DEVOTIONAL HOURS WITH THE BIBLE

by J.R. Miller

An eight-volume devotional series published between 1908 and 1913, guiding readers through the entire Bible from Creation to the early church. Miller provides warm, practical reflections on Scripture passages to nourish daily spiritual life.

9 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 0.1. 00 Devotional Hours with the Bible
2. 1. Volume 1.
3. 2. Volume 2
4. 3. Volume 3
5. 4. Volume 4.
6. 5. Volume 5
7. 6. Volume 6
8. 7. Volume 7
9. 8. Volume 8

Chapter 1

0.1. 00 Devotional Hours with the Bible

00 Devotional Hours with the Bible Devotional Hours with the Bible

J. R. Miller

This eight volume set was published between 1908 and 1913. From the Creation—to the Exodus From the Exodus—through the Life of David From the Psalms From Solomon—to Malachi From the Gospels, on the Life of Christ From the Gospel of Matthew From the Gospel of John From the Acts, the Epistles and Revelation

Chapter 2

1. Volume 1.

Volume 1.

Volume 1 From the Creation—to the Exodus In the Beginning God

The First Temptation

The Story of Cain and Abel

The Story of Enoch

The Story of the Flood

The Call of Abraham

Abraham and Lot

God’s Promise to Abraham

Abraham the Friend of God

Abraham’s Intercession for Sodom

The Outcome of Lot’s Choice

The Offering of Isaac

Isaac and His Sons

Isaac the Peacemaker

Jacob’s Dream at Bethel

Jacob a Prince with God

Discords in the Family of Jacob

Joseph and His Dreams

Joseph in Prison

Joseph from Prison to Palace

Joseph and His Brothers

Joseph and His Father

Joseph’s Old Age and Death

Israel Oppressed in Egypt

The Childhood of Moses

The Call of Moses

Moses and Pharaoh

The Institution of the Passover

Crossing the Red Sea In the Beginning God

Genesis 1-2

Genesis is the book of beginnings. The first chapter is one of the most wonderful portions of the Bible. It takes us back far beyond all beginnings. Its first words are among the sublimest ever written, "In the beginning—God." We are now in the midst of a vast universe full of life—but there was a period when there was nothing—not a grain of sand, not a blade of grass, not a flower, not a leaf, nor the tiniest insect—nothing but God.

There never was a time, however, when God was not. He had no beginning. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or before You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting You are God." The thought is too great for us to grasp! Everything else that we see or of which we know—had a beginning. The sea with its majesty began away back somewhere in the midst of the ages of creation, when the Creator gathered the waters of the globe together into one place. The mountains which we think of as ancient, hoary, abiding, of which we speak as eternal—also had a beginning. There was a period when they were not, and then a time when by some gigantic convulsion they were lifted up.

Everything but God, had a beginning. Matter is not eternal. All life is derived. Not only was God before all things—but all things are the work of His hands. God created all things. Nothing came by 'chance'. It is no part of the plan of this book to suggest any scheme of creation. We do not need to vex ourselves with questions as to how things came into being. We do not have to know or understand. But whatever the theories may be, science has not set aside the teaching of Genesis, that God created all things. The best science accepts the Christian teaching, that God made all things. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews states the case thus: "By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the Word of God, so that what is seen has not been made out of things which do appear." God was the Creator, however many ages may have been occupied in the vast work, or whatever the order or the processes of creation may have been. That is all we need to know. At the very beginning of the story of creation, we have a wonderful glimpse of the heart of God and of His love for man, His child. Man had not yet been made. Indeed, there was only chaos. "The earth was waste and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep." Then we have this statement, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." A marginal reading is, "The Spirit of God was brooding upon the face of the waters." The picture suggested in the words is that of a hen sitting on her nest, covering her eggs, brooding over them to bring out the new lives through the warmth of her own body. Without unduly pressing the words, they certainly suggest that when He brooded over the mere chaos, God was thinking of His children yet to be and planning for their happiness and good. That is the way love always does. It prepares the nest for the little birds. It fills the storehouse for the coming winter.

Through all the great ages of continued world-building, we find evidence of this same Divine brooding and forethought. Man was not the first of the creatures made—indeed, he was the last of

God’s works. In this fact we see a wonderful expression of the Divine kindness and love. If man had been created at an earlier period, he could only have perished. He was not created until a place had been prepared for him. From the beginning, he was in God’s thought. All through the creative ages before man was made—God was preparing and fitting up this earth to be his home.

First, there was chaos, a world without beauty, light or life, waste and empty—yet with God brooding over it. Then light broke over the dark world. Then the waters were gathered into seas and lakes and rivers, and the continents emerged—plains, hills, mountains. Then life appeared—vegetable life, animal life, in orderly succession. As the time drew near for man’s creation, one particular place was chosen and fitted up to be a home for man—the Garden of Eden, filled with the rarest things of creation. All this for man not yet made; all the exquisite beauty and variety of scenery, all the wealth hidden away in mountains and hills, all the useful things prepared and stored up in nature—were for man’s happiness and comfort!

Think, for instance, of the vast beds of coal laid up among earth’s strata, ages and ages since, in loving forethought, that our homes may be warmed and brightened in the late centuries. Think of the minerals that were piled away in the rocks long before there was a human footprint on the sand, to be discovered and brought out for use in remote ages. Think of electricity, stored in exhaustless measures everywhere and kept undiscovered until these modern days, when it has been brought out to perform its vast service for the world. Think of the ’laws of nature’, as we call them, established to minister to man’s pleasure and profit. Think of all the latent forces and properties that have been lodged in matter, to be brought out from time to time, at the call of human need. Look at the springs of water opened on every hillside, in every valley, to give drink to man and beast. Note the provision in every climate and every zone, for food and clothing. Look at the medicinal and healing virtues stored away in leaf, in root, in fruit, in bark, in mineral.

It fills our hearts with wonder and praise—to think that for uncounted ages, before there was a human being on the earth—that God was thinking of us, that He foresaw our needs and began laying up goodness for us in the storehouses of nature. No one dare say that all this was a mere marvel of coincidences—there is proof of design in it; it could have been nothing else but the love of God planning and preparing for His children in long ages to come.

It is interesting to think of the creation of man, at the close of all this vast preparation. When his home was ready for him, then he was created. Man was made, too, in the likeness of God. Here we see his exalted rank in creation—he is not like any other creature. This likeness to God was not a physical likeness, however. We are like Him in immortality, in mind, in will, in heart, in hope and life. This suggests man’s pre-eminence among the creatures. Last of all to be made—he was also the noblest, the greatest of all. All the things that had been made were good and beautiful. But when man was made he was distinguished above all other orders of beings by having put upon him the image of his Creator. Man was God’s child. Plants and trees and rocks and hills were things; beasts, birds, insects, and reptiles were living creatures; but man was a living soul, able to think and choose, to love and obey, to commune with God, to enter into close fellowship with Him, to be God’s friend, God’s child.

Man’s body was made of dust. This showed his frailty; he was not made from the rocks, or from metal ores—but from the lowly dust. Yet into this frail body God breathed His own breath and man lived. When God had made man, He gave him rule over all things. "Have dominion over the fish of

the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." Thus man was made to be lord of the creation. Not only was he above all the other works of God in rank and dignity—but he was set to rule over them all.

All things were made for man, for his use and service. Man still has great power over the creatures. He uses them for his own purposes, making them help him in his work. He employs the animals in his work, and makes them serve him. Steam is made to turn his machines, propel his ships, draw his trains. The sea he has mastered, making it, instead of a barrier—a highway to all parts of the earth, on which he carries his commerce. The lightning, whose thunders are full of dread, he has tamed and taught to be a gentle messenger, doing his bidding and serving him in countless ways. The rocks he has made to yield to him their minerals, and from the dark depths of the earth he brings his fuel.

God created man "male and female." It would have been very desolate for man to live on this earth alone. No matter how beautiful the world had been made, beauty would not have satisfied him. Man has a heart and needs love, and only love could satisfy him. There were animals of all kinds in the lovely Paradise which was given to man for his home—but man could not have found the companionship he needs among these. He was made immortal and only a being immortal like himself could answer his longing for fellowship. He was made to love, and only a being capable of loving could satisfy him.

It was a mark of God’s thought for man, therefore of His love for him, that woman was made to be man’s companion. They could talk together of the lovely things about them, they had minds alike and could think together and commune on the great things of God. They had hearts that beat alike, and could love each other. They could commune together on spiritual things and together enter also into communion with God.

We have here, too, the institution of marriage. God saw that man would be lonely, and that it would not be good for him to be alone, so He gave him a wife. Thus was she fitted to be man’s companion, his helpmate, his inspirer. God Himself united this first pair in marriage. Heart clasped heart, and life was knit to life.

God bade our first parents to "replenish the earth, and subdue it." He gave the earth to man—but it was yet a possession for conquest, an inheritance that man must win for himself. At the very beginning, in the unfallen life, man was meant to work. He was to cultivate the soil that he might gather its fruits and harvests. He was to find and dig out the treasures hidden away in the rocks and hills. He was to master the forces of nature. The earth was his—but he must subdue it.

God made provision for man’s sustenance. "I have given you every herb, . . . every tree, . . . for food." It is not God’s intention that anyone shall ever lack food. Yet we must not make the mistake that even in man’s innocence it was meant that he should have food without work. "If any will not work, neither let him eat," is a law of Providence which grace does not render inoperative. Sometimes a man says, "The world owes me a living." Yes, if he will by his own toil earn it! The prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," teaches us to live by the day and to be content with the day’s portion, trusting God for tomorrow; but it teaches another lesson in the word "our." It cannot be our daily bread until we have earned it. So we ask God to give us, with His blessing, the portion which our hands have gathered and prepared for the day. From the beginning, too, God cared for

animals and provided for their maintenance. "I have given all the grasses and other green plants to the animals and birds for their food." Does God care for oxen and birds and worms? Here is the assurance that He does. Then the Scriptures have other words which tell us of God’s thought for all His creatures. Your heavenly Father feeds the sparrows, said Jesus. We are taught here a lesson of kindness toward dumb creatures. If God is so thoughtful in making provision for them, surely we must be gentle and humane in our treatment of them. The First Temptation

Genesis 3 The story of the first temptation is intensely interesting. We do not need to perplex ourselves with its form. There is enough in it that is plain and simple and of practical value, and we should not let our minds be confused by its mystery. Whatever the broader meaning of this first temptation may have been, everyone must meet a like personal experience, and hence this Genesis story has for us a most vital interest.

Everyone must be tempted. Untried life is not yet established. We must be tested and proved. It is the man who endures temptation, who is blessed. Our first parents did not endure.

It was in the garden of Eden, with beauty and happiness on every side. But even into this lovely home, came the tempter! He came stealthily. The serpent is a remarkable illustration of temptation: subtle, fascinating, approaching noiselessly and with an appearance of harmlessness which throws us off our guard. The tempter began his temptation in a way which gave no alarm to the woman. He asked her, "Has God said—You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" The question indicated surprise that God should make such a prohibition. The tempter’s wish was, in a quiet and insinuating way, to impeach the goodness of God and make Eve think of Him as severe and harsh. His purpose was to put doubt of God’s goodness into the woman’s mind. "If God loved you—would He deny you anything so good?" The tempter still practices the same deep cunning. He wants to make people think that God is severe, that His restraints are unreasonable. He tries to make the young man think that his father is too stern with him; the young girl that her mother is too rigid. He seeks to get people to think themselves oppressed by the Divine requirements. That is usually the first step in temptation, and when one has begun to think of God as too exacting, he is ready for the next downward step.

Everything depends upon the way a person meets temptation. Parleying is always unsafe. Eve’s first mistake was in answering the tempter at all. She ought to have turned instantly away, refusing to listen. When there comes to us a wrong suggestion of any kind, the only wise and safe thing for us—is immediately to shut the door of our heart in its face. To dally is usually to be lost. Our decision should be instant and absolute, when temptation offers. The poet gave a fine test of character when he said he would not take for a friend, the man who needlessly sets his foot upon a worm. With still greater positiveness should we refuse to accept as a friend, one who seeks to throw doubt on God’s goodness and love. When the tempter finds a ready ear for his first approach—he is encouraged to go on. In this case, having raised suspicion of the Divine goodness, he went on to question God’s veracity. "The serpent said unto the woman—You shall not surely die!" He would not have said this at the first, for the woman would not have listened then to such an accusation against God. But one doubt makes way for another. She listened now, and was not shocked when the tempter went farther and charged God with insincerity. The tempter still follows the same course with those he would draw away from God. He tells them that what God says about the consequences of disobedience is not true. He tries to make people believe that the

soul that sins—shall not die. He is still going about casting doubt upon God's words and suggesting changes in the reading of the Bible. He even tried to tempt our Savior by misquoting and perverting Scripture! He sought to get Him to trust a Divine promise—when He had no Divine command to do the thing suggested. We need to be sure of the character of the people we admit into our lives as friends, advisers, or teachers. Jesus tells us that His sheep know His voice. They know the voice of strangers, too, and will not listen to them, because they will not trust the words of strangers. The tempter now goes a step farther with the woman. "God does know that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as God, knowing good and evil." Instead of dying, as God had said they should, if they ate the forbidden fruit—the devil said the eating of this fruit would open their eyes and make them wondrously wise, even something like God Himself! The tempter talks in just the same way in these modern days. He tells the boys and young men, that doing certain things will make them smart and happy. He taunts them also with the ignorance of simple innocence, and suggests to them that they ought to see and experience the world. It will make men of them and give them power, influence and happiness. There is a great deal of this sort of temptation. A good many people cannot stand the taunt of being 'religious' or of being afraid to do certain things. The temptation was successful. "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it." She listened to the cunning words of the tempter. Curiosity, ambition, and desire—all awoke in her. The one prohibited thing in the garden, began to shine in such alluring colors that she forgot all the good things which were permitted to her. It all seemed dull and poor, compared with the imagined sweetness of the fruit they were not allowed to eat. The commandment of God faded out of her mind—as she stood listening to the tempter and looking at the forbidden fruit before her. Then, fatal moment! She reached out her hand and took the fruit—and the doleful deed was done! We never know what a floodgate of evil and sorrow—one little thought or word or act may open—what a river of harm and ruin may flow from it! When one has yielded to temptation, the next step ofttimes is the tempting of others. "She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it!" Milton suggests that it was because of his love for Eve that Adam accepted the fruit from her hand. Since she had fallen, he wished to perish with her. Whatever the reason was for Adam's yielding, we know that the common story is—the tempted and fallen—become tempters of others! The corrupted become corrupters of others. One of the blessings of companionship should be mutual help. Mountain climbers tie themselves together with ropes that the one may support the other. But sometimes one slips and drags the other with him down to death. Companionship may bring ruin, instead of blessing!

However pleasant sin may be, when it has been committed, a dark shadow falls over the soul. "The man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees." The first thing after sinning is remorse, and then comes the desire to hide from God!

There is a story of a young man who entered the house of one who had been his friend, to steal costly jewels which he knew to be in a certain place. He made his way quietly into the room, found the trunk in which the jewels were kept, and opened it. Then glancing up he saw a portrait hanging on the wall—the face of one he had known in years gone, in this house—but who was now dead. The calm, deep eyes of his old companion looking down upon him, witnessing his dark deed, made him tremble. He tried to keep his back to the picture—but he could not hold his gaze away from it. Yet he could not go on with his robbery. The steady looking of the eyes down upon him,

maddened him. At length he took a knife and cut the eyes from the portrait and then finished his crime. If even human eyes looking down upon us make it impossible for us to commit sins—how much more terrible is the eye of God to the guilty soul! But it is impossible ever to get away from the presence of God. While the man and his wife were thus trying to hide, they heard God's voice saying, "Where are you?" It was not in anger but in love, that the Father thus followed His erring children. He sought them—that He might save them. It is ever so. God is not to be dreaded—even if we have done wrong. We never should flee from Him. He follows us—but it is that He may find us and save us. Conscience is not an enemy, but a friend—the voice of God speaking in love. People sometimes wish they could get away altogether from God, could silence His voice; but if this were possible, it would be unto the darkness of hopeless ruin!

It is pitiful to read in the narrative how, when asked regarding their sin, the man sought to put the blame on the woman. "The woman You put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." That is the way ofttimes—when a man has done wrong, he blames somebody else. A drunkard said it was his wife's fault, for she was not sociable at home and he went out evenings to find somebody to talk with. A young man fell into sin—and said it was the fault of his companion who had tempted him. No doubt a share of guilt lies on the tempter of innocence and inexperience. It is a fearful thing to influence another to do wrong. Yet temptation does not excuse sin. We should learn that no sin of others in tempting us—will ever excuse our sin in yielding. No one can compel us to do wrong. Our sin is always our own! At once upon the dark cloud—breaks the light! No sooner had man fallen, than God's thought of redemption appears. "So the LORD God said to the serpent—I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." This fifteenth verse is the gospel, the first promise of a Savior. It is very dim and indistinct, a mere glimmering of light, on the edge of the darkness. But it was a gospel of hope to our first parents, in their sorrow and shame. We understand now its full meaning. It is a star-word as it shines here. A star is but a dim point of light as we see it in the heavens—but we understand that it is really a vast world, or center of a system of worlds. This promise holds in obscure dimness—all the glory of all the after-revealings of the Messiah. As we read on in the Old Testament, we continually find new unfoldings, fuller revelations, until at length we have the promise fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ! This story of the first temptation and fall, is not the record of one isolated failure at the beginning of the world's history merely—it is a record which may be written into every human biography. It tells us of the fearful danger of sin, and then of sin's dreadful cost. What a joy it is that on the edge of this story of falling—we have the promise of one who would overcome! Now we have the story of one who has overcome, "strong Son of God," who also was tempted—but who did not yield, and now is the Mighty Deliverer. He overcame the world. And in Him we have peace and salvation! The Story of Cain and Abel

Genesis 4

Cain was the first child born on earth. The coming of the first baby, is always an important event in a home—but the birth of the first child in the human family, was an event of peculiar importance. Mothers have many dreams and hopes for their babies. The first mother had her dreams. She seems to have been expecting that her son would be the "seed of the woman" referred to in the promise of the bruising of the serpent's head. When she saw the beautiful new-born child, she said joyfully, "With the LORD's help, I have brought forth a male child!" The mothers will best

understand her glad hope, what expectations filled her heart. She forgot the pain of her travail—in her joy that a child was born. It is sad to think how this first mother's dreams were disappointed. Instead of becoming a godly man, his life an honor to his parents—he proved a wicked man, who brought sorrow to his home! At the beginning of the story of the human family, we find both good and evil. Two children of the same parents, have in their hearts dispositions that differ in every way. They had different tastes, which led them to different occupations. One become a farmer, tilling the soil, and thus providing for his own necessities. The other, with peaceful tastes, became a shepherd. The two sons differed still more radically in moral character. Cain developed wicked traits. He was energetic, ambitious, resourceful, a man who made his mark in the world, a builder of cities, a leader in civilization—but a man of bad temper, selfish, morose, cruel, hard, resentful. Abel was quiet, affectionate, patient. The world now would call him easy-going, not disposed to stand up for his rights, meek, allowing others to trample over him and tread him down in the dust. Cain was the kind of man who today wins the world's honors, who gets on in the world, grows rich, is enterprising, becomes powerful and rules over his fellows. Abel was the type of man described in the Beatitudes, poor in spirit, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, merciful, a peacemaker, unresisting, bearing wrong without complaint, not striving for mastery. Abel was the kind of man that He was—who, at the end of the ages, appeared as the true Seed of the woman, whose heel was bruised by the serpent, but bruised the serpent's head, conquering by love.

Both the sons were worshipers of God, though here, too, they differed. Cain brought of the fruit of the ground for his offering; and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock. Some suppose that Cain's offering was unfit in itself, inferring that God had already instituted the offering of blood, as the only acceptable worship. We do not learn this, however, from the Bible narrative; we are told only that the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering—but unto Cain and his offering He had not respect. Then in the Epistle to the Hebrews we are told that it was faith in Abel, which made his sacrifice more excellent than Cain's.

We learn at least—that God must be worshiped in the way He has commanded. We learn also that the acceptance of worship—depends on the heart of the worshiper. Cain's heart was wrong—and Abel's was right. The publican went down to his house justified, because of his penitence and sincerity; the Pharisee received no blessing, because there was no faith in his prayer. God cares nothing for forms of worship; He looks into the heart and is pleased only when He finds love, faith, and true devotion there.

"Cain was very angry." Why was Cain angry? Was he angry with God for not showing respect to his offering? Did he think God had treated him badly? If the anger was against God, how very foolish it was! What good could it do? It would be most silly for a man to be angry at the waves of the sea, or at the storm, or at the lightning. Would the waves, the tempest, or the thunderbolt mind his rage? It is infinitely more senseless, to be angry with God! Or was Cain angry with Abel because he had pleased God—while he himself had failed to do so? It seems, however, from the record, that he was angry with Abel. Why? What had Abel done? He had done nothing, except that he was a better man than his brother. Was that reason enough why Cain should be angry?

Superiority always arouses envy, opposition and dislike. We must not expect to make ourselves popular—by being great or good. "To show your intelligence and ability, is only an indirect way of reproaching others for being dull and incapable." It was Abel's favor with God—that made Cain

hate him.

Joseph is another striking example of the same hatred of the good—by the bad. It was not his pretty coat that made his brothers so bitter against him—but that which the coat represented, the superior qualities which had made Joseph the favorite of his father. Envy is a most unworthy passion. It is utterly without reason. It is pure malevolence, revealing the worst spirit. Cain was angry with Abel, because he was good.

"Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him!" Genesis 4:8. See here, the fearful growth of the evil feeling in Cain's heart. It was only a thought at first—but it was admitted into the heart and cherished there. Then it grew until it caused a terrible crime! We learn here, the danger of cherishing even the smallest beginning of bitterness; we do not know to what it will grow!

Some people think lightly of bad temper, laughing at it as a mere harmless weakness; but it is a perilous mood to indulge, and we do not know to what it may lead. In His reproof of Cain, the Lord likens his sin to a wild beast lying in hiding by his door, ready to leap on him and devour him. This is true of all sin which is cherished in the heart. It may long lie quiet and seem harmless—but it is only a wild beast sleeping!

There is a story of a man who took a young tiger and resolved to make a pet of it. It moved about his house like a kitten and grew up fond and gentle. For a long time its savage, blood-thirsty nature seemed changed into gentleness, and the creature was quiet and harmless. But one day the man was playing with his pet, when by accident his hand was scratched and the beast tasted blood. That one taste, aroused all the fierce tiger nature, and the ferocious animal flew on his master and tore him to pieces! So it is, with the passions and lusts of the old nature, which are only petted and tamed and allowed to stay in the heart. They will crouch at the door in treacherous lurking, and in some unguarded hour—they will rise up in all their old ferocity! It is never safe to make pets of tigers! It is never safe to make pets of little sins!

We never know what sin may grow into—if we let it stay in our heart. "It came to pass when they were in the field, that Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him!" That is what came of the passion of envy in Cain's heart! It was left unrebuked, unrepented of, uncrushed—and in time it grew to fearful strength. Then in an evil moment its tiger nature asserted itself. We never know to what dreadful stature—a little sin may grow. It was the apostle of love who said, "He who hates his brother is a murderer." Hatred is a seed—which when it grows into its full strength—is murder!

We can easily trace the development of this sin in Cain. First, it was only a bitter and hurt feeling, as he saw that Abel's sacrifice was more pleasing to God than his own. But by and by in uncontrolled anger, Cain rose and murdered his brother!

We need to guard especially, against envy. Few sins are more common. One pupil recites his lesson better than another, and the less successful one is tempted to all manner of ugly feelings toward his fellow. Unkind things are said about the scholar who gets along well.

Envy is classed among the "seven deadly sins," and one has said that of all these, it most disturbs the peace of mankind. "All the curs in the street are ready to attack the dog that gets away with the bone!" "It is the tall cedar, not the tiny shrub, which will likely be struck by lightning. The sheep that has the most wool—is soonest fleeced! Envy follows every successful man—as close as his

shadow. While David kept his father’s sheep at home—he might sing sweetly to his harp in the fields without disturbance. But when he comes to court and applause and greatness caress him, malice and spite dog close at his heels wherever he goes. Let us guard against the beginnings of envy. The Lord asked Cain to account for his brother. "Where is your brother?" We all are our brother’s keepers, in a certain sense. In families, the members are each other’s keepers. Parents are their children’s keepers. The older brothers and sisters are the keepers of the younger. Brothers are their sisters’ keepers—and should be their protectors and benefactors. Sisters are their brothers’ keepers—and should throw about them all the pure, gentle, holy influences of love. Each one of us is in greater or less degree—a keeper of all who come under our influence. We are certainly each other’s keepers—in the sense that we are not to harm each other in any way. We have no right to injure anyone; and we are under obligation to do as much good as possible to all about us.

We shall have to account for our influence over each other, and for all our opportunities of doing good to others. One of the most significant words in our Lord’s parable of the Judgment, is that in which the king is represented as saying to those on his left, "Then He will also say to those on the left—Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels! For I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in; I was naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not take care of Me." Matthew 25:41-43

There is no more serious teaching in the Scriptures than this of our responsibility for the lives of others—not for members of our own families only—but for everyone who belongs to the human family.

After Cain had committed his crime, he thought of its enormity. "What have you done! Your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground!" People do not stop to think beforehand, of the evil things they are going to do. They are carried away by passion or desire for pleasure, for power, or for gain—and do not see the darkness of the deed they are committing. But when it is done and they turn back to look at it—they see it in all its shame and guilt.

If the young man who is tempted to embezzle would go on and look at himself as a convict in prison, his name blackened, his family ruined—would he do the evil thing? The experience of Cain ought to teach everyone to ask before doing any wrong thing, "What is this that I am going to do?" Sin brings curse! Even the very ground is cursed, when remorse is in a man’s heart. Even the flowers, the trees, the birds, and all beautiful and innocent things, seem to whisper shame and curse to his conscience.

"My punishment is too great to bear!" Sin is always a dreadful burden. It may seem pleasant at the moment—but afterward the bitterness is intolerable! A man gratifies his evil passions for a time and seems happy—but the result is shame and remorse—penalty greater than he can bear. Cain would have given all he had—to undo the sin he had committed—but he could not. He could not bring back the life he had destroyed. His dead brother would not answer his cry of grief. Though one suffers from the law, no punishment for his sin—he yet bears punishment intolerable in himself.

People say they do not believe in a hell of fire, that a God of mercy would not cast His children into such torment. But sin needs no literal flames, to make its hell. It brings its torment in itself. It is not that God is cruel—it is sin that is cruel. We cannot blame God for the punishment which our disobedience brings; we have only ourselves to blame.

Someone said in bitterness, "If I were God my heart would break for the world's woe and sorrow." God's heart did break—that is what the Cross meant. Sin is indeed a heavy burden. Many are driven to suicide by remorse. Some become hardened, all tenderness in them having been destroyed. But it will not be until the sinner gets to the next world—that he will know all the intolerable burden of his sin and its punishment. Then there will be no escape from the awful load, no hiding forever, and no getting clear of the terrible burden. In this world, there is always a way of escape from sin's punishment. Christ bore sin and its punishment, and all who flee to Him will have the load lifted off! The Story of Enoch

Genesis 5 The history of the world is not told in detail in Genesis. We have only a glimpse here and there of the life of the first days. But a few names are preserved from antediluvian generations. The people seem to have lived long—but not to much purpose. All we learn of most of them—is that they lived so many hundreds of years, and then died. The good seed seemed to perish in the death of Abel—but Seth was born in his place, and then men began to call upon the name of the Lord.

Some generations passed and in the scant record, we come upon one name that shines brightly in the story. "When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away." Genesis 5:21-24

God and Enoch were good friends. Their relations were intimate and familiar. The meaning is not that God appeared to Enoch in any visible form and walked with him about the country, as a man would walk with his friend. A little child, however, told the story thus. She had been to Sunday School, and when she came home her mother asked her what she had learned that day. She answered, "Don't you know, mother? we have been learning about a man who used to go for walks with God. His name was Enoch. He used to go for walks with God. And, mother, one day they went for an extra long walk, and they walked on, and on, and on, until God said to Enoch, 'You are a long way from home; you would better just come in and stay.' And he went in!" The child's idea of the story was very beautiful. It was true, too—at least in a spiritual sense. The figure of a walk is used in the Bible many times for the course of life. When men are said to have walked in the ways of the Lord—the meaning is that they lived righteously, keeping God's commandments. When we read that the people walked in the way of Jeroboam, the thought is that they followed him in his idolatry. When it is said that Enoch walked with God, we are to understand that he obeyed God's commandments, so far as they were revealed to him, and that he lived in communion with God.

It was a walk offaith. Enoch did not see God. We do not know how much he knew about God. We must remember that he lived before the Flood, only a few generations from Adam. The race was in its infancy then, and only a few revelations from God had been made. There was no Bible. It was long before Moses received the ten commandments on Mount Sinai. But in whatever way and to

whatever extent Enoch had been taught about God—he believed. God was as real to him—as if He had walked with Enoch in human form!

We all walk with God in a sense, for all our life. We never can get away from His presence for a moment. He is closer to us than our nearest friend. Wherever we go—He walks beside us. But the trouble with many of us is that we do not realize this presence. We never think of it. Faith is that exercise of the mind, which makes unseen things, real. God was real to Enoch. His walk with God—was as real as if he had seen God's face, and heard His voice and felt the touch of His hand!

We may walk with God as consciously and as familiarly as Enoch did, if we really desire. Christ told the disciples that He wished to make them His personal friends, opening His heart to them and giving them His full confidence. But how many of us are living in conscious communion with Christ? We sing Bernard's hymn,

"Jesus, the very thought of Thee

With sweetness fills my breast;

But sweeter far Your face to see,

And in Your presence rest." But to how many of us, are the words really a true expression of our experience? We talk a good deal about God—but how many of us are actually walking with God? An eloquent preacher says, "A missing note of the religious life of today, is that of personal fellowship with the Creator. We are largely dependent on other people, not Christ—for our spiritual experience." Never have there been so many religious activities in which Christians take part, as at present. There are meetings, societies, brotherhoods, unions and all manner of organizations for the promotion of spiritual life and for the winning of souls. But is there not a lack of personal communion with Christ? We are depending more for the quickening of our spirits and for our religious interest and earnestness, on outside activities and on the influence of other Christians upon us—than on our own individual fellowship with Christ!

We need to learn anew to walk with God. We need to train ourselves to more personal communion with Christ, to be more alone with Him. We cannot get our religious life second-hand. None of us can give to another, what we have received from God, in our own communion with Him. The wise virgins could not give of their oil—to their sisters whose lamps were going out, and whose vessels were empty. Sometimes it seems to us as we read the story, that these virgins were selfish, unkind, ungenerous, in refusing. But the incident is meant to teach—that one cannot give the grace of God to another. Each must receive it directly from God for himself. If your friend walks with God—then in his hour of trial or need, he will have the comfort and strength he requires. But if you follow God afar off—then in your time of stress, you will find your lamp burning low and your vessel empty, and you cannot run to your friend for what you need. Each must know Christ for himself.

There are many blessings which come to him who walks with God. One is companionship with God. Human companionship is very sweet and refreshing. It makes the way seem shorter and easier. How could we live without friends? We never can be thankful enough for the companionships of our lives. It would be hard to live without our human friends. We need them,

and they bring us cheer, comfort, strength, encouragement all along the way. But human companionships, as heart-filling as they may be—are not enough. Then they drop away one by one—we know not what morning, the dearest and most needed friend shall be missed from our side when we come out to begin our day's walk.

What would you have done if the Great Companion had not been beside you on that dark day when the human friend you had leaned on so heavily, was called away? What will you do when those who now make the journey so pleasant for you, slip away and leave you if, when you lift up your eyes through your tears, you do not see the Master still by your side? Then, even with the happiest and gladdest earthly companionship crowding our path, we need God too. Without Him—the dearest human love fails to satisfy. But no words can fully tell of the joy and the blessing of Divine companionship. Think of the years when Christ walked with His personal friends, what His presence meant to them. And that short story of the Incarnation is not something past, which cannot be realized now. We may have those days over again, each one of us, with all their sweetness and helpfulness. Christ came down to earth, not to stay a few years only and then leave us—but to stay unto the end, and to walk with each one of us all the way home.

Another blessing that comes from walking with God, is the transfiguration of our common life. Many of us miss much of the beauty and the glory of life, because we do not know that God is with us. Life is all dark and mysterious, sometimes full of sorrow and disaster, when we know nothing of the love of God. But when His love fills our hearts—then all the world is changed. Even human love coming into a life, changes the aspect of all things. Only the other day a young friend came to tell of the coming of love, and the dear face was shining as if a holy lamp of heaven were burning within.

If human love brings such joy, the love of Christ brings infinitely more!

Enoch's walking with God was not interrupted by the common experiences of his life. "Enoch walked with God 300 years—and had other sons and daughters." Some people suppose they could continue to walk with God if they were engaged all the time in 'religious' work; but they do not suppose it possible to maintain a life of unbroken communion with Him, when they have to be at work in the shop, in the office, or in the kitchen. But the truth is, we may stay near Christ just as easily when at our daily duties—as when we are at our devotions.

There is a legend of a monk whose great desire was to see Christ and touch the hem of His divinity. At his monastery, he waited in prayer and penance before his crucifix. He had vowed that he would see no human face—until his prayer was granted. One morning he seemed to hear a voice which told him that his wish would be fulfilled that day. With eager joy he watched. There came a gentle tap upon his door, and the plaintive cry of a child was heard, pleading to be taken in and fed. But the voice of the cold and hungry little one, was unheeded. The 'saint' was busy with his devotions, watching for the vision of the Master, and must not be disturbed. The candles burned low and the monk grew dismayed. Why did not the vision appear? All he heard was, "Unhappy monk, you may pray on forever. The answer to your prayer was sent today—it lingered, then sobbed, then turned away."

God is quite as sure to come to walk with us, in the doing of some common task of love and kindness—as when we pray or sit at our Master's communion table. "For I was hungry—and you

gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty—and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger—and you took Me in; I was naked—and you clothed Me; I was sick—and you took care of Me; I was in prison—and you visited Me." Matthew 25:35-36 To him who is walking with God—all life has glory. We do not know what we miss—when we fail to see the Great Companion who is ever by our side. A little child was traveling with his mother over the sea. After a little while he asked, "Mother, where is the sea?" His mother said, "Why, we are on the sea. It is all around us." The child replied, "I see the waves—but where is the sea?"

Just so, we go through our days, all bright with the shining of God's glory, and ask, "Where is God?"

You remember how the disciples, going to Emmaus, talked with the Stranger who walked with them, about Jesus, telling how bitterly they had been disappointed, not knowing, not dreaming, that He who was walking with them—was the Master Himself for whom their hearts were breaking. So ofttimes, we walk on our ways in life with sadness, crying out for God, asking, "Where is He? Where can I find Him?" while all the time He is closer to us than our dearest friends. How a simpler faith would brighten all things for us—and reveal the Master to us!

Another blessing from walking with God, is a heavenly atmosphere. We know the value of atmosphere even in human friendships and associations. Everyone has an atmosphere of his own. With some people we feel ourselves in an atmosphere that is sweet, exhilarating, inspiring. All our life is quickened by their influence. With others we find a depressing atmosphere about us, when we enter their presence. Dr. Arnold used to say, "We too much live, as it were, out of God's atmosphere."

They used to build observatories in the heart of cities—but it was found that the atmosphere was unsuitable. It was not clear—but was full of smoke and dust which obscured the vision. Now observatories are built on the highest points that can be found, where the air is pure, so that observations can be made without hindrance. God walks always on the high levels—and those who walk with Him must leave the low valleys with their fogs and mists—and go up to the mountain-tops!

Another blessing from walking with God, is the cleansing of our lives. The influence of pure and good companionship is always transforming. John lay on Christ's bosom—and became like Christ. When two live together in close and intimate association, they grow alike. Intimacy with God, can result only in becoming like God.

Sometimes we want to run ahead of God—we cannot wait for Him. "Enoch walked with God." He waited for God—-was not impatient when God seemed slower than he wished. We must trust God when He delays to answer our prayers. He knows when to answer.

Then sometimes we hold back when God wants us to move quickly. Walking with God means that we must never parley nor dally when God moves on—but must move promptly, never falling behind. So let us walk with God—wherever He leads us. The way may not be easy—but that is not our concern; our concern is only to walk with Him—without question, unfalteringly. He always leads in the right way—He will lead us home! That was the way He led Enoch. "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away." People missed him one day and saw him no more—but he was not lost. God had simply lifted him over the river of death, so that he

missed dying, and had taken him home!

Christian life here is very sweet. It is a glorious thing to walk with God in this world. But only in heaven can we get the whole of anything good, which was begun here. We are going on into that land where all faith's dreams shall be realized, where all love's visions shall be fulfilled. Nothing beautiful shall be lost. We shall meet our Christian friends on the other side; dying is but parting for a little while. A child, about to fall asleep, threw her tired arms around her father's neck and said, "Good-night, dear father; I shall see you in the morning."

She was right. When we die, we are only saying to our remaining Christian friends, "Good-night!" And in a fairer land, we shall say "Good-morning!" The Story of the Flood

Genesis 6-9

Whatever the physical cause of the Flood may have been, the moral cause was sin! This is made clear in the narrative in Genesis. It was because of the wickedness of the people—that God determined to destroy the human race! The wickedness hinted at, was startling and vile. We cannot understand the connection between the Divine judgment and great natural catastrophes like the Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. A large question is opened when we begin to think of this matter. What shall we say of storms, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, which often cause great ruin? Must we say that there is always a moral cause? Jesus seems to have forbidden this, in His allusion to the falling of the Tower of Siloam. So we dare not say that it was sin that directly caused any great catastrophe in ancient or modern history. We can understand how cholera and yellow fever are the penalties of the violation of the physical laws of sanitation. But we can find a connection between the sin of the antediluvians, and the Flood; and between the wickedness of the Cities of the Plain—and the rain of fire which destroyed them. In the case of the Flood we may say that it was purely a miraculous visitation of judgment for sin—for we have a distinct statement of the fact. The Flood was a great parable of coming eternal judgment. The wicked were swept from the earth—not without warning, for ample time was given while the ark was being built. Noah was also a preacher of righteousness. No doubt, like Jonah at Nineveh, he warned the people of the coming destruction, and called upon them to repent. But they heeded not the calls to repentance, and the judgment was not stopped. The ark was not a normal ship. It was a great vessel built for floating on the water. It had neither sail nor oar nor rudder, and it would seem that it must have been guided in some supernatural way upon the rushing waters. God is always in His world, and He always keeps His eye upon His children—and reaches out His hand to protect, to rescue, and to keep His own.

During one of the great floods in the West, a few years ago, when the river overflowed its banks and swept houses, barns, buildings, and fences on its wild current, some men in a skiff saw a baby's cradle borne along in the stream. Rowing to it they found in it, sleeping as quietly and sweetly as it had ever slept in its mother's bosom—a little baby! God had cared for it in all the perils of waters. So God cared for Noah's ark in the great flood which swept from the earth all the human race, except for this one family.

We are not told anything about the experiences with the ark during the long months; or of the way the great, undirected vessel went on its strange voyage. We can only imagine the life the family lived, while shut in those long months. Perhaps they could see a little of what was going on

outside—the rising floods, the destruction of lives, the terror and agony of the people who were perishing. Not a word is told of this, however, in the description of the appalling scenes as the waters rose. A modern newspaper writer would have dwelt at length, in graphic fullness of detail, upon the tragic elements of the story—but the Bible narrative has not a word upon this phase of the subject. Nor have we any description of the feelings of Noah and his family, shut in with the varied mass of animals that were in the ark. We can easily imagine that the life was far from ideal, in its comfort and delight. But there must have been a serene sense of safety in the minds of Noah and his household, as the huge vessel went quietly on the floods. Yet was there not also a feeling of distress—as the dreadful work of judgment went on? The Chaldean legend of the Deluge speaks of the sorrow caused by the great calamity. Noah, when he looked out upon the great sea which had swept all humanity from the earth—sat down and wept. The sense of desolation must indeed have been indescribable. No mention of this is made, however, in the Scriptural account. The Bible tells its story simply, plainly, baldly.

"God remembered Noah." He did not forget him for a moment. For a whole year, this rescued family were in the ark. For five months, the ark was floating about in the waters amid countless perils before it grounded—but it received no damage. So in all the wildest storms and floods of life—God cares for His children. He is Lord of all the forces of nature. Not a drop of water, even in angriest billows—ever breaks away from the control of the God who is our truest and most loving Friend! At length, the appointed months had all passed. The provisions in the ark were nearly exhausted. The confinement must have grown more and more disagreeable, becoming almost unbearable. The family in the great vessel had been saved—but what was to be the outcome? We are not given any hint of the feelings of the imprisoned household during the long months. At length, however, the time of release drew near. The waters subsided, and at last were dried up. Noah and his family must have been happy when they left the ark. They went out at God’s command. The earth had been cleansed of its sin. All the evil men had been swept away!

Noah’s family were now the only human beings left. They were to begin life in the new world. We can think of the feelings of the little company—as they went out of the ark and stood once more on the dry ground. They had been spared from the universal destruction and they were grateful. They had been spared for a purpose, too—to start the human race again on a new plane. They must have felt a deep sense of responsibility as they stepped out and remembered that it was theirs now to possess the renovated earth for the God who had spared them for this very purpose. They were now to lead in a new trial of the human race. What would they make of the world which was now committed to them?

They began right. "Noah built an altar unto the Lord . . . and offered burnt offerings on the altar." Several things were implied in this devout act. It expressed Noah’s gratitude to God, for the great deliverance he and his family had experienced. It put God first, in the new life on which they were now to enter. They acknowledged Him as their God.

It was really, a devotion and a consecration of Noah and his family to God. They really laid themselves upon the altar, their lives, their hopes, their hearts! Then it was the taking possession of the renewed earth for God, as when the discoverer of a new land hoists the flag of his country and claims the territory for his nation. It was a fit beginning of the new life they were to live. The race which had perished had desecrated the earth with their sins, and now this little company of

redeemed ones were pledging themselves to keep the earth pure and holy. This pious act of Noah has its suggestions also for us. After every deliverance from trouble, from danger, from sickness, from any trial; and after rising from our bed each morning, we should first of all thank God for His mercy. To Him we are indebted for every comfort, every blessing, and we should never fail to express our gratitude. Are we thoughtful as we ought to be, in thus recording our gratitude to Him from whom all our blessings come? We, too, should put God first in every new work or effort we make, in every plan, transaction, and undertaking, and at the opening of every new day.

"In the beginning God" should be the motto of all our life. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" is our Master's summing up of all practical duty. "Acknowledge Him in all your ways, and He shall direct your paths" is an inspiring rule of life with a wonderful promise added. We should renew our consecration to God at each new beginning. But are there not many who never think of God, nor give Him any honor anywhere, at any time in their lives?

We should claim for God—all that our feet stand upon. We are sent out by Christ to conquer the world for Him. Every advance we make, every gain of influence, every new success and prosperity—we should take possession of for our King.

God is glad to have us recognize and confess Him. It would have grieved Him, if Noah had come out of the ark after His great deliverance, set up his home, taking possession of the fields, and begun his work of tillage and building—with no word of thanks, no honoring of Him who had brought him through the terrible dangers. But Noah devoutly recognized the Divine hand, and God was pleased, and accepted the homage and the offering. "The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma." He was pleased with Noah's sacrifice. In the ancient worship, incense was the emblem of prayer, and as the incense burned upon the fire—it gave out sweet aromas. True worship is fragrant to God. He smells a sweet aroma. The Lord then made a covenant with Noah, saying, "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done." We live now under the blessing of this covenant and promise—that never again will He destroy all living creatures, and that "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter; day and night will never cease." This promise must have been a great comfort to Noah and his family, as they stood there and looked upon a desolated earth. Terrible had been the experiences through which they had passed. There must have been in their hearts—a dread that this catastrophe might be repeated. But here was the promise of God that it should never be. "I confirm My covenant with you—that never again will all flesh be wiped out by the waters of a deluge; there will never again be a deluge to destroy the earth." As the little company of saved ones stood there, this assurance must have been a great comfort to them. Ever since that day, too, this same promise has been a ground of confidence to the dwellers on the earth. Floods have left devastation in many places—but there has always been the abiding assurance of a "Hitherto shall you come—and no further; and here shall your proud waves be stayed!" as this ancient covenant has been remembered. This Divine word is another illustration of the truth, that all nature's forces are under the control of God. He gathers and holds the winds of heaven in His fists! The waters He measures in the hollow of His hand. The Scriptures everywhere represent God as thus directly holding and controlling all the powers of nature, so that no tremendous energy of the elements can ever break from His grasp or go a hair's breadth beyond the bounds He sets for it!

Science now explains so many things which devout people in the past have loved to look upon, as the very 'acts of God', that some have begun to wonder whether, after all, our Father really has anything to do with nature. But what is nature? It is all God's handiwork. What are the "laws of nature"? They are nothing but God's ways of working. The powers that work so mightily in earth and air—God put there! Can these powers be greater than He who lodged them in His works? We need never fear that any scientific discovery shall show us a world beyond the control of God. We know, too, as Christians, that the God who made all and controls all—is our Father! And we are sure that we shall be securely sheltered and guarded in every danger. The blessing of God makes rich. He accepted the consecration of Noah and his family, and then sent them out to possess the new earth for Him. They were to replenish it, starting a new human family that should be holy and pure. They were also given authority over the beasts, the fowls of the air, the fish of the sea, and over all life. It is a beautiful thought, that God's covenant with Noah included every living creature. It is astonishing how God's care extends even to the beasts. Think of God making a covenant with the cattle that roam the valleys, the sheep that graze in the meadows, the birds that fly in the air, and even with the insects that chirp in the fields. We know, too, that this care is real. There are promises in other parts of the Bible, which contain the same assurance.

"He feeds the wild animals, and the young ravens cry to him for food!" Psalms 147:9 "He makes grass grow for the cattle!" Psalms 104:14

Then our Lord said, "Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them!" Luke 12:24

There is even a promise for the flowers. Our Lord says, "Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field..." Of course the lesson for us from all this is the one which Jesus taught. If God cares for birds and flowers, how much more will He care for His own dear children!

God deals with His children in a most simple and gracious way. We see it in His gentleness to Noah and his family, after they left the ark. After their terrible experience they would naturally be in dread every time there was a continuous rain. But God assured them that He never would again destroy the earth with a flood. Then, to make their confidence still stronger—He made the rainbow, which probably was then appearing, to be a seal or pledge of His promise.

"And God said—I am giving you a sign as evidence of my eternal covenant with you and all living creatures. I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of my permanent promise to you and to all the earth. When I send clouds over the earth, the rainbow will be seen in the clouds, and I will remember my covenant with you and with everything that lives. Never again will there be a flood that will destroy all life!" Genesis 9:12-15

It is a beautiful thought that God allows Himself to be reminded of His covenant. He says that when He sees the rainbow in the cloud—He will remember His covenant. Every time we see a rainbow—we can look at it and think that God is looking at it at the same time and is remembering His ancient promise. The Lord's Supper is another beautiful token of a Divine covenant. Christ wants us to receive it and by it to be reminded of His love and sacrifice and of His blessed covenant of redemption. It thus becomes to us—a pledge that all His promises will be sacredly

fulfilled. It is a sweet thought that Christ, as He looks upon the same emblems also remembers—thinks of us and of His own covenant of love. Of course all this, as applied to God, is but an adaptation to human forms of expression. God never forgets. He never needs to be reminded of His promises. He requires no mementoes or memorials to make Him faithful. But His condescension to our manner of human thought, so as to make His love the more real to us—is very gracious indeed! The Call of Abraham

Genesis 12:1-10 The purpose of the Bible is not to give the history of the human race—but to tell the story of redemption. In a sense, this begins with Abraham. No doubt there always were good men in the world, although the number of them at times may have been very small. The Flood left only one family for a new beginning of the race—but the new earth did not continue pure and holy. Even Noah, whose life had so pleased God by its righteousness, that he had been spared from the destruction of the race—did not close his career without stain. The story of his fall is a sad one. The spectacle of such a man lying drunk and naked on the floor—is most pitiful.

Again the race multiplied—and the people swarmed everywhere. The tenth chapter of Genesis tells us of the races that sprang from Noah's three sons and their distribution over the earth. The story of the Tower of Babel seems to indicate a Divine overthrow of a great human revolt, an attempt to establish a universal kingdom. The confounding of languages, led to the scattering of the people into different portions of the world. It seems to have been a judgment, and perhaps was regarded as a calamity by the people themselves—but no doubt proved to be one of those great providences which mean so much in human history. From this time, the Scripture narrative narrows to the family of Shem, and in this family to the story of one man, Abraham. We are not told of any great supernatural events or experiences in Abraham's life. He lived in Ur of the Chaldees. Abraham's family were idolaters. "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Long ago your ancestors, including Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods." Joshua 24:2. Perhaps Abraham himself as a young man worshiped idols. Tradition has interesting stories of his early struggles with idolatry.

