Jesus was walking there and faith could walk with Him. So Peter thought, and therefore “he came down out of the ship, and walked on the water to go to Jesus.”

Now this is a striking figure of the true path of a Christian, the path of faith. The warrant for that path is Christ's Word. The power to pursue it is to keep the eye fixed on Him. It is not a question of right or wrong. There was nothing wrong in remaining in the ship. But the question is, “At what do we aim?” Is it the fixed purpose of the soul to get as near as we can to Jesus? Do we desire to taste a deeper, closer, fuller communion with Him? Is He enough for us? Can we give up all that mere nature clings to, and lean on Jesus only? He beckons us forth to Himself in His infinite love. He says, “Come.” Shall we refuse? Shall we hesitate and hang back? Shall we cling to the ship while the voice of Jesus bids us “come”?

It may be said that Peter broke down and therefore it is better, safer and wiser to remain in the ship than to sink in the water. It is better not to take a prominent place, than having taken it, to fail therein. Well, it is quite true that Peter failed, but why? Was it because he left the ship? No, but because he ceased to look to Jesus. “When he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.” Thus it was with poor Peter. His mistake was not in leaving the ship, but in looking at the waves and the winds — looking at his surroundings in place of looking off unto Jesus. He had entered upon a path which could only be trodden by faith — a path in which, if he had not Jesus, he had nothing at all — no ship, not a spar or a plank to cling to. In a word, it was either Christ or nothing. It was either walking with Jesus on the water or sinking beneath it without Him. Nothing but faith could sustain the heart in such a course. But faith could sustain, for faith can live amid the roughest waves and the stormiest skies. Faith can walk on the roughest waters; unbelief cannot walk on the smoothest.

But Peter failed. Yes; and what then? Does that prove he was wrong in obeying the call of his Lord? Did Jesus reprove him for leaving the ship? Ah! no; that would not have been like Him. He could not tell His poor servant to come, and then rebuke him for coming. He knew and could feel for Peter's weakness. Hence we read that “Immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” He does not say, “O you restless forward one, why did you leave the ship?” No; but “wherefore didst thou doubt?” Such was the tender reproof. And where was Peter when he heard it? *In the arms of his Lord!* What a place! What an experience! Was it not well worth leaving the ship to taste such blessedness? Assuredly it was! Peter was right in leaving the ship, and although he broke down in that lofty path on which he had entered, it only led him into a deeper sense of his own weakness and nothingness, and of the grace and love of his Lord.

Christian reader, what is the moral of all this to us? Simply this. Jesus calls us forth from the things of time and sense to walk with Him. He summons us to abandon all our earthly hopes and creature confidences — the props and resources on which our poor hearts lean. His voice may be heard far above the din of waves and storms, and that voice says “Come!” Oh! let us obey. Let us heartily yield ourselves to His call. “Let us go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.” He

wants to have us near Himself, walking with and leaning on Him, not looking at circumstances, but looking only and always unto Him.