We are told that the Lord commanded Abraham to get out of his country and away from his kindred and his father's house to a land which would be shown to him. We are not told how this Divine call came to Abraham. Was there a theophany, an appearance of God in a human form, such as afterwards occurred before the destruction of Sodom? Or did God come to Abraham in some strange vision, as later he came to Jacob at Bethel or at Jabbok, or to Moses in the burning bush?

We are not told how it was, that the Lord gave His message to Abraham. It may have been in some quiet way, with no display of supernatural brightness, with nothing marked or unusual. We are in danger of letting ourselves suppose that when God comes to us—He comes always in some startling way, while the truth is, that He nearly always comes in common ways. Once He appeared in a bush that burned with fire—but evermore He comes in bushes which are not burning, and we do not see Him and go on with our irreverence, keeping on our shoes. When Philip said to Jesus, "Show us the Father," he was craving a display of glory, like a Sinai or a Transfiguration. Jesus told him He had been showing Him the Father every day for two or three years. He referred to His own life of kindness, mercy, love and holiness. Jesus Himself was God manifest in the flesh. It is always so. There is not a day when God does not come to us and show us the splendor of His

glory in some sweet human kindness, in some gentle thoughtfulness that is full of Divine beauty and grace, in some deed of unselfishness that is a thousand times more dazzling in angels' eyes—than was the fire on Sinai!

Let us not get the impression that God does not appear to men in these days—because He does not seem to come to them as He came to the boy Samuel in his sleep, or as He came to Gideon in the threshing-floor. He is always coming to men. Let us not conclude that God does not any more call us to new duties, to great tasks, to heroic missions—because He does not speak in a loud voice, or deliver His message in some startling way. The world is just as full of God today—as it was in Bible days. We do not know how God called Abraham. We know only that He called him, and Abraham was sure that He called him. In some way, it became clear to Abraham that there was only one God. Everybody else believed there were many gods. How this truth of one God came to Abraham, we are not told. The conviction may have grown gradually and slowly. Jewish tradition, however, represents the patriarch, as faithful to Jehovah from his childhood.

One myth says that he lived in early boyhood in a cave and did not come out of it until he was a growing lad. "When he first left it," says the legend, "looking up at the heavens over him, and round about him upon the earth, he began to think, 'Who could have made all this?' Presently, the sun rose in splendor, and he thought it must be the Maker of the universe, and cast himself down before it and worshiped the whole day. But when evening came the sun sank out of sight, and Abraham said it could not be the Creator of all—or it would not set. Then the moon rose in the east and the countless army of stars came forth. 'Surely the moon is the Lord of all and the stars are the host of His servants,' cried Abraham, and, bowing himself before the moon, he worshiped it. But the moon went down, the light of the stars faded, and the sun appeared again on the edge of the sky. Then he said, 'Truly all these heavenly bodies together could not have created the universe; they listen to the voice of an Unseen Ruler, to whom all things owe their being. Him alone, will I henceforward worship; before Him alone, will I henceforward bow.'" In whatever way the Divine command came to Abraham—the call was clear, explicit, and positive. "Leave your country, your people and your father's household—and go to the land I will show you." Genesis 12:1

It was a call to separation. Abraham was living among idolaters—and he must go out from the midst of them. His own family were idolaters—and he must leave them.

It was also a call to sacrifice. He must give up his country and his possessions. All true life must be sacrificial. It costs to live worthily. Jesus required His followers to leave their homes, their business, their property. All Christian growth is by abandonment, by giving up, by forgetting the things that are behind and reaching forth to things that are before. We must sacrifice earthly things—if we would gain things that are heavenly. The student who would win the honors of scholarship, must forego many self-indulgences. The Christian who would attain the highest things in spiritual life and achievement, must sacrifice many pleasures and amusements which in themselves may not be morally wrong—but which cannot be indulged in—if he is going to do his best as a follower of his Master.

Too many people who want to be Christians, do not heed this call to "leave your country, your people and your father's household". They want to have the blessings and the comforts of Christian life—without giving up the associations, the friendships, the gains, and the enjoyments of

the world. Perhaps it is this lack of sacrifice—which is the greatest impediment of the Church in these days. It does not have the power from on high because it does not give up the present world.

Abraham was called also to a life of faith. He had at first no promise of a definite country that would be given to him—in place of the country he was commanded to leave. It was only "the land that I will show you." Some people are disappointed when they do not find in the Christian life—the worldly prosperity and the temporal good they desired. The fact is that Abraham never received a country of his own—in place of the one he gave up. He was never anything but a pilgrim. Later Canaan was promised to him—but he did not himself receive it. He had to purchase and pay for the little plot of it he needed for a burying-place for his family.

Those who are called to follow Christ are promised an inheritance. They are told that they are heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, that all things are theirs. Yet many of them never receive much of this world.

We too are called to a life of faith. God has a land in waiting for us—a land that He will show us. But it is not earthly acres, houses, money, riches, ease, honor, power. We may be called to give up all of this world in going with Christ—and may never receive any earthly reward. But we will receive Christ and all spiritual blessing and good here on earth—and then in the end eternal life! The Lord promised to make Abraham the father of a great posterity, "I will make you a great nation." This promise was fulfilled. No name in all history compares with Abraham’s in honor, in influence, in greatness. Not only is he revered by the Jewish people; he is also the father of a great spiritual seed, including all who call themselves Christians. Then millions of Mohammedans also call him their father.

"And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you!" Not only was Abraham to be great himself if he would obey God’s call; he would also become a blessing to countless multitudes. This is always the law of spiritual life: blessed—to be a blessing. This is God’s offer and message to all of us. He wants to bless us—and then He wants us to be a blessing to others. When He would bless a little child—He puts a gift of love into a mother’s heart. When He would bless a class of young people or children—He sends a teacher full of warm sympathy and earnest interest in souls. When He would bless a community—He raises up a good man and touches his heart, that he may scatter benefits among the people.

Always, too, when God blesses us with gifts of whatever kind—He wants us to be a blessing to others. Nothing that we have is ours for ourselves alone; we receive, that we may dispense again. When God gives anyone money, He intends him to use it to be a blessing to the world. When God bestows upon anyone the gift of song, or of eloquence, or the artist’s power. He desires these gifts to be used to make men better and happier. Our lives should all be both blessed—and a blessing. We should never live for ourselves. We should seek always to live so as to make the world better, purer, happier, sweeter. We need God, and God needs us in order to reach others with His grace and goodness. He would bless others through us. If we fail, we check the flow of God’s blessing to others. The Lord extended the promise, so that all who were friendly to Abraham would also receive a Divine blessing. "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse." It is wonderful how God makes common cause with His people. It is a perilous thing to lift a hand against any of God’s people, for he who does so, lifts his hand against God. Christ says the same of His followers. To be kind to one of His people—is to be kind to Him. To harm a Christian—is to

harm Christ. To neglect a suffering Christian—is the same as if Christ Himself were suffering and we neglected Him. We need to beware that we never do injury of any kind—to the least of Christ's little ones. On the other hand, all kindness done to a friend of Christ in His name—is done to Christ Himself, and is rewarded accordingly. Even the giving of a cup of cold water to a disciple of His, does not go without reward.

Abraham believed God, and at once obeyed the call that had come to him. "Abram left, as the Lord had told him." He did not know where he was going, or what country was to be given to him; he had simply the call of God and the promise. But he asked no questions. He did not insist on knowing how his journey would come out, how profitable it would be, and just what he would get in exchange for the land he was leaving. Quietly, without doubt or hesitation, and without question or assurance of anything to come, he rose and cut the ties that bound him to his old home—and was off. That is the kind of faith all of us should have, whenever God calls us.

Some people insist upon seeing where they are going before they will follow Christ. But that is not walking by faith. We should not trouble ourselves to know where we are to be led—if only we know that God has us by the hand. We do not need to know what lies over the hill—if God is leading us. His guidance is safe, and we should be willing to trust Him and to do precisely what He says, and go just where He leads, without asking any questions. Abraham's life is a picture of a true walk with God.

Having left Ur, Abraham stopped for a time in Haran. His father was feeble and probably unable to travel, and he tarried at Haran until the end came. Haran was only half way to the land of promise. There is a pathetic suggestion in the fact that Terah died there. The old man's eyes never looked on the land of promise. Probably when the company of emigrants reached Haran, his feeble strength gave out and he could go no farther. The whole party then had to wait and watch beside the old man until he died and was buried. He had started too late on the long journey.

There is a lesson here for the old, that they should not defer too long any good thing they think of doing, any kindness they would show, any piece of work they would do. An old man with trembling hands planted a tree before his door. He said he wanted to enjoy its shade. But long before the tree had grown to strength so that it could cast a shade, the old man was in his grave. He planted the tree too late.

Abraham never settled down anywhere in this land of promise. "Abram traveled through the land." Genesis 12:6. That was all he ever did. He never stayed long anywhere. Abraham's pilgrim life in Canaan illustrates what every Christian life should be in this world, a journey through it—and not a settling down in it. We should be in the world, for we owe duties to it; we have blessings in our hands for it; but we are not of the world, and should never allow the world to possess us or engross us. However, that is not the way most people like to live in this world. They would rather settle down and have their permanent possessions here. Still the Bible idea of a life of faith—is not to take deep root anywhere here on earth—but to look forward for our true and eternal home, regarding this present life merely as a pilgrimage to it.

God promised the country to Abraham's family after him. "Unto your seed, I will give this land." He would not get it himself—but his children would possess it. The same history is being repeated continually. Parents toil, suffer, and wait, and do not themselves get the reward of their services

and sacrifices. They die without seeing the blessings for which they have wrought. Then their children reap the fruit of their parents' sowing and tears. Thousands who live now in ease and luxury—are enjoying the good for which their parents toiled—but in vain. We do not always remember what we owe to those who have gone before us. Sometimes a fashionable and wealthy woman is almost ashamed of her old-fashioned father and mother; but she ought to remember that it is because they worked hard and saved carefully—that she is what she is, and has what she has today. The artist was painting a portrait of an old mother who had passed away, using a photograph as a model. He proposed leaving out some of the lines in the photograph, that the face in the portrait might look fresher and fairer. But the son said, "No, no! Do not take out one of the lines. It wouldn't be my mother if one of them were missing!" Then he told the story of the mother's toils, sacrifices, and sufferings for her children, how she had nursed them in diphtheria, how she had gone without even the necessaries of life—that they might not hunger and might not want anything. The lines and wrinkles on the old face, told the story of the mother's holy love and were sacred. Every one of them must stay in the picture!

Wherever Abraham went he took God with him. "There he built an altar unto the Lord." It is good to mark the bright spots in our path, especially where God appears to us. We ought to mark our red-letter days—so as not to forget them. Some people are a great deal more apt to remember their sad days—than their bright days. We do not forget the days of our troubles—when the baby died, when we lost the money, when we had the long sickness, when we met the sore misfortune; but we very often forget the date of the great joy, the rich blessing, or the Divine help. The best way to mark these bright places, is by some act of homage towards God.

Abraham and Lot Genesis 12:10-20, Genesis 13:1-18 The story begins in Egypt. How did it happen that Abraham was there? Why had he left his promised land? We have the account in full. There was a famine in Canaan. Even the godly, living under the Divine guidance, do not have unbroken prosperity. The child of God is not promised exemption from the trials of life; his promise is, grace to meet every hard experience, strength to endure, Divine protection and provision. A famine was a great calamity to Abraham with his flocks and herds. What should he do? In his distress he went to Egypt and there found, no doubt, rich pastures. It is quite certain, however, that he did wrong in fleeing to Egypt in his need. At least there is no record of his asking counsel of God in his trouble, or of his being divinely sent there. It seems to have been a lack of faith that made him turn away from his own land in time of distress to find provision in a heathen country. A similar mistake is made ofttimes by Christian people in modern days. They take the care of their life into their own hands—rather than trust it in God's hands. In time of need or trial—they have recourse to earthly sources of supply rather than to God. God's call is not always to unbroken prosperity—but it is always a call to truth and righteousness. We must do right, whatever our dilemma may be.

Another sad thing resulted from this flight into Egypt. An oak-tree was once shattered by lightning, and in its hollow trunk was found a skeleton with some old military buttons and a pocketbook. The latter bore some pencil scratches, which, when deciphered, told that a soldier, fleeing from the Indians, had jumped into an open cavity where the tree-top was broken off. To his terror, the tree was hollow to the root, and he fell to the bottom, and there, hopelessly imprisoned, he died. His refuge proved worse than the terrors from which he fled. So it is to those who look to the world for shelter. Thus Abraham found it in Egypt. He got entangled in the world's nets—and did things that

were not right.

"Abram said to his wife Sarai—I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live!" So he resorted to falsehood to save himself. The result was a predicament from which he had great trouble in extricating himself, and from which he came with dishonor. We may learn from Abraham's experience, that a lie is never necessary nor justifiable to save us from any danger. God does not need any of our fabrications in protecting us. Truth is the only safety in any case. No doubt Abraham left Egypt wiser, stronger, and firmer in his hold upon the Divine covenant. He "went up out of Egypt." He went at once after escaping from his wretched entanglement with Egyptian authority. The narrative says he "went up." It was up in more ways than one—from a low moral plane—to the higher planes of sturdy heroism and obedience to the truth.

It is said that when Abraham returned he went at once to "the place where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the Lord." The language seems to indicate the thoroughness of his repentance—back to where he first began. Then he called upon the Lord, which indicates possibly that he had not been calling upon God of late—but had been taking his own course. Our repentance when we have sinned, should be complete; we should never stop half way. And if we have been leaving God out of our life at any time, we cannot get right again until we have gone back to His altar and started in the new.

"Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold. Genesis 13:2. God's favor was restored to Abraham, and he continued to prosper. He grew very rich. But riches do not insure one ease or worldly comfort. Indeed, as wealth increases—cares multiply! The Hebrew word for "riches" means "heavy." Riches ofttimes prove to be a very heavy load indeed! Sometimes in shipwrecks, men have tried to carry their gold away with them—but it was so heavy that it sank them to the bottom of the sea! Just so, many are dragged down into the deep sea of perdition—by the money which they gather into their pockets!

Riches ofttimes interfere with friendship. We are told in this story of a strife caused by wealth. "And quarreling arose between Abram's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot." Lot was Abraham's nephew. He had joined his uncle when he migrated from Ur. He too had been greatly prospered. The flocks and herds of the two men had become so vast, that they spread over all the land. There was not room enough for both of them, with all their possessions, in the same neighborhood. So here we see something of the evil of great wealth. It kindles jealousy and strife between men. Too often riches make men greedy and selfish. They learn to think only of themselves and their own enrichment, and do not remember that others have the same right to prosper. They forget Paul's counsel that men should think of each other's good, preferring one another in love, and then strife follows. This is a good place to take a lesson on the sin and unbeauty of quarreling. One of the aims of Christianity, is to teach men the art of living together peaceably. Love is the ideal of the true and beautiful life our Lord wishes us to live. Love is patient and kind. Love does not behave rudely, seeks not its own, is not provoked. We may well give heed to Abraham's beseeching. "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers." Strife anywhere between any people is wrong and very foolish—but strife between members of the same family is exceedingly unchristian. The lesson applies not to members of the same families only—but to Christians. We should live together in love. One of the reasons here

given by Abraham why there should be no strife between him and Lot was that "the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land." Nothing would have pleased these heathen tribes better—than a bitter quarrel between Abraham and Lot. Nothing pleases the world better—than to see Christians quarreling among themselves. It gives the world an opportunity, with apparent good reason, to sneer at piety.

Then, it hinders the progress of Christianity. A quarrel in one Church in a community destroys more good than all the other Churches in the community can accomplish! The newspapers eagerly spread the scandal, and evil men gloat over it. Nothing harms religion more than strife among its adherents. We remember that in our Lord's great intercessory prayer, it was from discord and division that He asked God to keep His disciples, "that they all may be one." The Canaanite and the Perizzite are still in the land where we dwell, with keen eye for all inconsistencies in the followers of the Master. We must walk in love, and thus prove the reality and the beauty of the Christian life.

It is ofttimes better, no doubt, for people not to attempt to live together in close and intimate relations, if they cannot live peaceably. "Separate, that friendship may remain," says an old writer. This was Abraham's suggestion to Lot: "Is not the whole land before you? Separate from me: if you go to the left, I will go to the right; if you go to the right, I will go to the left." In making this suggestion Abraham also showed his unselfish generosity, for although he had the first right—he gave Lot his choice. This is what the true Christian spirit always inspires one to do. Some people are forever haggling about their rights. If they had been in Abraham's place they would have said to Lot, "If you cannot get along peaceably here alongside of me, you can go elsewhere. This is my country, and I am going to stay here." But Abraham showed a much nobler spirit. He did not want to quarrel—he would not quarrel. He was illustrating two thousand years in advance Paul's counsel, "If it be possible, as much as in you lies, live at peace with all men." He was willing to secure peace—by giving up his own rights and yielding to those of Lot. We should always be ready to yield our own rights, rather than quarrel.

If all people were like this old patriarch, there would be no quarrels or contentions, and no need for courts to settle disputes between man and man. When Abraham had manifested his noble generosity in offering Lot his choice, Lot revealed the selfishness of his heart by grabbing the best of the land. Lot ought to have modestly but firmly said, "I cannot consent to take my choice. This land is yours—God has given it all to you. I am only accompanying you and through your kindness sharing the blessing that is yours. You choose the portion that you would have, and allot to me the part of the land, whatever it is, in which you would have me to live." But Lot did not have in him a generous or even a just feeling. He never thought of declining Abraham's great-hearted kindness. He was greedy and quickly accepted the opportunity to get the best. "Lot chose all the plain of Jordan."

There are several things about this choice which reveal the man who made it. It was a most selfish choice. Abraham had generously offered Lot his choice of the land, and Lot deliberately selected the richest and best, forgetting that he owed all his prosperity to Abraham. The Christian teaching is not to seize the best, even if we seem to have a right to the best. George Macdonald says somewhere, that the finest thing about "our rights" is that, being our own, we can give them up if we wish. Jesus teaches us not to pick out the best places at a feast—but to take humble seats. Lot

was selfish, and selfishness is never beautiful. We will always be ashamed of it—when we see our acts in their true light.

Then Lot's choice was also worldly. He saw that the Jordan valley was the richest spot in all that region, and he asked no further questions about it. He made no inquiry about its moral character, or if he did, he was not influenced when he had learned of the wickedness of the people in the Plain. He would find there the best pasture for his flocks, gather the richest harvests—and would soon grow rich. He looked no farther. No doubt he knew the character of the people in the valley—that they were very wicked. But he overlooked this fact, saw only the fertile valley and rich pasture lands, giving no thought to the terrible moral corruption of the people who would be his neighbors. As we read on in the story—we shall see the full result of the worldly choice which Lot made.

Abraham seemed to have accepted a disadvantage when he allowed Lot to take the richest part of the country; but when we look at the two men's possessions in the light of Divine teaching—we see that the advantage was really Abraham's. "Abraham dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot moved his tent as far as Sodom." No doubt Abraham's portion was less fertile than Lot's; but fertility is not all. Lot went down into his chosen valley, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. That is, he kept moving nearer and nearer to the wicked city. The next thing we hear of him—he is in the city! Then he is one of its chief men, for we find him sitting in the gate. We shall see a little later, what his worldly choice cost him in the end. There came a time when he had to flee from the condemned city, losing all that he had, barely escaping with his life, and even then besmirched with the pollution of the foul place! It is not safe to pitch one's tent toward Sodom. We would better live on the barest hills—and work like slaves to earn our bread.

After Lot had made his choice, taking for his own the richest portion of the land, God appeared to Abraham and renewed to him the promise of great blessing. In this vision Abraham was given a glimpse of the advantages that were in the rougher, less fertile portion that was left to him. He had God with him, God's favor. He received from God, promises of great future blessing—a seed like the dust of the earth for multitude, and an influence reaching over the whole world and through all time. It is better to have a rocky farm and God—than to have the fertile valley of Sodom without Him!

God's Promise to Abraham

Genesis 14-15

Lot had made a "good deal," as men say, in getting for his own such a rich section of the land. No doubt he congratulated himself on his fine fortune. We are not told whether he showed any gratitude toward Abraham, or whether he was one of those men who take all they can get, thanking neither God nor their fellow-man for any favor. There is need for cultivating a spirit of gratitude towards those who are kind to us and do things for us.

Soon, however. Lot found himself in trouble. He had pitched his tent in the neighborhood of Sodom, and one day there was great consternation in the valley when it was reported that King Chedorlaomer and his army were advancing over the hills with an irresistible force of warriors. The kings of the cities of the Plain were defeated in battle, their people were carried away as captives, and their goods as spoil. Among those taken captive, was Lot with his family and his possessions.

Perhaps Lot began to see now, the mistake he had made. His misfortune had come through his worldly choice.

News of the disaster soon reached Abraham, in his safe place among the hills. Probably he would not have felt called upon to attempt the rescue of the people of Sodom; but when he heard that his nephew was taken captive, he assembled his men and pursued the enemy, and brought back Lot and his goods and also the people of Sodom who had been carried away.

Some men, after having been treated as Abraham had been by Lot, would not have felt called upon to do anything to rescue him—but Abraham, with his large-heartedness, instantly forgot Lot's selfishness toward him and treated him as a brother. We would say that Lot would be lavish in his gratitude to Abraham for rescuing him—but we have no record of a word of thanks from him. The king of Sodom showed his gratitude to Abraham for bringing back his people—but no mention is made of Lot coming to say how thankful he was. Men who do injustice to you or treat you unkindly—are the last to show gratitude to you for kindnesses you may do.

Abraham seems to have been afraid after his attack upon Chedorlaomer. He had been easily successful—but he knew that the men he had defeated would probably return to seek revenge.

He did not want to become embroiled with them. In this time, therefore, when he was afraid, God came to him to reassure and comfort him: "Fear not, Abram: I am your shield." He did not say He would prepare a shield for Abraham, He said He Himself would be his shield. We need never be afraid of any danger—if we are obeying God and living faithfully. He who would do us harm—must first smite down God who is our shield! But there was something else that was causing anxiety to Abraham, besides the danger from the hordes of the mountains. A great promise had been given to him, the promise of an abounding posterity—but as yet he had no child! "O Lord Jehovah, what will You give me, seeing I go childless?" God comes now to comfort him in this great hunger of his heart.

It is interesting to notice the patience and kindness of the Lord in the way He sought now to encourage Abraham. "He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven." It is always a good thing to get people to look toward heaven. God likes to point us there, especially when we are discouraged, for He loves to be an encourager. There is always a bright outlook heavenward, however dark it may be on the earth. There always are stars shining there, though clouds may be all about us where we stand. Heaven is a place of hope. God is there, glory and home are there. We should train ourselves to look up and not down. The heart follows the eyes, and if we accustom ourselves to keep our eyes toward the earth—we shall grow to care only for earthly things. But if we look up, our life will grow upward, our affections will be fixed on things above, and we shall have our treasure in heaven. The stars became an object-lesson that night in the Lord's teaching, in helping Abraham to realize the numberlessness of his posterity in the future. "Number the stars, if you be able to number them . . so shall your seed be." Once before, God had given Abraham a similar promise, using then the dust under his feet as a measure of computation. Whenever he looked down at the ground he would think of God's promise and of the countless family that was assured to him. But now God gave him another sign. This time he pointed him to the heavens. His seed should be as the stars. The stars suggest radiancy, glory. He bade Abraham count them. Modern science makes this promise mean very much more than it did to Abraham. It is said that only five or six thousand stars are visible to the unaided eye—but with a

modern telescope there are millions and millions—eighteen million stars, astronomers tell us, in the zone called the Milky Way alone. The promise, therefore, was far greater than Abraham himself knew.

Abraham's response to the Lord's assurance, shows a childlike trust. "He believed Jehovah: and he reckoned it to him for righteousness." The Hebrew word for believed is very strong. It means that Abraham reposed upon God's word of promise—as a child nestles in a mother's arms. It is a wonderful picture of faith. That is what faith in God should always be—a lying down in God's bosom, a resting upon God in deep confidence. There was no human reason for expecting that Abraham should have such a posterity. He was growing old and had no child. Yet God assured him that he should have a seed as countless as the stars, and Abraham believed God's word, without question. He would not perplex himself about the time or the way the promise would be fulfilled—but would simply rest upon God, lean upon Him, trust Him—and leave all to His loving wisdom. There was no more doubting on Abraham's part after this. This is the kind of faith that pleases God. It is what Christ would have us exercise in Him. We cannot see Him—but we may trust Him, because He has assured us that if we believe in Him—He will save us, bless and use us, and bring us at last home to glory. He would have us repose upon His promises and trust our life, for time and for eternity, absolutely in His hands. Such faith is imputed for righteousness.

We need to think carefully of the importance of faith. In these days, the whole force of Christian teaching is toward activity. The followers of Christ are urged to be instant in season and out of season in the work of their Master. These are great missionary days. Christians are awaking as never before, to the duty of carrying the gospel to all lands, to every creature. Those who are taking no part in this work are not fulfilling their Lord's will and command. Young believers are taught to take up at once some work in the Church. It is here that all Christian teaching focuses. And there is nothing amiss in thus putting the emphasis on service. We must show our faith—in our works. If we believe on Christ, we must devote ourselves without reserve to His service. If the world is to be won for Christ, everyone who is Christ's friend must do his part. Nevertheless it is important that we keep ever in mind, the truth that without faith it is impossible to please God, that we are justified by faith, that it is only through faith we are united to Christ and receive power for life and service. Abraham was simply to believe God—that was all. He had nothing whatever to do with the fulfillment of the promises. Nor have we. Faith links us to God—our littleness to His almightiness, and then He does the work—not He without us, certainly never we without Him—but He in us and through us. Let us get a fresh vision of the meaning and importance of faith. The greatest measure of work without faith—will accomplish nothing. The Lord then said that His plan for Abraham's future would not fail. "I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur . . . to give you this land." God had had a plan for Abraham's life from the beginning. When He called him from his old heathen home, He had all his future in His thought. He intended then to give Canaan to his seed.

God has a plan for every life. There is something He wants each one of us to do, something He made us to do, a place we are born to fill. Paul puts this in a wonderful way when he says, "Those He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. And those He predestined, He also called; and those He called, He also justified; and those He justified, He also glorified." God has a glorious plan for the life of every one He calls from sin. Those who, like Abraham, listen to His call and leave all to follow Him—at last receive the inheritance of eternal life. Those who despise the call and stay in their sins—miss all this glorious destiny which might

have been theirs, which was offered to them and rejected.

Abraham asked for some token that the promise would be fulfilled. "How shall I know that I shall inherit it?" We all like to have tokens of love from our friends, though we never for one moment doubt their affection. When friends are called to separate for a time, they sometimes exchange gifts. A gift is not only a pledge, but is also a constant reminder, in absence, of the loved one who is ever faithful and true. A young man was going abroad for a long journey, and when he was about to leave home his father gave him a watch, bearing upon the dial plate, the miniature pictures of both his parents. He asked his son to carry the watch on all his journey, and every time he looked at it he would think of the faithful, tender love at home. The young man would never have doubted this love, though he had carried no token of it; yet this pledge made the love seem more real and was a great comfort to him when far away from home. The Lord's Supper is a similar pledge from Christ to every Christian in this world. We do not doubt Christ's love for us—but this memorial feast makes the love seem more real and keeps it ever fresh in mind. In answer to Abraham's request for some token—a vision was granted to him. The meaning of the vision is made clear. "Know this for certain: Your offspring will be strangers in a land that does not belong to them; they will be enslaved and oppressed 400 years. However, I will judge the nation they serve, and afterwards they will go out with many possessions. But you will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a ripe old age. In the fourth generation they will return here." Abraham himself would not receive the fulfillment of the promise, nor his immediate descendants. But four generations later the promise would be realized. There would be dark days of toil and sorrow meanwhile—but beyond these dark days—bright days would come.

God's thoughts are long; He plans for long periods, for generations and ages future. Because a promise has not an immediate fulfillment, we are not to conclude that it has failed. Some of God's wheat grains are long in coming to harvest. The same is often true of the Divine promises. They are long in being kept. There must be a time of preparation before fulfillment can come. We do not know what we must suffer and endure—before the spiritual beauty of which we dream when we consecrate ourselves to God, can be realized in us. We are only part, too, of a great company of believers who are to work in the bringing in of the kingdom. Our portion may be small, only a tear or two, only a word spoken for the Master, only a short day of service—and then death. It would take generations, the Lord told Abraham, to make ready for the occupancy of the promised land. Let us learn to believe—and to wait.

We do not live for ourselves nor for our own age alone; we live for those who will come after us, even generations hence. We may be only foundation layers—and may never see the superstructure rising. But no matter. If we can make a good beginning, which after we are gone shall grow to nobleness, will not the honor of the work be ours? Indeed, those whom the world honors most highly today—are the men who themselves did not see completed the great things they began. This was true of Abraham, of Moses, of John the Baptist, of Luther, of Calvin. They wrought in faith, receiving not the promise themselves—but only laying foundations for after generations to build upon, sowing seed for future harvests. The faith of Abraham was sorely tried by the long waiting before Isaac was born. The promise was repeated again and again—but still its fulfillment was delayed. Sarah seems to have lost faith altogether when she gave her maid, Hagar, to Abraham to be his wife. It is instructive to note the consequences of this foolish and unbelieving resort. Only think how different the history of the world might have been through the long

centuries—if Ishmael had not been born. From him came the vast Arab tribes which swarm over the East, claiming Abraham as their father, and the promises made to him as their inheritance. The Mohammedans are Ishmael's descendants, and when we think of their vast numbers, their hatred of Christianity, their bloody wars and persecutions, and all their opposition to the world's true progress—we see something of the evil that has come from Sarah's unbelief! The lesson for us is, never to doubt God's promise, however long its fulfillment may be delayed, and never to resort to any schemes or devices of our own—to hasten a Divine purpose. Sarah's trouble was that she could not wait. Then she thought she would help God. A little girl had been out quite a while. When she came in at length her mother asked her where she had been. "In the garden, mother." "What were you doing in the garden, my dear?" "I was helping God," the child replied. She explained that she had found a rose almost blossomed, and had blossomed it. But she had only ruined the rose. There are many people who try in the same way to help God, and try by schemes of their own to hasten the results they are expecting. The consequences to the world in the case of Sarah's impatient and unbelieving interference with God's way—show us the peril of taking our affairs out of God's hands into our own. We must trust and wait. We may trust, too, without doubting, for God's word never can fail. We may wait, for God's time is always the right time.

Abraham is called the friend of God. Once God speaks of him as "Abraham, My friend." We have in our Bible chapters a beautiful illustration of God's friendship for Abraham. It was just before the coming of the terrible judgment on Sodom, and God tells Abraham what He is about to do, giving the reason why He thus confides in him.

"The Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham this thing which I do?" The language is human. God is represented as a man reasoning with Himself as to what He should do. We see in this verse, a wonderful revealing of the Divine heart. We think of a man who has a great project about to be wrought out. Thus far he has carried the secret in his own heart, telling it to no one. But he has a friend, one he loves very much, to whom he confides everything, from whom he conceals nothing. One day he says, "I feel like telling my friend about this important thing which I am purposing and planning to do. I love him and trust him, and he loves and trusts me. To keep from him the knowledge of my purpose—is not consistent with my love for him." That is the way God is represented here as speaking with Himself about Abraham. He puts the highest honor upon him. But that is just the glory of the Divine grace—its wondrous condescension. Abraham is lifted up by this Divine act—to a sharing of the very innermost counsels of God's heart. God dealt with him as a man deals with his most intimate, confidential friend. In one of the Psalms we read, "The friendship of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." We have the same truth taught in our Lord's words to His disciples, when He says, "No longer do I call you servants; for the servant knows not what his Lord does: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard from My Father—I have made known unto you." God is ever ready to disclose to us—the secrets of His love. But we must be near to Him to enjoy this privilege. It was to John who lay upon His bosom, that Jesus revealed the innermost things of His heart. Peter, sitting farther off at the table, when he wished to learn something from his Master, beckoned to John—and John whispered the question in the Lord's ear, and got the answer.

Those who live near to Christ's heart—have closer intimacy with Him than those who stay on the outskirts of the disciple household. We cannot dwell remote from Christ, in spirit, in feeling, in character, in service—and learn the sweetest things. He tells us that He will manifest Himself to

those who love Him. "If any man loves Me—he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." Therefore it is to those who love Christ and do His will—that He will make known the secret confidences of His heart. The first reason God gives for His intimacy with Abraham and His revealing of His will to him—is that Abraham holds in his hands such great blessing for the future. The Divine purpose was to have a people trained as a holy seed, to whom He would commit the ordinances of true religion. Out of this nation the Messiah in due time would come. Abraham was chosen as the father of this new people. The divine plan for his life was very clearly marked out. He would become a great and mighty nation, and through him rich blessing would descend to all coming generations.

We cannot all be Abrahams. Not often does God want a man to start a new nation. But even for the lowliest life, He has a definite purpose. There is a place He would have us fill, a work He would have us do. If we are only faithful in the lot to which God assigns us, that is all He asks of us. It is a great thing to be what God made and designed us to be, though it be only to fill the obscurest place in the world.

Some people fail God. He requires them to do a certain work for Him, and they do not do it. It is a serious thought that something of God’s plan in the blessing of the world is in the hands of each one of us, depends upon our being faithful. What a motive this gives for being loyal to God and true to our trust! It will be a sad thing if we disappoint God, or if the interests of His kingdom which He puts into our hands suffer through our negligence or sinfulness. For example, to every father and mother—God entrusts the training of their children for Him. If they are unfaithful and their children’s lives are marred or come to nothing beautiful, they have failed God in their place.

It was a great distinction that was put upon Abraham in the purpose of God for him—that "all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him." We know how this was fulfilled. The Hebrew people, with all their faults and failings, carried blessing into all the old world. The fulfillment is yet going on in the Christian Church, in which the blessing of Abraham is still flowing through the earth. Abraham was faithful, and did not fail God. The Divine purpose was carried out in his life. All the nations of the world have been blessed in him. No other man has ever had the honor that was Abraham’s, of becoming the father of nations, carrying in his faithfulness, that which has blessed all the earth. But in our measure, everyone of us may be a blessing, if not to all nations, certainly to many people.

We should seek to live—so that others will be blessed in us. The secret lies in fulfilling the plan and purpose of God in our lives. We can do this only by entire self-effacement. We cannot live for ourselves, and also bless the world. "He saved others; Himself He cannot save," though spoken in mockery by the enemies of Christ, is a truth which lies at the basis of every life that blesses others. We cannot live selfishly—and then be a blessing to others.

Abraham had approved himself to God, by his faithfulness. God had trusted him—and Abraham had not failed him. "For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him." For God to know one is more than for us to know a person. His knowledge is fore-knowledge and choice, and the knowing of the heart, which takes the person into covenant relations. His knowing, choosing, and calling of Abraham were "to the end that he may command his children and his household after him." His mission was not completed when he had lived his own life faithfully and earnestly. He was also to train his family aright, so as to set their feet in the

paths of God’s purposes.

Many otherwise worthy men fail just here. They are good and saintly themselves, but they do not command their households after them in the way of the Divine law. Thus it was that Eli failed. He was a holy and saintly man in his own life—but he failed to restrain his sons from evil ways. Thus the good of his life ended in a measure, with himself. To make our life complete—we must see to it that those who are given to us to teach and to train, shall receive from us the good which has been entrusted to us for keeping and for transmission to posterity. Fathers and mothers are God’s messengers to perpetuate the blessings of His grace in the world. It is not enough for them to love God themselves; they must see that their children are also taught to love God and do His will. Few things are sadder in life—than the home where the parents are godly—but where the children, through lack of early training and teaching, drift into the world!

We speak much of the responsibility of parents for children. It is very great. But there is also a responsibility of children for parents. "That they may keep the way of the Lord and do righteousness and justice, to the end that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He has spoken to him." First, Abraham was responsible for the commanding of his children after him in the ways of God. If he had been negligent or remiss, and they had failed to be faithful, he would have been to blame for the failure. Next, his children must keep the ways of the Lord, "to the end that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He has spoken of him." That is, God’s promises to Abraham regarding the future could not be fulfilled unless his children were faithful to their part in the Lord’s plan. Many a child wrecks and destroys all the good that a godly parent has built up in this world.

We are thus responsible in a measure, for the success of those who have gone before us. Without us, the things they have begun cannot go on to completion. Every true man begins many things which he cannot complete in his short life, the carrying forward of which must be left to other hands. A teacher’s faithful work can come to its full fruitage—only through the diligence and earnestness of his pupils. A preacher’s work can prove effectual and enduring—only through the continued faithfulness in living and doing of those who attend upon his ministry.

Even in business the same is true. A man founds some large enterprise, building it with his own hands to great proportions, and then leaves it to his sons. Its future and final outcome is dependent upon the wisdom and fidelity of those who come after him. The Word of God has many promises for godly parents who bring up their families in the ways of holiness and righteousness; but their children have it in their power to hinder the coming of the promised blessings. Only by keeping God’s commandments, can they secure the carrying out of the Divine purposes and plans which began with their parents. Any child has it in his power to bring failure upon all that his father has lived, suffered, and sacrificed to establish. Thus children carry in their hands—the final and complete success of the lives of their parents.

God still speaks after the manner of men. He is going down to see the true state of things in Sodom. "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached Me." God never punishes without faithful inquiry into the facts of the case. We are not always so careful to know the facts—before we judge. We too often form our opinions after hearing only one side. We judge from what others have told us, sometimes from mere gossip, or from appearances. We condemn

without knowing all the facts. Indeed, there seems to be in human nature a quality most un-Christlike which is eager to seize upon the smallest reasons for condemning or criticizing others! Ofttimes things that seem to be wrong in others, if only we knew all the circumstances, would appear most trivial matters or even really good and beautiful things. A young man who made a fair salary seemed to his fellow clerks in the bank, to be very stingy and pinching. He stinted himself in his own living, boarding and dressing in an economical way that seemed quite unnecessary for one who had his income. He avoided all the social expenditures in which his friends freely indulged. But the truth about him was that he had an only sister, who lived some hundreds of miles away, an invalid, who was entirely dependent upon him for everything—as they were orphans. This was the secret of the economy and closeness in personal expenditure which his friends condemned—he was caring for his sister! He pinched himself—that he might send delicacies and comforts to her. If his companions had known all the facts—they would have honored his faithfulness and not have called it miserliness. Thus they misjudged him because they did not know all the facts. Life is full of illustrations of the same mistake in judging. We are apt to blame or condemn from only partial knowledge. Thus we are constantly doing injustice to others.

We may take a lesson from the Divine example in this case of Sodom. Of course the Lord knew the precise moral condition of these cities without making an investigation, for His eyes see into all hearts, and He knows not only acts but the reasons for them and the springs and motives from which they flow. But the representation we have here, is after the manner of men, to make it plain and clear to all, that the Lord is always just, never inflicting penalty when it should not be inflicted. Thus men were taught not to doubt the Divine justice in any case.

Abraham’s Intercession for Sodom

Genesis 18

Three travelers came one day to Abraham’s tent door. They were strangers—he did not know them. Yet he treated them with warm-hearted hospitality. That was the custom of the East. Kindness was always shown to the stranger. No man’s tent was his own alone—it was his and God’s, and its shelter and comfort must be shared with any other who were passing through.

Abraham rose eagerly when he saw the three men approaching, ran to meet them, bowed himself to the earth before them, and welcomed them into his tent, showed them the most gracious hospitality, and provided for them an abundant meal. At length Abraham learns that one of the men whom he had thus entertained was God Himself, and that the other two were angels from heaven. But at the time he had no thought that they were other than ordinary men. In the Epistle to the Hebrews this beautiful incident is used to teach the duty of entertaining strangers, reminding us that in doing so—some have entertained angels unawares.

It is not likely that we shall have such visitors as Abraham had, that heavenly angels shall come to our doors unawares in the guise of book agents, peddlers, or strangers of any kind. Yet the lesson remains, teaching the duty that we should so treat all who come to our door as friends, neighbors or strangers, in whatever garb they come, that if it should turn out that they are angels—we shall not be ashamed to remember how we received them and treated them.

William Bryant said that his rule was to treat every person who came to him in any way—as if he were an angel in disguise. It may not always be easy to do this—but this would seem to be the

Christian rule.

Jesus taught the lesson very clearly in His description of the Last Judgment, when He said that those who will be welcomed to the King's right hand will hear the words: "I was a stranger—and you took Me in;" while those on the King's left will hear, "I was a stranger—and you did not take Me in." If we knew that the stranger at our door needing welcome, love, shelter, and kindness were Christ Himself—how would we treat Him? Yet He says, "Inasmuch as you receive one of the least of these My brethren—you receive Me."

Times have changed since Abraham's day, and we are not expected to entertain everyone who comes along—as this good old patriarch entertained these men. Yet there is a courtesy which we may show to all who cross our path, a kindly spirit and manner which will at least not give pain, and may give pleasure and help. We should not treat even a beggar or a tramp—in a way the remembrance of which will condemn us should we learn that he is really an angel in disguise.

"Then the LORD said—I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." These strangers brought to Abraham a promise that in a short time, a son should be born to him. Thus the patriarch's faith received another assurance to strengthen it. The time of waiting was now almost at an end. The messengers then rose up to depart, and Abraham accompanied them on the way. The Lord then told Abraham what he intended to do to Sodom—if he found the wickedness of the city as great as it had been reported to Him. When Abraham heard the words of the Lord, his heart went out in compassion for the people of Sodom, and especially for Lot, and he began his intercession. "Abraham drew near, and said." He drew near to the Lord when he began to plead. This showed his earnestness, also his great boldness and confidence.

We may get from this example of Abraham's, several lessons for ourselves. One is that we ought to draw near to God in spirit when we plead with Him. If we are really in earnest we will do so. We should always have deep reverence in our heart when we approach God—but reverence need not keep us far away from Him. We are His children, and children do not dread a true father—nor stand far off when they desire to ask any favor of Him. God does not want us to come before Him as if we were slaves—but as His dear children. "Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help." "Having therefore boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus—let us draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith."

Abraham's intercession also showed a noble heart. Were the people of Sodom anything to him? Lot, his relative, was there—but Lot had not treated Abraham well; he had been ungenerous toward him. Yet Abraham did not nourish malice, and now, when doom is impending over Lot, he is quick to plead for him. Lot had been drawn away from God into the world—but this did not prevent Abraham's seeking to save him from destruction. Indeed, this only added to his interest and his compassion. We should pray for others—even though they have treated us badly. Jesus tells us to intercede for those who persecute us. But a careful reading of this narrative of Abraham's intercession, shows that he did not pray merely for Lot. Indeed, Lot's name is not mentioned at all in Abraham's prayer. Of course, it must have been that Lot was in his thought and compassion, in all his pleading—but not Lot only. It was for Sodom that he begged, for the saving of the city, not for the saving of his nephew alone. Abraham was a great-hearted man. A little while ago he fought for Sodom, not for Lot only, and rescued them. Now, when they were in far more

terrible plight, he intercedes with God that they might be saved. We need to widen our praying, taking in all men.

There is a striking contrast to Abraham's intercession, in the prayer of Lot as he fled from Sodom. He thought only of himself, and pleaded that he might not be driven to the mountain—but that the little town of Zoar nearby, might be made his refuge and spared for his sake. There is not a word spoken for Sodom or its people, in his pleading. The characters of the two men, Abraham and Lot, are revealed in nothing else more markedly, than in the reach of their prayers. As we look at Abraham standing before the Lord, interceding for the cities of the Plain, we are reminded of Christ as our Intercessor. He ever stands before God in heaven and pleads for us. We have a glimpse in one of His parables of His intercession for the impenitent. He pleads that the axe may not fall, that the fruitless tree may not be cut down—until He has tried in other ways to make it fruitful. Only the intercession of Christ spares the impenitent from speedy destruction. They are spared through Divine mercy that yet more may be done for their salvation. We have another glimpse of Christ's intercession in John's word, that if we sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. In heaven He carries our affairs in His hands. When we sin, He acts as our Advocate, securing our deliverance.

Abraham pleads God's own righteousness. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" He certainly will. We need not fear for a moment, that anything He does will be wrong. Some people worry about the fate of the heathen, and ask if God can be just and do so-and-so. A far better solution to such perplexity, is Abraham's, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Surely we can trust Him with all such things, leaving them in His hands with perfect confidence.

Other people have perplexity concerning the apparent lack of justness in the allotments of earth. Some godly people have little but trouble here on earth, while some very evil people have much prosperity. We have the same truth on which to rest all such seeming inequities. We do not know what is good and what is evil—in the way of earthly experiences. What we call trouble—may have more blessing in it for us than what we call prosperity. Then the end of life—is not in this present world. God may not make all things equal before death—but He has eternal years in which to adjust the equities!

Abraham's intercession was humble and reverent. "O let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak." The Lord loves importunity in prayer. He delights in the earnestness of His children, when they call upon Him. Two of our Lord's parables enforce the duty of persistence in pleading. Christ's own example in the Garden, shows us that it is right to pray and pray again. The Lord is never angry with us for being urgent in intercession for others. No doubt He is grieved far more by our lack of earnestness, than by our importunity. All Christians should pray for the lost—as earnestly as Abraham pleaded for Sodom.

Abraham first asked if God would spare the whole city in case fifty righteous men were found in it. He then asked if it would be saved though only forty-five were found, though only forty, though only thirty, though only twenty, though only ten. To each request came an answer of mercy. If there had been even so many as ten holy people in Sodom—the whole Plain, with all its cities and inhabitants, would have been spared from destruction for the sake of the ten!

We do not know how many other cities, towns, and communities in the world—have been spared along the centuries, for the sake of the few righteous people who lived in them. The wicked make sport of the godly—yet they do not know how much they owe to them in a thousand ways. Infidels, while they scoff at Christians and caricature the gospel, forget that for the very blessings of their civilization, the things that brighten their homes—they are indebted to the Christianity which they so despise! The world, even the wicked world, will never know what it owes to its saints. We do not know, any of us, what our debt is to the godly, the true, and the holy about us. Our security in our Christian community, is the result of the influence of the praying lives round us. As saints diminish in a place, and the wicked multiply—life and property become insecure. The Outcome of Lot's Choice

Genesis 19

Abraham ended his intercession, and the two angels went on their way. In the evening they reached the gate of Sodom. There they found Lot sitting in his place, ready to show hospitality to strangers. When he saw the heavenly messengers approaching, he arose and greeted them cordially and warmly. He invited them to stop with him in his house as his guests. Lot understood the laws of hospitality and failed not in practicing them. The men at first declined to stay in Lot's house, saying they would abide in the city square—but when they were pressed, they accepted Lot's invitation and went home with him. Lot then made a feast in their honor. The coming of the strangers to Lot's house became known outside, and during the evening the people of the town gathered about the door, apparently in a wild and boisterous mob. This shows the character of the inhabitants of the city, and gives us a hint of the wickedness that prevailed there. Peter speaks of Lot as righteous, and says that he was greatly distressed by all the immorality and wickedness around him; and that he was distressed by the wickedness he saw and heard day after day.

Lot is a problem. He is spoken of as a righteous man and one that preached righteousness. Yet his preaching seems to have had little power to make the people better. His own life appears to have been blameless, and yet it had no influence on the community. The people were not made better by it. It probably is not hard, however, to account for the ineffectiveness of Lot's righteousness and his preaching. He revealed the kind of man he was in his treatment of Abraham. He showed his selfishness in taking advantage of Abraham's generosity, and choosing the richest and best portion of the country for his own, choosing the garden valley and leaving the rugged hills for Abraham.

Lot's choice revealed his worldliness, as well as his selfishness. The people of the Jordan valley were exceedingly wicked. Lot knew the character of the towns in this garden spot—and yet he overlooked this in his desire for the wealth that he could gather there. Not only did he choose the rich valley—but he soon pushed his way into the depths of the wickedness, for he took his family into the city of Sodom and became identified with the place, doing business in it, one of the ruling men in the city.

One, to be an effective preacher in an evil community, must keep himself separate from the evil. He must not be a partaker in it. Those who would preach unselfishness must be unselfish. It is evident that Lot was a lover of money, of luxury, of gain. A home may be a blessing and a center of influence in a community—but to be so it must be a home of prayer, of love and of all righteousness. There are evidences that the home of Lot was not kept sacred and separate. Its

doors were open to the social life of Sodom. Lot's children made their friends among the Sodom young people. His daughters were married to evil men of the place. It is easy to see that his home had not made itself a power for good in the community. It was not known in the city, as a home of prayer. It was just like the other homes of Sodom!

All this explains the fact that however good a man Lot was in his personal life—he had no effectiveness as a preacher of righteousness. He loved the world and lived in the world and for the world—and therefore could have no influence upon the men of his community! He showed courage that night when his guests were so insulted by the wicked mob. He went out to plead with them and to try to persuade them to depart. He showed loyal hospitality, and was ready to pay any price to protect his guests. But the people only laughed at him and assaulted him. It would have gone hard with Lot—perhaps he would have lost his life—had not the angels, his guests, interfered to save him, bringing him inside, shutting the door and smiting the mob with blindness, so that they were powerless to do anything. The angels then began at once to prepare to get Lot and his family away from the city—before its doom would be visited upon it. First, they inquired about his household. "Do you have any other relatives here in the city? Get them out of this place—for we will destroy the city completely. The stench of the place has reached the Lord, and he has sent us to destroy it!" The angels wished that all of Lot's family might be spared from the overthrow which was impending.

It is not enough to secure our own safety; we must also eagerly seek the safety of all who belong to us. Lot hastened out in the darkness of the night and sought the homes of his sons-in-law and, arousing them, told them of the doom that was about to be visited upon the city. "Quick, get out of the city! The Lord is going to destroy it!" "But his sons-in-law thought he was joking!" They only laughed at him. They did not believe his message nor heed his warning. It is sad when a good man has no influence, even upon his own family! Lot had not begun soon enough to have his children trust in him and respect his counsels. A man rose in a prayer-meeting one evening, when the topic was "Home Religion," and asked prayers for his sons. In the early days of his home life, he was not a Christian. He did not love God nor honor Him. He never prayed in his home. He lived without God. He indulged in profanity, in bad temper, in strong drink. In that atmosphere, his children were born and spent their childhood. After a good many years the father came under the influence of the Spirit of God, and was saved. His conversion was genuine and thorough. He became a man of faith and prayer. He put away his evil habits and was an earnest follower of his new Master. Then he tried to bring his family to Christ. But his children had learned the ways which he had shown them by his example, and had so long lived in these ways that he could not win them to the new life he had chosen. They only laughed at his pleadings. He came into the prayer-meeting and told the whole story, asking the Christian people to help him.

If we would have our children safe with us in the shelter of Divine love—we must begin in their earliest years by teaching them the Divine commandments and by living ourselves near to Christ. When they are out in the world, absorbed in its life—it is too late to fly to them in some time of alarm and beg them to come to Christ. Lot had to go away from Sodom—and leave his two sons-in-law to perish in its destruction! At the breaking of the day the angels hastened Lot. "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the destruction of the city!" There was no hope now that the city would be saved. Abraham had prayed that if there were ten good people found in it the city would be spared for the sake of the ten. But there were

not ten righteous to be found. Yet while the city could not be spared, the good who were in it would be gathered out before the doom fell. It was so also before the flood came—the saving of Noah and his family was provided for. It was the same before Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD—the Christians were led out of the city and found refuge in Pella. So it will be at the end of the world. Not one believer in Christ shall perish in the destruction that shall come upon the wicked. Christ will send His angels and gather out all His own.

It seems strange that Lot lingered when the angels had urged him to flee. Why did he linger? Did he doubt that the destruction of the city was imminent? No! but all Lot's interests were in Sodom, all the property he had amassed. He was probably very wealthy. If he fled from the city—he must leave all this behind him, and his heart clung to it. It is hard for those who love the world and money—to part with it. We have an example of this in the story of the young man who came to Jesus asking the way into the kingdom. He was told to give up all that he had, and let it be used to help the poor, and then follow Christ. He longed to make the right choice—but he could not, and the last we see of him—he is clinging to his money and turning his back on Christ. The angels had almost to drag Lot and his wife and daughters away from their home and from the city. Angels are gentle and kindly messengers—but here was a time when gentleness would have been most unkind. "When Lot still hesitated, the angels seized his hand and the hands of his wife and two daughters and rushed them to safety outside the city, for the Lord was merciful."

If we understood the meaning of our troubles and chastenings, our disappointments, the blighting of our earthly hopes, the severe things in our lives which so often break into our ease and comfort—we would find that many of them are God's angels, sent to save us from ruin! Even stern treatment is kindness, when it saves us from destruction. Anything, however painful or stern, that tears us away from sinful attachments and brings us into the way of life—is a Divine mercy. When the angels had brought Lot and his wife outside the city—they bade them escape for their lives. The terrible storm of fire was about to burst upon the plain. What the exact agency of destruction was, is not known. Josephus, giving the Jewish tradition, ascribes it to lightning. An Assyrian legend also says that a terrible thunderstorm caused the destruction. Others say an earthquake was the cause. The Bible account is very striking and simple. "The Lord rained down fire and burning sulfur from the heavens on Sodom and Gomorrah. He utterly destroyed them, along with the other cities and villages of the plain, eliminating all life—people, plants, and animals alike!" This judgement broke suddenly and the angels had commanded Lot and his wife and daughters to, "Run for your lives! Do not stop anywhere in the plain. And do not look back! Escape to the mountain, or you will die!" They were not even to look behind them, nor were they to stay or slacken their flight anywhere on the Plain. They were not to rest—until they had reached the mountain. This is still the gospel message. We are in danger of God's judgement—and must escape from it—if we would live. We must not stay anywhere in all the plain of sin. There is no safe spot, no shelter anywhere, no place where the fires of judgment will not fall. Some people would like to compromise; they are willing to flee from some sins—but not from others. There are some professed Christians who like to stay on the borders of their old life. They are continually asking whether they can do this or that, go here or there—and still be Christians. They want to keep just as near to Sodom as possible—so as not to be burnt up in Sodom's destruction. The answer to all such questions is, "Run for your lives! Do not stop anywhere in the plain. And do not look back! Escape to the mountain, or you will die!" Even the borders are unsafe! The only safe place is the

mountain, the mountain where Christ's Cross stands!

Lot ventured to make a request, to ask for a special favor. The mountain seemed far away. The flight to it seemed greater than he could make. So he pointed to a little city that was near at hand, and begged that this might be an asylum for him. It was only a little city, and he pleaded that it might be spared from the doom of all the cities of the Plain, just to be a refuge for him. Lot did not show much faith in God, in making this request for a refuge near at hand. He certainly had not much of that faith which Abraham had, when he left all and went out, not knowing where he went—but trusting God to take care of him.

Lot reluctantly left Sodom—but he wanted to choose his own refuge. There are a great many who make the same mistake. They want to be Christians—but they are not willing to be brave, heroic Christians, cutting loose from all their old life and following Christ to the mountains in heroic ventures of faith. They are afraid to give up a wrong business which pays them well—and depend upon the Lord to provide for them. Such timid faith never reaches anything noble in Christian life or character. God may still accept us—but we are throwing away our own opportunities of doing a great work, and of attaining a high character. Little faith wins only little blessings.

Lot's request was granted, the doom upon Zoar annulled, and Lot was allowed to flee there. We should note, however, that God sometimes lets people have their own way, which seems an easier way to them—when it is not really best for them. He sometimes answers even unwise prayers and gives us what we crave, though it is not what He would give to us if we had more faith and courage and were able for the harder thing. In this very case, Lot soon found out that he had made a mistake in fleeing to Zoar, and he was glad enough to leave his unsafe refuge and go at last to the mountain to which the angels had bidden him to flee at first. God may sometimes let us have our own way, though it is not the best, until we learn our mistake by our own sad experience.

Lot's wife 'looked back'. There had been a specific command, "Do not look back!" The meaning was, that the storm of death would move so swiftly that even a moment's delay in their flight would imperil their safety. Why Lot's wife looked back is not explained. Was it curiosity to see the nature of the terrible destruction that she heard roaring behind her? Or was it her dismay as she thought of her beautiful home, with all its wealth of furnishing and decoration, and all her jewels and garments and other possessions—which were now being consumed in the great conflagration? Our Lord's use of the mistake of Lot's wife was to teach the peril of desiring to save things out of the world—lest in doing so we lose all. "It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. Remember Lot's wife! Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it." The inference from our Lord's use of the incident would seem to be that she was appalled at the thought of leaving and losing all her beloved possessions, and paused in her flight and looked back, with the hope that possibly she might yet run back and snatch some of the ornaments or gems—something, at least, from the awful destruction. "But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt!"

We should not miss the lesson which our Lord Himself teaches us from the tragic fate of this woman. We cannot have both worlds! Lot's wife could have escaped with her husband and her daughters—but she could escape only by resolutely and determinedly leaving everything she had

in Sodom. Her love for her possessions, cost her her life.

Just so, there are thousands today, to whom God’s message comes, "Run for your lives! Do not stop anywhere in the plain. And do not look back! Escape to the mountain, or you will die!" They somewhat desire to follow Christ—but their love for the world is so intense that they cannot give it up—they cannot renounce it. They must decide, however, which they will renounce—Christ or the world. They cannot keep both! In Lot—we have an example of one who was almost lost—and yet saved. In Lot’s wife—we have an example of one who was almost saved—and yet lost. She was lost because she loved the world. She looked back, lingering there until it was too late to escape.

There is a picture of an artist sitting on an ocean rock which had been left bare by the retreating waves. There he sat, sketching on his canvas the beautiful scenery—sky, earth, and sea—all unconscious that the tide had turned and had cut him off from the shore and was rapidly covering the rock on which he sat. The tempest, the waves, the rising sea were forgotten, so absorbed was he in his picture. Even the cries of his friends as they shouted from the shore were unheard. So men grow absorbed in this world, and perceive not the torrents of judgment onrolling, and hear not the calls of friends warning them of their peril. So they stand—until overwhelmed with the waves of destruction! The Offering of Isaac

Genesis 21-22 The record of the birthof Isaac is made as quietly and simply as if it had been an event of very small importance. The birth of a baby is indeed no unusual occurrence. Every moment, an infant is born somewhere in the world. Yet there was something about the birth of Abraham’s child, which made the event momentous. It had been long promised and foretold and painfully waited for. This was the child of promise, included in the Divine covenant, from whom was to spring the posterity numberless as the stars, promised to Abraham. The birth of Isaac, was one of the most important events occurring in any century of history. Yet it is recorded in a few simple words, "Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him." Genesis 21:1-3

Faith now had its reward. But little is told of the childhood and youth of Isaac. The child grew and was weaned. His weaning was celebrated by a great feast given by his father. Almost nothing else is related of him. When he was only a child, Hagar and Ishmael were sent away from Abraham’s home. After that, Isaac grew up with his mother, who was very old, and was "molded into feminine softness," says one, "by habitual submission to her strong, loving will." The offeringof Isaac was the highest reach of Abraham’s faith. For many years his faith was sorely tried in waiting for the promised heir. At length the child was born—and there was great joy. Great hopes center in every child in a true home. Every worthy father has large plans and expectations for his boy. But they were no ordinary dreams and hopes, which filled the heart of Abraham. "As the stars—shall your seed be," ran the promise. "In you and in your seed—shall all the families of the earth be blessed," the Lord had said. This lad in the patriarch’s tent was the son in whom this glorious future lived. Many a man in business, with great interests in his hands, knows with what expectations he thinks of his son as living after him, to continue his name and business. But there was far more than this in Abraham’s expectation concerning Isaac. There was fatherly love of the gentlest and truest kind, as the records show. There was a vast property to transmit to his heir. But besides these

human affections and interests, there was a new nation to spring from Abraham—and this boy was the single link.

There was also a Divine cause represented in Isaac. "Abraham saw My day," said Jesus, "and was glad." The Messiah and Christianity were in Isaac too!

It is only when we think of all that Isaac meant to Abraham, and to the cause of God, that we can in any sense understand what it cost him to obey this call. "Some time later God tested Abraham." The narrative suggests that the purpose was the still further testing and proving of the patriarch's faith. It had been put to the test already through the long years of waiting, and had not failed. Now it must be put to one other test. "God tested Abraham." The command by which he was tested startles us. Why did God demand a human sacrifice? We must remember, first of all, that in those days such sacrifices were not considered wrong. On the other hand, the highest religious act a father could perform, was to sacrifice his first and only son to God. Abraham, therefore, did not think it a sin to offer his son. If any father should now make such a sacrifice, he would be regarded either as guilty of murder, or as insane—and would be dealt with accordingly. But in Abraham's time he would have been considered as having paid to God the highest worship he could pay. But in God's judgment, then as now—it was wrong to make such a sacrifice. God wanted to teach Abraham that he must actually make this offering—but in spirit only, not in outward act. From that moment, human sacrifice was forever forbidden. "God meant Abraham to sacrifice his son—but not in the coarse, material sense. God meant him to yield the lad truly to Him; to arrive at the consciousness that Isaac more truly belonged to God—than to him, his father."

"Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' 'Here I am,' he replied." What did Abraham do when this command came to him? Did he hesitate and begin to argue the case with God? No! He quietly and unquestioningly obeyed the Divine command. When he heard his name called, he answered, "Here I am." He was ready to do whatever was wanted of him.

It was said by someone of William Carey, the missionary, that he was a man who could not say 'No' to God. He was called from the shoemaker's bench to preach, then to the mission field, and from service to service, and never could say 'No'. We call a man weak' who cannot say 'No'—and imagine that he has no will of his own. But the man who cannot say 'No' to God—is strong. "Here I am" was always Abraham's answer—to every calling of his name by God. Whatever the bidding was, it must be instantly and quietly obeyed.

We talk a great deal about consecration—but do we mean it? Consecration is no mere sentimental good feeling; it is the surrender of our will to God without question, without reserve, without shrinking. To "Here I am" came a call which cut into the depths of his heart. Abraham's God said "Take now," immediately, "your son, your only son, whom you love, even Isaac,"—not Ishmael—but Isaac. "And go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering." Remember all the Divine promises which centered in Isaac. Remember the posterity which no man could count, the glory stretching away into the future—all in Isaac. "Take this Isaac"—his name is given that there could not possibly be any mistake, "and offer him as a sacrifice." Could there have been any other test so searching as this?

How did Abraham stand the test? Keen as was the pang which the call of God sent to his heart, he promptly obeyed. "Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with

him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about." He did not stop to reason or to question WHY such a hard thing was asked of him; without a moment's hesitation, he set out to do that which God had bidden him to do. That is what we should do, whenever God asks a hard thing of us. We had better not perplex ourselves with the why and wherefore—it is enough to know that it is God's will for us. God's will is always good and perfect. If our consecration is sincere—we may never withhold anything that God asks of us; nor surrender anything for which He asks—with any but the most loving submission. A friend said to a mother whose son had been appointed as a foreign missionary, "I hope that you will be able to give him up for the work." "Oh," said she, "I gave him up to God in his infancy—but never knew until now—where God wants him." Every true Christian parent gives his child to God at birth—to be His entirely and forever. What God may want to do with the child—he knows not. God ordinarily gives the child back to the parent to be trained for Him—but always for Him, and then to be surrendered at His call, without murmuring, either for service in this world—or to live with God Himself and to serve Him in glory.

Parents may not make their own plans for their children, without consulting God. He knows what He wants them to do, and the parents' prayer should always be—that the child may become that for which God made him and redeemed him. George Macdonald says that he would rather be what God made him to be—than be the grandest being he could think of.

It is significant that before reaching the place for the sacrifice, Abraham dismissed his servants. He wanted no human eyes to look upon his agony. Perhaps they might have interfered in some way. Certainly their uncontrolled grief would have made it harder for Abraham to do the bidding of God. So he left the men behind, out of sight of the act of sacrifice he was to make on the mountain. The incident reminds us of Gethsemane. Our Lord said to the disciples, "Wait here," while He Himself pressed on a stone's cast farther into the heart of the solitude. Alone He entered into the anguish of that mysterious hour.

We all need to be alone in our times of great testing. Human sympathy is very sweet—but there are experiences in which even human sympathy will not help us; it will only do us harm, and endanger our perfect doing of our duty, in which, indeed, no human friend can ever be near to us. Alone, we must meet the sore trials, the hard struggles, the great questions of life. Others may stand near us with their cheer, their encouragement, their sympathy—but really—they are far away, and we are alone with our sorrow, our struggle or our decision.

Very pathetically reads the narrative of Abraham's preparations for the sacrifice. "Abraham took the wood . . . and laid it upon Isaac his son." Isaac was not altogether passive, either, in this day's events. Abraham did not tell him at first, what the journey meant. Until the very last moment, he did not disclose to him that he was to be sacrificed. Yet Isaac did his share in the preparations. "So they went both of them together." Together, but with what different feelings! Abraham's heart was breaking. Isaac was awed by the unexplained mystery. Then, his father's anguish must have oppressed him. The journey lasted two days. We may suppose there was little said, as the two went on together. The boy's mind was busy. "My father," he said, near the end of the long walk, "my father, behold the fire and the wood—but where is a lamb for a burnt-offering?" It was a terrible question. Abraham answered, not disclosing yet to Isaac, what was before him—yet giving faith's true answer: "God Himself will provide the lamb for a burnt-offering." In all this extraordinary

story, we see the earthly picture of another still greater sacrifice. Our Heavenly Father gave His only begotten Son to actual death without substitute, because of His infinite love for sinners. In Isaac carrying up the hill—the wood for the sacrifice in which he himself was to be consumed as a burnt-offering, we have a wonderful picture of Jesus going out to Calvary, bearing the cross on which He was to die for sinners!

Isaac's part in this great transaction, is sometimes overlooked. He must have consented to the sacrifice. He said not a word in resistance, made no outcry, did not flee—but quietly submitted to be laid upon the altar without a murmur. Thus the sacrifice was Isaac's—as well as his father's. He devoted himself to God, made himself over to God in perfect trust. He was the son of promise with great Divine purposes depending on him; if God wished him to die—he was willing to die. By this sacrifice Isaac became indeed Abraham's heir. The supreme moment was reached without any failure of faith. "Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son." Abraham stands here as the sublimest hero of faith. He knew only one thing—to obey. What terrible emotional pain it cost him—to make that long journey to Mount Moriah, then to build the altar and lay his son upon it, then to stretch forth his hand to slay him—no human heart can conceive! Yet he faltered not.

We can raise in these days a thousand questions as we study the story—but Abraham raised none. It was not his business to settle perplexities; his business was simply to obey. He knew very well—that all Divine promises centered in Isaac, and that if he were cut off—the foretold innumerable seed would be destroyed in Isaac. But this did not trouble him. The same God who made the covenant and gave the promise—now gave the command which seemed to sweep all away! But Abraham's one duty was to obey. We have a glimpse of his heart in the book of Hebrews, where we are told that he obeyed in faith, accounting that God was able to raise Isaac up from the dead. Nothing that God commands ever can bring harm or real loss to us. His commandments never cancel His purposes—nor clash with them. No painful sacrifice He ever demands of us—can possibly interfere with His covenant of love. When Abraham had gone thus far in obeying, God withdrew His request. "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from Me your son, your only son."

Abraham had proved his faith and obedience—by going straight forward, up to the very point of actual sacrifice, and God was satisfied. He did not want a literal offering of Isaac upon the altar—what He desired was the perfect surrender of the father's will—and this surrender was now made. This is the true sacrifice always, and the only one that counts with God. God is pleased far more with submission and obedience, than with the most costly offering. "To obey is better than sacrifice." The richest gifts amount to nothing—if the heart is not in them. The things we try to do for God, in obeying His commandments, even though they fail—are accepted and rewarded. God takes the will—for the deed. The testimony which God gave to Abraham after his testing and proving, is very beautiful. "Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from Me your son, your only son." God is pleased when we endure trials well—when He calls us to pass through afflictions, or to endure losses and make sacrifices. His eye is upon us in tender love. He watches us to see how we are obeying Him and trusting Him. Murmuring and rebellion grieve Him—but He is pleased when we submit to His will, though it is hard to submit, and though it cost us pain and tears. When He sees us faithful, patient, and submissive, He knows that we love Him and trust Him.

What does all this mean to us? We shall never have precisely this test of our faith—but we may have, we almost certainly shall have—some time in our life, a trying of our faith which shall be a testing of our life. We may be called to lay on the altar one dearer to us than life. He was a friend of promise. His coming to us was the fulfillment of a thousand hopes and dreams. All our future of happiness and good, seemed to depend upon him. Then we may hear the command to give him up. At first it will seem to us that we cannot possibly do it. There must be some terrible mistake. Certainly God cannot mean this. He gave us our friend—He would not take him away from us again. All the blessings of our life are in him, and to lose him—would be to lose all. But there is a higher view of life into which we must seek to rise. We belong to God—and not in any sense to ourselves. It is not our conception of life that we are to seek grace to fulfill—but God's purpose for us. Abraham thought that Isaac was to live, and that through him, he was to become a great nation and be a blessing to the world. Now for three days it appeared as if God's will for Isaac was death, not life. Abraham raised no doubt, expressed no surprise, asked no question, even showed no anguish. It was God's matter, not his. He had thought that the will of God was for Isaac to live—but if it was sacrifice on the altar instead—it must be right. Abraham was silent. When we seem called upon, to give up the friend upon whom all our happiness depends, let us remember that it was God who gave us the friend; that He knows how the friend can be the very most to us, to God, and to the world; that the thought in God's mind is our good and the blessing of others; that His will is not an arbitrary tyranny—but is the expression of perfect love; and that the very aim we seek will be reached—only by quiet acquiescence in that will. Our vision is too short-sighted to perceive what is best for us and others. The only safe thing for us—is to let God have His way. If we had our own way instead—our life might be hurt and our future darkened!

Faith is the absolute submitting of our life to God—so that He and not we shall direct it. Then let us learn that we and all our interests are absolutely safe in God's hands. No harm came to Abraham's hopes, through this experience on Mount Moriah. Abraham was a better man afterward. Isaac was a truer and worthier son after having been laid on God's altar. The promise lost nothing in its splendor and glory.

Likewise, we shall never lose anything in any sacrifice we make to God. What we surrender to Him—we receive back in rich beauty. Whatever plans of ours are broken—are only superseded by God's infinitely better plans, and brought into harmony with His perfect will. In the book of Hebrews it is said that "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death." When we give to God in simple faith—the friends and the things we love—we receive them back again, and they become more to us than ever they were before.

"Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh"—"the Lord will provide." We may write the same name over every place of sacrifice in our life. Whatever our need or danger, the Lord will provide. When we are convicted of sin, and only condemnation seems possible, the Lord will provide a Redeemer, "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." When we meet sorrow and loss, when everything seems gone, the Lord will provide, and our sorrow will be turned into joy—and our loss into gain!

Isaac and His Sons

Genesis 24-25 With the birth of Isaac, Abraham saw the beginning of the fulfillment of the Divine promise. He was to have a great posterity. For a long while, he had no child—but at last one was

born to him. Yet Isaac was little more than a link. He had none of the greatness of Abraham. One writer thinks this was partly due to his father's greatness—he was dwarfed and weakened by growing up under the shadow of Abraham. Another writer thinks Isaac's passive weakness of character may have sprung in part from his close relations with his mother. He grew up in the shade of Sarah's tent, and was molded into feminine softness by habitual submission to her strong will. Both these suggestions are worthy of thought.

It is possible for a son to be dominated too strongly and too exclusively by his father's influence, especially if the father is a man of great force of character and occupies a prominent place in the world. The sons of fathers who have grown rich, frequently fail to make of their lives what they might have made—if they had been born poor and compelled to struggle and toil for themselves. Life is too easy for them. Sons whose fathers are great in name and in intellectual power, are ofttimes hampered in the development of their own career. They are apt to live in the shadow of their father's name, to depend upon an inherited distinction, rather than upon making their own. There usually is a disadvantage for a boy in having too great a father. Such a father needs much wisdom if he would make his son's chance in the world a fair one, for true greatness of any kind cannot be bequeathed; each man must win his own greatness, through his own effort, his own toil and self-denial, his own struggle.

Then it is no doubt true also that many a son's career is marred, perhaps wrecked, by the very love of his mother. Boys are sometimes sneered at by other boys, as being "tied to their mother's apron strings." Sometimes the sneer is most unjust. Happy, indeed, the boy who is in all true ways, under the influence of his mother, if she is a worthy mother. The boy who is not proud of such a mother and does not make her his confidante in all matters—is missing one of the finest opportunities that will ever come to him. Someone was telling a boy of God's help, how all good came from Him. "Yes," said the boy, very thoughtfully, "yes—but mothers help a lot!"

Yet it is possible that Isaac was too exclusively under Sarah's influence. It is possible that he was too tenderly cared for by her, too much sheltered from care and danger, saved too much from thinking for himself, meeting his own difficulties, fighting his own battles, doing things for himself. It is possible that it would have been better for Isaac, would have made a better man of him—if he had been pushed out into the world, if he had had more contact with other boys and young men, if he had had to take more hard knocks, and measure his strength more with the strength of others.

One of the best results of college life for a young man—is his contact with other young men. It takes the self-conceit out of him—the self-conceit his mother in the very love of her heart—has probably done something to pamper. It teaches him respect for other young men's abilities. It brings out the finest qualities in character. No matter how great the educational value of the college curriculum, it is no doubt true, in most cases at least, that the part of college life which means most to a young man—is what he gets from college life itself. The best education a boy may get in private, studying alone—never can do for him all that he needs; it may make a scholar of him—but it cannot make him a man.

We are not told of much that Isaac ever did. He made no mark of distinction for himself. He dug some wells to get water for his flocks—but most of these were probably old wells of his father's which had been filled up, and which Isaac re-dug. After his mother had died, his father began to think of getting a wife for him. While his mother lived the question of marriage seems not to have

been taken up. Probably it was just as well, for a young wife might not have had an easy lot in Sarah's home. When Abraham took up the question himself, according to the custom of the country, he was wisely solicitous concerning the kind of wife his son would get. He did not want him to marry one of the Canaanite women. They were idolaters, and Abraham was to found a new nation that would worship only the one true God. Abraham's conversation with his servant on this subject is very instructive. The servant doubted whether a young woman would be willing to leave her own country to come to a strange land—but Abraham was sure God would take the matter in hand and would send His angel to influence her. The story of the journey in search of a wife for Isaac is told most simply and beautifully. It is a story of providence. God had gone before—and had prepared the way. The servant had prayed for guidance, asking that when the daughters of the neighborhood came that evening with their flocks, the girl whom God had chosen for Isaac should be the one who should give drink to him at his request. So it came about, that it was Rebekah who met him, and Rebekah proved to be God's choice for Isaac. When Rebekah was told at length the servant's errand, and asked if she would go and become the wife of Isaac, she said that she would go with him. So Rebekah became Isaac's wife, and he loved her and was comforted after his mother's death. For twenty years no child was born to Isaac and Rebekah. They had to learn in some measure, the same lesson of faith and waiting that Abraham and Sarah had to learn. At length their prayers were answered. The twin sons that were born to them gave evidence from the first of great differences in every way. They were different in appearance, and they developed difference in disposition, in character.

It was probably when they were quite young men, that the strange transaction between them occurred in which Esau, the firstborn, sold his birthright to his brother. This incident well shows the differing qualities and characteristics of the brothers. The narrative begins with the natural statement that "the boys grew". They were country boys, and they lived a free life in a simple sort of civilization. There was but little restraint put upon them. They did not have to go to school every day as our boys do. They probably had no athletic games to absorb their vast energies. Their home-life was simple. They lived very much as Bedouin boys live today. So they grew into great, stalwart fellows. Boys should always seek to grow. They should grow not only in physical stature and vigor—but also in mental power and in spiritual strength.

"And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents." The brothers developed their difference in taste and disposition very early. Esau became a hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob showed a preference for a quiet life.

If you plant an acorn and a chestnut in the same field, though the soil is the same, and the same sun shines on both, and the same winds blow over both—they will not both grow up either oaks or chestnut-trees. The individuality of each will assert itself. So it is with boys. Environment may have much to do with the shaping of character—but it does not make character. Your boy with the artist soul, will become an artist—though he is brought up on the farm among sheep and cattle. And though you keep your boy with the musical soul in the midst of most unmusical influences—the music will come out. A great English painter tells of a boy put under his training to be made a painter. One day the boy was found crying bitterly over his blotched work, and when asked what was the matter, replied, "Father thinks I can draw—but I want to be a butcher." God does not want us all to be alike—there is need in the world for every kind of ability—and the truest education is that which gives God's plan for the boy the best opportunity to work itself out.

It is said that "Isaac loved Esau". The reason given is "because he had a taste for wild game." The old man was fond of wild game, and Esau took pains to bring it to him from the field. Are we influenced in our preferences and friendships, by anything that panders merely to the physical appetites? Perhaps we are. The nearest and surest way to some people's friendship—is said to be through their stomachs! Sometimes a person of very vile and unworthy character, is received as a friend because he is "so kind," always bringing dainty things for eating. Of course Isaac ought to have loved Esau, because Esau was his son—but the reason given for it, and for Isaac's favoritism to Esau, is not a lofty one.

Then, "Rebekah loved Jacob". Each parent had a favorite child. This was bad. It is always unwise for parents to show preference and partiality for any one child. Jacob himself made the same mistake at a later time—in his undisguised preference for Joseph—but he only made trouble for Joseph. It should be the aim of parents to treat all their children alike, showing no preference. If there is special interest manifested in any particular child—it should be in the one who is in some way unfortunate, blind, crippled, deformed. In such cases there is need for special love and help—to balance the handicap of misfortune. But partiality and favoritism because of peculiar endowment or winningness, is both unwise and unjust. A single act sometimes reveals the whole of a life's inner quality. We may read some of the lines of Esau's character in his behavior that day when he came in from the field hungry and begged Jacob to give him some of his stew. Jacob was cooking lentils at the time, and the moment Esau smelled the odor of the savory dish—his hunger became ravenous. His appetite mastered him. He was hungry, and he acted like a big baby—rather than like a man. We ought to learn to keep our appetites under control and to endure the cravings of hunger with some sort of manly courage.

Esau was not a child at this time—but a man probably of more than thirty. Esau was altogether under the control of his bodily desires. He was altogether earthly. He had no heavenly aspirations, no longings for God. He was under the sway of bodily appetites. We see the same kind of man again and again, one who thinks of nothing but his meals—what he shall eat and what he shall drink! But what shall we say of the way Jacob treated his brother's pitiful craving? It was natural enough for Esau in his hunger to ask Jacob for a portion of his supper. What should Jacob have done? What would you say a Christian brother should do in a like case? If Jacob had acted as he should have done—there would have been no story of the selling of the birthright. We cannot commend Jacob's part in this business. It was despicably base and selfish. We should never take advantage of another's weakness or distress of any kind—to drive a sharp bargain with him. If a man is compelled to sell a piece of property to raise money to meet an urgent need—an honorable neighbor will not use the other's misfortune, to get the property at less than its true value. One who has money to lend—should not take advantage of another's necessity to exact usurious interest. No one should take advantage of another's ignorance, to impose upon him or to deceive him. No boy wants to be called base—yet nothing is baser than taking advantage of another boy's weakness, innocence, ignorance, or need! The Lord had said before the birth of the boys, that the elder would serve the younger. That was God's plan—but He did not want it brought about by any wrongdoing. He never wants our sins—in working out His purposes. If Jacob had been told this by his mother—he ought to have waited for God to give him the promised honor in His own way. We should never try to hurry God's providences. You can hasten the opening of a rose, tearing the bursting bud apart—but you will spoil the rose. You may force some plan which God is working out

for you—by putting your own hands to it—but you only mar and stain it. God's good purpose for you will bring you blessing, only if it is worked out in God's way.

Esau's present hunger seemed such a bitter thing to him, that to appease it he was willing to sacrifice a great future good. For one bowl of stew—he sold his birthright! We speak of his folly as if the case were exceptional, as if no other one ever did the same. But people are doing this all the time. For a moment's sinful pleasure, men indulge their lustful appetites and passions, throwing away innocence, happiness, and heaven for it! A man is hungry and steals bread—selling his birthright of innocence, making himself a thief, darkening all his own future with the shadow of crime, to appease for one little hour the pangs of hunger! The bargain was sealed. The price was paid and accepted. The birthright was now Jacob's—and the stew was Esau's. His hunger was satisfied for an hour or two—but his birthright was gone. The hunger would soon return—but the birthright never could be his again. He had traded rank, position, power, possession, headship, special Divine and very blessed promises—for one bowl of stew!

There are several things to notice in the terrible folly of such bartering. One is, that the present is not all. For the instant, it seems all. The giving of the passions or appetites immediate gratification, seems bliss. Everything is forgotten but the moment's pleasure or gain. But the present is not all. There are days, years, ages, afterward when the life will go on in shame, darkness, bitterness. It would be well to think of this—before blackening all the future—for one hour's sinful enjoyment! "Better give up my birthright than die," said Esau. "Nay, nay; better die than part with your birthright."

Another thing which intensified the folly of Esau's act, was its irrevocableness. He had taken an oath, and the compact never could be undone. In Hebrews this feature of Esau's wickedness is specially marked: "Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears." Ah, that is the bitterness of such sin—we cannot undo it; we cannot get again the birthright which we have sold. Tears will not bring back lost honesty, lost innocence, lost virtue, lost character, a lost Christ! By his reckless act, Esau showed that he despised his birthright. He did not value it. He rated it as worth no more than a morsel of food. Yet it really was worth everything to him. Men and women are all the while despising their own birthright. They are holding in one hand purity, noble character, usefulness, joy, peace, heaven—and in the other hand, some little sinful gratification, some transient pleasure, some prize worth nothing in the end! Imagine selling a priceless inheritance—for a few fading flowers. What fools we are! Shall we not seek to prize and honor—the things to be really prized and honored?

Isaac the Peacemaker

Genesis 26

Isaac was a child of old age, his father being a hundred, and his mother ninety, when he was born. His name means "laughter," thus being a constant reminder of the gladness of his mother's heart when she learned that she was to have a son. It is a good thing to be a joy, to make life a song, wherever one goes. As to character, Isaac was meek, gentle, and contemplative; perhaps not very ambitious—yet diligent, lowly in spirit, peace-loving. Isaac would probably not make a name for himself in the modern world, with its intense commercialism and its fierce driving—but God would

see quite a number of the Beatitudes shining in his character and disposition, nevertheless.

After the extraordinary incident of Abraham's sacrifice, when Isaac was bound upon the altar as an offering to God, he must always have considered his life, as in a special sense belonging to God. One who had served as a model for an artist in painting a picture of Jesus on His cross, said that ever afterwards the impression remained with him—he never could forget that for a number of hours he had represented the Master in His act of supreme devotion and sacrifice. In a still more real way—had Isaac been given to God, and had he given himself to God, and he must always have regarded his life as redeemed—an innocent animal died in his place.

Everyone who accepts of Jesus Christ as his Savior, has an experience just as real. He stands before God guilty, condemned. Then an offering is made for him. One takes his place on the altar and dies for his sins. He is redeemed now, not merely to go free—but to take his place as a living sacrifice. He is no longer his own, to do his own will—but bought with a price and belonging therefore to God. In the chapter we are now reading, we see Isaac in a characteristic phase of his life—as a peacemaker. A famine had driven him into the Philistine country. Isaac seems to have repeated two mistakes of Abraham in this journey in the country of the Philistines. He fled to another land to escape the famine, when probably he ought to have braved it out where he was, trusting God to care for him. He seems to have intended to go all the way to Egypt, as Abraham had done—but before he had gone so far—God appeared to him and told him not to go there—but to stop where he was. So he remained in the land of the Philistines.

Isaac then had the same trouble among the people of Gerar, that Abraham had in Egypt. His beautiful wife attracted the attention of the men; and Isaac, fearful of being killed for the sake of Rebekah, lied about her, as Abraham had lied about Sarah, saying, "She is my sister." The falsehood was exposed at length, to Isaac's dishonor. It seems strange, that precisely the same blot should be on the names of two men. We should learn a second time here—that the only safe way in any danger, is the way of truth. A lie will never make a safe refuge for us.

"The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy. He had so many flocks and herds and servants that the Philistines envied him. So all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the time of his father Abraham, the Philistines stopped up, filling them with earth!" Isaac was prospered in the land of the Philistines. He sowed there and reaped large harvests—a hundredfold, because the Lord added His blessing to Isaac's labor, and to the fertility of the soil. He increased in wealth and prosperity, his flocks and herds greatly multiplying. The result was envy on the part of the Philistines. It is always so. When one has special success, others envy him and become his enemies, ofttimes treating him meanly and wickedly. There is plenty of the same wicked spirit in modern times, and in any community examples of it can be found. The Philistines showed their envy towards Isaac—by filling the WELLS which Abraham had dug—with dirt. Wells were very important in those days and in that Eastern country. Water was scarce; there were few rivers or streams, and it was necessary to dig wells to get water both for themselves and for their flocks. To have a well in the desert was therefore a great benefaction. Someone asked Mohammed, "What shall I do to make my name immortal?" "Dig a well," was the answer. In the desert wastes of the East—a well is a great blessing. Neither man nor beast could live but for the wells. The Philistines did great harm, therefore, to Isaac and to the country when they stopped up the wells. The king of the Philistines at last commanded Isaac to leave his land.

He frankly gave the reason for this expulsion, "For you are much mightier than we." The king was afraid of Isaac; for with the remarkable prosperity that was attending him—he would soon be able to overpower the inhabitants of the country and drive them out. That is the way the Philistine king, the indwelling-sin in us, tries to do with anything good that is beginning to grow in our heart. He would drive it out. There is a great deal of this crowding out of the good, in the lives of Christians, by the evil that still remains in them. God is not desired to take full possession of us and to occupy our whole life. Too many professing Christians are careful not to yield unreservedly to the Spirit of God. The world is envious of Christ, and does not intend to let Him dwell in men's hearts and lives. In the time of the strifes and enmities which arose—we see Isaac's peace-loving spirit. He might have resisted Abimelech's command, refusing to leave the Philistine country. Some people like to contend for their rights. They fight against all encroachments upon them. They are continually in some contention—quarreling with somebody. They boast of the fact that they never allow anyone to impose on them. The world calls this a manly spirit—but Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." Here, twenty centuries before Christ came, we find Isaac living out this Beatitude.

"Isaac departed"—that is, he moved on when he was told to move on, rather than contend for his right to stay there. We should not fail to get the lesson: it would be better for us to suffer wrongfully, than engage in contention and strife. This is the way the Master did. He let Himself be a "way," a road, on which others walked to better things. It is thus that He would have His followers live. This is the upward way.

Isaac moved on, and now we see him clearing out the old wells which his father had dug—but which the Philistines had filled up. There is continual opportunity for us in this world, to open out old wells which have been filled up, and rendered useless. The Evil One is always trying to destroy the fountains of good in a community. It is sad to see a church building unused, falling into decay, in which once the gospel was preached every Lord's Day. It is a sad thing to know of a home where once there was a family altar which has been torn down—the old well of grace and goodness, having been filled up. It is a holy work to clear out these wells, that again the water of life may flow in them to quench thirst and to make life.

Besides cleaning out and opening up the old wells, Isaac's servants dug also a new well, and found there a fountain of springing water. Wherever we go these days, we should seek to dig a well, to start some blessing which has not been there before. Someone says that he who makes two blades of grass grow where only one had grown before, is a benefactor. No one should be content to live anywhere, even for a little while, and not do something which will make his stay there a blessing. It is not always necessary literally to dig a well—that may not be the best thing to do. But there are other things that one may do—which will make the neighborhood more beautiful, a better place to live in.

Perhaps one may plant a tree which will grow and cast a grateful shade long after he who planted it has gone to his rest. Thackeray in a story tells of one of his characters whose custom was to keep his pockets filled with acorns when he walked over his estate, and whenever he found a spot that was bare and empty—he would plant one of these so that at length an oak would grow up to adorn the place. It was said by a friend of a Christian girl who died when a little past twenty, "Everywhere she went—flowers grew in the path behind her." She was an encourager, an inspirer,

a comforter, a bearer of burdens, wherever she was known.

There are countless ways of starting a blessing in a neighborhood in which one is living. One does not need to have millions, and to found a great public library, endow a church, or open a well, in order to start a blessing. Just living a sweet life is a way of digging a well, whose waters will refresh others. To find an unhappy home—and change it into a home of love and peace—is to set going a blessing whose influence will go on forever. To change one unhappy person into happiness, one discontented man into contentment, one anxious woman into quiet peace, to help a little child—is to dig a well which shall become an enduring blessing. We should never allow a day to pass—without doing a kindness which shall make some heart gladder, some spirit braver, stronger, better. Wherever you go, tomorrow, any day—be sure you dig a well.

Although Isaac had moved on to avoid trouble with the Philistines, they persistently followed him, and wherever he settled, they continued to disturb him. Wherever his servants dug a well, the herdsmen of Gerar would claim it and try to take it. Isaac would then quietly give up the well, rather than have a struggle over it, and would dig another a little farther on. His enemies would then strive for that too, and then Isaac would again move on and dig another. All this showed Isaac's wonderful patience, his inoffensive spirit, and how willing he was to make sacrifices for the sake of peace.

Some who read this chapter may consider Isaac as lacking in manliness; but was he not doing what Jesus long afterwards, in His Sermon on the Mount, taught His disciples to do? "But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you." Matthew 5:39-42 At last Isaac got beyond the spitefulness of the Philistines. He seems by his inexhaustible patience to have literally worn out their persistent greed. "He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarreled over it." Isaac then made this well a memorial of his gratitude, for he called it Rehoboth, "room." "For now the Lord has given us room and we will flourish in the land," he said. Patience had wrought at length its perfect work.

Isaac's peaceful spirit was approved in heaven, and the Lord appeared to him at Beer-sheba, blessing him and renewing to him the promise which had been given to Abraham. There Isaac built an altar and worshiped the Lord. There also he pitched his tent and his servants dug a well. Again we have the tent, the altar, the well—emblems of a true and good home.

Jacob's Dream at Bethel

Genesis 28

Nothing is more beautiful than an ideal home. Love rules in all its life. The members are as one, in their fellowship and association. Each thinks of the comfort, the convenience, the happiness of the others. In the home of Isaac—all these conditions seem to have been reversed. The veil is lifted and the life of this chosen family is revealed as sadly divided, rent by strifes and jealousies. There is no semblance of love in the home association. There are no home ties binding the household together. The dove of peace does not nestle there. There is no common interest for which all strive. Instead, they are torn apart in bitter personal aims and struggles, plotting against each other

in most unseemly way, deceiving one another. The story told in the twenty-seventh chapter is a pitiful one, and when we remember that it was in the family of sacred promise, that all these unseemly things occurred, it perplexes us. We would naturally expect beautiful and godly living—in this family which carried in it the holy seed.

First, we see Isaac planning to give the family blessing to Esau. Yet he knew well that the purpose of God was that Jacob should receive the blessing. Esau had sold his birthright and had also shown himself unfit to be the head of the family. Still his father clung to him and sought to have him receive the blessing of the firstborn.

Rebekah, ever on the alert, having learned of Isaac's arrangement to bestow the blessing on Esau, set about to defeat it. She would stop at nothing and accordingly devised a scheme to deceive her blind old husband. Jacob played his part well, under his mother's instructions, and won the blessing by fraud and falsehood. The result was the intensifying of Esau's hatred for Jacob, and a vow that he would kill him. So Jacob had to flee for his life. For many years he did not see his home again or the faces of his father and mother. His life, too, was full of trouble. He had sought to live by fraud—and fraud followed him into his old age! The unveiling of the life of this home with its enmities, its strifes, its frauds, and deceptions—should teach us again, how unfit and unbeautiful is such a life in any home. Everything of happiness was wrecked. We cannot imagine anything gentle or kindly in the life Isaac and Rebekah lived together in their old age. After their striving and plotting so long—the one against the other—it is impossible to think of their coming together again in the confidence and mutual affection which ought to be realized in every marriage.

Then there grew a bitter feud between the brothers which was never really healed. All the hopes of marriage and home were negatived in this marriage and home. Out of this wreck and mockery of family life—comes an appeal for a home life which shall realize all the possibilities of love.

There are many homes in Christian lands, homes of wealth and of rank, in which the household life is no better than was that of this old patriarchal family. It is a shame, that this confession has to be made. Let us determine to make our homes places of peace, of unity, of purest unselfishness, a place where all the best and sweetest things of love shall be realized.

We take up now, the account of Jacob's flight from Beer-sheba. He was running away from home. It was his own fault, too—his and his mother's—that he had to flee. He had got a valuable thing—his blind father's blessing, which included the birthright with all its privileges. But he had sinned to get it—and sin always brings trouble. He had won by fraud and lying—what God would have given to him in His own time and way, without any stain or blot—if Jacob and his mother had only kept their hands off, and refrained from all plotting and scheming.

Success in life is a good thing—but we must not pay too much for it. Especially, we must not sin to attain it. It is inspiring to see men rise to high positions in life—but we want to know how they rise. Too many people get wealth and position—as Jacob got his blessing—at the cost of personal righteousness. Not every fine house in which people live, has a heavenly blessing upon it. Sometimes it has been built with the gains of dishonesty—and then a curse is written on the walls. An old man, about to die, called his sons to his bedside, and spoke to them of the money he had to leave them. "It is not much," he said, "but there is not a dishonest dime in the whole of it." A small

amount of money, every honest penny of it, is better than millions stained in the getting.

We follow Jacob in his flight, and one evening, probably his second or third evening from home, we see him preparing for sleep. It was not a very cosy place to rest for the night. "He took one of the stones of the place, and put it under his head, and laid down in that place to sleep." The rough lots in life have their compensations. It seems hard for a boy to have to grow up in poverty—but it is in such a condition, if there is anything noble in the boy—that his life will be trained into strength.

Jacob's circumstances were not luxurious that night. He was tired and homesick. His pillow was hard, his bed was cold. Yet never before had he seen such glorious things as he saw then. Luxury is not necessary to heavenly visions. John saw the wonderful visions of the Apocalypse, while in exile on the rocky Isle of Patmos. Bunyan had his marvelous spiritual experiences, in Bedford Jail. Stephen saw into heaven and beheld the Divine glory and Jesus standing there, when he was being stoned to death by an angry mob. Paul got a glimpse of his crown of glory, from a Roman prison.

It was a wonderful vision that Jacob had that night. He had sinned and he must have been most unhappy. He was lonely, too, and home-sick. But he seems to have thought of God and prayed. God is always gracious. He had His watchful eye on Jacob, for the promise to Abraham was now his. "Behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven." This ladder may be viewed in several ways. Its immediate meaning to Jacob himself was very comforting. It told him of God's mercy, friendship, and care, and of a way of communication with heaven. Although he had sinned, God had not forsaken him. There was a way open to God with free communication. But the ladder was not merely for Jacob. Centuries afterwards we stand at the Jordan, and hear Jesus say, "You shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." The ladder is, therefore, a picture of the Incarnation. It shows Christ to us as the Mediator, coming down to earth's lowest depths—and making a way for us up to heaven's most glorious heights. The ladder is a way on which human feet may climb; Christ is the way to the Father and the Father's house. "I am the way ... no man comes unto the Father but by Me." The angels went up and came down on the ladder; through Christ there is communication with heaven. The ladder is also an illustration of a true Christian life. At every young Christian's feet, springs such a ladder which stretches away through growing brightness until its top reaches the very glory of God. The figure of a ladder is suggestive. A ladder is not easy to ascend—a true, earnest life is never easy. A ladder must be climbed step by step, and it is thus, if at all, that we must go up life's ladder.

We must rise by daily self-conquests in little things. Every fault we overcome, lifts us a step higher. Every unholy desire, every bad habit, all longings for base, ignoble things, all wrong feelings, that we conquer and trample down—become ladder rungs for our feet, on which we climb upward—out of groveling and sinfulness, into godly manhood and womanhood. And there is no other way by which we can rise heavenward. If we are not living victoriously these little common days, we are not making any progress in true living.

Only those who climb—are getting toward the stars. Heaven is for the overcomers. Not that the struggle is to be made in our own strength, or the victories won by our own hands: there is a mighty Helper always on life's ladder with us. He does not carry us up—we must do the climbing—but He helps and cheers us and ever puts new strength into the heart, and so aids

every one who strives in His name to do his best, that he may become more than a conqueror, and may at last wear the victor's crown. The ladder was not empty. "Behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it." All along life's steep pathway, angels minister. They do not reveal themselves to us visibly—but they watch over us with loving faithfulness, guiding us, protecting us, helping us in temptation, whispering in our ears many a good suggestion, and ministering to us in countless ways. The ladder did not stop half-way up—it reached all the way to God's very feet. "Behold, the Lord stood above it." No plan of life is complete, which does not take in heaven—and reach up to God Himself. A picture without sky in it lacks something. No matter how brilliant life's way is, if it does not bring us at last to God and to blessedness, it is a dreadful failure! The gracious words which God spoke to Jacob, must have given him great comfort in his penitence and fear that night. "I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go." When the British mariner puts out to sea his prayer is, "Keep me, O my God; my boat is so small—and the ocean is so wide." The prayer suits everyone of us, especially the young as they step out into life. We are small and weak—and the world is wide and full of peril; we must have the mighty keeping of God—or we shall perish. This is assured in the word that God spoke to Jacob and speaks to us. Angel companionship is cheering—but here is something far better, "I am with you." God does not merely stand in heaven and look down on His children as they climb wearily up the steep ladder, waiting there to crown them with glory when they struggle to His feet. He comes down Himself and keeps close beside each one of them in all their conflicts and struggles.

Jacob was deeply impressed by the vision which came to him that night. Awaking out of his sleep, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I knew it not!" The Lord is everywhere. We talk about special providences—but why special? Every day is full of God; no event is independent of Him. He is in what we call the accidents of life. If we would remember this, it would make us reverent always, for any chance meeting or any smallest circumstance, may be God's hand laid on our shoulder.

There is another phase of the lesson. The Lord is in every place—but ofttimes we do not know it. There is no place where He is not. An atheist's child had learned something about God. One day the father, wishing to impress his own creed upon his child's heart, wrote on a piece of paper, "God is nowhere." He asked the child to read the sentence, and she spelled it out, startlingly though unconsciously, "God is now here."

There was still more of Jacob's thought. Not only was God in the place—but the place was near to heaven. "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" He was right.

Wherever God reveals Himself—is God's house, and God's presence is there. It needs no fine building—to make a Bethel. There is no spot on earth which may not any moment become a real gate of heaven. Wherever a heart in penitence calls upon God, there is opened straightway a path of light which stretches away to God and makes a glorious ladder on which the soul may climb to eternal blessedness. Wherever a saint is dying, in palace or hovel, on battlefield, or in a wreck on the sea—there is a gate which opens into the brightness of celestial joy. This sad world would not be half so sad—if we had eyes to see all the heavenly glory that bursts into it!

Jacob promised God to begin a new life from that hour. "Jacob vowed a vow, saying, if God will be with me . . . this stone . . . shall be God's house; and ... I will surely give the tenth unto You." There are three things in this vow which we should notice:

Jacob gave himself to God. This must always be the first thing in a new life. God cares nothing for our formal worship or our gifts—so long as our heart is not made His.

Next, Jacob set up Divine worship on the spot where he had been blessed.

Then Jacob consecrated his substance and pledged himself to give to God the tenth of all that God gave to him. Christians should certainly not give less than the Old Testament believer gave.

Jacob a Prince with God

Genesis 32-33

There are twenty years between Jacob's vision of the ladder—and this night at Jabbok. Jacob journeyed from Bethel, about five hundred miles. At the well near his uncle's home he met Rachel, and a beautiful love story began there. He served Laban seven years to get Rachel for his wife, and then was deceived, getting Leah instead. He was receiving in his own experience, what he had been practicing on others. Then he served another seven years for Rachel. After this he remained six years more, gathering wealth. At last he left Laban—to return to his own home. It was on the way that the incident of the Jabbok ford occurred.

He had fled from Beersheba to escape the wrath of Esau. As he now neared the old home, he began to fear Esau's anger—and sent messengers to his brother, expressing the hope that he might find grace in his sight. The messengers returned with the news that Esau was coming with four hundred men to meet him. Jacob was in great distress and cried to God for help. No wonder Jacob was afraid to meet Esau. He had treated him basely. It was twenty years ago—but the memory had not faded out of Jacob's mind. We forget base and dishonorable things done to us, if we are forgiving and generous—but it is far harder to forget such things, when we did them. Jacob was a better man than he was twenty years before, and this made him more ashamed to meet his brother. Besides, Esau still hated Jacob and might violently contest his return.

Jacob took his fear and anxiety to God. Trouble often drives men to prayer. In time of danger, there is no other refuge like the secret of God's presence. It is well if we have a habit of running into this refuge at every approach of danger or sense of need.

There are several points in this prayer which we may profitably study as elements in all true prayer. As faulty a man as Jacob was, we may learn from him important lessons in praying. For one thing, we should plead God's covenant when we pray. Jacob addressed God as the God of his fathers. God had made solemn covenant with the patriarchs, Abraham and Isaac, and had therefore put himself, as it were, under obligation to Jacob, who belonged in the line of the covenant. If we are believers in Christ, we may plead God's covenant with His Son, in which covenant we are heirs. God's covenant is a wonderful expression of His love and grace. Voluntarily He binds Himself to do what He promises; He puts Himself under an oath or a solemn and sealed pledge to give us the things that belong to our redemption. We may then remind God of His promise given in the covenant.

Another thing in Jacob's prayer, was his plea that he was in the way of God's commandment, and therefore might expect blessing. "O Lord, who said unto me. Return unto your country, and to your kindred, and I will do you good." We cannot plead God's protection, if we know that we are not doing God's will—for example, Jonah, running away from his duty. But Jacob was conscious that

he was in the way of obedience. He had not taken his homeward journey at his own suggestion—but at the bidding of God Himself. Besides, he had received a definite promise of protection and blessing on the journey. The Lord had said, "Return, and I will do you good." This made Jacob very bold and confident in his prayer.

We should always be sure that we have God's bidding for everything we set out to do, for every journey we undertake; then we shall have the right to expect and claim God's blessing and help on the road. When the Lord sends us anywhere, however dangerous the way may be—He intends to take care of us and to see us safely through. We need then only to make sure that God sends us. The path of duty—is always the path of safety.

Jacob also shows penitence and humility in his prayer, and gratitude, as he thought of all that God had done for him. So Jacob remembered God's great goodness to him. He thought of his own sinfulness, and then of all that God had done for him, and the remembrance made him ashamed of his own life. He did not ask then for his own sake—but for the sake of God's mercy. Humility is important in all true prayer. We are not worthy to receive anything from God. We deserve only His wrath and punishment. If we claim what is really due to us—we would get no blessing or goodness. Our plea, therefore, is to be, not our worthiness—but our unworthiness. That is what we mean when we offer our prayers for the sake of Christ. Our only claim is the Divine mercy. We are saved by grace—that is, unmerited favor. We receive all blessings in the same way. It is because Christ died for us—that we have a right to expect mercy and blessing. We ought not to forget this; it will keep us ever humble, and humility is always beautiful in God's sight. Pride He hates; humility He loves. He dwells with the humble—but in the proud heart He never makes His home.

Jacob then prays definitely for protection from Esau. "Deliver me, I pray You, from the hand of my brother." There is something very striking in the artless simplicity of Jacob's pleading. He is in danger from the long-nursed wrath of an angry brother. He tells God about it, just as a confiding child would tell a loving mother of some danger.

It would seem that one ought never to need to seek protection against a brother. Only love should be in a brother's heart. But here there was hate in the heart of a twin brother. It was bitter, long-rankling hate, and it was very needful that God should be asked to shield Jacob against the approaching danger.

We may learn here a lesson on simplicity and directness in prayer. We are apt to pray in formal, stilted phrases; but we ought to talk to God just as we would talk to a human father or mother. All Bible prayers are direct and straight, requests for the thing that is wanted. In our secret prayers, we may lay aside all forms of words, and, getting near to God, may tell Him in briefest sentences what troubles us, what our danger is, or our fear, what we need or desire.

It is night. Jacob has sent a present of flocks and herds to Esau, arranging them in three divisions, hoping to appease his brother. He then sent his family and his flocks over the brook, he himself lingering behind. Then "a man wrestled with him." Jacob had been a wrestler all his life, seeking to get on by his shrewdness and cunning. Now he is met at his own strong point. The prophet Hosea tells us that it was an angel that wrestled with him. Christian commentators generally agree that it was a manifestation of God in human form—a theophany. This was a crisis in Jacob's life. There was yet in him much that was wrong. He was willful and crafty. He wished to prevail with God that

night—but he could do so—only by being first defeated. Hence God appeared to him as an antagonist, wrestling with him.

Jacob was left alone for his hour of pleading. Another suggestion here is that in all the deepest and most intense experiences of life we must be alone. There is companionship, in living, at only a few points.

We must meet our sore temptations alone. We may get strength from human friendship, and may be cheered by sympathy, or nerved by heroic counsels—but the struggle itself, we must endure alone.

It is so in sorrow. Others may come and sit down beside us, and breathe tender comforts into our ears, or draw our head down upon their bosom; they may hold the lamps of Divine truth to shine upon our darkness and thus may lighten it a little; but through the sorrow—we have to pass alone. So we must die alone. Our nearest and best beloved may sit about our bedside. With holy affection they may try to sustain us. The one we love best may hold our hand; another may wipe the cold beads from our brow; another may sing to us some sweet hymn, or speak for us to God in prayer; but in the act of dying the nearest and dearest must be left behind, and we must pass out alone into death's strange mystery. Human companionship in that hour is utterly impossible. This stranger who wrestled with Jacob was no less a personage than the Son of God Himself. He came in human form, with His glory veiled; for if He had come to that sinful, unworthy man in the splendor of Divine majesty, Jacob would have fled away, or would have fallen as dead at His feet! He came in the plain, lowly form of a man, and then during the struggle of that night, revealed Himself to Jacob as a manifestation of God, with power to bless.

One lesson for us here is, that while we can have no human companionship in life's deepest experiences, there is no loneliness in which God Himself cannot come to be with us. In the loneliness of temptation, or of sorrow, He comes with strong help. In the deep mystery of dying, when every human friend has been left behind, we shall find this Friend of friends close beside us. He walks to us on the wild billows of our sea of trial or trouble, when human friends can only stand on the shore and look in powerlessness upon us in our peril.

We should notice, also, that while God came to Jacob in human form. He revealed Himself to him before the night was gone—as the Lord Himself, for Jacob said of Him, "I have seen God face to face." Had He been only a man He could not have helped Jacob. All this was a fore-gleam of the Incarnation. God came down to earth as a man, that He might get near to us in our need and sorrow; then when we trust Him and lean on Him—we find the everlasting arms underneath us.

Why did the Lord come to Jacob as a wrestler? The answer is that this was the way He could best bless Jacob. There were things in him that must be got out of him—before he could receive the spiritual blessing. The old Jacob must be defeated and crushed before the new name Israel could be given. And the Lord has not ceased wrestling with men.

People often ask why it is that God seems to be contending with them? Perhaps He is. There may be something in them of which they must be cured—before they can be richly blessed, and God comes to them as a wrestler, to contend with them, until the evil that is in them has been destroyed. Of course this Divine Stranger could have crushed Jacob instantly—but that is not the way God deals with men. He struggles and wrestles with them, that they may yield to Him—but He

does not crush them by His great strength. Why did He touch Jacob's thigh? The thigh is the pillar of the wrestler's strength. Jacob had been depending on his own strength all his life. Then God by a touch takes away his strength, that he can wrestle no more. When God contends with men and they will not yield to Him—He often touches the point on which they depend instead of upon Himself, and withers it, that they may rely on Him alone and seek and find their joy and strength in Him. Sometimes it is money, or position, or human friends, or worldly circumstances, or some sinful thing; God contends with them—but they do not learn the lesson; then He touches the thing that is boasted of, and depended upon, and it is gone.

Jacob got the victory by clinging. He refused to let his antagonist go. It was his unconquerable perseverance that at last won the victory. When Jacob could not longer wrestle, he wound his sinewy arms round his antagonist and clung to Him. It is sometimes said that he prevailed with God by wrestling—but really he did not prevail until he ceased wrestling and simply clung to the Stranger. That is the lesson God was teaching him—that not by wrestling but by clinging was the blessing to be obtained. We are not to contend with God and seek to have our own way; we are rather to yield our wills and seek blessing by loving submission.

Then came the great final blessing—in the new name given to Jacob. "He said, Your name shall be called no more Jacob—but Israel." His name was not changed—until his nature had been changed. The old Jacob never could have been called Israel. The change in nature came in the struggle, when the old, proud, self-reliant man was subdued—and he became content to cling to God and hang upon Him. The new name stood, therefore, for faith and trust in God, for crushed pride, for lowly humility, for the strength that comes only from God. The new man limped as he walked away; probably all through life thereafter, he bore the marks of the struggle that night, and his lameness was a constant memorial of the rich spiritual blessing that had come into his soul through his defeat. He was never the same man afterward. He left the 'Jacob' forever behind with his old wiliness, craftiness, deceit; and was 'Israel' thereafter, a prince with God. Every Christian carries in his later years marks of similar struggles, out of which he came with new blessings. Sorrows leave their marks; so do temptations and great trials.

We do not like Jacob—many of us. At least we do not like his nature, his disposition. Yet probably we are nearer of kin to Jacob than we would care to confess. At least there are ugly things in us—things that spoil the beauty of our character. We all have to come to our Jabbok, to get face to face with ourselves, and face to face with God—where the battle may be fought to a finish, the old nature, the old SELF, beaten, lamed, crippled—and the new nature, the new self, victorious. It will be well if in this wrestling—our name shall be changed, if it shall be no more Jacob—but Israel—a prince of God!

Discords in the Family of Jacob When Jacob returned to his father's house, Esau met him with four hundred men. If Esau's intent was hostile, he was appeased by Jacob's generous kindness. Then we must remember that Jacob had prayed to the Lord to protect him and his household from his brother's anger, and we believe in prayer. God softened Esau's heart toward Jacob. Jacob had got right with God that night at Jabbok, and now he also gets right with his brother. There is rich instruction in all this even for us who read the story so long afterward.

We saw that the home of Isaac was not ideal—but was rent with strifes and jealousies; the home of Jacob as we see it now was also full of discords. The behavior of Jacob's sons caused the old

man great sorrow. The hand of death also wrought sadness for him. Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died. There are old servants who are so faithful and true, who do so much for those with whom they live, that they become almost as dear as if they were members of the family. We should be kind to those who serve us.

Then a still greater bereavement came to Jacob. Rachel had been close to Jacob's heart all the years. Polygamy had made his home a most discordant and unhappy one—but the one abiding comfort of his life had been Rachel. On the way from Bethel a son was born to her—but the mother died in the hour of her anguish. She knew, in dying, the mother's joy that a son was born. She had strength to give him his name—Benoni, "The son of my sorrow," and then died. Her disappointment was very bitter. "She was never to feel the little creature stirring in her arms with personal human life, nor see him growing up to manhood as the son of his father's right hand. It was this sad death of Rachel's which made her the typical mother in Israel."

Rachel was buried at Bethlehem and her grave marked by Jacob. Then the family journeyed on. We cannot stop long, even for sorrow, on our pilgrimage. The baby lived and took his place as the last of the twelve sons of Jacob, completing the number. We now take up the beautiful story of Joseph. The family of Israel was still living in the land of Canaan, although they did not own it. Canaan is called the land of their father's sojournings. That was all this land was to any of those old patriarchs—a land of sojournings, of pilgrimage. They had no abiding home in it. They merely pitched their tents here and there, tarrying for a little while, then pulling up the tent pins and moving on. This is a picture of what the world really is to all God's children who are passing through it—a land of sojournings. We have no permanent abiding-place here. Our true home is in heaven. We are strangers and pilgrims on the earth. A distinguished clergyman used to wish that he might die at an inn, because it looked like one going home, the world being but like a great noisy inn—and he a wayfarer tarrying in it as short a time as possible, and then hastening away. Not all of us, however, look upon the world in just this way—but if we are children of God, why should we not? It is said that ofttimes those who walk by the lakes of Switzerland are scarcely aware of the lake, are hardly conscious that they are journeying beside it, their eyes are so enchanted by the glorious mountains that rise up, piercing the clouds. So in a sense it is with the Christian in this world whose eye of faith sees heaven's glories.

JOSEPH was of rare person of beautiful character. Because of his importance in the great events of the beginning of the nation, the story of his life is told with unusual fullness in the Scriptures. We would not say that Joseph's early environment was just such as to make a great man of him. He had not much to inspire him to beautiful or noble things. Yet, no doubt, the circumstances amid which he grew up, proved in the end—full of the best influences for his growth. His home was a quiet one. His father was now at his best. Jacob had not begun well, and he had had many hard lessons to learn, for there was much chaff in his character, which had to be winnowed out. He had to be knocked about rather roughly—to get the refining and polishing which he needed. But in his old age he was no longer Jacob the supplanter—but Israel, prince with God. His disposition was softened, his character was improved, his nature was enriched. He was a long time ripening—but at last the late fruit was compensation for all the experiences through which! he had come.

Joseph grew up in the patriarchal home in these better, softer, richer years of Jacob's, and we cannot doubt that the blessings of his father's later evening time—had their part in the making of

his character. Isaac, also, was an inhabitant of the home when Joseph was a boy. He was a very old man, more than one hundred and sixty years of age. It is ofttimes a beautiful friendship that is formed between such a grandfather and a young boy. Isaac doubtless would talk to the lad about his own experiences, about the divine promises, and not the least beneficial of the early impressions upon the heart of Joseph—were those which the touch of Isaac's hand left there.

Joseph did not always have a sweet and happy home in which to grow up. If his brothers were much in it—there must have been bickerings and strifes ofttimes, and much ungodliness. The boy had no good books, magazines, and newspapers, as our boys have. An English or American boy of this day, would have had a dreary time in Joseph's environment; but the man is the proof of his education, and Joseph came out of his training—as one of the noblest men that ever was grown on this earth! The lesson is, that circumstances help to bring out what is in the life. God will help us to grow anywhere into His own thought and plan for our life—if only we are faithful in our place. Indeed, He knows just where and under what influences you will best grow into what He wants you to be—and therefore you may let Him choose the place and the circumstances. You did not come to your place by accident; it is the very place God meant for you!

Jacob loved Joseph more than any other of his sons. There was good reason for this. Joseph was of winning disposition. He was different from his brothers, who were sons of the other mothers. Jacob could scarcely help having a special fondness for Joseph. His mistake was in showing his preference. He seems not to have tried to conceal it. He showed it openly, for instance, in putting on Joseph a garment which advertised that he was the favorite. The father's showing of his partiality for Joseph, worked badly for the boy.

There is an old fable of an ape which had a favorite cub—that he hugged to death through over-loving. Some parents show their love in like unwise ways for their favorite children, hurting instead of helping them by their over-kindness. In Joseph's case, there was at least this injury done by the favoritism of his father: that it made his brothers hate him more, and thus became the occasion of all the trouble which came upon him through them. The father's foolish mistake was no excuse, however, for the crime of the brothers. We see here again—the danger of allowing envy in our hearts to take root. At first only an unkind feeling, if cherished and nursed—it grows with alarming rapidity into hatred, often even into murder. We remember that in Cain, envy became actual murder, and in these brothers of Joseph, the murder was in their hearts and was even planned and begun.

We are all human, with human weaknesses, and not one of us dare say that such and such a result would never be reached in our case, that we never would do such wickedness. The only safe thing to do with envious thoughts—is to crush them at once, to overcome evil with good, compelling ourselves to do some kindness to the person of whom we are disposed to be envious, to drive the wicked feelings out with that love which seeks not its own, which is not provoked, which thinks no evil.

We must notice here, too, that it was in a home that this envy grew up, in the hearts of brothers. Homes ought to be places of love. Brothers and sisters ought to love each other and live together affectionately. Yet in too many homes there is sad lack of love, at least of the expression of it. There are children who do not live together affectionately, nor always speak kindly to each other. Let us learn from what is not beautiful in this home of Jacob—to make our own home-life more

Christlike and heaven-like.

One night the boy Joseph had a dream. It was a Divine fore-gleam, or intimation, of his future destiny. Both of Joseph's dreams were glimpses of the same future. We shall see as we go on with the story—how the dreams at length came true. Every young man has visions of his own future, which are more than dreams. God often shows in the first visions of early youth—the things which it is possible for the person ultimately to attain or achieve. Many a great artist has had visions in his childhood of the greatness which later in life he achieved. Many boys show at the beginning of their days—glimpses and intimations of what they afterward become.

Joseph seems to have talked rather too freely of his dreams of coming honor and greatness. Possibly he showed or seemed to show, a little self-conceit. Yet we may account for this on the ground of his frankness and simplicity of spirit. If Joseph had been older and had had more discretion, he would not have told his dreams. He would have known that other people, especially members of his own family, are not apt to take kindly to a boy's thoughts of his superiority. He was less than seventeen years of age, without experience of the world, and had not learned wisdom and tact. It is probable, too, that he did not imagine the dreams had any real meaning. He was excited over what he had dreamed—and naturally and boyishly told the family all about it. So we must not blame Joseph too much for this. All his life he was frank and outspoken, and this quality it was that made him tell at the breakfast table what his dreams of the night before had been. The father's rebuke was certainly not very serious, for we are told that the old man kept the matter of the dreams in his mind, no doubt wondering if they would some day come true. His rebuke may have been given with a desire to allay the bitter feeling in the hearts of Joseph's brothers. Be that as it may, we know that ultimately not only the brothers—but also the father himself, bowed down to Joseph in the land of Egypt. Then, too, we know that the brothers never forgot these dreams, and when at last they learned who Joseph was in Egypt, they remembered very vividly these incidents of his early boyhood.

JOSEPH AND HIS DREAMS They said one to another, "Behold, here comes that dreamer!"Genesis 37:19 When a story of providence begins—we never know what the end will be. In seven chapters will be retold the story whose beginning we have here a boy coming across the fields carrying a basket. God wanted the family of Israel down in Egypt for a few hundred years. Why? Was not Canaan promised to them as their own land? Why not keep them there? Several reasons may be given.

Canaan was filled with warlike tribes. While there were only a handful of the Israelites, these tribes let them alone. But they were now to grow rapidly, and as soon as they began to be a multitude, war would be waged against them and they would have been exterminated. God's plan, therefore, was to take them away to a place where they could live securely, and grow into a nation—and then to bring them back, able to conquer the hordes of Canaan.

There was another reason for getting them away from Canaan. They must grow up separate from the world. They were to be God's people. They were to receive God's Law and God's Word. From them were to come teachers, singers, prophets. By and by the Messiah, the world's Redeemer, was to be born of this nation. They must be a holy people, with unmixed blood. If they grew up among the Canaanites, this could not be. These tribes would mingle with them. They must be taken to some place where there would be no temptation to inter-marriages and social

commingling. The Egyptians were proud and exclusive. They would have no associations with any foreigners. In Goshen, then, while under the favor and protection of the king—they were effectually shut up by themselves. They were compelled to grow up together, and separate from all other people.

There was yet another reason for their removal from Canaan for a time. Canaan was a country of crude and barbaric peoples, without learning, without culture, without the arts and sciences. Egypt was the seat of the world's highest civilization. It had its great libraries, its colleges, its arts and letters, its culture. By dwelling in Egypt, the Israelites would become educated. They would be trained and would learn the arts necessary to fit them for self-government and for being the conservators of the revealed law of God, and the teachers of the world. We cannot estimate what the Hebrew nation has been to the world, especially through its laws and its religion. Humanly speaking, if the people had grown up in Canaan, they could never have had the influence they attained.

It was God's plan, therefore, that the family of Jacob should be taken away from Canaan to Egypt. This boy coming across the fields with a basket, is to play a most important part in all this great movement.

He did not know it. Likewise, we hardly ever know when we are being used of God in doing important things. Joseph had been sent on an errand. He was seventeen, bright, beautiful, innocent, happy. His mother was dead. He had only one own brother Benjamin, four or five years old. He had ten half-brothers, and with these he was unpopular.

One reason for this unpopularity, was that he was his father's favorite. Doubtless he was better than his brothers. Then he was Rachel's son, and Jacob loved Rachel most tenderly. Jacob loved Joseph best of his sons and did not hide the fact. Indeed he seems to have taken pains to show it. He gave him a coat which advertised to all, that he was his favorite.

Favoritism in a family, is most unwise. It is wrong in itself. The dull child—not the bright one; the weak, faulty child—not the strong, perfect one—really needs the most praise and encouragement, the most help and favor. Also, favoritism usually spoils the child, cultivating pride, self-conceit. Not many of us can stand petting, pampering, and flattery. It is unjust to the others, too—to choose one for special preference and distinction. Once more, favoritism naturally draws upon the favorite, the hatred and envy of the others.

There was a timid knock at a mother's bedroom door early one morning. "Is that you, pet?" asked the mother from within. "No; it isn't pet; it's only me," was the pained answer. But the sorrowful tone cured the mother. There was no more a "pet" in that household. There should not be a "pet" in any home.

"Behold, here comes that dreamer!" Joseph had had some dreams. His brothers' sheaves bowed down to his sheaf. The sun, moon, and stars made obeisance to him. With boyish simplicity, he told his dreams—and his brothers never forgave him. The dreams were divine intimations of the boy's future, which came true by and by. All we need to notice at present, however, is that the dreams and the boy's telling of them—made the brothers hate Joseph the more. The merest hints of his present or possible superiority over them—made their envy the more bitter.

Sixty miles away these brothers were pasturing their flocks. The old father wanted to know how they fared. So he sent Joseph to carry messages and a basket of good things to them, and to bring back word again. It was a long, lonely journey for a boy of his years, but at last he was near the end of his journey. Far off the brothers saw him coming. They knew him by his coat of bright colors. "Behold, here comes that dreamer!" they said, one to another. "Come now, and let us slay him, and cast him into one of the pits; and we will say, 'Some evil beast has devoured him.'"

Here we must pause and take a lesson on the fearful danger of allowing envious thoughts to stay even an hour in our heart. Envy grew to murder in these brothers! We see here the wisdom of Paul's counsel, not to let the sun go down upon our anger. We should instantly crush the merest beginnings of envy. The hour of evening prayer, when we bow at God's feet, should always be a time for getting right all that may have gone wrong in us during the day. Then every feeling of bitterness against any person should be cast out of our heart. It should be a time for forgetting all injury, and unkindness, all hurt done us by anyone.

Joseph was not killed. His errand was not yet finished. Instead of a tragedy, came a providence. Reuben, one of the brothers, was not ready for murder. He proposed that they cast the boy into a dry pit. Reuben intended to come and rescue him afterwards. The suggestion was accepted. So they cast Joseph into the pit, and leaving him there, they went to their accustomed meal. "They sat down to eat bread." But there was an Eye on the weeping, shivering lad—and an Ear that heard his piteous cries in the dark, dank pit. Then there was another providence. The heartless brothers, as they ate and chuckled over their shrewdness in getting the hated dreamer out of their way, looked up and saw a caravan coming. It was going down to Egypt. A bright thought struck one of the brothers. Judah proposed that they sell Joseph to these passing merchants. It would be a good thing for two reasons. They would get rid of the boy's blood—and blood is always a troublesome thing on one's hands. It will not wash off. Besides, there would be a little money in the transaction. So the boy was hurriedly drawn up out of the pit, and after some parleying with the traders, was sold to them for some twelve dollars. The caravan moved away, carrying the dreamer farther on his errand. The brothers returned to their unfinished meal. Reuben, who had been waiting apart for an opportunity to rescue Joseph, came, and finding the pit empty, supposed the lad had been killed, and tore his clothes in bitter grief. The other brothers, knowing that some news must be sent to the old father, killed a young goat, and dipping the hated coat in the blood, sent it home, innocently explaining: "We found this coat, in this condition, in the field. Does our father think it is his son's coat?" The father recognized it and drew the inference the cruel brothers meant him to draw. "Joseph is without doubt, torn in pieces!" So, for more than twenty years he thought that his dear son Joseph had been torn to pieces—and all the years were filled with sore mourning.

Dropping the thread of the story for the present, let us gather some practical lessons, as we see the boy carried off to a distant land as a slave.

1. When we say our good-byes at our home doors in the morning, though it be but for a few hours separation, as we think—we do not know how long it may be before we shall meet again. Joseph went out from his father's door that morning, on a common errand, for but a few days' absence. We can picture the parting. All the household was much interested in the lad's journey. All sent messages to the absent brothers. The old grandfather Isaac was still living a very aged man, and

he would have messages and a blessing to send. Little Benjamin would have a deep interest in his big brother's journey, and would want to go with him. All the family gathered about the door to see Joseph off, and stood there watching him, calling and waving their good-byes, until he was out of sight. But no one was anxious. In a few days Joseph would be home again—so they thought. No one dreamed that for more than twenty years, that bright happy face would not be seen, that some of them would never see him again.

We must not miss the lesson. Even our most casual partings may be for years, and perhaps forever. When we part at our doors in the morning, one to go to business, one to school, one on a short journey, others to stay in the home—we do not know when we shall all look again in each other's face. We expect to gather at the table at noon, or round the fireside in the evening—but are we sure of it? Many go out in the morning—who never come home at night!

If Jacob and Joseph and the other members of that family had known that morning, that for more than twenty years they would not meet again, would not their parting have been very tender? Yet life is quite as uncertain for us and our households, as it was for that patriarchal family. Any hurried good-bye may be for years, and perhaps final; surely then it should be loving. We should never separate in an angry or impatient mood, with unforgiveness, bitterness, or misunderstanding. We should not say our good-byes coldly, carelessly—but always with thoughtful love and gentle feeling.

Suppose that the one who goes out—should be brought home dead; or should return to find the one dead—whom he left at the door. If the parting were with harsh word or look or thought—how must the surviving one grieve, when sitting by the flower-covered coffin, to remember the last word or look! The flowers then will not atone for the coldness of the parting on the doorstep, nor will they take the pang out of the bereft heart. We should make every parting with home loved ones, every briefest good-bye, sweet enough, kindly enough, for a last farewell, should it prove to be the last, as it may well be.

2. We never know when we set out in the morning, what misfortune or calamity may befall us before the night comes. See that happy lad leaving Hebron, and passing on his way to Shechem. He had no apprehension of danger. With a pure heart and a quiet trust in God, he went along without fear. He was expecting a kindly welcome from his brothers, certainly he never expected for a moment, the cruel reception they gave him. After a short visit away, he hoped to return to the old home, where there was so much love for him. Yet see to what circumstance, he was blindly going! So we all go on continually, unaware of what lies before us. We spend today in gladness—not knowing that tomorrow will bring us tears. We move on through the flowers, heedless of danger—not suspecting that at our next step we may fall into some hidden pit. We boast of our sturdy health, our rugged strength—not dreaming that tomorrow we may be stricken down by disease. We rejoice in our prosperity, unconscious of the fact that disaster may come any hour and sweep it all away! We set out on the happy journey, without thought of the possible accident on the way—which may leave us crippled or dead.

What is the lesson? Should this uncertainty of all human affairs, sadden our life? Should we tremble at every step we take, lest the next may be into some grief or calamity? No! That is not the lesson. That would take all the joy and all the energy out of life for us. God does not want us to be unhappy while the sun is shining—because by and by it will pass under a cloud. He does not want

us to bring in tomorrow's possible shadows—to darken our bright today. He does not want us to dim and spoil youth's gladness—by gloomy forecastings of the trials of old age. He wants us to live in today, to enjoy its blessings, and do its work well—though tomorrow may bring calamity. "Sufficient unto the day, is the evil thereof."

How can we do this, you ask, if we know that any bright future has in it, possibilities of sudden darkness? Only by calm, quiet, trustful faith in God, and obedience to him at every step.

We sometimes wish we could see into the future—that we might choose our way, and avoid the rough paths. But suppose that Joseph had been told, on his way to Dothan, how his brothers would treat him, and that he would be sold as a slave; would he have gone forward? Would he not have turned back? Then what a wonderful story of God's providence would have been spoiled! Joseph himself would have missed all that bright future, which lay beyond the period of wrongs and cruelties into which he first plunged. Then think what his people would have missed, what the world would have missed.

It would not be well for us—to know what is before us; we would often meddle with God's plans and spoil them, marring our own future, and harming others. Nor is it well for us to be made afraid and overcautious, by the thought of our day's experiences. Yet this uncertainty ought to hold us near the side of Christ at all times. Nothing can ever go really wrong with us—if he is leading us, and we are quietly following him. Though he takes us through pain, misfortune, suffering—it is because that is the path to true blessing and good.

3. Take a lesson on the heartlessness of some people. When these brothers had cast Joseph into the pit, they sat down to eat bread. Not far from where they were feasting, lay their own brother, suffering untold anguish. They had decided not to kill him—but to leave him in this pit to die. They seem to have forgotten that this was no less cruel, than if they had slain him outright!

We see how envy freezes out of the heart—all warmth of affection, turning it to stone. Unmoved by the thought of their brother's suffering, and indifferent to his cries of anguish which rang in their ears—these men sat down to selfish enjoyment. Let us study the picture closely. A boy who had left his happy home only two or three days since, finds himself in a deep dark pit. He cannot escape out of it. His feet sink in the mire. Slimy creatures creep about him. He can only die. Does not a like fate befall many a young man in these days? Life all around us, is full of worse pits, deeper because their bottom is hell—into which thousands of young men, and young women, too, are cast.

Brothers cast Joseph into this deep pit. There are brothers who evermore are dragging down their brothers into dark snares. Are we our brothers' keeper? Yes! yet see how many who bear the image of God and who ought to be the loyal guardians of other lives, rest not unless they cause someone to sin. It is a terrible thing to sin, to debauch one's own conscience, to stain one's own soul. But it is a far worse thing to cause others to sin, to put the wine-cup to pure lips, to whisper impure, unholy words into innocent ears. Yet there are brothers who are leading brothers into snares, and causing the young and innocent to fall into evil pits!

Every drinking saloon is a pit, a thousand times darker and more deadly than Joseph's, into which hundreds of the young boys of the country are entrapped, never to come out as they went in. Every gambling den is such a pit, where honor and truth and character are the real ventures,

where immortal souls are the fortunes lost. Every house of the immoral woman is such a pit. "Her feet go down to death! Her house is the way to hell."

Men hang red lanterns on the streets where there are pitfalls. Red lights should be hoisted over these pitfalls of death, which are open everywhere. He who loves his own soul, who loves peace, honor, purity, life—should shun them! Those who fall into them—can only be rescued by the strong hand of Almighty God. But we are not done with this picture. See the brothers feasting while this lad, their own brother, lies yonder in the pit! "How cruel! How heartless!" one says. Yes—but is there no such heartlessness in our own life? The world is full of sorrow, suffering, need. Go where we may—we find anguish and distress. Here, it is sickness. There, the fluttering crape tells of death within. Inside this door, it is poverty—little children are crying for bread. Next door it is sin, drunkenness, vice, crime—turning God's blessing of life to cursing. On all hands are our brothers, who have fallen into sin's pits and are perishing there in the darkness! There are homes close to ours, where there is no prayer—and that is worse than no bread. There are little children on our streets, who are being lured into hell's pitfalls—and no one seems to care. This sad, heart-rending picture of the bright, pure, noble boy, in the pit at Dothan, is no strange sight to heaven's angels!

What are we doing? Are we any less heartless than these inhuman brothers were? Do we not sit down to our meals and eat them with relish, unmoved by the cries of need that come in at our windows? "Heartless," does any one say they were? Yes; but is much of our Christian charity any better? In one home, feasting, affluence, luxury—and at the back gate, beggary timidly knocking. Out in the chill darkness the child of poverty crouches, peering into the brilliant parlors. But where are the hearts that have pity?

Souls are perishing. Young men are being snared in pits of hell. Young women are being lured away to wretchedness and degradation. Children are being entrapped and dragged into pits of shame. And what are we doing? What are the greater number of Christian people doing? Are we trying to rescue these ensnared ones? In our own hearts, we have Christ and the joy of his love and grace. We sit down to our communion tables and feast on heavenly provision. We sing our songs. We clasp our hands in Christian love. But do the cries of the perishing outside, ever break upon our ears as we sit there? Do the visions of our brothers and sisters in their peril and woe, never flit across our eyes, as we look with rapture into the blessed face of Jesus?

There is wonderful response to calls for physical relief when people are in need. Christian people open their hands to the hungry. But there are sorer, bitterer needs. In sin's dark pits where they have fallen, there are dying ones, with none to care. Is there no pity in our heart for these? They are all about us brothers, fallen into pits, brothers, cast into pits by brothers—and with none to heed their cries. If we found a dog, or an ox, or a horse, fallen into a pit—we would hasten to lift it out. Shall we pass by our brothers and not lend a hand to save them?

One tells of a man in a New England town who walks about always with his head bent down as if in sad dejection. Once this man was captain of an ocean vessel. One day, as his ship was speeding through the waters, a signal of distress was observed some distance away. It was seen that there was a man on the piece of wreck. To go to his rescue the ship would have to be stopped and turned back, losing much time. "No," said the captain; "some other vessel will pick him up." He speeded on and was in port in good time, and was commended for his swift passage. But the captain could not get out of his mind the memory of that signal of distress out there on the wild

sea, and the sight of that one man on the piece of wreck left there to perish. By day and by night that picture haunted him. He has never gone to sea since; and when he walks on the street, people know him by his downcast face, and remember the pathetic story of his last voyage. As we are hurrying on these busy days, do we see no signals of distress on life's broad sea? Do we hear no cries no wails of anguish from souls that are out on the angry waves? Do we heed the signals and hearken to the cries? Do we turn away from our business, our pleasure, our ease, our money-getting, our personal ambitions—to rescue to those who are perishing? Or do we hurry on and say that we have no time for these things—no time to try to save our brothers—no time to lift out of sin's pits, those who have fallen into them—no time to wipe away a tear? If we do not reach out our hand to help—may not our sorrow in eternity be the memory of cries of distress unheeded? May not the visions of perishing ones neglected, haunt us forever?

Listen to the words of Scripture: "Rescue those being taken off to death, and save those stumbling toward slaughter. If you say, 'But we did not know about this;' will not He who weighs hearts consider it? Will not He who protects your life know? Will not He repay a person according to his work?" Proverbs 24:11-12 A modern writer has written an interesting tale entitled "Hands Off" which illustrates God's providence in the life of Joseph. It represents a man in another stage of existence, looking down upon the Hebrew lad in the hands of the Midianites. As the story goes—being an active, ingenious lad, Joseph escaped from the caravan on the first night after his brothers had sold him. He had just reached the outer edge of the camp when a yellow dog began to bark and awakened the men who were in charge of him, and he was returned to captivity.

However the onlooker wanted to kill the dog before he had awakened the camp. Then Joseph would have got away and would have reached home in safety. Great sorrow and suffering would have been avoided. But the onlooker's guardian said, "Hands off." And to let him see the evil of interfering, he took him to a world where he could try the experiment and see its results. There he killed the dog. Joseph reached home in safety, his father rejoiced, his brothers were comforted. It certainly seemed a better way than the other. But when the famine came on, there was no Joseph in Egypt to foretell it and to prepare for it, and there was no food laid up in the storehouses. Palestine and Egypt were devastated by starvation. Great numbers died and the savage Hittites destroyed those whom the famine had spared. Civilization was set back centuries. Egypt was blotted out. Greece and Rome remained in a barbarous state. The history of the whole world was changed, and countless evils came—all because a man in his ignorant wisdom killed a dog, saving a boy from present trouble, to his own and the world's future great loss.

We would better keep our hands off God's providences. Many a beautiful plan of his is spoiled by human meddling. Peter wanted to keep Jesus back from his cross. Suppose he had done so, what would have been the result? No doubt, many a time, love has kept a life back from hardship, sacrifice, and suffering, thereby blighting or marring a destiny, a plan of God. We are likely to pity the boy Joseph, as we see him enter his period of humiliation, and as we read of his being sold as a slave, then cast into fetters. But we well see, that if human pity could have rescued him from this sad part of his life—that the glorious part which followed, with all its blessed service to the world, would have been lost!

Few truths are more sustaining to Christian faith than this—that our times are in God's hands. We forget it too often and sometimes we fret when life brings hard things to endure, when our own

plans are broken. But someday we shall see that God knows best.

Joseph was seventeen when the caravan bore him off, as a slave, to Egypt. He was thirty when called from prison to become prime minister of Egypt. The whole period of his humiliation was therefore, thirteen years. The three points on which we are to fix our thoughts are his slave life; his great temptation; his prison life. The special thing to mark is, that Joseph went through all these experiences unhurt. This is a secret worth learning, of how to meet injustice, wrong, cruelty, inhuman treatment, temptation, and misfortune—so as to receive no harm from the experience. Let us look at each of the three phases of Joseph's humiliation, to see how he bore himself so as to rob them of their bitterness and their power of harming, and to extract from each of them blessing and good.

Joseph's slave life was humiliating. It is always hard to be a slave—not to be one's own, to belong to another, to be driven to grinding toil, to bow beneath heavy burdens bound upon one's shoulders, to feel the lash of the taskmaster, not to be able to claim the fruit of one's own toil, to serve as a mere animal, bought and sold in the market!

Joseph was a slave. His brothers sold him to the traders. In the shambles of Egypt, Potiphar saw him, looked him over as one would a horse, and bought him, paying, no doubt, a handsome profit to the merchants who had brought him down from Canaan. Think how galling was all this, to a boy of Joseph's free spirit! Think, too, of the sense of wrong which filled his heart as he remembered the treatment he had received from his brothers:

They had torn him away from his home.

They had been about to kill him.

They had treated him with heartless cruelty.

They had sold him as a slave.

Surely it was hard to keep one's heart sweet and free from bitterness, with such a sense of injustice in the soul. But add to this, the hardness of the new condition in which Joseph found himself. He was among strangers. Not a face he had ever seen passed before him. He was utterly alone. He had not a friend in all the land. He was not free to go as he pleased, to do what he liked, to follow his own tastes. Many a young man lands in our free country—poor, friendless, and alone—but with a brave heart filled with noble impulses, free to make what he will of his life, and soon is on the highway to success. But Joseph was a slave. Potiphar had bought him. He was in fetters. It is hard to conceive of a condition more discouraging. It was a sore test of character, to which Joseph was exposed. The treatment he had received from his brothers tended to make him bitter. His present circumstances seemed enough to crush his spirit. Some men in such experience of injustice, wrong, treachery, and falseness—would have lost all faith in humanity, becoming soured. There are people who have had not the tenth part of Joseph's trouble, but who are embittered against the world and denounce it as cold and heartless and ungrateful. Other men there are who, having been wronged, grow hard and vindictive, and live only to repay the injustice they have received—with like injustice blow for blow. Still others sullenly surrender to the injuries they have received—and with broken spirit creep through life, like wrecks drifting on the sea, pitiable spectacles to men and angels.

Few men there are, who pass through such experiences of injustice and cruelty as those which Joseph met with—and keep their heart sweet and gentle, their faith in God bright and clear, and their spirit brave and strong. It showed the healthiness and wholesomeness of Joseph's nature, that he passed through the galling and trying experiences of his humiliation unhurt. He was not soured toward men. He did not grow morbid, sullen, or disheartened. Though a slave, he accepted his position with cheerfulness, and entered heartily into his new life—doing his duties so well that he soon became overseer in his master's house. He wasted no time or strength, in weeping over his misfortunes. He did not grieve over his wrongs, nor exhaust himself in self-pity, which is one of the most miserable and unmanly of emotions. He did not burn out the love of his heart, in vindictive and resentful feelings. He did not brood over his wrongs. He looked forward and not back; out and not in. A poet writes of one who had had bitter experiences, that the darkness crept into her heart and darkened her eyes. But the darkness about Joseph's life, was not allowed to enter his heart. This was one of the great secrets of his victorious living. The light within him continued to burn pure and clear. With hatred all about him—he kept love in his heart. Enduring injuries, wrongs, and injustices—his spirit was forgiving. With a thousand things that tended to discourage and dishearten him, to break his spirit—he refused to be discouraged. Because other men lived unworthily, was but a stronger reason why he should live worthily. Because he was treated cruelly and wickedly, was fresh reason why he should give to others about him the best service of love and unselfishness. That his condition was hard—was to him a new motive for living heroically and nobly. So we find the spirit of Joseph unbroken, under all that was galling and crushing in his circumstances. The lesson cannot be too urgently pressed. Many people find life hard. Sometimes wrong and injustice make the days bitter. Sometimes the atmosphere of daily life is one of strife, petty persecution, miserable fault-finding, incessant opposition, nagging, criticism. Home life ideally ought to be loving, inspiring, encouraging, helpful, full of all kindness and grace. Yet there are homes little better than Joseph's, where instead of love—are envy, selfishness, bitterness. There are those, too, who must live continually amid unjust opposition and antagonism. There are those whose life is little better than that of a slave, with grinding toil half-requited, driven as by cruel taskmasters to severe and rigorous service. There are those who are pressed on all sides by human selfishness, who suffer from the dishonesty, the baseness, the avarice, the selfishness of others.

Let us not fail to get the lesson. The problem of life—is to keep the heart warm and kindly—amid all injustice and wrong; to keep the spirit brave and cheerful—in the midst of all that is hard in life's circumstances and conditions; to be true and right and strong—in all moral purpose and deed, however others may act toward us. Our inner life should not be affected by our external experiences. Right is right, no matter what others about us may do. We must be true—no matter if all the world is false—even false to us. We must be unselfish and loving—though even our nearest friends prove selfish and cruel to us. We must keep our spirit strong, cheerful and hopeful—though adversities and misfortunes seem to leave us nothing of the fruit of all our labors. A young man must do his work well, making the most and best of his life, though compelled to serve for most inadequate wages. In a word we are to live victoriously, truly, nobly, sweetly, cheerfully, songfully—in spite of whatever may be uncongenial in our condition! This is the lesson from the first period of Joseph's humiliation. This is the lesson of all Christian life. We should not let the outside darkness into our soul. We should seek to be delivered from all morbidness and all unwholesomeness. We should not allow anything to crush us. Though a slave as to our condition,

our spirit should be free.

We read that Joseph bore himself so congenially, and did his work so well, and was so capable, so true, so trustworthy, that Potiphar "left all that he owned under Joseph's care; he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate." Genesis 39:6. Joseph would never have won such a success—if he had given up to discouragement, if he had brooded over his wrongs, if he had sulked and complained, if he had spent his time in vain regrets or in vindictive feelings. We should learn the lesson, and it is worth learning—it is life's highest and best lesson. It is the victory of the faith in Christ which overcomes the world.

Another part of Joseph's humiliation was his temptation. He had been in Potiphar's house for several years. He had lived so worthily and worked so faithfully, that he had his master's fullest confidence and had risen to the first place in the household. We can think of the boy's dreams of greatness as again coming into the young man's heart, as he found himself so honored. His temptation was, by an intrigue with Potiphar's wife—to rise to yet higher prominence. He would throw off his slave's chains and become a man of rank in the great nation of Egypt. This, and not the appeal to base immoral passion, was the chief element in the temptation to Joseph.

We may think, too, of the circumstances which made the trial the harder. Joseph was away from home and friends. No eye of mother, father or sister was upon him, inspiring him to all that was pure, true, and noble. We do not realize what a restraint against wrong-doing and all that is vile and ignoble—we have in the expectations of our friends for us, their belief in us. Joseph was in a heathen land, too, where the standard of morals was low and where such intrigues were common. We do not realize how much we are helped in our virtue—by the high ideals we find around us ,and by the knowledge that certain lapses and sins would expose us to disgrace, and to the condemnation of society. Joseph had none of these social restraints to help him to be strong and pure. But he met the temptation on far higher grounds, on grounds of pure principle. Note his answer to the solicitation of his temptress: "No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

Two motives appear in these words of Joseph's. One is loyalty to his master. Potiphar had trusted him, trusted him implicitly with all that he had. Could he now be guilty of such a base wrong—to the man who had placed such confidence in him? To Joseph's mind, such an act would be treachery to his friend. In the face of the flattering solicitation of this woman high in rank, unmoved by her passionate temptation, regardless of the consequences which offending her might bring upon him—he kept his eye fixed on his duty and wavered not—but flung the temptress from him and tore himself away his soul unstained. The other motive which saved him was his loyalty to God. "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" All sin is sin against God. "Against you, you only, have I sinned," said David in his penitence. Cruelty to an animal—is sin against God. Treachery to Potiphar—was sin against God. All our acts have reference to God. Sins against innocence and purity—are sins against God. We can never get away from our relation to God, in any act of our life. In all such temptations as this of Joseph's, men should remember that while to yield would be treason to another—it would also be sin against God.

Another element of Joseph's nobleness of character in this case, appears in his silence under false accusation. His temptress, in her disappointment and anger, charged him to her husband

with the most reprehensible behavior. Under this accusation, Joseph was seized and cast into fetters. But he said not a word to Potiphar, to turn suspicion upon the accusing wife. He seems to have thought still of Potiphar's honor, and rather than lay a stain upon it—he would go to the dungeon under the false charge, leaving to God the vindication of his own honor and the proving of his own innocence. It has been said, "For his purity you will find his equal—one among a thousand; for his mercy—scarcely one." By a word he could have told Potiphar the whole story—but rather than speak that word—he suffered the dishonoring accusation to rest undenied.

Nothing is harder than to live under false charges which bring upon one suspicion and condemnation, which hinder one's advancement, and which by breaking silence—one could cast off. There are people who do live, thus bearing reproach and odium to shield others. Sometimes it seems to be a duty—but it is very hard. Joseph had resisted temptation in order to be loyal to Potiphar; now Potiphar thinks him guilty of the very baseness, which for love of him—he had scorned to commit. But in all this, Joseph kept his heart sweet and loving.

Sometimes it costs very dearly—to be true to God. Joseph lay now in a dungeon. But his loss through doing right, was nothing in comparison with what he would have lost—had he done the wickedness to which he was tempted. His prison gloom, deep as it was, was as noonday, compared with what would have been the darkness of his soul under the blight of evil, and the bitterness of remorse. The chains that hung upon him in his dungeon, were but like feathers in comparison with the heavy chains which would have bound his soul, had he yielded to the temptation. Though in a prison, his feet hurt by fetters—he was a free man because his conscience was free, and his heart was pure! No fear of consequences should ever drive us to do a wrong thing.

It is better to suffer any loss, any cost, any sacrifice—than be eaten up by remorse! Better be hurled down from a high place for doing right—than win worldly honor by doing wrong! Better lose our right hand—than lose our purity of soul! Better rot in prison—than to sin against God!

It was the prayer of a girl queen, which she wrote with a diamond point on her castle window, "Keep me pure; make others great." That is the lesson of Joseph's victory over temptation; dishonor, loss, dungeon, death—anything before sin!

Another phase of Joseph's humiliation was, his prison life. It was a terrible blight upon his young life—to be thus hurled into a dungeon. We can imagine his thoughts when he found himself shut away in the darkness, and bound with chains. This, then, was the reward of being true to God and to duty! He had resisted sin—and here he was in irons, while his guilty temptress was posing as an injured woman, receiving compassion and enjoying luxury!

However bitter the prison may have been at first to Joseph, we know that here as before—he soon rose to honor. He was not yet crushed. The noble soul within him, rose superior to all the effects of the misfortunes and the wrongs under which he was suffering. He did not lie down and despair. Soon his old aptitude for meeting life with courage and hope, showed itself. "The jailer put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners and over everything that happened in the prison. The chief jailer had no more worries after that, because Joseph took care of everything." So we find Joseph always superior to his condition and circumstances.

There is a story of one who during a time of persecution, was cast into a deep dungeon, far underground. Once only each day, and for but half an hour, did the outer light stream down into the darkness of the prison. But this good man found an old iron nail and a piece of stone among the rubbish on his cell floor. Using the nail for a chisel, and the piece of stone for a mallet, he carved on his prison wall, during the few moments when the light streamed in, a crude figure of the Savior on his cross. So should we do in our life prisons. Thus did Joseph. He did not hew any figures on the stone walls which shut him in; but on the walls of his own heart he cut the figures of hope, joy and love. His heart was not in chains. The fetters did not hurt his soul. He was victorious over all the wrong, the injustice, the false accusation, the suffering. Indeed he found his period of humiliation a great time of growth, of discipline, of training. At length he was summoned from the prison to sit beside the king; and so well was he fitted for greatness and for wise ruling, that his head did not grow dizzy—when he stood on this pinnacle of honor and fame. So we get from this part of our story—the duty of victoriousness in all life's conditions. What is the secret? Be true to God. Be true to yourself. Be true to your fellow men. The record tells us: "The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man." This was when he was a slave. Then of the time of his prison life we read: "The Lord was with Joseph, and showed kindness unto him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper." Truly, if we are true to God—God will bless us, and even our misfortunes, he will use to train us for larger, better, nobler, more useful life! A writer tells the story of the rose of Jericho—how it flourishes in lack of all things plants need in the hot desert—in the rocky crevices, by the dusty wayside, in the rubbish heap. Even more, the fierce sirocco tears it from its place and flings it far out upon the ocean, and there, driven by the storms and tossed by the salt waves—it still lives and grows. So should we grow in any and all circumstances, wherever we may be cast in sorrow, in hardship, in misfortune, in suffering. A deathless life is in us, and we should be unconquerable. Christ is with us; Christ's life is in us; nothing should be allowed to crush us. Live near the heart of Christ—and the world's power will not hurt you, nor the world's darkness dim your soul's light.

FROM PRISON TO PALACE "Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and they quickly brought him from the dungeon." Genesis 41:14 The story reads like a romancenovel! In the morning, Joseph lay in prison. He had been there probably three years. He knew of nothing that gave any hope of release. In the evening he was wearing the king's ring, was arrayed in vestures of fine linen, had a gold chain around his neck, and was honored as next to the king. It seems too strange to be true—yet it was true.

We may think a moment of the man in the prison.

He was not a criminal. He was in prison on false charges. Let us beware lest we do injustice to others—by believing false things about them. What is it in human nature, that inclines people to believe evil of others? Shall we not strive to have the love which thinks no evil? In the story of Joseph, we know the other side, and we see a man with a white soul, though under the shadow of a black charge. May it not be so, with some other person we know of, whom people allege dishonorable things—but who in God's sight is innocent, with clean soul? We should plead for justice, for charity, toward all. We should shut our ears to the insinuations and whisperings of the slanderer's tongue! It was a lie that put the felon's garb and chain upon Joseph, robbed him of his good name, and turned the dungeon key upon him! Be slow to believe an accusation against another! One false mouth can destroy the reputation won by a lifetime of worthy deeds!

Joseph was in prison under a false charge. The very treachery against his master which his noble nature scorned to commit—his master was made to believe he had committed. Yet he sealed his lips and went to the dungeon without one word of self-exculpation. He could not exculpate himself without bringing scandal and ruin upon his master's home—and he was silent. This was a case when silence was hard—but when silence was noble.

Any one of us may become the innocent victim of calumny. Blameless, we may have to endure false accusations. As Christians, what should we do in such a case? Of course, not all cases are alike. In some instances vindication may be possible, and it may be our duty to seek it. But there may be cases, like Joseph's, when we cannot free ourselves from false accusation, without bringing dishonor and suffering upon others. Then it may be our duty, like Joseph, too—to suffer in silence and in patience. He left all in God's hands, doing nothing himself to right the wrong. There is a verse in the thirty-seventh Psalm, which gives a lesson and a promise: "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun."

Joseph committed his way into the Lord's hands that terrible day. He kept his own hands off. He was three years under the black cloud—but then he came forth into the light, and there was not a stain on his soul. We may safely leave our vindication to God!

Those were hard years for Joseph indeed, all those thirteen years were—from the day the boy was sold to the passing caravan—until he was sent for by Pharaoh, and lifted to honor. But as hard as they were—they did not hurt him. There are little flowers that grow through all the coldest winter, under the snows, keeping sweet and beautiful beneath the deepest drifts, coming out in the spring days, when the snow melts away—unhurt, as lovely and fragrant as if they had been sheltered in a conservatory! So it was that the life of Joseph remained gentle, beautiful and sweet—under all the terrible trials of those years: wrong, cruelty, heartlessness, injustice, inhumanity from brothers, too; then slavery, degradation; then false accusation, fetters.

Some of us can hardly keep sweet under little imaginary slights, and the common frictions and microscopical hurts and injustices of fairly easy conditions. Some of us grow morbid and cynical, if a friend omits some simple amenity! The noble bearing of Joseph, teaches us to be superior to all circumstances and conditions, to all unkind or unjust treatment. That is the great lesson of life. If you are going to be affected by every change of social temperature, by every variation of experience your spirits running up and down like the mercury in the thermometer with the fluctuations of the atmosphere, you will have a sorry life! That is not living. But as Christians, we have the secret of a divine life within us. We must live unaffected by circumstances. Morbidness is sickly living. Cynicism is unworthy of a being in whose heart human blood pulses, especially in a heart in which Christ's life throbs. Discouragement is undivine.

We must be strong in the grace of God. We must be unconquerable through him who loved us. We must put misfortunes, adversities, personal injuries, sufferings, trials—under our feet, and tread ever upward over them. We must conquer ourselves also—the evil that is in us, we must subjugate. That is the way to grow.

Remember, your task in living—is to keep sweet, to keep your heart gentle, brave, strong, loving, full of hope—under the worst that the years can bring you of injustice, hardship, suffering, and trial.

That is what Joseph did. Then when he was suddenly needed for a great duty, he did not fail.

Something went wrong one day, in the big world above Joseph's dungeon. There was trouble in Pharaoh's palace. Two high officials were careless and they were hurried off to prison. Why is this related in the Bible? Because it was one of the links in the wonderful chain of providence, by which Joseph was at last brought to his place of power.

We do not know what circumstances or events of that vast complex network of things about us, will help change our destiny. "God is always coming down to us through unlikely paths, meeting us unexpectedly." We see how important to Joseph was the coming of Pharaoh's two officers to the prison. Let us walk reverently along all life's paths. We know not what trivial occurrence, any day—may affect all our after course unto the end. Who knows but the casual meeting with someone today—may have great good for us long years hence? The touching of Joseph's life by these prisoners from the palace, was a link in the chain by which Joseph was lifted out! Just so, the person you meet casually tomorrow, may have in his hand the key which some day will open a prison for you and lead you to liberty.

Yet it seemed for a long time, as if nothing would come of the touching of Joseph's destiny by this hand from the outside. Joseph told the meaning of the men's dreams, and in three days what he had said came true. As the chief butler went out happy from the prison, to resume his old duties—he parted very affectionately from his friend. Joseph had said to him: "But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison." No doubt the butler promised to do so. Oh yes, certainly he would remember his prison friend! But here are the pathetic words with which the record closes: "The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him."

He was restored to his place in the palace. He again wore the insignia of office. He was again in the blaze and brilliance of the royal presence. Waiting in his prison, Joseph hoped each day to be released, through the strong influence of his friend at court. He waited and hoped—and yet the days went on without bringing any token that he was remembered. Two years passed, and still Joseph languished in the darkness, wearing his chains. The chief butler, who had been so profuse in his promises to remember him, forgot him! This "chief butler" has many successors in all ages. We are all quite ready to condemn his ingratitude; but do we never repeat his sin? In the time when help comes to us, or deliverance, or favor—our hearts are warm with grateful feeling. We will never forget this kindness, we say with sincere intention. But do we never forget it? We probably remember injuries done to us. It is hard for many people to forget a wrong. "I forgive him—but I can never forget his treatment," we hear people say. Slights, and cutting words, and unkindnesses, and neglects—how well we remember these! Some of us nurse them and cherish their memory. But have we as faithful recollection of favors, kind words, comforts given in trouble, help in need? "Men too often write the record of grudges in marble—and of favors in sand." Let us not fail to get the lesson. Let us write the record of hurts and wrongs done to us in sand—and of kindnesses shown to us in stone.

Stop a moment right now, and think. Is there someone somewhere, suffering, shut in, perhaps enduring wrong, bearing a heavy load—to whom once you gave a promise of sympathy, of a visit, of an effort to help or relieve—a promise you have now forgotten? When we find people in distress or sorrow or adversity or crushed by some heavy blow—we are quite apt to promise them love and

thought and friendly help. But do we always keep our promises? Our words cheer them, and they look for our coming again, and watch and hope for the help we so eagerly said we would give; but how often do we forget, just as the butler forgot Joseph? Is there not someone to whom you spoke in strong words of sympathy, in a time when your heart was warm? You meant to call again very soon. You meant to lend a hand to help the weary struggler. You meant to try to give or secure the relief the person needed. But out in the busy world, you forgot it. "The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him." For two years he forgot him!

There are forgotten Josephs everywhere, to whom promises have been made—but not kept. We should recall those to whom we once spoke so freely, so earnestly. Have we ever called since? Have we ever done anything to give the comfort we promised to give? Think of the disappointment we have caused, the long weary waiting, for kindness expected—but which we have forgotten to render.

We do not know what power there is in our heart to bless others, to make the world a little brighter for them, the burden a little lighter, the path a little easier. All about us in life, are dungeons in which suffering Josephs lie in chains! It is dark about them. The air is not sweet. Bird songs do not break in upon the heavy silence. They are lonely. You and I, out in the free air, hear the bird songs, and quaff the nectar of human happiness, and have joy and love for our portion. Let us not forget the Josephs in their prisons. They look for tokens from us, to assure them that they are not forgotten. They expect our visits, some proofs at least of kindly thought, some effort to give relief or comfort. You have in your heart’s full cup, that which will give strength and cheer. Do not think it a small thing—to put a little new hope or courage or gladness into a fainting human heart. It is helping God warm this world. It is helping Christ save a soul. But now a strange thing happened. As it so happened, it was better for Joseph, in the end, that the butler did not speak for him to the king for so long a time. Had he made intercession for him at once, and had Pharaoh listened to the plea and set Joseph free, what would have been the result? Joseph could not have gone back to Potiphar’s house, and would probably have been sold away from the city, for he was still Potiphar’s slave. Or possibly he might have been set free to return to Hebron. In any case, he would not likely have been within reach when he was sought for to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams.

Consider the consequences. His career would have been toward obscurity. Perhaps he would never have been heard of again, and then this charming story would never have been written. Then Pharaoh’s dreams would have had no interpreter. The years of plenty would have come and passed, leaving no storehouses filled for the famine years which followed. In the terrible distress of those years—the family of Jacob, with its holy seed, might have perished from the earth. But the ingratitude of the butler, inexcusable as it was, left Joseph in the prison, suffering unjustly—but waiting close at hand, until the moment came when he would be needed for a work of stupendous importance. While God’s purposes were slowly ripening in the world outside, Joseph’s character also was ripening, into strength and self-discipline within the dungeon walls! So we see again the wonderful providence of God, how every link of the chain fits into its own place with most delicate precision. Nothing comes a moment too soon, nothing lags, coming a minute too late. God’s providence is like God’s nature. Among the stars there are no haphazard movements. The sun never rises late. No star sets too early. So in providence, everything comes in its set time. God’s clock is never a second slow. Can this be mere chance? Can nature’s perfect adjustments, be chance? Can the wonderful beauty and beneficence of providence, be chance, a mere endless

succession of happy, blessed coincidences? Oh no, there is a God whose hand moves the machinery of the universe—and that God is our Father! There is a heart beating at the center of all things. He who has ears to hear, cannot but hear it.

Thus in Joseph's life every smallest event, was wrought into the final result with perfect adaptation. The inhuman wickedness of his brothers in selling him, the foul lie of Potiphar's wife which sent him to a dungeon, the ingratitude of the butler which left him friendless and forgotten for two years in prison—all these wrongs from others, were by the divine touch, transmuted into blessings! As we read this story, we see all this in the life of Joseph. Shall we suppose that Joseph's life was in God's hand, in any exceptional sense? Is there any less of God's providence in our life—than there was in the life of that Hebrew lad? He did not see the providence at the time—not until afterwards did the dark clouds disclose their silver lining, or the rough iron fetters reveal themselves as gold. Not until afterwards, shall we see that our disappointments, hardships, trials, misfortunes, and the wrongs done to us by others—are all made parts of God's providence toward us! Not until afterwards—but the "afterwards" is sure if only we firmly and faithfully follow Christ and keep our own hands off. God works slowly—and is never in a hurry. The light which shines from this story of Joseph, ought to shine into a great many lives today with its beam of cheer and hope—for those who are waiting amid discouraging circumstances. The heart of God is beating in each life's experiences, and the hand of God is working; only the hour for full revealing has not yet come on the dial of the clock of God. At last came the time for Joseph's deliverance and exaltation. Pharaoh had a double dream. It was not an ordinary dream; it was God's way of revealing the future to the king, that he might be a true father to his people. Seven fat cows feeding in a meadow; and seven lean cows standing by the Nile. The seven fat cattle eaten up by the seven lean—which are lean as ever, afterwards. Seven fat, good ears of corn; and seven thin, blasted ears. The thin ears devour the fat ears—and are thin as ever. The dream troubled the king. He sent for Egypt's famed wise men, dream-interpreters; but they gave him no light. Now, at last, after two years of ungrateful forgetting, the butler remembered his fault and told Pharaoh the story of the Hebrew slave in the prison, who had interpreted his own dream. Swiftly runs the messenger to the prison, and Joseph is called into the presence of the king. He is thirty years old. He has been thirteen years in Egypt, as slave and prisoner. Now his time for honor and for service has come. This is the hour, and here is the duty for which all his former life has been a preparation.

Pharaoh tells his dreams. Listen to Joseph's answer. A vain man would have had his head turned by such a sudden blaze of royal splendor about him, and would have spoken boastfully. But Joseph speaks with the humility of an unspoiled child. "It is beyond my power to do this—but God will tell you what it means." We should not miss the lesson—we who teach others, we to whom perplexed ones come with their questions. We should not seek to show our own wisdom—but should hide ourselves away, and point to God as the One who is the source of whatever wisdom our lips may speak. "It is beyond my power to do this—but God will tell you what it means."

Then Joseph told the king what the dream meant. It was God's message to Pharaoh—a glimpse into the future. There would be seven years of great plenty in Egypt, and after these, seven years of sore famine. And the famine would be so grievous, that it would eat up all the food of the abundant years. Joseph went on to advise the king what to do to find a wise man and let him gather the extra food of the seven years of plenty, and lay it up in great storehouses to meet the needs of the coming years of famine. At once the king appointed Joseph himself to this place of

honor and trust. He took off his signet ring and put it on Joseph’s hand, thus giving him almost royal authority. He arrayed him in vestures of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck—insignia of princely rank. He caused him to ride in a chariot next to the king’s own, in a royal procession along the streets. He gave him a new name Zaphenath-paneah, which meant "bread of life" in allusion to Joseph’s great service in saving the land from famine. He gave to him also in marriage a daughter of one of Egypt’s priests, thus elevating him into the priestly caste.

All this honor came suddenly to Joseph. Was it not worth waiting for? The way seemed long from the pit at Dothan to the steps of Egypt’s throne. The dreams of the Hebrew boy were long in coming true. The experiences were hard and tended to crush and destroy the young life. Those thirteen years out of the golden prime of life seemed wasted. Yet, we should notice that all this time, and in all these experiences, God was training the man for his work. The butler’s dream came true in three days—but there was not much of it when it was fulfilled. It took thirteen years for Joseph’s dreams to be realized, because the dreams meant so much. If a man’s work is of small importance, he can be prepared for it in a little while. But when he has a great mission to fulfill, it requires a long time to fit him for it. Let no one grow impatient in God’s school, however slow the advancement may be. The longer time God takes with your training, and the harder the discipline is—the richer will be your life when the work is finished. No doubt Joseph recognized the providence of God in all those slow years of his life. He believed that he was being prepared for his life’s mission. This was the secret of his unconquerable hope and courage and of all his sweet life—in the trying experiences of those years. He knew he was in God’s school. Providence was a Bible to him. The same may become just as true in our life—as it was in his. We may accept our condition as God’s appointment for us. Then we may read God’s will for us as clearly in each day’s unfoldings—as if the divine finger wrote it out for us on a sheet of paper under our eye! We shall cease then our restless struggling. We shall no longer fight so for our own way—but will take God’s way.

Thus and thus only, can anyone be what God made him to be, and do what God made him to do in this world. God has a plan for every life—but we can fulfill that plan only by daily reading the little page of God’s Bible which he writes for us on the tablet of the day’s providences. To be able to say always in disappointment, in sorrow, in loss, in the suffering of injuries at the hands of others, in the midst of pain and trial, "God is teaching me some new lesson, training me for some new duty, bringing out in me some new beauty of character," is to live as we should live. One incident left out in Joseph’s strange career, would have broken the chain and spoiled all. So it is in every life; all the events are necessary to fit us for the place for which God is preparing us.

We may learn a lesson from the system which Joseph adopted of providing in the years of plenty, for the years of famine. In everyone’s life there are seasons of abundance, of rare plenty—and then there will come also, surely, seasons that are empty and full of need. It is wisdom’s part to gather the bounties of the full years—and lay them up in store for the empty years.

Youth is a time of plenty. It brings opportunities for education, for study, for reading, for self-discipline, for the formation of habits, for the culture of character, for the establishment of good principles and for careful training and preparation for life’s work or business. If youth’s plenty is allowed to run to waste—if the season of youth is not improved, after life can bring only misfortune and failure. In the years of health and prosperity, we should lay up a little of our plenty for the

"rainy day" that will certainly come the day of sickness, when the hands cannot work and the doctor’s bill must be paid. Through the years of joy, we should lay up in our heart the divine comfort for the years of sorrow which will come. Through youth and manhood or womanhood, we should be ever filling storehouses to draw from in old age. In the present life, we must lay up treasures in heaven for the life to come. In the days when the gospel’s grace is falling like sunshine about us, we must receive it into our heart, or we shall perish in the eternal years of darkness.

AN INTERPRETER FOR GOD

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."Genesis 41:15-16

Joseph was an interpreter for God. There are two instances recorded in which he made known the meaning of dreams. The first was in the prison in Egypt. Two officials from the king’s palace were among his fellow prisoners. Joseph had risen to influence in the prison. "The Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison," is the way the Bible puts it. "And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners that were in the prison." So when these distinguished prisoners from the palace came into the dungeon, they fell under Joseph’s care.

One morning when Joseph was going his rounds he found these men sad. He had a sympathetic heart, and he asked them, "Why do you look so sadly today?" They told him that they had each dreamed a dream the night before, and there was no one to act as interpreter for them. Promptly he said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams." The men in turn told him their dreams, and Joseph told them the interpretation. He was God’s interpreter to them, showing them what God’s Word for them was. The other case was that of Pharaoh. He had two dreams in one night. In the morning his spirit was troubled, and he wished to know what his dreams meant. He called for Egypt’s wise men, who were supposed to understand dreams—but none of them could interpret the king’s dreams. Then it flashed upon the memory of the chief butler, that two years before, a Hebrew slave, in Potiphar’s prison, had interpreted his dream, and that it came about as the young man said it would. Soon Joseph stood before Pharaoh, listening to a recital of the dreams that so troubled the king.

"Pharaoh said to Joseph—I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." Joseph’s answer reveals his humility. It shows also his courage, for in the presence of the heathen king he honors his God. "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." Then he told the king the interpretation of the dreams. We know how important was the message of God that Joseph read in Pharaoh’s dreams. Think what woe and sorrow and devastation were averted, not for Egypt only—but also for other lands, by the interpreting of those dreams. Think what it would have cost the world, if no interpreter had been found. He read the divine meaning that lay folded up in the king’s dreams, and the king was enabled by gathering the surplus of the harvests in the years of plenty to feed his people and the starving people of other lands, in the years of famine which followed.

Thus, Joseph was an interpreter for God. He explained to others the meaning of what God was saying to them. Some writers speak of Joseph as a type of Christ. There certainly are many striking points in which the life of Joseph seems to shadow forth that of Jesus. Like our Lord, he was his father's beloved son. He was sent by his father to visit his brothers on an errand of love; so Jesus was sent. He was seized by his brothers and sold by them for silver; so was the Son of God. Through his bondage and humiliation, Joseph became the deliverer, the savior, in an earthly sense, of his brothers and of the world; Jesus, dragged to death, made redemption for His people. Joseph as an interpreter for God, was also typical of Christ, the great Interpreter. In the largest sense, Jesus is the interpreter who alone has made plain to the world—the nature and the will of God, and who alone can unfold to us the meaning of the divine revealings for our personal life.

It is only in Christ that we can know God. "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known." As Jesus walked among men and was asked to reveal the Father, he said "He who has seen Me—has seen the Father." The mysteries of the divine nature, were interpreted in Christ. He was the love of God made visible on the earth. Joseph interpreted men's dreams, in which God's words were wrapped up. Jesus heard men's questions, and gave answers to them. He made plain and clear to them, the meaning of the divine teachings. All mysteries vanish, as we sit at Christ's feet. He is the great interpreter for God. But there is a sense in which we are all called to be interpreters. When Joseph came to the cell of the prisoners from Pharaoh's palace, he saw a deep gloom on their faces. When he asked why they looked so sad, he learned that the cause was their uninterpreted dreams. They were sure that the dreams had a meaning which concerned their future, and they were burdened and anxious to know what the meaning was. So it is with people all about us. There is sadness in their faces. There are lines that tell of perplexed thought, of earnest questionings which get no answers, of deep cravings to know which cannot be satisfied. If we were to ask every sad person we meet, the reason for his sadness—we would find that it is the old story of these prisoners unanswered questions, uninterpreted mysteries, unexplained trials, unsolved perplexities.

We all need interpreters. The dreams of these two prisoners, really were words of God referring to their future, lamps of divine revealing which threw gleams of light upon their destiny. One was a foretelling of life, the other of the swift coming of death. But the men could not understand the words in which the revealing was made. So, in Pharaoh's case, the dreams were not mere meaningless dreams—but were words of God to the king. They were words, too, of the utmost importance, for they concerned the coming days and were meant to guide the king in his caring for his people. God meant that Pharaoh should know the meaning of the dreams in order that he might act according to the wisdom which this new revealing of the future required. It would have been a great calamity, if he had not learned what God had spoken into his ear in these visions of the night. But without an interpreter he never could have known. So we all stand in this world, in the midst of mysterious writings which we cannot read, having our dreams and visions whose meanings we cannot ourselves interpret. Yet these writings and these visions are really God's words to us, divine teachings, which we ought to understand, whose meanings it is intended we should find out. They have their lessons for us. They hold messages of comfort for our sorrows, of guidance for our dark paths, of instruction for our ignorance, of salvation for our perishing life. We cannot live as we should live—unless we learn the meaning of these divine words. We need interpreters.

Take the little child. It comes into the world knowing nothing. On all sides are wonderful things in the phenomena of nature, in its own life, in the lives of others, in books, in art, in science, in providence; but every door is locked. The child does not understand anything. It cannot read the simplest written sentence. It does not know the meaning of the commonest occurrence. Yet it is here to learn all it can of the mysteries which lie about it. All these things contain words of God, which it is intended that the child shall hear and understand, words which concern its own happiness and well-being in the future. But the child needs an interpreter. As soon as it is born, it begins to learn. When it is only a few weeks old, we see the questions in its eyes. With the first prattlings of speech, it begins to ask what this means, and what that is. When it is taught to read, its wonder grows. Books are full of great secrets. As it becomes older, life's mysteries rise before it. "How do I see? How do I hear? How does my heart keep beating, beating, beating, without pause, day and night? What is that strange voice within my heart, which keeps forever saying 'I must, or I must not?'"

Nature, too, has its endless mysteries for the child. We all know how children ask questions. Some of us at times grow almost impatient of their endless interrogations. But the truth is, these mysteries all about them, these strange phenomena, these things they do not know and cannot make out for themselves, are words of God which it is meant they should understand. The children are not impertinent in their incessant asking, What? and Why? and How? They have a right to know what these strange things mean. They would be poor stupid things—if they did not care to find out. Their lives would be incomplete, half-blessed, or failures, if they never learned them. And it is our duty, to act as interpreters to them. The mother is the child's first interpreter for God. She hears its first questions, and seeks to answer them. She tells it the meaning of a thousand things. Then the child's school teachers come next, with their interpretations. The church, too, has its function of interpretation for childhood, for the most important of all revealings of truth are those which concern God and his will for man, what he is, what are his feelings toward us, what he wants us to be and to do. But not childhood alone needs an interpreter; ail through our life, even to the end, we come continually to questions which perplex us, and we have dreams and visions which trouble us. Life is full of enigmas. We bend over the Bible and find texts we cannot understand. The Ethiopian treasurer, sitting in his chariot, and reading the words of the ancient prophet Isaiah, reading with deep interest—but not knowing what the words meant, is a picture of many of us. "Do you understand what you are reading?" asked the interpreter, who stood beside the chariot. "How can I, except someone guides me?" answered the puzzled reader. Then the evangelist sat beside him and showed him a blessed revelation of the Messiah, in the words which he had not been able to understand. Who has not bent over what seemed obscure Bible texts, unable to find out their sense, until some interpreter came and made the meaning plain? But it is not for the words of God written in the Bible alone, that we need interpreters. There are mysteries in providence; they come into every life at some time. There are dark days in which no light breaks through the clouds. There are nights in which no star shines. We sit with sad heart and with gloom in our face. All things seem to be against us. We cry out with pain and fear. Yet in these very providences, there are words of God hidden—good words, words of love, words of mercy. A minister was talking with his child, about some trouble the child had, and taking a book from his table he pointed to a verse. The child could not make out the words, could not even name a letter. It was in a language he did not know. Then the father told him what the words were, putting them into English. As he did this, the child's face began to brighten. It was a Greek New Testament in which he was reading, and

the words were words of love from the lips of Christ. The child needed but to have the interpreter to show him beauty and blessing, where all had been mystery before to his eyes. So it is that God's dark providences appear to his children. Yet thoughts of divine love lie in them, and we need only to have them interpreted to us.

These are only hints of the great mysteries that lie about all of us in this world—all the way from the cradle to the grave. God gives his messages in many forms: in nature, in the lives of others, in his providences, in history, in his Word, in books and friendships, in circumstances. But how often does the writing baffle us! We need interpreters to read off for us the mysterious handwriting.

All of us in our turn, are to be interpreters to others. Joseph found the two prisoners sad—and his heart was touched with sympathy. He became eager to comfort them. That showed a noble spirit in him. He had a warm, gentle heart. No one can ever be greatly useful in this world—who does not enter into the world's experiences. Christ was moved with compassion when he saw human pain, sorrow and sin. At once his love went out to the sufferer, and he desired to help and save. Wherever we go—we see sad faces, telling of unrest, or broken peace, of unsatisfied longings, of unanswered questions, of deep heart-hungerings. Sometimes it is fear which writes its lines on the pale cheeks. Sometimes it is perplexity over tangled circumstances, which darkens the features. Sometimes it is baffled longing; sometimes it is unquenchable desire to know the future; sometimes it is eagerness to learn more of God.

We are sent to be interpreters, each in our own way, and in the things that we know. When we think of it, we see that all the rich knowledge of the world, has come through God's interpreters. Along all the ages seers have been climbing to the mountain-tops, where the first light breaks, catching the divine meanings in God's writings, and then interpreting them to others. There have been prophets in every age, gifted to look into the scrolls of truth and read off the words and their meaning. The scientific knowledge we have today, has come through many interpreters who have learned to read God's word in nature. For nature is one of God's Bibles. Long ago David wrote, "The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. They speak without a sound or a word; their voice is silent in the skies; yet their message has gone out to all the earth, and their words to all the world." Psalms 19:1-4

All nature's works, are pages written full of noble thoughts from God. But not all of us can read the writing. Thousands walk through this world with lovely plants and flowers and a million forms of vegetable life all about them, with the grandeur of mountains, hills, rivers, seas and landscapes on all sides, and with the brilliant splendor of the skies and the starry heavens overarching them—and yet never see anything in all this to stir their heart to admiration or their mind to rapture or praise. But there have been interpreters, men with eyes which saw, and with ears which heard—and they have told us something of the wonderful things that God has written in nature. Or take the literature of the world. It is the harvest of many centuries of thought. In every age there have been a few men who have looked into truth with deeper, clearer vision than their fellows, and have heard the whispers of God's voice; then coming forth from their valleys of silence, they have told the world what they have heard. They have been God's interpreters.

Take the treasures of spiritual truth which we possess today. How have they come to us? We know how the Bible was written. God took Moses up into the mount, and talked with him, as a man

talks with his friend, speaking to him great truths about his own being and character, and giving him statutes and laws for the guidance of men; then Moses became an interpreter to the world of the things God had shown him.

David was an interpreter for God. God drew him close to his heart and breathed heavenly songs into his soul; then David went forth, struck his harp and sang—and the music is breathing yet through all the world.

John was an interpreter for God. He lay in Christ's bosom and heard the beatings of that great heart of love, and learned the secrets of friendship with his Lord; then he passed out among men—and told the world what he had heard and felt and seen; and the air of the world has been warmer ever since, and more of love has been beating in human hearts.

Paul was an interpreter for God. Christ took him away from men and revealed himself to him, opened to him the mystery of redemption as to no other man, and Paul wrote the many divine letters we have of his, which have been marvelous in their influence throughout all these Christian centuries. But not alone have these inspired men been God's interpreters; many others since have taken up the Word of God and have read new secrets, blessed truths, precious comforts, which had lain undiscovered before, and have spoken out to men what they found. Evermore new insight is breaking forth from the Bible.

God gives to every human life that he sends into this world—some message to speak out to others. Indeed he never gives anyone anything to keep for himself alone. Every beam of light he flashes into any soul, from a text of Scripture, from a note of song, from a flower, from a star in the heavens, from a book, from the heart of a friend—is an interpretation which is to be given out again. The words he speaks to you in the darkness—he wants you to utter forth in the light. Into the heart of every creature therefore, he puts something which he wants that creature to speak out to the world.

God gives the star a message of light—and we look up into the heavens at night and it tells us its secret. Who knows what a blessing the star may be to a weary traveler who finds his way by its beam, or to the sick man lying by his window and in his sleeplessness looking up at the glimmering point of light in the calm, deep heavens?

God gives to a flower a message of beauty and sweetness, and for its brief life it tells out its message to all who can read it. And who can sum up all the good that even a flower may do, as it blooms in the garden, or as it is carried into a sick room? But especially does God give to every human life, a message to interpret. To one it is a new revealing of science. A great astronomer spoke of himself as thinking over again God's thoughts, as he discovered the paths of the stars and traced out the laws of the heavens. To the poet God gives thoughts of beauty which he is to interpret to the world, and the world is richer, brighter and better for hearing his message.

Thus to everyone of us, even the lowliest, God whispers some secret of truth which he wants us to interpret in word or act to others. We cannot all make books or write poems or hymns, which shall bless men; but if we live near the heart of Christ, there is not one of us into whose ear he will not whisper some fragment of truth, some revealing of grace and love; or to whom he will not give some experience of comfort in sorrow, some glimpse of light in darkness, some glimmering of heaven's glory, in the midst of this world's care.

God forms a close personal friendship with each of his children—and whispers to each one some special secret of love which no other has ever learned before. That now is your message, God's own peculiar word to you—and you are his prophet to forthtell it again to the world. Let each one speak out what God has given him to tell. If it is only a word, it will yet bless the earth.

Suppose that Joseph, knowing by divine teaching, the meaning of Pharaoh's dreams, had remained silent; think what his silence would have cost the world. Or suppose that John, having leaned upon the Lord's breast and having learned the inner secrets of his love—had gone back o his fishing after the ascension, and had refused to be an interpreter for Christ, what would the world have lost!

If only one of the million flowers that bloom in summer days in the fields and gardens, refused to bloom, hiding its little gift of beauty—the world would be less lovely. If but one of the myriad stars in the heavens should refuse to shine, keeping its little beam locked in its own breast, the nights would be a little darker. Every human life that fails to hear its message and learn its lesson from God, or fails to interpret its secret, keeping it locked in the silence of the heart—in some measure impoverishes the earth. But every life, even the lowliest, which learns its word from God and then interprets it to others—adds something at least to the world's blessing and good.

It is the interpretation of life—which makes for most in blessing the world. Our creeds may be good—but unless we interpret their articles into sweet, beautiful living, in this world of sorrow and sin—our orthodoxy will count for little. One writes of a day in the dead of winter, when even men and women wrapped in furs could scarcely endure the biting cold. Yet in the midst of it all, wearing only tatters which flapped in the wind, passed a child, shivering and crouching, as in mumbled words that seemed frozen on his tongue; he called out the name of his newspaper. One face by its genial light arrested his calling. "May I have a paper?" he asked. The kind eye glistened as the stranger took the newspaper and glanced at the stiffened fingers, dropping into the boy's hand the value of his fifty papers. "Ah, poor little friend!" he faltered, "Don't you shiver and ache with cold?" The boy, with a gulp of gladness, sobbed out, as he raised his eye to the warmth of the face above him, "I did, sir—until you passed by!" That was a bit of true interpretation. We should try to get men and women to know of the love of Christ, and we never can do it in sermons and bible-lessons alone; we must do it in deeds, in living, in humble service; in love which interprets itself in kindly helpfulness; and in truth which is wrought into honesty, integrity, uprightness and holiness.

Joseph was an interpreter for God; we must be God's interpreters. How? We must live near to God, so as to hear what God has to say to us. We must study God's truth, that his words may become plain to us. If Joseph had yielded to temptation; if he had let his heart grow bitter under injury and wrong; if he had lost his faith in God in the darkness—he could not have been God's interpreter when he was called to tell others the meaning of the divine teachings. So must we keep our heart gentle and warm, our hands clean, our faith strong, and our character right—if we would be God's interpreters to others.

Let us set ourselves anew, to the task and the duty of being the interpreter for God. Let us learn well the meaning of God's Word—that we may interpret that. Let us seek for the key to God's strange providences, that when we are beside those who are perplexed and in darkness, we may speak to them the interpreting word of divine peace. Let us get into our heart so much of the word, the spirit, and the love of Christ—that we may show in our daily life—the beauty of Christ. Whittier

truthfully tells us that, The dear Lord’s best interpreters

Are humble human souls;

The gospel of a life—

Is more than books or scrolls.

From scheme and creed the light goes out,

The blessed fact survives:

The blessed Master none can doubt,

Revealed in holy lives.

JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS

"Then Joseph kissed each of his brothers and wept over them, and then they began talking freely with him." Genesis 45:15

It was a startling revelation to the Hebrew brothers, when these words fell from the lips of the great ruler of Egypt: "I am Joseph!" No wonder they could not answer him. No wonder they were troubled at his presence. But let us bring up the story. There were seven years of plenty, and then the seven famine years began. The famine extended to Canaan, where Jacob lived. He and his household began to be in need. Then Jacob heard that there was food in Egypt, and that the hungry people of all lands were flocking there to buy bread. So he sent his sons to obtain provision for his household. The brothers seem to have been slow to start on this journey. Their father had to urge them. "Why are you standing around looking at one another?" he asked them. "I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die." But we are not surprised that they did not set out eagerly for Egypt. It was into Egypt they had sold their brother. That was more than twenty years ago—but the memory was fresh as ever. There are some things we cannot forget. The mention of Egypt was like a sword in the flesh of these strong men. No wonder they had to be urged to start. Only ten went. The father would not trust Benjamin away from himself.

Arriving in Egypt, they were ushered into the presence of the governor, and bowed down themselves before him, with their faces to the earth. So Joseph’s dreams were fulfilled at last. He knew his brothers. At first he treated them harshly, made himself strange to them, spoke roughly to them. Why did he do this? Was it resentment? Was he repaying the evil they had done to him so long before? No! he was testing them. He wanted to know if they had grown better through the long years. So he tested them at different points, in different ways.

If one has wronged us, treated us unjustly, shown toward us a spirit of envy, or of ingratitude; forgiveness is not all the duty we owe him. We have a duty to the man’s soul. We should seek the cure in him of the evil disposition which caused him to sin against us. We should try to make it impossible for him to repeat the wrong to another.

Before he revealed himself to them—Joseph sought to know whether his brothers had been cured of the badness of heart which twenty years before had led them to treat him so cruelly. Were they

penitent, or hardened still? He found very soon that they were suffering the bitter pain of remorse. He put them into prison for three days, alleging that they were spies. Again they stood before him. Not supposing that he understood their Hebrew language, they talked among themselves:

"They said one to another—This has all happened because of what we did to Joseph long ago. We saw his terror and anguish and heard his pleadings, but we wouldn't listen. That's why this trouble has come upon us!"

Joseph heard their words and understood what they said. He saw that they remembered their sin against him. He saw, too, that they were feeling the sense of remorse and conscious guilt, and believed that the calamity which had now befallen them, was in retribution for the great crime they had committed against their brother.

Remember that he was now testing them, to find out whether they were the same men who had dealt so cruelly with him twenty-two years before. The first testing was encouraging. They seemed to be truly penitent. Joseph was deeply affected. The record says "He turned away from them and began to weep." This shows that even at this first interview, his heart was tender and loving toward them. Why did he not then make himself known to them at once? Instead of doing this, however, he suppressed his heart's deep feeling, restrained his longing to say to them, "I am Joseph!" and to forgive them, and turned back to them sternly, saying that one of them must stay in prison while the others returned home with food for their households. Then he took Simeon and bound him before their eyes.

Why was this seeming severity, when his heart was so full of love for them? He was not yet sure enough of the genuineness of their repentance. Perhaps it was the prison that had wrought this penitence in them. Perhaps they were not really changed in their heart and character. Mere sorrow for wrongdoing, is not enough. One may have bitter remorse for a bad past—and yet not be cured of the spirit which did the evil. Would these men do now the same thing, over which they were grieving so bitterly? Joseph was not yet sure, and he would not make the mistake of revealing himself to them and forgiving them—until he was satisfied on this point. So he sent them away.

Nine brothers went back to Hebron. On their way home they were startled at finding their money in their sacks with the food. Guilt makes such cowards of men, that every new incident fills them with new terror. Finding the money, made the brothers afraid. They interpreted this bit of generosity as evidence of enmity, a trick to get some cause of harming them. Even a sweet bird note, sounds like a warning of retribution, to a conscience in remorse. Our own heart—makes our world to us. Peace in the bosom changes a wilderness to a garden; it changes thorns to roses; it changes discords to harmonies. But remorse makes a hell of the loveliest spot of God's footstool. The brothers went home. At length, they are back again in Egypt, and Benjamin is now with them. They had a kindly reception. The governor asked after the welfare of their father "the old man of whom you spoke." He saw Benjamin and his heart yearned upon his brother, and he sought where to weep. He could not keep back the tears, and he entered his own room and there gave vent to his feelings. Gaining control over his emotions, he washed his face, to remove the traces of his tears, and came again to his brothers. He had them dine with him. Still he did not make himself known to them. He let them start homeward again. They are happy now. Simeon is free, too, out of prison and with the others. But they have not gone far, before they are suddenly overtaken by an Egyptian officer who charges them with the theft of Joseph's silver cup. Sack after sack is taken

down and searched, in the order of the men's ages. At last the missing treasure is found in Benjamin's sack. Instantly dismay seizes all the brothers. They did not know that Benjamin was innocent, that Joseph had ordered the cup to be put into his sack for a purpose. All the circumstances were against him. It looked as if this youngest brother of theirs, of whom their father was so proud—was a thief! Here he was, bringing disgrace upon all of them. Now mark where the test of character comes in. If these older brothers had been the same men they were twenty-two years before, they would have made short, sharp work with Benjamin. But what did they do?

They tore their clothes in their sorrow, and went back, all of them, to the city. They hastened to Joseph's house and fell down before him on the ground. Joseph spoke sharply to them: "What deed is this that you have done? "

There was another outburst of penitence: "Oh, my lord, what can we say to you? How can we plead? How can we prove our innocence? God is punishing us for our sins. My lord, we have all returned to be your slaves—we and our brother who had your cup in his sack." They do not denounce Benjamin, and propose to give him up. They will all stand together.

Joseph said he could not punish the innocent with the guilty. "Only the man who stole the cup will be my slave. The rest of you may go home to your father."

Here was the test. Would these ten men go away and leave Benjamin alone, in the grasp of Egyptian justice, to suffer for his supposed offense? Twenty-two years ago they would have done it. Instead of this, however, we have one of the finest scenes in all human history. These brothers will not desert Benjamin. The speech of Judah, as he pleads for Benjamin, is one of the noblest pieces of natural eloquence in any literature, sacred or profane.

"Then Judah stepped forward and said, "My lord, let me say just this one word to you. Be patient with me for a moment, for I know you could have me killed in an instant, as though you were Pharaoh himself. "You asked us, my lord, if we had a father or a brother. We said, 'Yes, we have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, his youngest son. His brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him very much.' And you said to us, 'Bring him here so I can see him.' But we said to you, 'My lord, the boy cannot leave his father, for his father would die.' But you told us, 'You may not see me again unless your youngest brother is with you.' So we returned to our father and told him what you had said. And when he said, 'Go back again and buy us a little food,' we replied, 'We can't unless you let our youngest brother go with us. We won't be allowed to see the man in charge of the grain unless our youngest brother is with us.' Then my father said to us, 'You know that my wife had two sons, and that one of them went away and never returned—doubtless torn to pieces by some wild animal. I have never seen him since. If you take away his brother from me, too, and any harm comes to him, you would bring my gray head down to the grave in deep sorrow.' "And now, my lord, I cannot go back to my father without the boy. Our father's life is bound up in the boy's life. When he sees that the boy is not with us, our father will die. We will be responsible for bringing his gray head down to the grave in sorrow" Genesis 44:18-31 No one can read these pathetic words of Judah, as he pleads for his brother Benjamin, and not see that these men have been wonderfully changed since that day when they sold another brother into bondage, and were deaf to all his piteous cries and entreaties. Judah evidently speaks for all his brothers. We notice particularly, in these men, a tender regard for their father, which they had not shown before. They had seen his uncomforted sorrow all the years

since they had robbed him of Joseph; now they cannot endure to cause him even a single pang. Their gentle thought for him is really beautiful. We notice also a tender love for their youngest brother, which contrasts wonderfully with their hard-hearted cruelty toward Joseph that day at Dothan. As they were then—they would not have cared what might happen to Benjamin; now Judah begs to take the boy's place and bear his punishment, staying in Egypt as the governor's slave, so that Benjamin may return home.

Joseph was now satisfied. At their first visit he had seen their deep consciousness of guilt, as they remembered their sin against him. In this final testing he saw more—he saw that they were changed men. The grace of God had been at work in them. The sin of twenty-two years ago, they could not now commit. Penitence had wrought deeply in them, softening their hearts. They were prepared now to stand together as brothers and together to lay the foundation of national life. The time has come therefore for disclosure. All doubts are gone from Joseph's mind. As soon as Judah had finished his eloquent plea, Joseph ordered all the attendants to go out of the room. No eye must witness the sacred scene which was about to be enacted. When they were altogether alone, Joseph, with streaming eyes and loud weeping made himself known to his brothers. "I am Joseph!" he said to his brothers. Who can imagine their feelings—as these words fell upon their ears! First there must have been terror mingled with the amazement. Again all their sin against their brother rose before them. Here was Joseph whom they had so cruelly wronged. He was Ruler of Egypt, and they were in his power; what would he do with them? Twenty-two years ago, they had put him in the pit to die, and then had hastily lifted him out, only to sell him as a slave. They had supposed that they were now done with "that dreamer." But here they are before him in utterly reversed position. Is it any wonder they stood speechless in the presence of Joseph, or that they could not answer him, or that they were troubled? But Joseph's heart was too full to prolong the scene. "Come near to me," he said. "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt!" But he hastened to comfort them. "And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God!" Genesis 45:5-8

Then he bade them hasten to his father with the news—and to return, all of them, with their father and their families, to dwell in Egypt, to be near to him. The wonderful scene closes with Joseph's falling upon Benjamin's neck in loving embrace, then kissing all his brothers and weeping with them in the joy of reconciliation. The barriers were all now broken down. The old sin was forgiven. The long-sundered family was brought together again. Estrangement had been healed by love and peace.

Here we may pause in the narrative, to gather some of the PRACTICAL LESSONS.

Joseph's dealing with his brothers is an illustration of Christ's dealing with us, when we have sinned. When the brothers came the first time to Egypt and stood before Joseph, he was ready to forgive them, to be reconciled to them, and to take them into his favor. When he heard them talk in confidence among themselves of their sin against him, he was so moved that he had to turn away from them and weep. There was no bitterness even then in his heart toward them. Yet he did not at once say to them, "I am Joseph!" and fall upon their necks in forgiving love. He restrained his

tender feelings and impulses. He let them go away and for months longer remain uncomforted by the forgiveness, which was even then warm in his heart. He did it because he believed it were better for them that he should do this. He was not satisfied that they had yet reached the experience in which forgiveness would be the full, rich blessing it should be to them. In all this we have an illustration of the way Christ ofttimes deals with us in forgiving us. There is forgiveness in his heart the moment we stand before him. We have not to excite and kindle love in him. He loves us in our sins. He is always ready to forgive. But ofttimes he leads the penitent through experience after experience, before he reveals himself in full, rich love. These brothers were sorry for their sin when they first stood before Joseph. "We are truly guilty!" they said among themselves. That was confession. But had their sorrow for their sin—cured them of their wickedness of heart? Joseph was not sure at first. Mere consciousness of guilt is not enough when we stand before Christ. It is not enough to say, "I have sinned." There is a sorrow of the world, which works death. It is a sorrow because the sin is found out, because it brings shame and reproach upon us, because it hurts our reputation among men, or because it must be punished. Such penitence as this, does not satisfy Christ. He does not yet declare himself to the man who stands before him, weeping over his sins—but with heart unchanged. He does not yet forgive him. He may even seem cold to him, and may treat him with apparent harshness. The sorrow for sin which God wants and waits for—is godly sorrow, which works amendment of life; which is not only sorry for past sins—but which will no more repeat those sins. When Joseph learned at last that his brothers were new men, gentle-hearted toward their father whom they had once so cruelly and with such heartlessness, wronged; and loving and noble-spirited toward their brother, instead of manifesting the spirit of envy and wickedness which they had shown toward himself—he quickly revealed his identity to them, forgave them, took them into his heart, and lavished his generous love upon them.

Just so, does Jesus. When our repentance is sincere, true and deep—he then reveals himself to us, makes himself known to us, grants us forgiveness, and gives us his peace. As Joseph invited his brothers to come to Egypt, where they would be near him and where he could nourish them—so Jesus invites his forgiven ones into fellowship with him, into the family of God, to share all his blessedness and glory. This story teaches us the duty of forgiving those who have wronged us. It would be hard to conceive of any sorer wrong that could be done to another, than was done to Joseph by his brothers. There was no cause for it either, no provocation. It began in a feeling of envy because their father loved Joseph more than he loved them, and weakly showed his preference. It was aggravated by the boy’s dreams, which he in a naive and childlike way told them. Envy grew to hate, and hate ripened into the intention of murder, which by God’s providence was softened into selling as a slave. It was cruel wrong—and causeless! But we have seen how freely and how beautifully it was forgiven.

There does not appear ever to have been any revengeful feeling in Joseph’s heart toward his brothers. He seems to have kept his heart free from any trace of bitterness—and full of sweet, gentle love, through the years. When his brothers bowed before him, and he had them in his power—all his old affection for them revived. He forgave them completely. He took them to the old place in his love. He confessed them as his brothers before the king. He had them come and live close beside him, and nourished them with affectionate tenderness.

Surely it is a beautiful picture—Joseph loving and blessing those who had sought to kill him, who had caused him years of sorrow and grief! It is more than a mere human sweetness and gentleness of heart, that does this. Centuries before Christ came to teach the world the blessedness of forgiving, before the cross was raised up, before the gospel was written—Joseph had learned the whole lesson! How? He must have lived close to the heart of God all those years, and thus he became the interpreter of the divine forgiveness. And the lesson is for us! We live more than as many years after Christ's birth—as Joseph lived before he came; have we learned this lesson of forgiveness as well as Joseph had learned it? Are there any of us who have been abused by brothers as he was? Are we keeping our own heart sweet and loving under the ill-usage? Or have we allowed bitterness to creep in, a feeling of resentment, a desire for revenge? Let us study the picture of this badly-treated brother, forgiving those who had so sorely wronged him—until its spirit sinks into the depths of our spirit! Life is too short for us to carry in our heart, even for one little day—a feeling of bitterness.

"Forgive us our sins—just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us." So we pray.

We are taught here, too, that God uses even men's evil—to help advance his kingdom. Joseph said to his brothers: "Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you." We can readily see how blessing and good came out of all the evil done by the brothers of Joseph. Had not Joseph been sent to Egypt—no preparation would have been made for the famine. Even the men who did the cruel wrong themselves, ate the bread which through their sin had been laid up! This is a wonderful truth. God's hand is on everything. No evil deed of worst men, is allowed to run riot among the divine plans and purposes, or to defeat his love and grace. This does not make sin less sinful; but it assures us that even the wrath of man, shall be made to praise God.

It has been, said that some of the greatest treasures in heaven will be blunders which God's children have made when trying their best to do something to show their love. The soiled and puckered handkerchief the little girl is trying to hem, because she loves her mother—has a value away beyond anything a seamstress can do. Many a piece of marred work, marred by one who wanted to help Christ, and did her best—will have immeasurable value in God's sight. Many of us in looking back over our life, can see many things we thought were mistakes—but which now appear to have been the very best things we could have done. It seems as if the "mistakes" were all the while intended to be there, so thoroughly have they become part of the fabric of our life and work.

Indeed we may go further, and say that the errors, yes, even the sins of our life, when repented of, forsaken and forgiven—are taken into the hand of the great Master builder, and used in the temple walls. The result of Peter's fall was so transmuted, that it became a great blessing to him. Someone says, "God does not need our sins to work out his good intentions—but we give him little other material;" and it is surely a comfort to us in our penitence—to know that even out of such material, he can build beauty and good. It is a comfort to know that while we cannot undo our wrong deeds—yet God can keep them from undoing us—and can even use them in his kingdom. This truth should not make anyone think less penitently of his sins. We may not do evil—that good may come, depending upon God to bring good out of it. This would be presumption and blasphemy. The lesson is for those who have already sinned and done wrong and foolish things.

They never can be, as if they had not done evil. The memory of transgression will always give pain. Penitence is not the best thing; innocence is far better. But, having sinned, penitence is blessed; and even out of the hurt and the marring—God can build good. "You meant it for evil; but God meant it unto good."

We must all stand one day before him, whom by our sins we are grieving and wronging these passing days. The brothers never expected to meet again, the lad whom they had sold away as a slave. But one day, in Egypt, they found themselves face to face with him, and heard from his lips the startling words, "I am Joseph!" Pilate had Jesus before him, pale and despised, and sent him to his cross. In judgment, Pilate will lift up his eyes on Jesus and hear the words, "I am Jesus!" Are you wronging Christ? Are you grieving him, rejecting him? Are you harming any of his little ones? There will be a day when you shall stand before a great white throne, and shall hear from the lips of him who shall sit there, "I am Jesus!" Let us so treat Christ now—that when he reveals himself to us in the judgment, it may not terrify us with the words, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels!"—but give us joy to hear the precious words pronounced by his lips, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world!"

JOSEPH AND HIS FATHER

"But when they told Jacob all that Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to transport him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived." Genesis 45:27

Every side of Joseph’s character is beautiful. Everywhere we see him—he bears himself nobly. His childhood was winning. It was a sore test to which he was subjected when he began to endure wrongs; but here the splendor of his spirit shone out in even brighter light than in his childhood. When he was a slave, the manhood in him was free and unshackled. In the hour of temptation his soul remained untarnished. When he was cast into prison, falsely accused, though innocent, hurled into chains and a dungeon, he was not yet crushed. Instead of letting the darkness into his soul to darken his eyes—the light that was in him shone out and filled his prison with brightness, overcoming the gloom. Instead of yielding to discouragement and despair—he became a comforter of others. He filled the dungeon with the fragrance of love. Then at one bound, he passed from the darkness and the chains of cruel imprisonment, almost to the throne of Egypt.

Many men who bear adversity well, fail in prosperity. Many a spirit that shines radiantly in trial, fades out in the fierce light of human honor. But the promotion of Joseph, dimmed no line of the beauty of his soul. He went as quietly to the great tasks of government, as ever he had gone to his lowliest duties when a slave. He stood the test of sudden promotion to highest honor.

Again the experience changed. His brothers stood before him the brothers who had sold him as a slave. This was a great trial of his character—but he was equal to the testing. There was no bitterness in his heart. One of the most beautiful scenes in all history, is Joseph forgiving his brothers.

We pass now to still another chapter in the life of Joseph, and here, too, we shall find the beauty unsullied, the splendor undimmed. We look at Joseph and his father. We see at once, that through all the strange and varied experiences of life—he kept his love for his father warm and tender.

There is one incident which at first thought, seems to have shown forgetfulness of his old home. When his first son was born he named him Manasseh. "For God," said he, "has made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house." But he did not mean that the coming of this child into his home, blotted out all memory of his father. The words reveal the heart hunger of Joseph for home, love, and domestic ties. He had been torn away from these, and for thirteen years and more, had lived unblessed by human affection. Now the hunger of his heart was met by the child he held in his arms. He had now a home of his own, and in the new joy—the years of hungry, unmet love were forgotten, as the earth forgets the desolation of winter when springtime comes with all its glory of bursting life and bloom and foliage. But his father was not forgotten, even in the gladness of his own happy home. All through the story of the brothers' visits, we have glimpses of Joseph's love for his father. Little did those men from Canaan, know how eagerly the great governor watched their words to hear about his father. As he pressed on them the charge that they were spies testing them, learning what was in them, they dropped the words: "Your servants are sons of one man . . . The youngest is this day with our father." They spoke carelessly as to a stranger who knew nothing of their home—but their words told Joseph that his father was yet alive, sending a thrill of gladness into his heart. The brothers went home and came again, and when they stood before the governor, almost his first word to them was the inquiry, "Is your father well the aged man of whom you spoke? Is he yet alive?" The brothers saw nothing in the words but the fine courtesy of a noble gentleman; yet under the courtesy, there throbbed a tender filial love. When Judah presented his plea for Benjamin, referring again and again to his father at home his old age, his loneliness, his bereavement, his love for Benjamin so deep and tender that he would die if the lad were not returned to him—he little knew what chords he was touching in the soul of the great man to whom he was speaking.

It was this picturing of the aged, sorrowing father—which most of all moved Joseph as he listened to Judah's words. When the plea was ended, Joseph broke down could not refrain himself longer, and said amid sobs, "I am Joseph!" Then the very next words were, "Does my father yet live?" A few minutes later, after the passionate assurance of forgiveness had been given, to quiet the hearts of his brothers in their consternation, he bade them hasten to "my father". "Tell my father all about my glory in Egypt and about all you have seen. And bring my father here quickly!" He also sent wagons to bring his father over the rough roads as softly and gently as possible. He sent him presents, too, twenty donkeys carrying provisions and comforts for his father's use on the journey.

Weeks must have passed while the caravan slowly wended its way to Canaan, and while preparations for breaking up the old home and moving were progressing, and while the family journeyed again toward Egypt. At last, however, word came to Joseph that his father was approaching; and he made ready his chariot and went to meet him. Who can tell the tenderness of that meeting? The Bible never indulges in sentimental narration, and yet the picture its words present is very touching. "Joseph presented himself to him, threw his arms around him, and wept for a long time!" It had been twenty-two years since Joseph, a lad of seventeen, had gone away from the home door, to carry messages and tokens to his brothers, expecting in a few days to return. He had never seen his father's face since that morning, and the pent-up love of all the years found expression in his greeting.

Sometimes young men who have risen from a lowly origin to places of honor, have not cared to acknowledge the members of their own family in the presence of the distinguished friends who

stood about them in their new rank. But here, too, the character of Joseph shines in brilliant splendor. Egypt was then the first nation of the world in its civilization, its refinement, its culture. The court of Pharaoh was a place of great splendor. Jacob was a plain shepherd, lowly, unconventional in manners, without worldly rank or honor, withered, limping, famine-driven. Far apart were these two men, the governor of Egypt and the patriarch of Canaan. But the love in Joseph's heart for his father was so strong and so loyal, that he never thought of the difference, and he led the old shepherd into the presence of the great King with pride. He told Pharaoh of the coming of his father as eagerly as if Jacob too had been a king.

He made provision for his father, also, in Egypt, and nourished him as long as the old man lived. When Jacob was dying, Joseph stood watching by his bedside, the Prime Minister of Egypt by the old shepherd, with beautiful filial devotion. When Jacob was dead, Joseph fell upon his face and wept upon him and kissed him. Then followed a funeral like that of a king. Pharaoh's nobles, with the great men of the land, joined the family of Jacob in honoring the father of him who had saved Egypt from famine. The narration of these incidents in the story shows how loyal to his father, Joseph was. Through all the years the love of his heart continued warm and tender. Amid the splendors of rank and power, he never forgot the aged man, waiting in sorrow and longing, in his tent in Canaan. When his father came to him, bent, withered, limping—he honored him as if he had been a king. During the remaining years of his life he nourished him in almost royal state. When he was dead, he honored him with the burial of a prince.

All this illustrates the nobleness of Joseph's character. The lesson is plain. Children should honor their parents. Nothing more sadly mars the beauty of a life, than anything which shows lack of filial love and respect. Children never come to an age, while their parents live—when they may cease to treat them with affection and honor, in return for their unselfish devotion, self-denial, and care on their behalf, in the days of infancy and childhood. These are debts we never can pay, except by love that stops at no cost or sacrifice, nor flags in its faithfulness, until we have laid away the revered forms to rest in the grave.

Children who rise from lowly and simple homes to wealth, honor or distinction, should never dishonor the parents they have left in the obscurity of the common walks. There have been children who have grown distinguished in the world and then have been ashamed of the old-fashioned father and mother to whom they owed all that gave them power to rise among men. There have been fathers and mothers who, old, poor, broken, and broken-hearted, have been turned away from the splendid mansions of their own children children for whom they had toiled, suffered and sacrificed, without stint, without complaining, in the time of their infancy and early years. They thought it would disgrace them to own these plain, uncouth, uncultured old people as their parents, in the presence of their fashionable worldly friends. They did not know that their unfilial treatment of their own father and mother, left upon them a dishonor a thousand times deeper than any little social stigma which their acknowledgment of them before their friends could have occasioned. All the world condemns and scorns anything that has the appearance of disrespect to parents. This is a sin which even society never forgives. On the other hand, those who honor their parents have the commendation of all men. The beautiful example of Joseph should inspire in all children whose parents are living—a deep desire to give them comfort, gladness, and tender care as long as they live. In our infancy and childhood they cared for us, not murmuring at the trouble we caused them; when they are in the feebleness of old age and we are

strong, it should be ours to repay their care and patience.

If we are blessed with wealth or with plenty, they should share it who shared their all with us in days gone by, perhaps pinched themselves that we might not lack, or that we might be better fitted for life. If we have risen to higher position and greater honor than our parents had, we should bring them into the sunshine that is ours, that the blessing of our favored life may brighten and sweeten their old age. If they are a little peculiar, or odd in their ways, lacking some of the refinements of our more fashionable life—we should remember that these are only outside disfigurements, and that beneath them beat hearts of love, and dwell spirits which are noble with the nobleness of Christlikeness.

Even if parents have marred their life by sin which has brought shame, it were better, like Noah's nobler sons—to close our eyes and to fling the mantle of filial love over the shame.

There is another part of the story of Joseph and his father, which has its revealings and its lessons. We turn back to Hebron, and to the time when the brothers came home from Egypt after Joseph had made himself known to them. They told their father that Joseph was alive and that he was the governor of Egypt—but the old man could not believe the tidings. His heart was overwhelmed. For more than twenty years, he had mourned Joseph as dead. The vision of the boy's coat covered with blood, which had been brought home to him, had never faded from his memory. Joseph was dead, and torn in pieces by a wild beast. Jacob had never dreamed of seeing his son alive. Not a hint nor a whisper of him had ever come back to the old home all these years. Now to hear that he was alive in Egypt, was too much for the old father. "Jacob was stunned; he did not believe them." His sons sought to make him believe what they had told him. They repeated to him the words of Joseph. While he still listened, bewildered, doubting, full of conflicting emotions, the wagons Joseph had sent to carry him to Egypt were driven to the door. Then the donkeys, bearing the provisions and the good things of Egypt also appeared. Now Jacob was convinced. His spirit revived. "I'm convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die!" Why did the sight of the wagons help Jacob to believe that Joseph was still alive? Wagons were not known in Canaan at that time, at least, such wagons as those which stood before Jacob's door. These were fine carriages, such as were used by Joseph himself and other members of the royal household. When Jacob saw them he knew at once that they did not belong to Hebron or to any place in that region—but that they had come from Egypt. Thus he was convinced. Joseph must indeed have sent them. So the fruits and other things sent to Jacob's door were unmistakably from Egypt. They could not have grown any place but beside the Nile.

We have here another beautiful illustration of a phase of our Savior's life. Jacob had long supposed that Joseph was dead. He had seen his coat wet with blood. Now he is told that Joseph is alive. But he cannot believe it. He has no evidence of the fact, except the words of his sons. Are they speaking to him seriously and truthfully? He has never been sure of what they told him; they have not been truthful men. Might they not now be trying to deceive him? Besides, might they not be mistaken deceived themselves? 'Joseph alive! Joseph governor of Egypt! It cannot be,' said the old man. Then came the wagons and the good things of Egypt. "Joseph sent these wagons to carry you to Egypt, and these provisions for your use on the way," said Judah.

"Did Joseph send these?" asked the old man. He looked at the wagons and the provisions. Now he was convinced. "Joseph is alive!" These gifts and presents could not have come from any place

but Egypt. They must have come, too, from one that loved him and thought of his comfort. Then they must have been sent by one high in power and position, for they were fit for a king. Thus the wagons and the good things of the land helped Jacob to believe in the continued existence of his son, whom he had long thought to be dead.

All this is suggestive and illustrative of the way we are helped in this world to believe in the existence of Jesus Christ in heaven. We know that Jesus died on the cross, slain by wicked hands. We know that he was laid in the grave, and that a stone was rolled to the door. The gospel comes to us, telling us that he is alive. Note here, again, the similarity of Joseph to Christ. 'Joseph was alive in Egypt,' that was what they told Jacob. 'Jesus Christ is alive in heaven,' that is what the gospel tells us. Again, not only was he alive, he was ruler over all the land of Egypt. Jesus Christ is alive forevermore, beyond death; and he is ruler over all things, King of kings and Lord of lords! But Jacob could not see Joseph, and could not believe that he was alive. We cannot see into the land of glory, where we are told Jesus lives and rules. We strain our eyes gazing up amid the stars—but we see no face looking down upon us. We call to him—but we hear no voice answering our calls. Can it be true, we ask, that the Jesus who was nailed on the cross and died there—is indeed alive and ruling in heaven? Jacob was convinced that Joseph lived in Egypt—when he saw the tokens he had sent. Christ sends us blessings out of heaven, which prove to us that he is really alive there and in power. Do there not come answers to your prayers, when you bow and plead with God? Do there not come comforts for your sorrows, when your heart is burdened?

Canaan was famine-stricken. There was no bread in all the land. The people were starving. In Egypt there were great storehouses. From these, supplies certain good things came to Jacob's door. Somebody had sent them, somebody who knew him and loved him. They said it was Joseph, and the old man believed it. This world is famine-stricken. There is no bread here for our souls. Heaven has its storehouses. Daily there come to your doors from these reserves of goodness, supplies of blessing. There are blessings just for you, having your name written on them. They just meet your needs. They come just at the right time. "There must be someone in heaven who knows me!" you say; "someone who keeps his eye upon me and knows what I need, and then sends his good things to me at the right moment!" Yes; that someone is Christ. He is not dead under the Syrian stars—he is alive and in heaven. He knows you, and watches you, and sends the blessings your life requires. These good things that come into your days, with their joy and brightness, are all from him. To be sure they tell us that the proofs of Christ's resurrection are infallible the historical proofs. Witnesses saw him. He gave indubitable evidences of being truly alive. He ate with his friends. He talked with them. He showed them the nail prints in his hands and feet and the spear wound in his side. He remained on the earth for forty days until the last shred of doubt of his resurrection had vanished from the slowest to believe of all his friends. Paul said triumphantly, "Now is Christ risen from the dead." The historic evidence is utterly invincible. But a proof still more convincing and sure, is found in the experience of every believer. We know that Christ lives and reigns in heaven, for every day blessings come to us that could have come from no land but the heavenly land, and that no one but Jesus could have sent to us. The forgiveness of our sins, the peace that fills our heart, the joy that comes in sorrow, the help that comes in weakness, the human friendships that bring such blessings, the answers to prayer, the blessings of providence—who but Jesus could send all these heavenly good things to us? These are the best proofs to us that Jesus lives and rules in the land of blessedness and glory.

Wagons came for Jacob, to bear him to Egypt. Wagons will come for us by and by to carry us home. A chariot of fire, with horses of fire, came for Elijah and bore him away into heaven. The chariots need not be visible, are not visible, which come for God's people; nevertheless they are real. Jacob was not left in famine smitten Canaan while Joseph continued to live and rule in glory in the land of grain and wine. The royal carriages came to take him to his son. This, too, is a parable. We learn that Jesus lives and rules in heaven. We have glorious proofs of this. We bow in prayer and we know that our Redeemer lives and that he hears us and remembers us. But that is not all; that is not the best. To know that Christ, though unseen, is yet yonder in the silences, amid the hallelujahs; that he ever lives to make intercession for us; that he sends blessings down to us on the earth, heaven's good things—is a very precious truth. Even this is a joy that thrills our hearts. But there is something better.

We are not to stay always on this earth, separated from our Savior. The wagons came and took Jacob away from that land of hunger, with its mere handfuls of the good things of the land of plenty, and bore him right into the heart of the country where his son ruled. He was met on the borders of the country by the son who had died to him—but still lived. He was welcomed by him with love's warmest welcome. He was presented to the king who bade him dwell in the best of the land. There he stayed close to his son, nourished by him. No longer did he have merely a few of the good things, sent from far away, as tokens of the abundance in store yonder; he dwelt now in the very midst of the storehouses and had all that he could wish.

We see how beautifully true all this parable is, in its application to Christ's believing ones in this world. Here our joy is very sweet—but we have only little foretastes of the heavenly good things. By and by, the wagons will come for us to take us into the very presence of Christ. Already they have come for some of our friends, and have borne them to the land of life and blessedness. That is what death is—God's chariot swinging low, to carry home the beloved saint. When Jacob got into the royal carriage and it drove away, he was not sad. He was leaving his old walks and the place of his sorrows—but he was going to his son! He was leaving famine and poverty, and was going to a land of plenty. That is what dying is to the Christian. We shall leave the place of toil and care, to find rest. We shall leave the land of tears and separations, to go into the presence of our Joseph. The wagons of heaven have been at our doors already and have taken some of ours home. Some day they will come for us, and we will go away from this earth where the famine is, and where we cannot see our Savior. But it will not be a sad day to us, if we are Christ's own by faith. The wagons will take us to the land where our Savior lives in glory and reigns over all. He will meet us on the edge of that blessed country.

He will meet us on the borders of the land of blessedness. He will welcome us with tenderest love. He will present us to his Father not ashamed to own us as his friends, his brothers, his sisters, before all heaven's angels. He will give us a place near to himself, close to the center of heaven's glory. There he will nourish us with heaven's choicest fruits, and we shall go no more out forever. Our Joseph has gone before us to prepare a place for us! And when the place is prepared for us and we are prepared for the place, he will come again and receive us to himself, that where he is—there we may be also. Dying is but going from where we get only the crumbs—to sit at the full table! The doctor had spoken of the importance of keeping everything serene in the death-room, where a Christian woman was about to take her departure. "I do not see anything here to make us unserene," she said. "Death is but entering into wider, fuller life." Shall we not try to get true views

of Christian dying?

JOSEPH IN OLD AGE AND DEATH

"And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said—God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place." Genesis 50:25 Our last study brought us to the close of Jacob's life. Word was sent to Joseph one day that his father wished to see him. The old man was thinking of his departure. He knew that he must die in Egypt—but he did not want to be buried in that strange land. He wanted to lie in the land of promise. So he asked Joseph to swear to him, in the crude fashion of the times, that he would not bury him in Egypt.

Joseph promised. "Swear unto me," said Jacob. And Joseph swore unto him. It was no mere sentiment that made the old man, as his end drew near, crave to lie beside his father and his wife in the cave of Machpelah; it was his strong faith in God's promise to give Canaan to his descendants. He believed that the promise would be fulfilled and he wanted his grave to be where the future home of his children would be. Then he wanted his family, though still abiding in Egypt, to have a constant reminder that Egypt was not their home. He knew that his grave in the land of promise would continually draw upon their hearts.

There was another incident. Jacob was sick. Joseph heard it and hastened with his two sons to his father's bedside. Jacob adopted these boys as his own, taking them in among his own sons, kissing and embracing them, then stretching out his thin, trembling hands and laying them .on the heads of the lads, while he uttered this beautiful blessing upon them: "the angel who has kept me from all harm—may he bless these boys. May they preserve my name and the names of my grandfather Abraham and my father, Isaac. And may they become a mighty nation."

Then we have Jacob's death scene. All the sons are there and the dying patriarch, in prophetic words, unveils the future of each in turn. We need not linger on these patriarchal predictions, interesting as they are. But it is interesting to note the blessing pronounced upon Joseph:" "Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall. With bitterness archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility. But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel." Genesis 49:22-24

It is a solemn moment to a man, when he stands by the deathbed of a beloved and honored father. He lives over again all his own life—as he watches the last breathings of his sire, and listens to the last words of farewell and blessing. Those were intensely solemn moments to Joseph. All his honors seemed small, as he stood there by that patriarchal bed and felt on his head the touch of the hand now growing cold in death. At length the feeble voice ceased to speak. The blessings were all pronounced. Then came the dying charge. "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite." And when Jacob made an end of charging his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the Spirit, and was gathered unto his people. What a strange thing is death! He who but a little while ago was breathing out his blessings and his farewells—is gone now, away from earth. The old house is empty. The love that thrilled the heart with its tenderness and flushed the face with its glow and warmth, an hour ago—has passed from earth! Strange mystery of dying! How orphaned it leaves us when it is a father or a mother that is gone. We never are prepared to lose our parents. No

matter how old they are, how ripe their life, how full their years—the time never comes when we can lose them without a pang. Life is never quite the same again—when they have left us.

It is always so, when either father or mother is gone. Life is never the same again. Something has gone out of our life, something very precious, which we never can have again. Never more a mother's prayers lost and missed, now for the first day since we were born. No more a father's love, thought, care, and hope, in this world, lacking now, first, since infancy. The consciousness of bereavement is keener when a parent is taken away in the child's earlier years, and the loss is greater, in a sense—but perhaps the pain is no deeper. No wonder that Joseph fell upon his father's face and wept upon him and kissed him, when he saw that he was dead. His grief was sore, his sense of loss was great.

Quickly Joseph set about to do all that love could do to honor the name and memory of his father. The body was embalmed. Then followed seventy days of mourning according to the custom in Egypt. After this the patriarch's dying command was obeyed, and the twelve sons, with many Egyptian friends, among them men of rank, bore the body away to Canaan, and laid it to rest beside the bodies of his kindred.

It was at Hebron, in the cave of Machpelah. This cave is covered now by a great Mohammedan mosque. The entrance is so sacredly guarded that none except Mohammedans can enter it. There are shrines in the mosque for each of the dead who sleep beneath Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, Jacob. In the interior of the sacred building is a small circular opening which leads down into the ancient cave, where, no doubt, the twelve sons of Jacob laid the embalmed body of their father. Mohammedanism cannot always keep such jealous guard over that sacred burying-place, and it is the dream of many that some day this cave may be opened and explored, and that the mummy of Jacob may be found, as, recently, in Egyptian burying-places, the mummies of many distinguished men, including one of the Pharaohs of the days of Moses, have been discovered.

After the burial of his father, the story of Joseph is almost a blank. Only one incident is given. When Jacob was dead, the brothers grew uneasy. They thought that their father's influence had restrained Joseph from seeking revenge upon them for their sin against him, and they feared that now, when this restraint had been taken away, Joseph would visit punishment upon them. The memory of sin dies hard! It had been forty years since this wrong was committed, and for seventeen years the brothers had lived in the sunshine of Joseph's forgiveness, nourished by his love, without a word or an act to suggest anything of resentment; yet here we find the old dread still lingering. Guilt makes cowards of men! Sins against love—plant thorns in the heart!

Joseph wept when he heard his brothers' words. It pained him to learn that they doubted his love and forgiveness. When you have been a loyal and faithful friend to another, loving him unselfishly, making sacrifices for him, giving of your life's strength and skill to help him, putting honor upon him—it grieves you sorely to have him misunderstand you, suspect your sincerity and doubt your affection! Seventeen years of such generous love as Joseph had shown to his brothers in Egypt, ought to have made it forever impossible that they should doubt or suspect his forgiveness. Do we ever treat our friends so? Do we never treat Christ so? Do we never doubt his forgiveness, or question his love for us? Let us not grieve that gentle heart—by even the faintest doubt of a love that is infinite in its truth and its tenderness.

Joseph was pained when he heard of the fears and the distrust of his brothers—but his patience did not fail. "But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, do not be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them." Genesis 50:19-21 This was his answer to their distrust. It takes a large heart to love on—in spite of doubt, suspicion and unwholesome discontent; but Joseph had a large heart. His generous love never failed. In this case its warm tides overflowed the new barriers his brothers' distrust had cast into the channel, and buried them out of sight. His answer was only a new assurance of affection undisturbed by their treatment; he would nourish them in the days to come as he had done in the past. He would share his honor with them. He would provide for them in the land where they were strangers. He would care for their children. So he comforted them and spoke kindly unto them.

After this incident, Joseph lived fifty-four years—but nothing whatever is told us of these years. We can picture to ourselves a ripe and beautiful old age, full of honors and full of usefulness. He had saved Egypt and there is no reason to suppose that he failed to receive the gratitude of the people of the country unto the end of his life-course.

We know that his life continued beautiful to its close. Sometimes old age does not fulfill the prophecy and the promise of the earlier years. Sometimes men who live nobly and richly until they have passed the meridian of their days, lose in the splendor of their character and the sweetness of their spirit—as they move toward the sunset. A great many sermons are preached to the young. No doubt youth has its perils and needs constant warnings. But there is need also of wise words of counsel to those who are growing old. Old age has its perils and its temptations. It is hard to bear the honors of a good and worthy life, as they gather about the head when the years multiply, and not be spoiled by them. It is hard to keep the heart humble, and the life simple and gentle, when one stands amid the successes, the achievements, the fruits of one's life's victories—in the days of a prosperous old age. Some old men grow vain in their self-consciousness. They become talkative, especially about themselves and their own past. The ease and freedom from care which come sometimes as the fitting reward of a life of hardship, toil and sacrifice—do not always prove the happiest conditions, nor those in which the character shows at its best. Some men who were splendid in incessant action, when bearing great loads and meeting large responsibilities, and in enduring sore trials, are not nearly so noble when they have been compelled to lay down their burdens, drop their tasks and step out of the crowding, surging ranks—into the quiet ways of those whose life work is mainly finished. They chafe in standing still. Their peace is broken—in the very days when it should be calmest and sweetest. They are unwilling to confess that they are growing old and to yield their places of burden and responsibility to younger men. Too often they make the mistake of overstaying their best usefulness in positions which they have filled with wisdom and honor in the past—but which with their waning powers they can no longer fill acceptably and well. In this respect, old age puts life to a crucial test.

Then sometimes old age grows unhappy and discontented. We cannot wonder at this. It becomes lonely, as one by one its sweet friendships and its close companionships fall off in the resistless desolation which death makes. Then it is hard to keep sweet and gentle-spirited when the hands are empty and one must stand aside and see others do the things one used to do himself. Feebleness of health, too, comes in ofttimes as an element which adds to the hardness of living

beautifully when one is old.

These are some of the reasons why old age is a severer testing time of character, than youth or mid-life. Many men who live nobly and richly while in their prime, fail in their old age. The grace of Christ, however, is sufficient for the testings and the trials of the old as well as of the young. We should set ourselves the task of making the whole day of life to its last moments, beautiful. The late afternoon should be as lovely with its deep blue and its holy quiet, as the forenoon, with its freshness; and the sun-setting as glorious with its splendor of amber and gold, as the sun-rising with its radiance and brightness. The old, or those growing old, should never feel for a moment that their work, even their best work, is done, when they can no longer march and keep step in the columns with youth and strong manhood. The work of the riper years is just as important as that of the earlier years. Young men for action, old men for counsel. The life that one may live in the quieter time, when the rush and the strife are left behind, may be even more lovely, more Christlike, more helpful than was the life of the more exciting, stirring time that is gone. Life ought to grow more beautiful every day to its close. Let no one think that he has finished his task of sweet, true living—when he has got safely through the years of mid-life, into the borders of old age. No! we must not slacken our diligence, our earnestness, our fidelity, our prayerfulness, our faith in Christ, until we have come to the gate of eternity. God’s plan for our life takes in all.

Chalmers wrote: "It is a favorite speculation of mine, that if spared to sixty years of age, we then enter the seventh decade of human life; and that this, if possible, should be turned into the Sabbath of our earthly pilgrimage, and spent sabbatically, as if on the shores of an eternal world; or, as it were, in the outer courts of the temple that is above, the tabernacle that is in heaven. A beautiful thought, and as true as beautiful. Old age is a time for waiting, praying, hoping, and for reflecting to others, something of the peace and love of the heaven we are nearing, and of the Christ we hope soon to see." At last the time came for Joseph to die, as this time must come to all. "Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place." Then the record goes on giving the end of the story: "So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt."

Embalming was a costly process. When the body had been prepared, it was wrapped in bands of fine linen and placed in a stone or wooden coffin or mummy case. The Egyptian funeral rites were very elaborate. Because of his great service to the country, Joseph might have had a burial with the highest honors; but he refused all this. It is said that among the ruins of that wonderful land there has been discovered a tomb which it is thought was prepared for Joseph. It is near the pyramid of one of the Pharaohs. It is the tomb of a prince. It bears the name "Eitsuph" or Joseph, and the title "Abrech" which means "Bow the knee." If this tomb was prepared for Joseph he refused to have his body rest in it. He was not an Egyptian—but an Israelite. Like Moses, afterwards, he preferred to share the reproaches of his own people, rather than receive the honors of a heathen nation. Joseph was not buried at all in Egypt. His body was embalmed there—but not entombed. Egypt had long been his home. It had been the scene of all his honors and triumphs. His wife was an Egyptian. His friends were Egyptians. But he was still a loyal Israelite, and would not lie in an Egyptian grave. He would be buried in an Israelite grave. This is the first thought which

Joseph’s dying command suggests. But there are other thoughts. In the Epistle to the Hebrews when the faith of Joseph is spoken of, it is remarkable that it is this command concerning his bones that is mentioned. "By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones." How did this show his faith? It showed that he believed God’s promises concerning his people. His faith was so strong, that he refused to be buried at all in Egypt; his burial must wait until his people went up out of Egypt to their own land.

Mark the difference in the dying requests of Jacob and Joseph. Jacob, too, refused to be buried in Egypt. He had spent seventeen happy years there, and his family was well settled, with his son honored in all the land. But he could not die until he had the pledge from his children, that he would be buried beside his kindred. Joseph’s request was different. He was not to be buried in Egypt, yet his body was not to be carried to Canaan until his people should go there. He was so confident of their exodus—that his mummy was not to be laid in the grave at all until they went back to the land of promise.

There was a special reason why Joseph made his will in this way. He wanted even his bones to do good after his death. His people would need all the influences that could be put into their lives, in the long, dark years of trial before them, to keep alive in their hearts the memory of the promises, love for Canaan, and the hope of possessing that land. The graves of their fathers were there, which made the country dear to love and hope. But Joseph felt that his mummy left among them unburied, waiting to be carried away to Canaan and buried there, would do more to keep hope alive in their hearts, than if it lay at rest yonder in the cave of Machpelah. Every time they saw it they would remember why it was unburied, and their thoughts would turn toward their land of promise. By and by it grew very dark in Egypt. The dynasty of the Pharaohs who had been Joseph’s friends gave way to a new dynasty who cared nothing for his memory and were jealous of the growth of the Israelites. Bitter oppression followed. In those days of gloom, who knows how much the unburied mummy of Joseph, with its unspoken words of hope, helped to keep the people from despair?

Then one night there was great excitement in Goshen. The hour of departure had come. Here is the record: "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He had said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place." Exodus 13:19. Then followed forty years of weary marching and wandering, and during all this time the mummy of Joseph was in the camp. At length there was a funeral one day at Shechem, and those bones, in their Egyptian mummy case, were laid to rest by Joshua. Here again is the record: "And Joseph’s bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor." When tourists journey in the Holy Land, they are shown at Shechem the tomb of Joseph. It is but a little way from the pit at Dothan, into which his brothers cast him to die. So the great wrong is righted, for the world now honors his grave.

We may take two lessons from Joseph’s dying words. One is a lesson of faith. "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid." He would die—but God would live on and his work would go on. "God buries his workmen—but carries on his work." We have only our little fragment to build in the wall. Then we shall die—but the work will go on, for God lives on and his plans and purpose

shall not fail. The other lesson is, that we should live so that the memory of our life and its influence, when we are gone, shall inspire those who stay behind. "The memory of the just is blessed." Proverbs 10:7. Joseph's embalmed body, kept among his people, spoke not only of his noble work in the past—but declared ever the word of hope for the future. It said: "This is not your home. You are but tarrying here as strangers and pilgrims. By and by you will go on."

Such should ever be the impression that our life makes and that our memory keeps alive in other hearts. We should so live that when we are gone, every recollection of us shall make others think of heaven as home. We have not lived at our best—if the memory of our life only makes our friends think of us. The true life must ever speak of spiritual and eternal things!

Let us seek then to be so filled with Christ that every influence of our life shall incite men upward, toward God, and onward, toward imperishable things, starting in every heart, the prayer of divine longing for our heavenly home!

Israel Oppressed in Egypt

Exodus 1

After the funeral of Jacob, Joseph and his brothers returned to Egypt. Why did they not stay in Canaan? Was not Canaan the land of promise? Why was it that this chosen family were led off to Egypt, where ultimately they had to meet such experiences of trial and suffering? When we read on and learn of the hard lot of the Israelites in Egypt, their cruel bondage, does it not seem to us that it would have been better if they had not returned after the funeral of Jacob? But when we think of the matter more closely, we learn that the period of their stay in Egypt was not a mistake—but part of God's wise plan for the training of His people. For one thing, Canaan was full of fierce tribes, who would not have allowed any strange people to live and grow up among them. The sons of Jacob and their families would have been blotted from the earth. In the providence of God, therefore, they were led into Egypt, where they could grow up into a great people, protected by the king, through the influence of Joseph. Then, in due time, when they were great in numbers, they came back to Canaan and conquered the land for themselves, driving out the people that had held the country.

Another reason for the removal to Egypt—was that if they had remained in Canaan it would have been impossible for them to be kept separate from the nations about them. Yet this was essential. They were not to mix with any other peoples. The exclusiveness of the Egyptians, was such that it was impossible for them to mingle in intermarriage or even in social relations. A still further reason for the transfer to Egypt—was that Canaan was a wild country, crude and uncultured. It was necessary that the people of God should be educated, that they might be the teachers of the world, which afterwards they became. Egypt was at that time, the most advanced of all countries in civilization, in the arts, in education. Dwelling in Egypt, the people of Israel learned the things they needed to learn to fit them for their high position and their great mission.

We take up now the story of the Israelites in Egypt. It is something that even names live for thirty-five hundred years. It is suggestive, too, that out of the wrecks of human things in those ancient times, the names that are here presented are not those of kings, poets, philosophers, and conquerors—but those of men who were in the line of God's chosen people. The names of God's children are the only really immortal ones. They are written in the book of life. They may be names

of lowly people—but they are preserved, while the names of the great of the same period, have utterly perished from the earth.

Long, long ages ago, a fern grew in a deep valley. It lived for only one summer and then fell into the earth and perished. As it sank down in the indistinguishable mass of decaying vegetation it murmured, "I shall be utterly forgotten. I shall have no record in this great world. My memory shall perish." But the other day a teacher of geology, going about with his class, struck off a piece of rock with his hammer, and there lay the fern, every line of its beautiful leafage and veinage traced in the stone. So it is with the names and the deeds of those who live in this world to honor God and bless their fellow-men. Love never dies. Love's memory never perishes. The things you do in the name of Christ and to give comfort, cheer, and help to others—cannot fade out of the universe. Their record is written in imperishable lines in the book of God, and also in the lives into which the deeds have been wrought. Thousands who live in this world obscurely, and die, never thinking that they shall be remembered, will be surprised in the other world to see the record of every beautiful thing they have done, every gentle word they have spoken, every kindly touch they have put upon a human soul. The story says there were souls in Jacob's family. The Bible talks about people as souls. If you look at your concordance you will be surprised to find how common this is. Three thousand souls were added to the Church. On the ship on which Paul was when he was wrecked were two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. We talk about people having souls—but a far better way to put it is that they are souls. We are souls and we have bodies. The children who sit in the teacher's class and look up into her face are souls. They are going by and by into eternity, and will carry there the marks and impressions which she is making upon them these days.

It is well we should remember that we are immortal souls. We shall live forever, and what we do in this world shall never perish. It is worth while that we live every day at our best. At length Joseph died. He died—but he lives yet in the world. The story of his early days lives, and has for us all the interest and charm of a delightful romance. We read of his noble spirit, uncrushed by adversity, unembittered by injustice and wrong, keeping sweet, courageous, and loving, through all the thirteen years of cruel injury and wicked treatment. Joseph lived nobly, and then died.

We grieve when a godly man dies. But why should we? If he has filled his years, few or many, with beautiful living, dying is not a disaster. Joseph lived gloriously, and now the influence of his unconquerable life is still going on. Everyone who reads his story thoughtfully, gets new inspiration for beautiful and victorious living. All that Joseph wrought, all the impressions he made upon human history—yet lives. Good done in the world is imperishable. They tell us that a word spoken into the air goes quivering on and on, forever. We are certain, at least, that every good word spoken and every good deed done—leaves an impression on human lives which shall never die out. Every life that is pure in its purpose and strong in its strife, makes all lives better, truer, and stronger. Not only did Joseph die—but the whole generation to which he belonged passed away. However long one may live, the story always closes with "and he died." Whether beautiful or marred, whether good or bad in our life and character, we must come to the same end—death. There are those who do not like to think of this, and never put death into the plan of their life. Then when death comes—it finds them unready for it.

Then came a change of dynasties in Egypt, and the new king did not know Joseph, and so had no remembrance of what Joseph had done. Thus it is ofttimes. Nations and communities are

ungrateful; the good that men do—is too often forgotten. It is not best to count too certainly on the lasting gratitude of the people whom we benefit or try to help. Many times those we serve at greatest cost—heap injustice upon us or do wrong to us. However, the possibility of ungrateful treatment, should never check the outflow of our beneficence. Even if men do forget, there is one place where all our good work is kept in mind. Every tear, every sacrifice, every smallest service, Christ remembers. If we but learn to do all our work for Him, though men forget us and wrong us—we shall not fail of the final reward. The world can never rob us of the true reward of faithful service. It may withhold gratitude—but no earthly ingratitude can intercept the Divine blessing. Joseph is no poorer now for the ingratitude of the Egyptians. He helped shape the history of the world. Think of the countless thousands of lives he preserved from famine. His beautiful character has been for many centuries one of the world's brightest ideals. His influence is felt wherever the Bible is read. What does it matter then, that the new king sought to blot out the name of Joseph and every memory of him? Today his is one of the most honored names in all history, and his work in the world will abide forever. The new king entered on a course which was intended to check the growth of the Hebrews. He was a wise king, and feared that this growing people would by and by become a formidable power, if allowed to increase in the future as it had been increasing in the past. So he set to work to counteract the alarming increase of the Hebrew people. He did not know that he was contending with the Almighty. Tyrants do not see the invisible Being who stands behind the frail people they seek to destroy. They are continually resorting to cunning and policy to outreach God and carry out their own schemes. They consider it dealing wisely—but the end always proves it to be the most wretched folly!

There is only one place in the Bible where God is said to laugh, and that is when the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Almighty King. How foolish it is for puny man to contend with the omnipotent Jehovah! Men go on with their diplomacy, their scheming, imagining they are carrying out their own ambitious plans to final success; but they really are only like children trying to dam back the rising tides of the sea by their little embankments of sand. It is the worst of folly to contend with God. The only wise thing to do in any case—is to fall in with God's purpose and to work in full harmony with His plan.

Instead of checking the increase of the Hebrews, the effect of the king's oppressive measures, was to make them grow all the more. This has been the history of all persecution. It has served only to strengthen the Church and multiply it. The first great persecution of Christians soon after Pentecost, instead of exterminating the little company, only scattered the disciples abroad to carry the gospel into hundreds of new centers. It was like the effort of the wind to put out a fire—it only blows the few coals in every direction to kindle new conflagrations. "The blood of the martyrs—is the seed of the Church." So with all trial. Grace in the heart cannot be crushed out by afflictions. It is like those roots which, once in the soil, cannot be exterminated—but which grow all the faster and thicker the more you beat and dig them and try to get them out. This truth has two bearings. It shows how utterly futile it is to contend with God, for when we oppose Him—we really only help to carry out the purpose we seek to defeat. Then, it ought to bring a sense of wonderful security to the Christian who is exposed to wrongs or to trials of any kind. They can never really injure him, if he cleaves to his Lord. "We know that all things work together for good—to those who love God."

We are all in bondage naturally, and until our chains are broken and we are brought out by Christ—we are under this terrible taskmaster. Sin's bondage is hard, and it makes men's lives

bitter. It grows worse every day and never easier. Unless men are delivered from it in this world—it will end in eternal bondage. But God has mercy upon souls in this cruel slavery, even when they have no mercy upon themselves. He has compassion upon those who are bound and crushed by Satan’s taskmasters, and comes with deliverance. Jesus is the great Deliverer. The Childhood of Moses

Exodus 2

Everybody is interested in a baby—that is, everybody who has a gentle heart. The babies of the Bible are especially interesting. Next to the infancy and childhood of Jesus, perhaps no Bible baby interests us so much as the infant Moses in his basket among the rushes.

We must bring up a little of background of the story. Pharaoh became alarmed at the rapid growth of the Hebrews. He determined to check their increase. He tried to do this, first, by making the people slaves, reducing them to bondage. He made them toil on the public works. He set taskmasters over them and compelled them to work in building storage cities. The intention was, by the burdens put upon them, to wear them out and check their increase. But the more he afflicted them—the more they grew. Yet more rigorous was the service made—and the more bitter the cruel bondage. But all availed nothing. They still increased marvelously.

Then a still more barbarous scheme was ordered. Every male infant was to be killed, cast into the Nile. It was while this edict was in force that Moses was born. The prospect was not bright for the child’s future. But when God has a purpose and a work for a life, men’s schemes do not avail. The king was no match for God.

It is a beautiful story we are to study. The king’s own daughter becomes unwittingly the protector of the little child, not only rescuing him from the river—but also training him under royal shelter for his mission as liberator of his people. When Jochebed, the mother, looked into her baby’s face she saw that he was "a fine child", very beautiful. The child’s beauty was to play an important part in shaping his destiny. No doubt it influenced the princess, too, when she saw the child in the basket. It is not surprising that he seemed beautiful to his mother. What mother ever saw anything but beauty in her own child? Love transfigures the homeliest features. Every baby born into the world is the handsomest baby ever born—to one woman. God never sends a baby—but He sends love to make a nest for it. Yet there was something unusual in this infant’s appearance, something which told the mother that he was to have a great destiny. "Cast this baby into the river!" she said. "Never!" So she hid him. No doubt there were spies watching the Hebrew homes to drag every boy baby away to the Nile. Jochebed would keep the news of the little stranger’s coming so secret, that it never would be known there was an infant in the house. Yet it is hard to hide a baby very long. How she must have trembled every time the child cried, lest some informant might be prowling round the door and should hear the sound and come in. Three months passed. Then she began to feel that she could hide him no longer. He was getting too large. The danger was too great. She must think of some other way to protect him. How should she do it?

Love is fertile in devices. Jochebed decided upon her course, and then she intelligently and very bravely set to work to carry it out. She wove a little ark of bulrushes, and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. She seemed to put it just where the king’s watchers and guards would be surest to find the child. What

did she mean? Just this—that when she could no longer conceal him herself she would put him altogether out of her own hands—into God's. That is the law of Providence—God does nothing for us which we can do for ourselves; but when we can do no more we may turn to God and be sure that He will work for us. Jochebed believed that God had a great purpose for her child, and she would let God take the whole care of him in the present peril. Does any mother ever now place her child on the edge of such perils, committing him to God? Yes; there are more cruel rivers than the Nile, flowing by our very doors. Only think of intemperance, impurity, evil companionship, the myriad vices amid which every child has to be raised. The Christian mother cannot hide her child forever in her own home. Some mothers think this is their duty, and they try to keep their children sheltered in their home, not allowing them to mingle with other children. But this is not the true way to bring up a child in order to make him strong and ready for life's tasks and duties. He must meet temptation, or he will never be able to live victoriously. He must go out into the world. What can the mother do to shelter him from the dangers and the enemies? She can only build an ark for him, then put him out of her own hands, and ask God to take care of him.

See good Jochebed making this ark for the launching of her heart's treasure. She takes great pains in weaving it to make it strong. Then she plasters it with tar and pitch to make it watertight. No doubt many tears dropped upon it as she worked away, and she wove as many prayers as reeds into the little barque. At last it was finished. Then she took her three-month old baby and laid him in the ark, and told Miriam, the baby's sister, to carry the basket down to the river and leave it there at a certain spot among the reeds along the bank of the Nile.

Well, that is just what good Christian mothers are doing all the while with their children. They must let them go out to meet temptation. So they build arks out of the promises, the good counsels, the Bible teachings, and the home influences. They line them with many prayers and much love. They consecrate them with tears. Then they put their children into them and push them out into the world, committing them to God.

Now what did God do? He took charge of this child. How wonderfully He arranged everything! All the promises to Abraham and all the hopes of the nation hung upon that baby, born in slavery, with the doom of death pronounced upon it, and now laid actually outside of the mother's care in a little basket by the river's edge. Yet all was perfectly safe, for God was watching. "Steer boldly," said Caesar to his pilot in a storm. "Steer boldly, good pilot, for you bear Caesar and his fortunes." More than Caesar's fortunes lay in this little basket, and no wave could wreck it, no great beast could crunch the baby or trample it into the mire. The sister did her part well. She kept faithful watch over that basket, and did not go off to gather flowers, nor sit down to play with her dolls. She attended to her duty. Her baby brother's life was in her keeping. We shall see, as we read on, what she was to him, not only then but afterward. Many an older sister has been God's angel to her younger brother. Sometimes noble sisters sacrifice their own pleasure and happiness in unselfishly living for their brothers, that they may obtain an education and become noble men. In many a home there is a boy exposed to danger and temptation, and there is an older sister who has it in her power to be guardian and friend to him, doing for him what Miriam did for her brother. Will the young girls who read these words—think what they can do for their brothers? Was it an accident that the princess came down that way just at that time? She did not know any reason for taking a stroll but for the common one—that she might bathe in the Nile. Yet she was really on an errand for God. She did not even know God, for her religion was heathen—but God knew her, and

had her unwittingly do this beautiful work for Him. So we all go on our way each day, each intent on his own purposes—but all the while God is using us to help carry out His greater purposes. Any daily walk we take—may accomplish an errand for God, may touch some life with blessing, or decide some destiny. Had the mother thought it all out? Did she know the habits of the princess? Did she put her baby in the ark and place it carefully so that the princess would be the first to see it? Then did she depend upon the appeal the child would make by its helplessness to her woman heart? So it would seem. When the princess had the ark opened—the baby was crying, and this cry touched her compassion. She would have been an unnatural woman if she had remained unmoved, or if she had bidden her maidens cast the baby into the river.

We cannot but admire Miriam's beautiful doing of her part in this wonderful life-drama. Someone has said of her and her words, "A little girl by one speech changed the history of the world." She was watching faithfully, and the moment the little basket was brought to the princess this artless Hebrew maiden was close beside her. A picture of the scene represents Miriam standing with her hands behind her back, looking into the basket as innocently as if it were all a perfect surprise to her. With wondrous artlessness she suggested that she would run and find a nurse for the child among the Hebrews.

What woman should she call to nurse that baby—what one but the baby's mother? How the little maiden must have hastened! How the mother's heart must have leaped when she was called to become nurse to the little foundling! And now we see the princess of Egypt, unawares committing the beautiful baby she had found, back into his own mother's hands to be nursed by her!

We can imagine the feelings of Jochebed's heart as she took her child into her bosom again. She did not need to hide her baby now. The princess of Egypt had adopted him and the protection of the throne was over him. No one dared touch him. When God took charge of the training of this child for his great mission—the first teacher He sent him to was his own mother. No one can ever take the true mother's place in the training of a child. Some things God gives twice—but He never gives a mother twice to a child. It was especially important that Moses should be brought up in his earliest days by his own mother. He must be trained as a Hebrew, with Hebrew sympathies, with the knowledge of the true God. If he had been brought up from the first in the palace of Egypt, with Egyptian teachers, he never could have become the deliverer of his people. At length, however, the child was removed from the mother's care, and taken to the palace to occupy his place as the son of the princess. His mother must be his first teacher—but she could not teach him all he needed to learn for his life's mission. So God arranged at the proper time to have him taken to another school. He would have to wrestle with Egypt by and by, and deliver his people out of Pharaoh's hands. He would also have to take a great company of slaves, form them into a nation, train them for self-government, and fit them for a glorious mission. To be prepared for all this work, Moses was placed in a position to learn the best of the world's wisdom. He never became an Egyptian, however—but remained a loyal Hebrew. The Call of Moses

Exodus 2-3 The training of Moses took eighty years. For a great mission the preparation must be wide and thorough. Perhaps many of us would do larger and better work and leave a more abiding impression in the world—if we took longer time to prepare for life.

Moses received the first part of his training in a slave home on the Nile, with his mother for nurse and teacher. Mothers do not know the opportunity they are missing, when they allow any other one

to have the chief care of their children. It matters not how well qualified the nurse or governess may be, nor how faithful, how gentle, how devoted, the child needs the mother first. She has something that no other woman can give her child. "God could not be everywhere, and therefore He made mothers," said the Jewish Rabbis. God comes first to the child through its mother. She is a new incarnation, as it were. Her love is God's love interpreted in the only way a child could understand it. A nurse may do blessed work—but still the child needs the mother, and there will be something lacking in the child's training, if there is no mother's influence in it. No doubt it was a plain and humble house in which the child Moses was nursed and brought up. His parents were slaves. But there was love in the home. There was faith. There was loyalty to the God of Israel. There was prayer. Poor as the home was, and empty as it was of adornment, it was the best place in the world for the nursing of this child.

We know nothing of Jochebed, except that she was the woman God had chosen and prepared to be the mother of the man who was to lead the people of Israel out of bondage, then train them for national life, be their teacher, their lawgiver, and lead them to the promised land. This was one of the most stupendous tasks ever given to any man. God never gives the privilege of being the mother to such a man—to any but the truest, strongest, noblest, and most faithful woman. The quality of the training which Moses received from his mother, is seen in Moses himself. She had him in her home only a few years, and yet she put into his mind and heart, teachings which shaped all his future life. If there had been as little religious instruction given to him in his childhood, as is given by many professing Christian mothers in these Christian days—would it have made him the loyal Hebrew which he became? After these few early years with his mother, Moses, until he was forty, was constantly under Egyptian influences of the strongest kind. He was brought up in the king's palace as the son of the king's daughter. He had Egyptian teachers. His religious instructors were Egyptian priests. He attended the best Egyptian schools and was trained in all Egyptian learning. No doubt Moses, as the adopted son of the princess, received the best education that could be given to him. In all these years, therefore, he was constantly under Egyptian influences.

Yet he never became an Egyptian; he never forgot that he was a Hebrew. His mother had done her work so well, that thirty-five years of Egyptian teaching and influence could not undo it. Mothers may take encouragement from this splendid outcome of the work of Jochebed. Let them fill their children's minds and hearts with the best teachings and influences, training them to love God above all and to be faithful and true to Him at whatever cost, and then it will matter little what the after influences may be—the children will remain faithful and true unto the end. But the mother of Moses could not give her son all the education he would need for the great mission which was God's plan for his life. She was only a plain woman, without the culture of the schools. She could not teach her son the arts and sciences, the philosophies and the wisdom of the society, all of which he must know to be ready for his work as leader and prophet of his people. It was providential that the child fell under the shelter and influence of the princess, where he was fitted unwittingly in the largest possible way for the great part he was to play, in the making of the Hebrew nation. But the training of Moses was not yet complete. He was not yet ready for his great work. He thought he was. We do not know how it came into his mind, that he was to be the deliverer of his people. The desire may have grown slowly. In the scant records, however, we come suddenly upon the fact that his heart was burning with the wish to help his people. "One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their

hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand." The next day he went out again and sought to reconcile two Hebrews who were quarreling, and was defied. "Who made you ruler and judge over us?" Moses probably expected his people to accept him as their head and rise up against their cruel masters—but they were not ready for it. Then his effort showed that he himself was not ready. His act was brave, patriotic and chivalrous—but indiscreet. He had to flee from Egypt to escape the king's vengeance. The mistake Moses had made in trying to avenge his people, God used, as He often uses our mistakes, for the advancement of His cause. Moses was led into the wilderness, where he entered on the third part of his education. For forty years God was his teacher. He had lessons to learn which neither his mother nor the universities could teach him.

Moses was a shepherd. He was a great deal alone and had much time for quiet thought and meditation. We all need silent times in our lives. Some photographs require long exposure to fix them on the plate. Some Divine impressions one can receive only through long experiences. We need to dwell in the presence of God for years—to get the holy beauty fixed upon us! While he went about his homely duties he was maturing for the great work he was soon to do. Pride, self-confidence, revenge, and hot temper were dying in him. He was learning that self-control which gave him the honor in after years, of being called the meekest man.

One day Moses had a strange experience. As the old shepherd was leading his sheep in the desert, he came suddenly upon a bush which was in flames of fire. From the bush came a Divine voice calling him to become the leader of his people. "Come now therefore, and I will send you unto Pharaoh, that you may bring forth My people . . . out of Egypt." This call startled him. The fire of his old bravery and heroism had died down to cold ashes. In his long seclusion, he had lost his spirit, his enthusiasm, his confidence. So his reply to the call was, "Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

We may look at the persistence of Moses in seeking to be excused from his mission. First, he urged his lack of fitness. "Who am I that I should do this?" He knew Egypt, its power, the stubbornness of the king and how he would tighten his hold upon the Hebrews and refuse to let them go. What could he, the old shepherd, without an army, without influence, do with the proud, haughty king? The Lord met this objection with one word. "Certainly I will be with you!" Moses alone was not to do this stupendous task—God and Moses were to do it. Moses could not do it himself—no man, no company or combination of men could do it. Yet God would not do it alone; He needed a man with whom and through whom He could work. And when God says to any man, the frailest and feeblest, "Certainly I will be with you!" there is nothing the man cannot do. When a great conqueror was dead, some men who had heard of his exploits came and asked to see the sword that had fought so marvelously. They were astonished when they saw it to notice how small it was. "How could this common blade win such victories?" they asked. "Ah," was the reply, "you have not seen the arm that wielded it." When we read of the achievements of Moses after his eightieth birthday, and learn that he had nothing in his hand in all his work but a shepherd's rod, we must remember that the secret of power was not in the rod—but in the hand that held it. But Moses had another difficulty to present. His people would not accept his leadership. He remembered how, forty years before, when he wanted to be their leader, they had demanded, "Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?" They would ask now for his authority. What should

he say to them? "Tell them," said the Lord, "I AM has sent me unto you." Say to them, "Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Israel—has sent me unto you." Then He gave him also certain signs that would be his credentials, proving to the people that he was divinely sent to lead them out of bondage.

Still Moses hesitated. Another element of unfitness presented itself to his mind. "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." He may have had some impediment in his speech, or he may only have lacked fluency in speaking. Whatever the defect was, it seemed to him, to unfit him for the mission to which God was calling him. It would be necessary to speak well in order to impress Pharaoh. But the Lord promptly met this excuse or difficulty by saying to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

God is able to use the weak things of life, even the faults and imperfections of men. When He calls a man to a mission, He knows the gifts and talents necessary in fulfilling it, and will always give them. If it requires eloquence, eloquence will be given. But it may be that a man can better honor God with a halting, stumbling speech—than if he were gifted with human eloquence. We are sure at least that God will make no mistake in qualifying His servants for the mission to which He calls them.

Thus the difficulties Moses presented were met—but still he was unwilling to accept the Divine call. He had no further definite excuses to offer—but he broke out despondently, impatiently, almost petulantly, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it!" This was little short of a final and absolute refusal to go. "Send some other one, anyone it pleases You to send. But I cannot go."

God never gets angry as men do. Yet the record says that the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Moses for his continued and persistent refusal to go on the errand on which he was bidden to go—to do that for which he had been born and trained. The Lord’s reply was, "What about your brother, Aaron? I know he can speak well. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him."

There are two views as to the meaning of this reference to Aaron. One is that it shows God’s patience and kindness in meeting the fear and timidity of Moses. Moses was conscious of his lack of speaking ability, and Aaron, his eloquent brother, was promised to make up his lack. This was a grateful relief to a man who felt unequal to the task assigned to him. The other view is that the coming of Aaron into companionship with his brother, to share his work, was a distinct taking away of part of the mission and part of the honor of Moses. If he had cheerfully accepted the call of God he would have had honor unshared by another. But as it was, he lost part of the glory of his mission.

There is something painful in this part of the story of Moses. As great a man as he was, one of the greatest who ever lived, he appears at this point of his career in sad light. His hesitation in accepting his call is a blot on his name. When God calls us to any task or duty, small or great, we should accept it without question, without fear or doubt. Whatever we ought to do—we can do, with God’s help. God knows what He is doing when He marks out a mission for anyone. He will

never give us a task we cannot do, nor send us on a mission without qualifying us for it. For everyone of us, God has a life-plan, something He made us for. Moses almost missed filling his place in the Divine purpose. Suppose he had continued to give reasons why he could not accept his call, and God had taken him at his word and chosen some other man in his place, consider what it would have meant for Moses. He would have gone back to his shepherd life in the wilderness for the remaining years of his life and would never have been heard of in history. As it is, no other man in all the world's records has greater honor or influence than has Moses. May we not fear that many Christian people repeat the sad story of Moses in declining to do the work for which they were born? When you have been summoned to some service, some mission, or some great task, have you never said, "Who am I that I should do this work?" When you have been called to do some important work, have you never said, "I have not the ability for this!" Are there not men who in youth heard a call to the Christian ministry—but who begged off for some reason? Instead of spending their lives in the glorious work of winning souls, building up men in Christian character and comforting sorrow—they are devoting their lives, with all their fine abilities, to some little secular business—the care of a farm, a clerkship, an agency.

You are called to do Christian work in some definite form—in the Sunday School, in the Church. Do you promptly accept the call? Or do you give reasons or excuses why you cannot do it? Do you know what honor you are declining? There can be no excuse that will relieve us from anything that is our duty. We may sincerely think we cannot do it—but if it is our duty—we can do it, with God's help.

There is another suggestion here—talking is not the only way of doing God's work. Moses was a poor speaker; Aaron was a glib talker, the man the people heard gladly. Moses was ofttimes cast in the shade by his brother's brilliant eloquence. But Moses was the man of power.

There are men in every community who talk finely—but whose words are only sounding brass, making no impression, because character is lacking. Then there are other men who lack eloquence—but whose plain, simple words have measureless power, because of the true and worthy lives of those who speak them. Let not those who have slow, stammering tongues be discouraged. See to what splendor, power, and honor Moses attained, in spite of defective speech. Aaron could speak better—but was not one Moses worth a hundred Aarons? In studying the story of Moses the fact should deeply impress us that his life, with all its greatness and its mighty achievements, came perilously near to being a failure. It startles us to think that with only one more word of hesitation and unwillingness, he might have been left with his sheep in the wilderness, and the honor of the great mission for which he was born and trained given to another. At Baalbek, in a quarry, lies a great block, hewn and shaped, almost detached and ready for transportation, dressed and carved for its place in the Temple of the Sun. Then in the temple is an empty space. The column meant for this vacant space lies in the quarry, ready for its place—but never filling it. Moses was almost such a failure. And are there not many lives, made for places of great influence and honor—but which lie among the wastes and ruins of the world? The only way to make one's life glorious, is to accept the Divine purpose and to plan for it, and without hesitation, excusing, or shrinking obey the call of God and do the will of God.

Moses and Pharaoh

It was hard to get Moses to accept the leadership of his people. He almost missed the glory of his life, by urging his unworthiness and unfitness. But when he had accepted his mission—he gave himself to it without reserve. He never again raised the question of his ability. He never shrank from any service required of him. He never failed in any task or duty.

Moses and Aaron stood before Pharaoh and delivered to him the message of Jehovah, "Let my people go!" "Who is Jehovah," was the insolent reply, "that I should hearken unto His voice to let Israel go? I know not Jehovah, and moreover I will not let Israel go!"

Pharaoh charged Moses with keeping the people from their tasks, and the taskmasters were then commanded to make it still harder for them. They were to withhold straw from the brick-makers, compelling them to gather straw for themselves, while the quota of bricks required was not lessened. Thus the demand made upon Pharaoh, only added to the burden and hardship of the people. In their anguish, they cried to Moses in bitter complaint. Moses took the matter to God. God rehearsed His covenant promise that He would surely bring the people out. But they could think of nothing except their cruel wrongs and great sufferings.

One of the dangers of affliction, is that in our distress we fail to hear God’s words of comfort, that we think only of our own affliction and pain. There is a picture of a mourner sitting on a rock beside the sea which has swallowed up her dear ones. She is bowed in deep grief. Behind her is the Angel of Consolation, touching the strings of his harp. But the woman is so absorbed in her sorrow that she sees not the angel nor hears the music of comfort. So it is ofttimes with those in grief. The comfort is brought to them—but they hear it not. If the people of Israel had listened in their bitter trouble, to the promise of God—they would have been braver and stronger to endure a little longer in hope of the relief that was coming.

Then began a series of plagues or judgments—while Pharaoh fought stubbornly against God. These plagues were meant to reveal to Pharaoh the power of Jehovah and to compel him to let go his hold upon God’s people. The waters were turned into blood; frogs swarmed everywhere—in people’s houses, in their beds, their ovens; lice, then flies filled all the land; a grievous pestilence caused great loss among cattle; boils afflicted the people; a fearful storm of hail wrought destruction upon crops and property; locusts covered the whole country, eating up all the herbs and trees which the hail had left; thick darkness was over all the land for three days. At the first Pharaoh seemed entirely indifferent to these judgments. Then he began to be affected by them for a little time—but as soon as the plague was withdrawn, he would harden his heart. After the plague, he offered to let the people go to worship their God—but they not allowed go out of the land. This condition Moses could not accept. Pharaoh then agreed that they might go out of Egypt—but not very far away. But when the flies were gone, he withdrew his permission altogether. When the storm of hail was working such destruction, Pharaoh confessed that he had sinned—but his penitence was of brief duration. When the devastating plague of locusts was announced, Pharaoh said the people could go—but the men only. This condition, however, could not be accepted. When the darkness lay upon the land Pharaoh said to Moses, "Go you, serve Jehovah; only let your flocks and herds be stayed." The answer to this was prompt and positive. "Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not a hoof be left behind." Pharaoh then said to Moses, "Get out of my sight! Make sure you do not appear before me again! The day you see my face you will die!" Moses said, "I will never appear before you again!"

It should be noted that the Israelites did not suffer in the plagues. When the plague of flies was threatened, Jehovah said, "I will set apart that day the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there. I will put a division between My people and your people." After the plague upon the beasts of Egypt we are told that Pharaoh sent, "and, behold, there was not so much as one of the cattle of the Israelites dead!" In the storm of rain and hail the record is, "Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, there was no hail." In the time of the darkness in Egypt "all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings."

God always makes a distinction between His own people and those who do not accept Him. It may not seem so. Christian people suffer in the same calamities with those who are not friends of Christ. In the great conflagration there is apparently no distinction made. The houses of Christians are not spared, the fire does not leap over them and burn only the homes of unbelievers. In the desolation of the earthquake, when a city is destroyed, godly men's homes are not left standing, while the houses of wicked men topple in ruin to the ground. In the sweep of contagion over a community, there seems to be no favor shown to those who love God and live lives of faith and service. Life's common sorrows and troubles seem to knock at all doors alike. The godly are not exempt. Indeed, it sometimes appears as if the wicked fare better than the righteous, and have fewer trials!

How, then, does God make a distinction between His own people—and those who do not own Him and worship Him, who do not obey Him and live to honor Him and bless others? We may say at least, that when God's children suffer with the ungodly—they do not suffer as the ungodly do. The latter have no comfort in their sorrows or losses. They are not sustained and strengthened in enduring them. When their property is destroyed in the flood, the conflagration, or the earthquake, they have nothing left; their loss is absolute. When they are bereft, when loved ones are taken from them, they have no consolation; no Divine comfort is with them. On the other hand, the children of God, in precisely the same troubles or afflictions, have joy of which the people of the world have no experience; they have light in their homes. In their losses—they have compensations. A man had put all his money into the building of a mill. Just when it was completed there came a great flood, and the mill was swept away. As the owner stood on the bank when the floods had subsided, grieving over his loss, he saw something shining in the sands. The wild waters which had swept away his mill—had laid bare a vein of gold. The disaster which had beggared him—had made him rich. So is it always with the earthly losses which befall the godly—when they endure them with faith and trust in God. Earthly losses—uncover spiritual treasures! Pain which hardens the impenitent heart—softens the heart of him who is abiding in Christ. Bereavement leaves the Christian lonely—but he is comforted by the Divine love and sings and rejoices in his grief. "To those who love God—we know that all things work together for good."

Let us not say, then, that God makes no distinction now between His own people and those who love and obey Him not. We do not know what protection from physical hurt and danger comes continually to those who are Christ's. The ninety-first psalm is filled with promises of Divine care, sheltering and blessing to those who dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty. We do not know from how many unseen dangers we are preserved every day. God's eye is always upon His people. The very hairs of their heads are all numbered. Then when sorrow or trouble befalls them, they are held in the everlasting arms and the love of God ministers to them healing and comfort. The same troubles come to the saint and the sinner.

Yet there is always a difference. God does indeed make a distinction between the world and His own people. If sorrow comes to both, it is different—to the Christian it is illumined by hope. If death comes to both, it is not the same to both—to God's child it is but the opening of the gate into the Father's house!

Nine plagues had been visited upon his land and people—but still Pharaoh yielded not. Now the announcement was made that there would be one more judgment, the most terrible of all, and that then Pharaoh would yield. "I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. After that, he will let you go from here, and when he does, he will drive you out completely." The appalling character of the last plague would be such that Pharaoh would no longer hold out.

Preparations were now to be made by the people of Israel for leaving Egypt. The Lord's assurance had been realized. "No word He has spoken shall ever be broken." The people were to go out, and they should not go empty. "Tell all the Israelite men and women to ask their Egyptian neighbors for articles of silver and gold." The Hebrews had been serving the Egyptians long without wages; what they were taught to ask now, was their simple right. The result was that they went away with gold and silver and other valuable articles freely given by the Egyptians. These gifts no doubt were used afterward, perhaps contributing toward the building and adorning of the Tabernacle.

Moses then told the people of the terrible woe that was to come upon the Egyptians. "All the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die!" There would be no exceptions—no household would be spared the calamity. From the palace to the lowliest hut—every family would have its dreadful sorrow. Even the cattle would not escape. This would be the last judgment of God upon the Egyptians, to compel Pharaoh to let go his hold upon the Hebrews.

It is most interesting to notice that the Lord said, "I will go out into the midst of Egypt." It was a Divine judgment, not a mere ordinary calamity. This death of the firstborn in all the land of Egypt, suddenly and simultaneously, was not a mere coincidence, was not due to any pestilence or contagion. It was the hand of God which produced it. It was a direct Divine act, a judgment upon Pharaoh, to bring him down before the Lord in submission.

Here, as in all this struggle between the Lord and Pharaoh, the Hebrew people were unharmed. "But among the Israelites it will be so peaceful that not even a dog will bark!" This shows that it was not merely an epidemic that swept through the land, for then the Israelites would have suffered as well as the Egyptians. "Then you will know that the Lord makes a distinction between the Egyptians and the Israelites." It is always so. The Lord knows His own people, knows where they live, knows them in any company or crowd, never overlooks the least or lowliest of them, and always distinguishes between them and the people of the world. "The Lord knows those who are His."

Though Pharaoh had received such a fearful warning concerning the death of the firstborn—announced to him in advance, no doubt, to give him an opportunity to repent—yet his heart was not softened—but only grew harder! We would say that he, as king and father of his people, should have submitted in order to save them from the terrible calamity that impended, and which he was assured would surely come unless he yielded to God. But even this motive of compassion for his people did not make the stubborn king relent. He persisted in his struggle with Jehovah though he was assured that unless he let the people go—the firstborn in all his land

would die at midnight.

We should not forget that the same resistance to God is repeated in a measure, in everyone who year after year hears God’s calls of mercy and grace—and refuses to yield to the Divine love. There is a passage in the Gospel of John which reads strikingly like this story of Pharaoh: "Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them." John 12:37-40 To us the lesson is that we should listen to every voice of God, to every appeal and command, never resisting, always submitting gladly, cheerfully. Only thus can we make sure of God’s blessing. To resist, to refuse to obey, is to have our hearts made harder and less open to future appeals. And the end of final resistance and rejection—is the utter hardening of the heart until it is past all feeling, and past all hope! The Institution of the Passover

Exodus 12 The time had come for the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt. The struggle with Pharaoh had been long and bitter. He had resisted and refused to let the people go. Now the time had come when his resistance would break down. When in every house the firstborn would be dead, in the palace as well as in the laborer’s hut—the king would hold out no longer, would even demand that they leave his land at once. The ’Passover’ was instituted as a memorial of deliverance form Egyptian bondage. It would be their last supper in Egypt, and was to be observed annually ever after, to keep in mind the great deliverance. The leaving of Egypt, was a new beginning for the Israelites. They were to call this date, their New Year. They were to reckon time thereafter, from the Passover. In like manner the Christian world counts time from the birth of Christ. We write our dates Anno Domini—"in the year of our Lord". There were a great many hundreds of years before the beginning of the Christian era. The world is very much more than nineteen hundred and eight years old—but we count only the years of our Lord. In personal life the same is true—we begin to live, only when we become Christians. What went before, does not count. The real birthday of the Christian, is the day of his new birth, the day he was saved. No one truly begins to live, until the chains of his sin bondage are broken—and he goes out free. All the time before he leaves Egypt—is lost time! An eighty year old man, when asked his age—replied that he was just six months old. He said that though he had lived more than eighty years in this world—he had been a Christian and had really lived, only six months. All his other years had been time thrown away! No other anniversary should be kept so sacredly, with so much joy, as the anniversary of one’s conversion! The arrangements for the Passover were very definitely prescribed. Each family must take a lamb for itself; one household could not take it for another. Just so, one can take Christ for another. We have to carry our own sins to God. It must be by our own faith that we receive forgiveness. All true religion is personal. No one, not even a saintly mother, can believe for us, do our duty for us, or carry our load. "Each one must bear his own burden." Every family must have its own lamb. No one could come under the protection of some good neighbor’s faith. Every home makes its own home-life. If it is happy, the happiness must be made within its own doors. If it is loving and sweet, the love must be in the hearts and lives of the inhabitants. Every home must have Christ for itself.

We should not overlook this lesson. A man said, "Oh, my wife is religious for us both." But if a man depends upon such vicarious religion as this, he will find that his wife will have to go to heaven for them both.

There is a pleasant thought here also about family life, "a lamb for a household." The family is one. Parents and children stood that night about the table and were sheltered behind the same blood. Every family should be one in Christ with loving fellowship, all the members trusting in the same Savior and gathering beneath the shadow of the one Cross. The lamb chosen should be without blemish. It would not do if it were imperfect. The people were not to bring in a lame, crippled, or blind lamb. God wants the best. We should always bring to Him the best we have. We should give Him our heart when it is warm, tender, and unstained—not waiting until it has grown cold in the service of the world. We should give Him our hands when they are skillful and strong for work—not waiting until they are cramped, stiff, and unfit for beautiful service. We should give Him our feet when they are swift and ready to run upon His errands—not waiting until they have become crippled with age. We should give Him our lips when the eloquence and the song are still in them—and not wait until our voice is broken and has no music in it. Do we never bring to God things that are blemished, keeping the best for ourselves—and laying on His altar things that we not longer prize? Do we never give to Christ only the poor scraps—after we have served ourselves with the best?

Dr. Wilton Merle Smith tells of buying a ring for his wife. He found one which was very beautiful, with a stone that was rare and rich. The salesman then showed him another ring almost identical with the first, and said, "I can sell you this one for just half the price of the other." The rings were so alike that none but an expert could tell the difference. Dr. Smith asked why the second ring was offered for so much less, and learned that there was a minute and almost imperceptible flaw in the stone which only an expert could detect. "No," he said, "I do not want that. Would I present to the woman I love—a flawed stone?" Should we offer to Christ—a flawed offering, a blemished life, an imperfect service? The lamb was to be killed, and the blood put upon the posts of the door. The lamb died in place of the firstborn. That night in Egypt the firstborn of every family would die at midnight. The firstborn of the Hebrews would be saved—but only if redeemed, a lamb dying in its place.

It is said that on the roof of a little church in Germany, stands the stone figure of a lamb which has an interesting history. When some workmen were engaged on the building, many years ago, one of them fell to the ground. His companions hastened down, expecting to find him crushed to death. They were amazed, however, to see him unhurt. A lamb was grazing just where the workman came down, and falling upon it, he crushed the little creature to death, while he himself escaped injury. He was so grateful, that he had an image of the lamb cut in marble, and placed upon the building as a memorial of his deliverance. The lamb saved his life—by dying in his place! Each one of the firstborn sons of Israel was living the morning after the Passover, because a lamb had died in his place! Every one who is saved can point to the Lamb of God and say, "I am saved because Jesus died in my stead!"

It was not enough to kill the lamb—if they had done this and nothing more—the people would not have been saved from the death-angel. The blood must be put upon the doorposts. The angel would look for this mark on each house, and if he did not see it—he would not pass over that

house. It is not enough that Jesus, the Lamb of God, died for us on the cross. This He did, and the offer of salvation through His redemption is made to everyone. But we must make personal application of His redemption to ourselves, by having His blood sprinkled upon us. This we do by the personal receiving of Christ as our Savior. This is to each one of us, the vital point in the whole matter—not that the blood has been shed—but that it is found upon us. Paul speaks of the possibility of making the Cross of Christ of no effect. This we would do, if after Christ has suffered, we reject His redemption. Only the personal receiving of of Christ makes us safe.

There is something else here. The Hebrews were not only to put the blood upon the doorposts—but the family were then to gather inside the house and stay there until God should call them out. If any of them were found outside—they would not be protected by the blood. "None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning." Just so, we must take refuge behind Christ's Cross, and we must abide there, staying in the shelter. It will not do for us to run out whenever we please. We must live a life of continual faith in Christ, trusting constantly in His blood for our redemption, abiding in Him and yielding to Him unbroken obedience. The second part of the duty and blessing of that night—was the eating of the lamb. While the plague was sweeping over the land of Egypt—the household in every Hebrew home was gathered about the table, eating the midnight meal. While Christ by His blood shelters His people from the penalty of sin—He also provides a feast for them. This suggests many a beautiful thought about the Christian life. On the dark night of the betrayal, while the enemies of Jesus were preparing for His arrest and crucifixion, He and His disciples were sitting in the upper room, enjoying a feast of love together. Christ is always bread for our needs—as well as refuge from our sin. A feast means joy, gladness—all Christian life should be full of song and praise. Even in sorrow—we may have songs to sing. A Christian life is not merely protection from penalty, freedom from condemnation, a life sheltered from the storm; it is a life of joy, of peace, of love, of song. We are not only forgiven criminals—we are children of God, we have fellowship with God, all things are ours! We are not exempt from sorrow—but in our sorrow we have comfort. We have trials and afflictions—but in all of them there is blessing for us. Then the road, however hard and rough it may be, leads to our blissful eternal home! The blood on the doorposts was to be a mark of safety. "When I see the blood, I will pass over." It was very important, therefore, that the blood should be upon the doorposts in plain sight. There was no other safety. It would not be sufficient for a man to say, "I belong to the people of Israel, and God intends only to slay Egyptians. There is no need of my troubling myself to put blood on my doorposts. My home will be safe. My firstborn will not be harmed." Would this man's house have been passed over by the destroying angel? No! God had appointed a way of deliverance, and if any of His people had refused to accept that way, thinking that some other way would do as well, or that they were safe without any mark—they would have put themselves outside the protecting walls of the covenant!

Men may say of Christ's blood now: "I will trust myself in God's hands, for He is merciful; He is my Father. But I will not look to Christ's blood for salvation. I can see no need for that." He who would say this, rejects God's way of salvation; and there is no salvation in any way—but that which He has appointed, through Jesus Christ. We cannot say we trust in God's mercy—while we reject His Son. Christ is the mercy of God to the world. The angel looked that night for the blood, and only the houses marked by it would he pass over. No matter how good the people inside were, if they had disregarded God's appointment and had taken some way of their own—there would have

been death within their home at midnight! The blood must be on the doorposts—and the people must put it there with their own hands! It is so now—God looks for Christ's blood. Where that mark is found—He gives protection and blessing. Where Christ's blood is lacking—there is nothing to shelter from eternal wrath! The Passover was to be a perpetual memorial. The people were never to forget the deliverance of that night. Lest they might forget it, the Passover feast always reminded them that they had once been in bondage—and that they had been delivered by great power. It also reminded them that they were a redeemed people, since their firstborn were saved from death that night—by the dying of the paschal lamb in their place. The Lord's Supper is a like memorial to us. It tells that once we were in sin's bondage, that now we are free, and that our redemption cost the blood of the Lamb of God!

Crossing the Red Sea

Exodus 14

"At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well! Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead! Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron during the night. "Leave us!" he cried. "Go away, all of you! Go and serve the LORD as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, and be gone!" The people of Egypt were urgent that the Israelites should be sent away in haste. "If they are not, we are all dead men," they said. The Egyptians were disposed to be kind also to the Israelites, and responded generously to their requests for gifts, jewels of silver and gold and clothing. The children of Israel took their journey, gathering together, perhaps two million people in all, and began their march. It was four hundred and thirty years since the little company had come down to Egypt. God's covenant with Abraham had been fulfilled. "Know for certain," God had said to him, "that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions." When Pharaoh had thrust the people out of his land, God took charge of them. He chose the route they were to take. The shortest way would have been through the country of the Philistines—but that route was avoided, because they would have had to fight their way, and they were not trained soldiers and might be afraid and turn back again to Egypt. God never leads His people by any way that is too hard for them. He has compassion on our inexperience and weakness.

It is mentioned in the narrative, that the bones of Joseph were taken by Moses when the people moved. They had been kept unburied, because they were to be laid to rest in the land of promise. The people had Divine guidance—the Lord Himself led them, even directing their movements so as to draw Pharaoh's pursuing army to destruction. The narrative is full of instruction. It shows us that God is in all our life. We do not think enough of this—indeed, we sometimes forget it altogether. It will do us great benefit, to see the Divine part in all this story. Pharaoh was sorry that he had let Israel go, and soon was in hot pursuit. The Lord did not hinder him—but so directed the Hebrews that they were safe.

They were in great terror when they found that the Egyptian army was closing in behind them. Moses quieted them, bidding them not to be afraid—but to stand still and see the salvation of

Jehovah. "Jehovah Himself will fight for you. You won't have to lift a finger in your defense!" We need not be afraid to believe this record. This is history written from the Divine side. We see only the human side, and write our history from what men do. Here we see God proposing, planning and active in all things. There always are these two sides in life. We think that we are directing our affairs—but One we cannot see—is the real Master and director. "God is on the field—when He is most invisible."

Some men may tell us that the world has now got quite beyond belief in such a narrative as this. But this is God's world as truly as ever it was, and God is on the field as actually as He was that night by the Red Sea! There is no conflict here with science.

There comes a time when prayer is not the duty. Moses was called to get up off his knees, and lead the people forward. They thought they were hopelessly shut in between the mountains and the sea, with Pharaoh's army behind them. But they did not see the way of escape before them, through the sea! They did not need to cry to God for deliverance—they needed only to go forward.

They had a heavenly escort—the angel of the Lord, first before them, and then behind them. It is always safe to follow the guidance of an angel of God. God never sends a heavenly messenger to lead us into unsafe ways. This angel was revealed in the form of cloud and fire. Sometimes God sends us angels that wear robes of sorrow. It was wonderful guidance which God gave to His people in their marches out of Egypt. By day the pillar of cloud sheltered them; and then by night the same cloud was fire, to fill their camp with brightness. By day it was shelter, by night it was light, and always it was guidance. This was supernatural guidance—but we have God's presence just as really, though in no visible pillar, to lead us in life. God guides His people by His Word, by His Providence, by His Spirit. If we truly want to be led and are willing to follow unquestioningly, we shall never be left long in perplexity, as to the way we should take. Our guidance is given to us—only as we will receive it and follow it. God does not compel us to go in the right way. Nor is the guidance given in maps and charts, showing us miles and miles of the road at one glance; it is given only step by step as we go on. At a certain time, the angel changed his position and went behind the people. The pillar of cloud also moved and took its place behind them. Sometimes it is not guidance that we most need. Sometimes we must stand still, and then God goes behind us to shelter us, when there is danger behind us. He always suits Himself to our needs. When it is guidance we need—He leads us. But when we need protection—He puts Himself between us and the danger. There is something very striking in this picture—the Divine presence moving behind—and becoming a wall between Israel and their enemies.

There are some mother-birds that cover their young with their own bodies in time of peril—to shield them, receiving the dart themselves.

Human love often interposes itself as a shield to protect its own. On the cross Jesus bared His bosom to receive the storm, that on His people no blast of the awful tempest might strike! Not only does Christ put Himself between us and our sins; He puts Himself also between us and any danger! Many of our dangers come upon us—from behind. They are stealthy, insidious, treacherous, assaulting us when we are unaware of their nearness. The tempter is cunning, shrewd, watching for opportunities to destroy us. He does not meet us full-front. We need a guardian behind us—to shelter and defend us. It is a comfort to know that our Savior comes behind us—when it is there that we need the protection! The pillar stood between the Egyptians

and the Israelites. But it was not the same to the two camps. The same cloud was darkness to the Egyptians, gloom, hostility, confusing and hindering them; and to the Israelites light, friendly, favorable, showing the way. To His own people God is light, protection, shelter, blessing—but those who are not reconciled to Him, who are fighting against Him, do not find these favoring things in Him. To the unreconciled, the thought of God brings terror and alarm. The truth that God perfectly sees into every heart—brings to the Christian a sense of security, and fills him with peace and confidence; but the same truth makes the unreconciled sinner tremble.

God's providence in like manner has this double aspect. The Christian sees God's love everywhere. He knows that all things are working together for good to him—because he is God's child. He sees his Father ordering and shaping all events with loving wisdom, and he is never afraid. Every flower breathes love. When he cannot understand what God is doing—he trusts the heart of God, and waits. But to him who does not have God as his friend—this same Providence is a dark mystery. He has no sense of safety, no assurance of protection, no consciousness of God's love anywhere in the universe for him.

Death also to the unbeliever is a dark cloud, filled with terrors—but to the Christian it is a glorious blaze of Divine love, a pathway of light through the valley—into the heavenly glory!

It will be the same also in judgment. To His own people Christ will then be all glorious, and His appearance will give unspeakable joy; but to the ungodly His presence will bring terror! As the people went forward—they found an open way. God had cut the path for them through surging waters. Thus God always opens ways for His people, when they are following His guidance. He never asks us to take paths which do not lead at length, into blessedness. He never leads us into traps that we may be destroyed by enemies. Sometimes we think we are shut in, and that no way can be made for us out of our difficulties; but we have only to wait for God, and at the right time—He will open the door for us. We have only one thing to care for—that we are doing God's will and obeying His commandments. All else belongs to Him, and He will never fail us.

Thus God always changes dangers—into walls of safety for those who obey Him, and go firmly in the path of duty. So it is continually in life. Things we dread, when we go quietly forward in Christ's name to meet them—become helpers and protectors. We need never be afraid of anything into which our Master leads us—if we are faithfully following Him. "All things are yours," all things become your helpers. The storms only waft your barque towards home. The sickness that shuts you—in teaches you new songs. The sorrow that makes life dark for you—enriches you with heavenly comforts.

While the Lord was leading His own people in the light, helping them on—He was making it hard for their enemies. On one side of the cloud—an eye of love looked down upon the people of God; on the other side—it was the eye of an offended Judge which looked out on those who were fighting against God and trying to destroy His people. It makes a world of difference with us—on which side of God we are on! From the one side—love streams; from the other side—wrath bursts! A great fort in war times, is a protection to those who are inside its walls! Amid the roar and crash they can lie down and sleep in peace. But those outside the fortification find no such protection from it. The walls that shelter those within—frown upon those without, and from its guns the deadly fire belches. So God is the refuge of those who have fled to Him for safety—but it is a terrible thing to have God against us, to be on the wrong side, among His enemies! The Egyptians at last saw

that it was a resistless power against which they were contending, and that they could only be destroyed if they followed further, and they sought to retreat. But it was too late. They had gone too far in fighting against the Almighty! The destruction of the Egyptians was complete. They had seen the Israelites enter the parted sea, and supposed they could go in the same open way. But where the former found safety—the latter found death. The path which God opens for His own people—is not a safe path for His enemies. It was not made for them. The very Providence that protects the former, destroys the latter.

There are many promises to those who believe in Christ and follow Him; but not one of these is for those who believe not on Him. The angels who protect the one—destroy the other. The waters which are a defense for God’s own children—become a flood to overwhelm His enemies! Let no unbelieving person venture into the way marked out for God’s own children, hoping while unrepentant to find the same protection and blessing that they have found!

Life is full of illustrations of this truth—but its most striking application is to death. The believer finds the way open. "Why, there is no river here!" exclaimed a dying Christian. God opens a path through the waters for His own people. But not so for the unbeliever; death’s waters roll over him and overwhelm him in their blackness!

2. Volume 2

Volume 2

Volume 2 From the Exodus—through the Life of David

The Giving of Manna

The Ten Commandments

Worshiping the Golden Calf

The Tabernacle

Nadab and Abihu

Journeying Toward Canaan

Report of the Spies

The Brazen Serpent

Moses' Death and Burial

Joshua Encouraged

Crossing the Jordan

The Fall of Jericho

Joshua and Caleb

Cities of Refuge

Joshua's Parting Advice

The Curse of Meroz

Gideon and the Three Hundred

Ruth and Naomi

Samuel the Judge

Israel Asking for a King

Saul Chosen King

Samuel's Farewell Address

Saul Rejected as King

Samuel Anoints David

David and Goliath

David and Jonathan

Saul Tries to Kill David

David Spares Saul

Death of Saul and Jonathan

David Becomes King

David Brings up the Ark

God’s Covenant with David

David and Absalom The Giving of Manna Exodus 16, Numbers 11 The people of Israel had now entered upon their forty years of discipline. Daring this period they were to be made into a nation. This wider purpose should be kept in mind in all our studies of the incidents of the wandering in the wilderness. The people were to be trained to trust God and to obey Him. The first experience recorded was at MARAH. There, in great thirst, after three days of desert journey, they came upon springs to which they eagerly rushed, only to find the water bitter, unfit to drink. A tree growing close by was cut down and cast into the waters, at once sweetening them. Thus a lesson in trust was taught—God was leading them and He would not fail to provide for their needs.

Often in life, God’s children come to bitter springs. What promised to be experiences of refreshing, prove to be disappointing. Human lives have many sorrows. But always close by the bitter spring—grows the tree which will sweeten it. Many interpret the tree of Marah to mean the cross of Christ. The gospel has comfort for all in any trouble. Dr. Fairbairn speaks of the words of Christ as a handful of spices cast into the world’s bitter streams and sweetening them.

After leaving Marah, the people journeyed to ELIM, where they found an oasis with twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees. Life is not all disappointment and bitterness. Troubles pass away. Joy comes after sorrow.

Moving farther into the inhospitable wilderness, the people soon found themselves needing bread. They had already forgotten the lesson of Marah—the kindness of God in providing for their needs—and began to murmur! Again God’s answer to their ungrateful complaining was love—a new mercy. "I will rain bread from heaven for you."

"In the morning there was a layer of dew all around the camp. When the layer of dew evaporated, there on the desert surface were fine flakes, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they asked one another, ’What is it?’ because they didn’t know what it was. Moses told them, ’It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat.’" Exodus 16:13-15

MANNA was a substance which fell with the dew. For forty years, manna was rained about the camps of the Hebrews, until they reached Canaan and had the natural products of the fields for food. It fell in small grains, like white frost flakes; and in taste like thin flour-cakes with honey. It was gathered every morning, except on the Sabbath, and in place of this—a double portion fell on Friday morning. If kept over-night, it became corrupt except on the Sabbath. Manna was the

principal part of the food of the people all the forty years. As a perpetual memorial of this miracle, a golden pot of it was laid up in the ark.

God always has some way to provide for the needs of His people. He is not limited to ordinary means. He never works needless miracles. He did not send manna while the people were in Goshen, because there was no need for it then. But here in the wilderness, where food could not be gotten in any ordinary way, He supplied it supernaturally.

"Yes," someone says, "that was the age of miracles—but we cannot expect God to provide for us in these days—as He did then for Israel." The answer is that God's love is just as watchful and as faithful now—as it was in the days of miracles. We may always with perfect confidence depend on our Father to provide for us in some way—when we are following His guidance. Indeed, it is God who feeds us every day—just as really as it was God who gave the people the manna each morning. We do not call it a miracle when our daily morning meal is spread for us—yet it is no less God who gives it to us—than if a separate miracle were wrought each morning to feed us.

'Give us this day our dally bread.'

Back of the loaf—is the snowy flour,

And back of the flour—the mill;

And back of the mill—is the wheat, and the shower,

And the sun, and the Father's will.

Something was given to the people to do—even when the bread was supplied supernaturally. "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day." Exodus 16:4

They were not to lay up in store—but were taught to live simply by the day. When night came, they did not have a supply of food left over for the next day—but were entirely dependent upon God's new supply to come in the morning. In this method of providing, God was teaching all future generations a lesson. When the Master gave the disciples the Lord's Prayer, He put this same thought of life into it, for He taught us to say: "Give us this day—our daily bread." This is a most valuable lesson for every Christian to learn. We should make a little fence of trust around each day, and never allow any care or any anxiety to break in. God does not provide in advance for our needs. We cannot get grace today—for tomorrow's duties; and if we try to bear tomorrow's cares and burdens today—we shall break down in the attempt.

TIME comes to us, not in years, not even in weeks—but in little days. We have nothing to do with 'life in the aggregate' —that great bulk of duties, anxieties, struggles, trials and needs, which belong to a year or even to a month. We really have nothing to do even with tomorrow. Our sole business is with the one little day now passing, and the one day's burdens will never crush us; we can easily carry them until the sun goes down. We can always get along for one short day—and that is really, all we ever have. The Divine purpose in all this experience comes out here, "In this way I will test them, to see whether or not they will follow My instructions." God is always testing us. Trials test us—whether or not we will submit with humility and obedience to the experiences that are sore and painful. Life's needs test us—whether we will trust God in the time of extremity or

not.

None the less, do the gifts and favors of God test us. They test our gratitude. Joy tests us as well as sorrow. Some people forget God, when all things go well and they have only prosperity. Do we remember God always—as the Giver of each new blessing? Are we grateful to Him for all that we receive? These favors also test our faith. Do we still lean on Him—while we have plenty? Ofttimes one who turns to God when help is needed—fails to look to Him when the hand is full. The Divine mercies also test our obedience. Do we obey God as carefully and follow Him as closely and trustingly, when our tables are full—as when the pressure of poverty or need drives us to Him? Every day is a probation for us. In the midst of this great mercy of manna, God taught the people to remember the Sabbath. On the sixth day they were to gather and prepare twice as much food as on other days. The reason was that on the Sabbath no work was allowed. No manna fell on that day. There are several interesting things to notice here. While on other days, any manna stored up—would rot; the extra day's portion gathered on the sixth day remained fresh and pure for use on the Sabbath. Still further, on the morning of the Sabbath, no manna fell as on other days. Thus God taught the sacredness of His own day.

He teaches us also here that in order to keep the day as it ought to be kept, we should prepare for it the day before. The people were to gather the Sabbath's portion on the sixth day. There would seem to be in this provision and preparation in advance, a suggestion of the way we may best observe our Christian Sabbath. Some of us remember certain old-fashioned times in the country, when on Saturday evening careful preparations were made for the Sabbath, so that there would be no needless work done on the Lord's Day. Wood was cut and carried in, all the implements of worldly labor were put away, boots and shoes were cleaned and blackened, coffee was ground and food cooked, so far as possible—in a word, everything was done that could be done beforehand to insure the most restful Sabbath possible. This old-fashioned custom is a good one to keep in vogue always. Very much of Sabbath enjoyment and profit, will always depend upon the measure of preparation we make for it in advance. The Lord spoke of this manna miracle as an exhibition of His glory. "At evening, then you shall know that the Lord has brought you out from the land of Egypt; and in the morning, then you shall see the glory of the Lord!" The supply of food was an exhibition of God's glory. We may see the same glory in every evening's and morning's blessings, which a thoughtful Providence brings to us. We think only of the unusual, or the supernatural, as manifesting the glory of God. We forget that this Divine glory is shown just as really and as wonderfully in every day's new blessings. The miracle of God's daily Providence is infinitely more stupendous, than the feeding of a prophet for a few months from an inexhaustible handful of meal; the feeding of five thousand in Galilee with a few loaves and fishes; or even the feeding of a nation with manna for forty years. If the single special miracle shows glory, what does the great continuous miracle of each day's common blessings, year after year, and century after century, show?

Let us learn to see the glory of God in every piece of bread which comes to our table, in every drop of water which glistens on a leaf in the morning sun, in every blade of grass and bursting bud and blooming flower in field or garden.

One special lesson that God wished the people to learn—was trust. So He rebuked their complainings and murmurings when they found fault, and became afraid when they had hardships

to meet. "The Lord hears your murmurings which you murmur against Him!" Exodus 16:8. This is startling! Does God really hear every discontented word we speak? Does He hear when we grumble about the weather, about the hard winter, about the late spring, about the dry summer, about the wet harvest? Does He hear when we fret and murmur about the drought, about the high winds, about the storms? Does He hear when we complain about our circumstances, about the hardness of our lot, about our losses and disappointments?

If we could get into our hearts and keep there continually, the consciousness that every word we speak is heard in heaven, and falls upon God's ears before it falls upon any other ear—would we murmur as we now do? We are always on our guard when we think anyone we love and honor is within hearing, and speak only proper words then. Are we as careful what we say in the hearing of our Father? We are careful, too, never to speak words which would give pain to the hearts of those we love dearly. Are we as careful not to say anything that will give pain to Christ?

There are many interesting points of analogy, between the manna and Christ. The manna is called "bread from heaven." "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever!" John 6:51 The manna was indispensable—without it the people would have perished. Without Christ our souls must perish. The manna was a free gift from God—there was nothing to pay for it. Christ is God's gift, coming to us without money and without price.

Yet the manna had to be gathered by the people, Christ must be received and appropriated by personal faith. "Take, eat," runs the formula of the holy communion. The bread is offered to us—but we must take it and we must eat it. So must we take Christ when He is offered to us. The manna came in great abundance, enough for all. Just so, there is such abundance in Christ that He can supply all the needs of my soul, and of every soul who will feed upon Him. No one ever came hungry to Him—and found no bread.

Manna had to be gathered each day, a supply for that one day. We must feed upon Christ daily. We cannot lay up supplies of grace for any future. We cannot feed tomorrow, on today's bread. The manna had to be gathered early, before the heat of the sun melted it. We should seek the blessings of Christ's grace in life's early morning before the hot suns of care and trial beat upon us. The Ten Commandments

Exodus 20

Mount Sinai became the meeting-place of God and the people of Israel. The Lord met Moses on the mountain and told him that He would reveal Himself in a thick cloud, and speak to him in a voice that the Israelites would hear. Solemn preparations were made for the great event. Bounds were set, inside of which no one should pass—on penalty of death. On the third day, the promised revelation came. There were thunders and lightnings, and a cloud enveloping the mountain. Then out of the midst of the magnificent scene, God spoke to the assembly of Israel, the Ten Commandments as the basis of His covenant with them. The commandments are of Divine origin. The Lord based the obligation of the people to obey these commandments, on what he had done for them. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

Everywhere we find the footprints of God. Life is full of His goodness and mercy. When we think of what He has done for us—we cannot but recognize His right to command us. All the hopes of the

Israelites had come from God’s deliverance. Once they were slaves—and He had set them free. Had it not been for His love for them, and His power put forth in their behalf—they would still have been slaves in Egypt! He had redeemed them—and now they were a free people, on their way to a land in which they would grow into a great nation.

"You shall have no other gods before Me." The commandments are given in the second person singular, "You shall." God’s law deals with individuals and comes to each one personally and separately. The first commandment requires that God shall have the first place in our life. The opening words in the Bible are suggestive: "In the beginning God." We should put Him first and keep Him first in all our life.

Every person has some ’god’. Our god is that which rules us, that which we love, obey, live for, and reverence. We talk with pity of the idolatry of heathen nations. But there are idolaters nearer to us—than India or China. In whatever heart the true God is not worshiped, some false god is. Is the God of the Scriptures, indeed our God? Do we love Him above all persons and all things? Is He really first in all our thoughts, affections, plans and hopes?

It is not enough that we give Him the first place in our creed, saying: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord." If lip confession is all we have to give Him, He cares nothing for it. What is God to our hearts, to our consciences, to our wills? Do we trust Him? What is He to us? How much would we lose out of our life—if we were to cease to trust Him? Then it is not trust only that God asks—He claims also our worship and obedience. "If you love Me," said Jesus, "you will keep My commandments." This first commandment ought to start a great many searching questions in our hearts as we study it.

"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments." Exodus 20:4-6 This commandment does not forbid the arts of painting and sculpture, for even in the tabernacle, carved figures were placed. What is forbidden is the worship of God under any form or image. When God says that He is jealous, and visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, He does not mean that He punishes the children for the evil that their fathers have done. Each one must bear his own burden of guilt. But sin casts long shadows. It does not stop with him who commits it. Parents who are tempted to do wrong, should think that besides bringing punishment upon themselves, they are also sowing seeds of hurt and curse for the children they love.

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless, who takes His name in vain." There are many ways of taking God’s name in vain. One is to use it without reverence and love.

One tells of a miner, with grimy hand, plucking a pure, sweet flower. It seemed unfit, almost a desecration, for the lovely flower to be held in the soiled hand. How infinitely more of a desecration is it when in trivial speech we speak the name of God! The ancient Hebrews would, never utter the sacred name of Jehovah; they said it was too holy to be taken upon human lips. In some parts of the East, the Mohammedans will not tread upon the smallest piece of paper which they see lying

on the ground. They say it may have on it the name of God. If we only thought more of the holiness and majesty of God—we would surely honor His name more thoughtfully. Even Christians are ofttimes careless in the use of God's name in their speech.

One common application of this commandment, is to profanity in speech. Even boys who are but learning to lisp their early words, are heard using the Divine name in awful oaths and cursing. Men who claim to be cultured and refined, speak the name of God profanely, using it to give emphasis to their speech.

All the universe honors God's name. The stars as they shine, flash His praise. The storm, the sunshine, the towering mountains, the sweet valley, the thunder peal, the whisper of evening, the sweet flowers—all honor God. Man alone profanes, dis-hallows and blasphemes the blessed name. Profanity is a sin which brings no pleasure, no gain; it does not adorn one's speech—but disfigures it. There seems to be no reason for it—but contempt of God in human hearts.

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." Exodus 20:8-11

Many people seem to forget God's day. The day is like all other days to them. They do their work just as on week days. Or if they do not work, they take the time for worldly pleasure. It is time we should be reminded again, of what God has said about the Sabbath.

"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you." There are many reasons why we should honor our parents. We owe a great deal to them. They watched over us through years of helpless infancy. They toiled, suffered and sacrificed for us. They bore patiently with all our faults. They took the storms of life themselves, that they might shelter us. Perhaps they appear a little faded and old-fashioned to our keen, critical eyes. But if so, we should not forget how it all came about. It was in caring for us—that they lost their freshness and vigor. The Brittany peasants give this beautiful legend of the way the robin got its red breast: When Jesus was being led out to crucifixion, bearing His cross and wearing His crown of thorns—a bird, pitying Him, flew down and plucked a thorn from His brow. The blood from the wound gushed out and splashed the bird's breast. Ever since that day the robin has borne this mark of its pity for the suffering Christ. This is only a legend—but it teaches a beautiful lesson. We should ever be eager to pluck out the thorns which are piercing the brows of our mother and father. Some children, however, by their careless life or by their neglect, weave circlets of thorns for the brows of those whom they ought to love and bless!

Jesus gave us the highest example of honor to parents, in the way He showed His love to His mother. It was a sweet friendship that existed between this mother and her Holy Son. He opened His soul to her—and she gave not a mother's love only—but also a mother's counsel, and strong, inspiring help. Then His love overshadowed her to the last. One of the seven sayings spoken while He hung on the cross told of His faithful affection for her. The world would be desolate for her when her Son was gone. So He made provision for her in the shelter of a love in which He knew

she would be safe. As He saw her led away by the beloved disciple to his own home—part of the pain of dying was gone from His own heart. His mother would have gentle care.

"You shall not murder. Exodus 20:13. So long as we interpret this commandment only with bare literalness, it does not give us much trouble. Not many of us have ever killed anybody. But when we read into it the meaning that our Lord gave it in His Sermon on the Mount we find that it is not so easy to keep it. God looks into the heart, and He may find the spirit of murder there—when no hand is raised to strike. All bitterness, malice, hatred, envy, jealousy, uncharitableness, and all angry thoughts, dispositions and feelings—are the beginnings of murder.

There are many ways in which we may indirectly injure the lives of others. The dealer adulterates the food he sells, and the preparations act as slow poisons, secretly destroying the lives of those who use the food. A mother allows her children to violate the laws of health, to eat unwholesome food, to be irregular in their rest and exercise. By-and-by, they sicken and perhaps die. She wonders then at the strange ways of Providence and asks why it is that God so afflicts her. The plumber does careless work, and diphtheria finds its way into a home. The builder is negligent, and a wooden beam lies too close to the flue, and one night catches fire, leaving death in the ruins of the home. We are our brothers' keepers, and any failure in our guardianship leaves guilt on our souls. When the old Hebrews built a house, they were required by law to put a fence round the flat roof, lest someone might fall off and be injured or killed. So we should not only guard against harming others directly—but should also construct our whole life and influence so that no one may indirectly receive injury from us.

"You shall not commit adultery." Exodus 20:14. The seventh commandment also searches the heart, taking cognizance of the thoughts, feelings, desires, affections and imaginations. We must learn to guard our thoughts if we would please God. "Blessed are the pure in heart." One part of true religion, as James defines it, is to keep one's self "unspotted from the world." Lilies float in the black water of a bog—and yet remain pure and white, without spot or stain. So by the grace of Christ, every young person should try to live a pure and heavenly life in the world—but unspotted by the world's evil.

"You shall not steal." Exodus 20:15. There are many ways of stealing without deliberately putting one's hand into a neighbor's pocket and abstracting his gold or silver. The postmaster had failed to cancel the stamp on a letter, and the young girl who received it peeled off the stamp and used it again to send a reply to her friend. She thought she had done a smart thing—she did not see the eighth commandment broken under her feet. A boy went to the store for a pound of coffee. The shopkeeper was hurried, and in his haste gave him five cents too much change. The boy ran home chuckling over the mistake in great glee, because the grocer had cheated himself. He did not think that while the man had made an honest mistake—he himself was a thief. A man borrows money from a friend. He promises to return it next Tuesday. But he never returns it at all. He often thinks of it—but as his generous friend does not ask him for it—he never attempts to pay his debt. He supposes he is a debtor—he never thinks for a moment that he is a thief.

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Exodus 20:16. There is probably not a large amount of false witnessing in courts of justice. Even wicked men are afraid to lie under oath. But there is a vast amount of lying about other people, which is done in the ordinary conversation of the street, the office, the parlor. Anything is false witnessing, which misrepresents another or

puts him in a wrong light. Taking up any evil report which we hear and repeating it again, is really bearing false witness. Our neighbor's good name is a jewel which we should sacredly guard. The best rule is never to say anything unkind of another, even if it be true. It might stop much of the fashionable talk of society—but that is of little matter; the world would not be greatly the loser.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." Exodus 20:17. The tenth commandment forbids the sin of covetousness, and teaches the duty of contentment. A Roman Catholic priest said that among all the thousands of 'confessions' which had been made to him, no one had confessed the sin of covetousness. Yet probably no sin is so common, no one of the commandments is so often broken.

One of the best proofs of the Christian spirit, is the ability to rejoice in the success and prosperity of others. Does it make us glad to see our neighbor possessing good things—or does it make us envious? Do we rejoice in his prosperity, or do we begrudge his good things to him and wish they were ours instead? Does other people's happiness or success—make us happy or discontented? When we look down to the root of things, we discover that many crimes start just in the simple desire to have something that is not ours. "I saw, I coveted, I took!" told the whole story of Achan's sin.

Worshiping the Golden Calf

Exodus 32

Moses continued long in the Mount receiving instructions from God concerning the institutions of religion which were to be established in Israel. Meanwhile, what were the people doing in their camps at the foot of the Mount? While God was providing for them with such wise and loving thought, planning for their national life and giving them laws for their government, they grew weary of the absence of their leader, became restless and began to look back towards their old life. This shows the influence that Moses had over the Israelites and how much he meant to them. So long as he was with them—they were willing to follow his counsel and obey the Lord. But when he was absent and when his absence, though on their behalf and for their sake, was long continued, they forgot his teachings and in their hearts began to tire of serving the Lord.

Many people are good as long as another good person is beside them to influence and direct them. But when their friend passes out of their life they drift away into wrong ways. Many a boy begins a downward course—at his mother's coffin or by his father's grave. Many a Sunday-school scholar drops out of a class and begins to drift towards the world—when a faithful teacher goes away. Many departures from God begin—when a young man goes out from his old home and from under the influence of the household life and associations. The losing of a friend—is ofttimes the beginning of decay in moral and spiritual life.

There is a story of a man who had formed the drinking habit. One day he met a friend and said to him: "When I am with you I have no desire to drink, and if I come into your presence when the desire is upon me—it is instantly overcome. If I could come to you always when I am tempted—I would not fall." The friend told him to come to him at any hour of the day or night, and he would gladly help him. The invitation was accepted, and again and again a little talk in the friend's office and a little prayer—sent the struggler with temptation out brave and strong for victory. For years

the young man never once fell. At length his friend died. Then when the temptation came again he had no place to go and found no voice to cheer him, no hand to hold him up—and fell back into his old sin!

Whatever human friends may do to help us, we need Christ, too. A man is often a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest—but we need more than a man, else when the man is missing, there will be no one to help. The strongest human friendship will some day pass out of our life, and then if we have not Christ—we shall fall. The Israelites had been used to seeing other nations worship images, and they longed, too, for some visible image of God. The worship of the Lord they had been taught was pure and holy, while idolatry gave license to human passions. Discouraged by the long absence of Moses, and their hearts turning back again towards the world's ways, they came to Aaron, saying: "Up, make us gods, which shall go before us." We can easily find fault with the Hebrews—but are we much better?

We make our covenants and promises to serve God—do we keep them? In young people's societies the members pledge themselves to do certain things, and each month renew their pledge at their consecration service. Are none of these covenants ever broken? Christian people solemnly dedicate all they have and all they are to Christ. At every communion service they renew their promise and pledge of consecration. Do they never forget these promises and violate these covenants? Of course, there are temptations—but temptations are meant to be opportunities for victory and growth. Instead of yielding, we should be victorious through God's help, and in every victory we gain we shall become stronger ourselves. Temptations are never reasons for falling. They are only testings of our faithfulness, and everyone of them ought to be an occasion for victoriousness. When God permits as to be tempted—He does not want us to yield and fall into sin. His thought for us, is that in the testing, we shall endure and be proved true; and that in the resisting, we shall gain new experience and new power to stand faithful.

Aaron showed strange weakness in this crisis. Those who are set to be leaders of others have a tremendous responsibility. Other eyes are upon them, and for them to falter or prove weak—will be to draw other lives with them downward. One fine qualification was mentioned in Aaron when he was appointed to help Moses, "He can speak well." But eloquence is not enough in one who stands for God. Moses was slow of speech—but he could stand like a rock. If he had been in Aaron's place that day—the people would not have dared suggest a calf of gold, or if they had done so—they would have been met by such an answer that they would never again have thought of such a departure from God.

Aaron, however, seems not to have offered even a word of opposition or resistance to the suggestion made by the people. He assented to their request without even a protest or a single effort to keep them from sin. "Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden rings . . . and bring them unto me." Some writers suppose that Aaron thought the people would not grant the request he made for their jewelry. But if this is true, it still shows Aaron's weakness. It is never safe to parley in such a case as this. In the absence of Moses, Aaron was the responsible leader of the people. If he had boldly told them of the sin they were thinking of committing, speaking out with stern denunciation of it as Moses would have done—he would certainly have turned the tide of feeling, and saved them from their great sin. By yielding, however, even though he hoped to defeat their intentions in some other way, he showed his own pitiable weakness, and opened the way for the

great flood of evil which came in upon the nation. We should learn to stand like a rock in all matters of duty or principle. We are all leaders of some others. People come to everyone of us with their questions about this or that thing, which they are thinking of doing. If it is wrong—we should unequivocally tell them so, and refuse to lend our encouragement to the sin. The people were so eager to have the golden calf—that they did not hesitate to do as Aaron requested. The women loved their jewels—but in their enthusiasm, they were ready to give them up. "All the people broke off the golden rings . . . and brought them unto Aaron." When the work of Christ demands self-denial or sacrifice, no matter how costly—we should be ready to make it. When the things we love most deeply and cherish most sacredly are asked of us—they should be given up at once for God. Idolatry, wherever it is practiced, shows a measure of devotion and a spirit of sacrifice—that are not always found among the followers of Christ. When the idol was ready, the people said to each other: "These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" They, did not mean to turn away from the Lord—but to worship Him under the visible form of the golden calf. What they claimed to be doing, was the making of an image to represent the true God who had blessed them so much, and whom they wished to honor. It was the second commandment, not the first, therefore, which they specially broke. They had been forbidden to make or to worship any graven image. God desired purely spiritual worship. It is not likely that any of us will make images and worship them as gods—but whatever we put in the place of God in our hearts, as the first object of our thought, love and obedience, becomes an idol to us! We should guard carefully against this sin. God alone should be worshiped. The incident of the golden calf shows how easy it is to turn away from God. The way of obedience is a straight and narrow way. It lies along the path of the commandments. The Israelites turned aside from this path—and walked in ways of sin. God has made the way still more plain for us. We have conscience, the Bible, Christian friends and teachers, and the presence and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and we certainly know the way. Yet many of us are continually turning aside. God is then grieved—and trouble and sorrow come upon those who forget Him. The story of God’s anger and the intercession of Moses for the people, as told in this chapter, is full of instruction. We see what a fearful thing sin is. Moses hastened down when he was told that the people had corrupted themselves, and in his anger dashed the tablets of stone from him and broke them, when he found the people engaged in heathen rites. "When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain!" He then destroyed the calf, rebuked Aaron, and calling for those on the Lord’s side to gather about him, he sent them to slay the leaders in the idolatrous rebellion.

Moses’ faithfulness in dealing with the people after their sin, teaches us a great lesson. "You have sinned a great sin! I will go up unto the Lord; perhaps I shall make atonement for your sin." They had broken their covenant with God, and in doing so had forfeited the favor and blessing which God had promised them on the condition of obedience. There was only one hope—Moses would intercede for them. When we break our covenants with God—we have the same way—it is the only way—to get back into divine favor. It is a privilege to have human friends who will go up into the mount of prayer and plead with God for our forgiveness when we have sinned. The Lord’s words to Moses when he told Him of the people’s sin, reveal the almost omnipotent power of intercession. "Let Me alone," God said, "so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them!" If there had been no intercession, if God had been left alone, they would have been blotted from the earth because of their great sin. It was only the pleading of Moses for them that

saved them.

We cannot know what blessings come to us, and what woes and penalties are averted, through the intercession of our friends. No duty of love is more sacred, than that of praying for those we love. Especially should we pray for them if they have sinned, that they may be forgiven. Not to make intercession for them, then, is to leave them to receive the reward of their evil-doing without any plea on their behalf. But precious to us as are human mediators and intercessors, there is something better yet—Jesus Christ ever lives to make intercession for us. When we have sinned, He is our Advocate with the Father. The pleading of Moses for the people, shows what a great heart of love he had. "But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written!" It is doubtful if Moses himself knew precisely what he meant when he prayed thus. The prayer came out of a great heart bursting with sorrow and with love. So much we know, however, that Moses was willing to make any sacrifice, even to lay down his own life, that he might save his people from the doom which their sin had brought upon them. Jesus Christ not only was willing to lay down His life—but actually gave His life, making Himself an offering for sin, that He might redeem His people!

Sin brings sorrow. "The Lord sent a great plague upon the people because they had worshiped the calf." The sin was forgiven—but not all the consequences were averted. God spared the people—but He punished them for their wickedness. It is always so. The pardon of God does not save us from all the effects of our sin. The wounds may be healed—but the scars remain. Many a good Christian bears all through his years—the marks of his early sins. God forgave David’s sin—but the forgiveness did not take away all the consequences. The child of Bathsheba died, and then through all David’s life, retribution followed him, the same sins which he had committed reappearing in his own family, leaving their blight and curse upon his home! The Tabernacle

Exodus 40 The tabernacle was not built after the plans of any human architect. Moses did not design it himself. It was made according to the pattern shown in the Mount. We must worship God, not according to our own ideas of propriety and taste—but according to the Divine directions. The Divine instructions for building the tabernacle were definite and minute—but the work was to be done by human hands. The people were to contribute to the cost. Offerings were to be invited from the people—gems and jewels, precious metals, skins and yarns, spices and oils. Everyone among the people should have the privilege of contributing. The tabernacle was to be built with free and voluntary gifts. The tabernacle was not like our modern churches, either in its form or in its purpose. It was not a place where the people came together to sing and pray and hear God’s Word. Indeed, the people never entered the tabernacle at all. None but the priests were allowed inside the sacred tent. It was really God’s dwelling-place. The tabernacle was a type or illustration of Christ. God dwelt in a tent in the midst of His people. When Christ came He was the Word, God Himself, dwelling not then in a tent but in human flesh. His name was Emmanuel, God with us. There is an evident allusion to this first tabernacle, in the words of the writer of the Fourth Gospel: "The Word became flesh, and dwelt, tabernacled, among us." We do not need the symbol any more, since we have the reality. The tabernacle also showed the way of access to God. There the people came with their sacrifices and offerings, their prayers, their needs and sorrows, finding God ready to answer and help. The tabernacle also taught God’s holiness, for none but the priest was permitted to enter it. We can come to God only through Jesus Christ our High Priest. "No man comes unto the Father—but by Me." The furniture of the tabernacle consisted of four pieces: the

ark of the covenant,

the table with its bread and wine,

the seven-branched candlestick,

and the golden altar of incense.

First there was the ark of the testimony. This was only a box or chest, made of acacia wood—but it was the center of the whole sacred shrine. In it were placed the two tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written. The covering of this ark was not a mere lid—but a most sacred part of the furniture. It was made of pure gold, indicating its sacredness. It represented the very throne of God, and there He sat to receive the confessions and the praises of all the people.

It was a mercy seat, for God is a God of mercy. When people come to Him they are not coming to a God who is angry, who will not forgive, whose look is a consuming fire. He is a holy and righteous God—but also a God who is gracious and compassionate. The approach to the mercy seat was made always by the high priest with blood, which told of atonement. The cross of Christ is now our mercy seat!

Above the mercy seat appeared the Shekinah-glory, the Presence of God, on which no eye could look except when beneath it, hiding the accusing law, is the mercy seat. Just how much all this meant to the worshiping Hebrew, we cannot tell; to us, however, the meaning is clear. Christ is our High Priest. He made His offering of Himself on the altar and then passed through the veil and appeared before God with His own blood, which He offered there and thus obtained eternal redemption for us. The high priest went into the Holy of Holies, not for himself only, but for all the people. He bore the names of the twelve tribes on his breastplate and thus represented them all. When he passed into the Holy of Holies, and stood before the Shekinah, all the people stood there in him. There is access for us to the mercy seat—but only through Christ. The priest could stand before the mercy seat only when he had made an offering on the altar and bore the blood of the sacrifice to sprinkle on the golden lid. That is, access to God could be had only after atonement had been made. This, too, has its plain teaching for us. Jesus Christ could open the way for us into God’s presence—only by making an atonement for us. When He was dying on the cross, the veil which, until this time, had shut men away from God’s presence was torn apart. This rending of the veil was not accidental—but symbolized the truth that now the way to God had been fully opened. There is no longer any need of a priest—Christ Himself is our great High Priest, ever standing before God and making intercession for us.

There was also a table in the tabernacle. "You shall bring in the table, and set in order the things that are upon it." This was the table of the show-bread. It was overlaid with pure gold, surrounded with a border of gold. The table was furnished with dishes, on which, every Sabbath, twelve loaves of bread were laid. These remained there for seven days, and when replaced by new loaves were given to the priests to be eaten by them. Besides the bread, there were vessels on the table, no doubt containing wine. These provisions had their spiritual meaning. A table is spread for God’s children wherever they are. Christ not only redeems His people by His blood—but He offers Himself also as bread, the bread of life. In the Lord’s Prayer we are taught to pray for our daily bread, and the promise is given that our Father will provide for all our needs. The tabernacle was God’s House, and the table spread in it gave it the character of a home. It tells of the fellowship of

love. Oar Father brings us into His very family and causes us to sit with Him and commune with Him. The table suggests also the abundance of the provision which Christ makes for us. We have the same picture perpetuated in the Lord’s Supper. Friends of Christ gather as a family and sit down together with their Lord. All this points forward to still another scene, when all God’s children one day shall gather as one family in heaven.

Another article of the furniture in the tabernacle was a candlestick or lampstand. The lampstand represented the Church. There was only one central stem, indicating the unity of the Church. Then there were seven branches, each one with its lamp, indicating the multiplicity of God’s people. The lighted lamps burning in the darkness of the tabernacle symbolized believers, who shine as lamps in this dark world.

Jesus says to His disciples: "You are the light of the world." Every Christian should shine to make one little spot of the earth brighter. We are brightened, that we may brighten. All this was beautifully and impressively taught here at the beginning, in this Divine picturing of religion. We have it made clearer still in the vision of Zechariah. The oil is supplied without human agency—but the light shines in the lamps; that is, in the human lives which are Divinely lighted. The Church is to shine as the aggregate of all its individual members. If one little lamp goes out or shines dimly, one spot in the world is left unlighted or only dimly lighted.

Another thing in the furniture of the tabernacle was the golden altar for the incense. Incense was an emblem of prayer. There are several suggestions. For one thing, there was a Divine prescription for making the incense. "Take fragrant spices—gum resin, onycha and galbanum—and pure frankincense, all in equal amounts, and make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of a perfumer. It is to be salted and pure and sacred." Any compound different from that described was not acceptable.

There is also a Divine prescription for prayer. We are clearly taught how we must pray, of what ingredients we must mix our incense. The fire used on the golden altar must be holy fire from the altar of burnt offering. Prayer is not a sweet savor unto God, unless it is kindled by the fire of God’s love and by the Holy Spirit. Burning incense was fragrant; true prayer was sweet perfume before God. As the fragrance of flowers is pleasing to us, arising from forests, meadows, fields and gardens in the summer days; so is the prayer of earth which ascends from the homes and sanctuaries, from secret closets and from supplicating hearts. The incense was offered by the priest within the Holy Place, while the people were praying without. Christ in heaven offers our prayers before God, purifying them and adding to them the incense of His own sacrifice, and then presenting them, sweetened by His own intercession.

Outside the tabernacle there was another altar—the altar of burnt offering. This altar was the first object the worshiper saw as he approached the sacred tent. It stood guard over the way to the Holy Place. No one could enter the tabernacle, to reach God’s presence, except by the way of the altar of burnt offering. It thus pictures Christ’s cross. Before we can gain access to God—we must stop at the cross and find forgiveness of sins. An unforgiven soul—has no access to God. The cross is the gate and the only gate, which opens to new life and to glory.

There was also a laver outside the tabernacle. It was placed between the altar and the tabernacle door. After sacrificing upon the altar, the priest must stop at the laver and wash before he entered

the Holy Place. We need not only the blood of Christ to atone for our guilt—but also the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. The altar of burnt offering told of justification, and the laver told of sanctification. When the tabernacle was set up, it and all its vessels and furniture must be anointed. Nothing was ready for use, though all things had been made after the Divine pattern, until anointed with holy oil. There was a Divine prescription also for the making of this sacred oil: "Collect choice spices—12½ pounds of pure myrrh, 6¼ pounds each of cinnamon and of sweet cane, 12½ pounds of cassia, and one gallon of olive oil. Blend these ingredients into a holy anointing oil." With this oil, the tabernacle and its furniture were to be anointed. This anointing made the place holy. After this it would have been sacrilege to use the tabernacle or any of its vessels for any common service. Our lives, when anointed by the Holy Spirit, are sacred to God, and should not be used in any profane or unholy service.

There is a story of an artist who had made a noble representation in marble of the Redeemer and who afterwards refused to make any figures of any but sacred subjects. He was requested to make statues of heathen goddesses for ornaments—but he said his art was now consecrated to God. "The hands that have cut the figure of the Christ in marble," he said, "must not carve anything that is not holy." So we may say that the lips that speak Christ's name in prayer—should utter none but holy words. The hearts which are temples of the Holy Spirit—should not entertain any impure or unworthy guests. Whatever is touched by the consecrating oil of Divine grace—must never be profaned by any unholy use.

Aaron and his sons were appointed priests. They were washed with water, symbolizing their spiritual cleansing in preparation for their sacred work. Then upon them were put the holy garments. These garments had their typical meaning. For example, on each shoulder, in the golden clasp that fastened the two parts of the ephod, was an onyx stone, on which were engraved the names of six of the tribes of Israel—six on one stone and six on the other. Thus the high priest bore all the people on his shoulder—the place of strength and upholding.

Again, the priest's breastplate had in it twelve precious stones, with the names of the twelve tribes cut in them, on each stone the name of one tribe. This breastplate the priest wore over his heart, the place of love. Thus he bore the people in this typical way on his shoulders for support and upholding, and on his heart for affection and cherishing. Thus Christ, who is our High Priest, bears all His people on His shoulder for uplifting, and on His heart in tender, unchanging love.

Nadab and Abihu Leviticus 10:1-11

"Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered strange fire before the LORD, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD." Leviticus 10:1-2 The incident of Nadab and Abihu is the story of a sin which casts a shadow over the beginnings of the tabernacle worship. These young priests were presumptuous, elated by the new honor conferred upon them, and, besides, were probably under the influence of wine. Swift and terrible punishment came upon them for their sin, the essence of which was that they disregarded definite Divine instructions and took their own way instead of God's. It was right to offer incense—but it must be offered in the way God had prescribed. The fire must come from the altar of burnt offering—but these priests took common fire instead.

One lesson is, that we are not to be guided by what we think proper and fitting in serving God—but by what God Himself tells us He wants. Saul, in one of his campaigns, thought he would honor God by sparing some of the finest cattle he had taken from the Amalekites, which God had bidden him to destroy and offer them as a burnt offering. But his act was displeasing to God. "To obey is better than sacrifice," Samuel told the king. The Lord knew what was the best thing to do with the Amalekites cattle. Precise obedience is what pleases God. He cares nothing for sacrifices, if in making them we have disobeyed Him. Any fire would make incense burn fragrantly—but God had not said any fire would do. It must be holy fire. Our worship must be of the heart, inspired by love for Christ and under the direction of the Holy Spirit. All our life must be according to the will of God. It is not enough that we make it brilliant, that it shall win the praise of men—it must please God. It is well for us to ask ourselves continually, what God thinks of us and of the things we do. No matter how men compliment us on the excellence of our achievements, if God is not pleased and does not approve us, human commendation is only a mockery!

Another teaching is, that we are always in danger of offering strange fire in our worship. If our prayers are only for things we ourselves want, without reference to God’s will, they are kindled with strange fire. If we offer only forms of worship, however ornate and beautiful—but without faith and love and true adoration, we are offering strange fire to God. If we live in sin, breaking the commandments, and then come before God with devout postures and pious words, it is strange fire we are bringing. If we make money dishonestly and then come with the fruits of our dishonesty in our hands, giving them for God’s service, we are offering strange fire in our censer. Only the prayers that are in accordance with the will of God and are inspired by the Spirit of God—are acceptable to the Hearer of prayer. Only the service that is rendered in obedience and holiness is pleasing service. Only the money that is earned according to God’s law is a fragrant offering when laid upon God’s altar.

Someone tells of an old codfish dealer, a very earnest and sincere man, who prayed every day. One of the chief joys of his life was the hour of daily family worship. One year two merchants persuaded him to go into a deal with them, by which they could control all the codfish in the market and greatly increase the price. The plan was succeeding well when this good old man learned that many poor people in the city were suffering because of the great increase in the price of codfish. It troubled him so, that he broke down in trying to pray at the family altar and went straight to the men who had led him into the plot, and told them that he could not go on with it. Said the old man: "I can’t afford to do anything which interferes with my family prayers. And this morning when I got down on my knees and tried to pray, there was a mountain of codfish before me, high enough to shut out the throne of God, and I could not pray. I tried my best to get around it, or get over it—but every time I started to pray, that pile of codfish loomed up between me and my God. I wouldn’t have my family prayers spoiled for all the codfish in the Atlantic Ocean, and I shall have nothing more to do with it, or with any money made out of it." When Nadab and Abihu had offered the strange fire, the punishment followed swiftly and terribly. "So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them!" On one page of the Scriptures we read: "God is love," but on another page we find the words: "Our God is a consuming fire." We see so much of the Divine mercy that covers up our sins and hides them, putting out their blackness with the glorious whiteness of grace, that we are in danger of forgetting how exceedingly sinful sin is, how hateful to God, and what penalties it brings upon itself! Indeed, the smallest sin is a breach of law which

would invariably draw instant death upon him who commits it—were it not for the patience and forbearance of God. Such judgments as this, give us glimpses of sin's true character and its invariable penalties, unless we are shielded beneath the wings of Divine love!

God's holiness is always manifested in His acts, whether they are of mercy or of justice. In the case of these men, the holiness was shown in their punishment. They refused to honor the Lord by doing that which he had commanded them to do, and were struck down at the tabernacle door for their sin. The law of God always has a double aspect. From one side—it appears bright and full of blessing; from the other side—it is dark and full of terrors. It is like the pillar of cloud which led the people in their journey from Egypt. It was light on one side, towards the Israelites; it was dark and terrible towards the Egyptians. Even of the gospel of Christ, the same is true. Paul tells us that it is either the savor of life unto life, or of death unto death. If we accept it, it has only good for us; but if we reject it, it has only condemnation. The conduct of Aaron in the presence of his great sorrow is pathetic. "Aaron remained silent." His heart was crushed by the terrible sorrow—but he recognized the justice of God and bowed himself submissively to the Divine will. We may always be silent to God, therefore, even in the darkest hours and in the most painful experiences. We do not need to understand—God understands, and He is our Father. On the grave of a child in an English churchyard, these words are cut in the marble: "Who plucked this flower?" The answer from, Christ will be: "It was I." Then sorrowing ones should be silent in their grief.

God has a sovereign right to do as He will, and we may not question what He does. We know that God is love and that all He does is done in love. We know that He is wise and good and that His way is always right and best for us. We should never be afraid to trust His heart—when we cannot understand His hand.

Aaron's sorrow was made far more intense by the fact that his sons had died in an act of disobedience to God. It makes a vast difference, when parents sit beside the coffin of their dead child, whether the child has died in sweet faith in Christ—or in sin. If Aaron's sons had fallen in the performance of some duty, giving their lives a sacrifice in obedience to God, there would have been no bitterness in the father's heart. But when death had come because of their sin—there seemed no comfort. What could the father say? David's grief over Absalom was similar. All the stricken king could say was: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would that I had died instead of you!" Aaron said nothing, bearing his sorrow in silence.

It seemed a strange command that Moses gave, forbidding any exhibition of grief over the death of these young men. "Do not let your hair become unkempt, and do not tear your clothes, or you will die and the LORD will be angry with the whole community." One reason for this was that any expression of grief in this case would seem to be a complaint against what God had done, and they were not, either by word, by act, or by look, to show anything but the most perfect submission. These men had sinned, and had been stricken down because of their sin. There must be reverence and submission before God, and not complaint.

Another reason why they should not give expression to their grief was that they had their duties to perform in the tabernacle and must not leave them for a moment, not even to attend to what seemed to be the sacred duties of affection. The worship of God must not be interrupted, even by the experience of sorrow.

We must not understand, however, from the command in this particular case, that we are never to weep over our friends who have died. Grief is human. Jesus Himself wept beside the grave of His friend Lazarus, at Bethany, and He does not forbid tears in time of affliction. But we should never weep rebelliously, and our grief must never interfere with our duty. Ofttimes there are things to be done even in the midst of our sorrow, and duty must not stop even for tears. Jesus refused a disciple permission to go home to bury his father, before going forth with the gospel message. We must go on with our work in the very days of bereavement.

Sometimes people let their tasks drop out of their hands in the time of trouble, as if they are absolved from any further participation in the duties of active life. But this is wrong. We lay our dead away today, and tomorrow we must return to our place in the midst of life's activities. Our friend's work in this world was done when God called him away—but our work is not finished, and we must not neglect it, even though our hearts are breaking with grief.

One of the saddest things about this whole story, is that the crime seems to have been the result of intemperance. The fact that the command was given at that particular time and in connection with this terrible occurrence, that priests should drink no wine when they were about to enter the tabernacle to engage in their sacred duties, seems to imply that the sin of these men was due partly at least to intoxication. The lesson is very urgent. It applies first to ministers, to those who minister at God's altar, to those who have to do with spiritual things. They should not take strong drink when they are about to engage in God's service. The reason suggested is that their minds may always be clear to understand what is right and what is not right, and that they may be able to teach the people wisely and discreetly all the words of God. Those who yield to the influence of strong drink are thereby disqualified for the sacred work of their office. But we need not confine this Divine counsel to ministers. The lesson is for all. We should always live so as to be at our best, with mind unclouded, that we may know distinctly what our duty is. Strong drink unfits anyone for truest and best living. It takes away men's senses. It makes them reckless. They are unable while under its influence to do their work well. At a large banquet given in a great city by physicians, in honor of a distinguished surgeon from abroad, the visitor turned down his glasses when the wine was brought on. One sitting beside him asked somewhat playfully: "Why, doctor, are you an abstainer?" The honored guest replied: "Not perhaps for the reason usually given—but I am a surgeon, and any moment may be called to perform some delicate operation on which life and death depend. I must never be unready. I must always be in condition to do the most perfect work possible as a surgeon. Even the smallest indulgence in alcohol unfits me, at least in some degree, for doing my best work. Hence I never drink at all." The great doctor's experience is suggestive. Every man should be always at his best, ready to do his duty in the fullest, completest way. Anything which unfits him for this, he should never do. A young surgeon was proving most skillful and successful in his profession. His specialty was the eye. He was becoming very proficient. He was passionately fond of cricket. But he discovered that playing was affecting his hands. He saw that if he would do his best in his work on the eye—he must give up his cricket. It was hard to do this—but he did it cheerfully in order that his hand might always do its best in his profession.

Whatever in life, though it be only harmless play, that hinders us in reaching the highest attainments or doing the truest and worthiest things—we should gladly sacrifice. This is one of the reasons for abstinence from strong drink. Some men tell us that it excites and stimulates them so

that they can think more brilliantly and work more rapidly and efficiently. But the effect in such cases is illusive, is only temporary at the best, with unwholesome reaction. The excitement produced by wine is not normal, is unnatural, and, as in the case of the great surgeon, really unfits one for work that requires steadiness and nerve and the fullest possession and use of all one's faculties. Paul's counsel is always the sanest: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."

Journeying Towards Canaan

Numbers 9-10 The stay at Sinai was ending. The time had come for the beginning of the march towards the promised land. Pauses in life are necessary. The tarrying at Sinai was not loitering on the way. It was part of the will and plan of God for the people. They stopped there at God's command, that they might receive revelations and instructions. At Sinai the law was given. There they received also the tabernacle with its furniture and all its equipment for worship. There the great system of feasts and all the ritual of religious life were promulgated. The year spent at Sinai was therefore not a lost year. It was a year spent with God in necessary preparation for the beginning of national life. Activity is not the only duty in true living; sometimes it is quite as essential that we wait with God—as that we work for Him. Youth must take time for growth and for education, before entering upon active tasks and duties. We need to get acquainted with God, to learn our relation to Him, to know His will for us and our duty to Him—before entering His service in a public way.

Some people chafe when they are interrupted in their progress, kept waiting when they want to hasten on. But the pauses in life, when they come in Providential guidance, are as fruitful of good and blessing as the hours of most strenuous activity. Night is not a wasteful mistake in the ordering of time. Sleep is not self-indulgence. The hour of devotion at the beginning of the day is not lost time. Stopping for meals does not keep us back in our day's schedule. "Prayer and provender hinder no man's journey."

Some pauses in life are forced. The busy man in his busiest season is stricken with illness and has to drop all his pressing work and be shut up in a sick-room. But he need not fret. The days of illness are not meant to be lost. If rightfully accepted and used—they do not set us back in our life. We have to grow spiritually, and we may grow more in a week or a month in a darkened room, suffering pain—than in a year of free, unhindered life in the world.

Sinai was not therefore an interruption on the way to the promised land; it was a preparation, a help. But at length the time came for going on. Here the people are receiving their instructions for the march. They would need guidance, for there was no great highway to follow. Their route lay through a wilderness. They would be Divinely led every step of the way. "Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. At the LORD's command the Israelites set out, and at his command they encamped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted, they set out. Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out."

We do not seem to have any such guidance in our lives. That is, we have no pillar of cloud or fire to lift and go before us when we are to go forward, to settle down when we are to stay our steps, and to rest over us when we are to keep still and do nothing, whether it be for two days, or a month, or a year. There come times to many of us when we would like to have just such guidance, when our hearts cry out to have some unmistakable leading, when we should be freed from the responsibility of having to decide certain questions for ourselves. Is there anything now in place, of this wonderful supernatural guidance which the Israelites had in their journeys? There certainly is nothing which our eyes can see. The Incarnation was the coming of God into the world in a human life, and now there is no longer any need for the forms of Divine revealing that were used before Christ came. Yet the New Testament assures us of Divine leading in these Christian days, just as real and as unmistakable as was the leading of Israel in the wilderness.

Part of the care of the Good Shepherd for His sheep, is their guidance. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." Jesus led His own disciples while He was with them, answered their questions, told them what they should do, was their real Companion in their journeys, helped them over the rough, dangerous places and through the dark ways. There is no doubt about the guidance of our Master's personal friends while He was with them. But when He left them, they seemed to have no leading, no way of finding the road. They were like a company of orphan children, in the sad days after His death. They did not know what to do or where to go. They were timid and afraid. When they met together they locked the door for fear of enemies. But Jesus had assured them that He would be absent only a little while—and would soon be with them again. When at the last supper, Thomas asked Him about the way to the place where He was going, and how they could know the way, Jesus answered: "I am the way." He Himself would be their guide. We are sure, therefore, that the friends of Christ will be led through all this world's tangled paths—just as unmistakably as if they had a visible pillar going before them.

We have the guidance of the Holy Spirit who will lead us from within, filling our hearts with wisdom, enlightening oar eyes and making the way plain. We have the guidance of the Word of God which is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. We have Providential guidance. Life is full of God. He is in all events and circumstances. We talk about the strange way in which things happen, working out good for us. Only, really, things do not happen—nothing just happens. Everything is under God's all wise providential control.

We need not ever seek guidance in vain—God is everywhere, and He is ready always to show us the way if we want to find it, if we truly seek it, and if we are willing to take it. The trouble is—we often do not want to take God's way. When the pillar settles down—we are not ready to pitch our tent—but want to push on. Or when the cloud lifts to lead on—we are not ready to go forward, at least to go the way it moves. We are too often more willing to hear some earthly guidance than the heavenly. In His parable, Jesus said of the sheep that they know the shepherd's voice and follow him—but will not follow a stranger, for they know not the voice of strangers. We may always hear the Good Shepherd's voice if we will, and may always have heavenly guidance in all the ways of our earthly life.

It is well for us to have our hearts so sensitive towards God, that we shall always recognize the leading He would give us. It is a lofty privilege to have in our earthly life, heavenly guidance. Dr. Peabody, of Harvard University, tells of watching a vessel lying becalmed on a glassy bay. There

was not a breath of air to fill the sails. While the men were waiting and watching, however, they noticed that the little pennant, far up on the masthead, began to stir and lift. There was still not a ripple down on the water, nor the faintest moving of the air on the deck—but when they saw the pennant's stirring they knew that there was a wind rising in the higher air, and they quickly spread the upper sails; and instantly the vessel began to move under the power of the upper currents, though on the surface of the water there was still a dead calm. The incident suggests something like this also in common life. There are lower and higher currents. There are influences that are only earth-born, and there are currents that blow down out of heaven from God. There are friendships that offer guidance which would lead us only along low plains; and there are friendships which would lift us up towards God, and whatever things are true and noble. Too many people set only the lower sails and catch only the winds that blow on earthly levels. But if we would get the Divine guidance, we must catch the upper currents; that is, put our lives under heavenly influences.

We may do this by abstaining from evil companionships—not walking in the counsel of the wicked, nor standing in the way of sinners, nor sitting in the seat of scorners. We may do it by choosing for our companions and friends—only those who are godly, by living in the atmosphere of holiness. If we walk with God—we shall ever be where the upper currents blow, and we shall always be in the way where God will lead us.

Very beautiful is the prayer in one of the Psalms: "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk." This prayer we may make every morning as we go out for the day, and our prayer will be answered if it is sincere. We need, too, to make the prayer, for we cannot find the way ourselves. There is no morning when we do not need to make it, for even the day when the path seems plainest—may have its experiences of peril. The guidance may come when we think it has not come, and the bit of hard path which it seems to us certainly cannot be the answer to our prayer—may indeed be God's very way for us. The cloud may sometimes rest for weeks or months when we think it ought to lift and lead on; still it is all right. No movement really takes us forward—unless God leads on. No resting ever retards our progress—if it is God's will that we should rest. All our guidance is hour by hour, step by step. The cloud showed the people only a little bit of the way at once, and any moment might settle down. So our guidance is only a step at a time. In the story of Hobab, we have an illustration of the human part in the guidance of the people. The cloud was to lead them in all their marches, calling them to move, indicating the course they should take, and fixing the place at which they should rest. But there was need also for human guidance in the details of the marches. One who knew the wilderness, its paths, its springs of water, its shelters, its dangers, was essential to the commander in leading his people towards Canaan. Hence Moses desired the help of Hobab, the Kenite. The Kenites were an Arab tribe. When Moses fled from Egypt he took refuge with these people, marrying a daughter of Jethro, their chief. Jethro was helpful to Moses in his organization of the people, and when the march was about to begin Moses earnestly requested Hobab to accompany him. "Come you with us, and we will do you good," was the assuring invitation.

We should invite our friends to join us and go with us on our pilgrimage towards the holy land of heaven. Yet we must really believe in God ourselves and in the promises of the inheritance which He has in reserve for us, or we cannot assure others of the good things they will receive if they go with us. But if our faith is strong and clear—we can say to people confidently that it will be a good

thing for them to unite with the church. It will bring them into the company of those who are journeying towards the good land. The invitation, however, did not impress Hobab. His answer was: "No, I will not go; I am going back to my own land and my own people." His own home and kindred evidently drew strongly on his heart. The good promised him did not seem sufficient to win him away from the simple associations of his life. There are many people who make a like response to kindly invitations to unite with the church. They are not willing to leave their own companionships and fellowships, to make the sacrifices they would have to make.

Moses showed much earnestness and importunity with Hobab. He was not willing to leave him behind. They had long been good friends, and it was hard to go on even to the land of promise and have Hobab not go with him. He said: "Please do not leave us. You know where we should camp in the desert, and you can be our eyes." The first plea of Moses was that Hobab would find good for himself by accompanying Israel. Now he pleads that Hobab would be helpful on the way. Moses needed him. Hobab had been brought up in the desert and knew every part of it, every path, every spring of water, every bit of pasture. He would be able, therefore, to be a guide to the people in their journeys.

Moses felt that he could not spare Hobab, that he could not take the people through the wilderness without his help. This appears to have had more influence with Hobab, than the promise that he would receive good himself by going. Some people are more strongly influenced by opportunities for usefulness and helpfulness, than they are by promises of personal good. In every appeal, too, which Christ makes for followers, He has the two thoughts in mind—He would save the man himself, lift him up to life and blessedness; then He would have the man become a helper of others, a helper of the church.

There are many people not yet members of the church whom God needs and whom Christ is calling, and who could be greatly helpful to the cause of Christ if they would become His followers. There are men with money who would do very much in the world if only they were Christians devoted to Christ. There are men with gifts of speech, who, if they would unite with the church and devote their energies and powers to the service of Christ, could win many souls and give great help in the building up of Christ’s kingdom. There are women with large social influence whom Christ needs. If they would enter His church with devoted hearts and ready hands their lives would be great blessings to many.

Report of the Spies

Numbers 13-14

"The LORD now said to Moses—Send men to explore the land of Canaan, the land I am giving to Israel. Send one leader from each of the twelve ancestral tribes." The story of the spies is very interesting. Just how it came that spies were sent is not very clear. From Deuteronomy it seems that it was at the demand of the people. Moses says, "You said, Let us send men before us, that they may search the land for us, and bring us word again of the way by which we must go up, and the cities unto which we shall come." In Numbers, however, it is said that the Lord commanded Moses to send men to spy out the land. The meaning would seem to be that the people requested it, and the Lord approved the request and gave the command to Moses. The sending of the spies was a wise and natural precaution, and did not necessarily imply doubt. God wants us to use our

sense and judgment in all possible cases. What we can find out for ourselves, He does not wish to teach us in a supernatural way. He never works an unnecessary miracle. The task of the spies was important. They were to learn all they could about the country and the people. They should find out whether the inhabitants were weak or strong, so that they would know how to meet them. Anxiety is forbidden—but forethought is not. We should study out problems—that we may know how to meet them. The spies did their work thoroughly. They studied the people, their resources, their cities, their defenses. They studied also the land, its quality, its fruitfulness, its possibilities. We are not to go blindly through life, when it is possible for us to learn the condition of our pilgrimage. Many times we cannot know—there are mysteries in the Divine Providence, which we cannot now comprehend. Then it is our duty to go forward in faith, knowing that God understands, and trusting Him. But when we can learn—we ought to seek to know. When the spies came back they brought samples of the fruits of the land. They cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes, and carried it on a pole between two men. It must have been a large cluster to require two men to carry it in this way. When the people saw the fruit they asked: "Are there more of these?" The spies answered: "Yes; we brought just this one cluster to let you see how fine the fruit is. But there are more clusters just as fine." Is there not something very like this going on in this world all the time? No spies have gone over into heaven to bring back any of the specimens of fruit that grow there. But God has sent into our earthly wilderness-life many samples of the good things of the heavenly life, foretastes of the full glories awaiting us there. All spiritual blessings enjoyed here on earth—are mere samples of what life in heaven will be. The joy, the peace, the love, the grace we get in time of need—are very sweet—but they are just little specimens of fruits that grow everywhere in the heavenly Canaan. The blessings of Divine grace which we enjoy in this world—are little more than the husks of the heavenly good things sent down on the river of Divine grace, as foretastes or intimations of what is in store for us in heaven. The peace we get here is very sweet—but it is only the faintest image of the peace of heaven. The joy the Christian has here is deep and rich—but heaven’s joy is infinitely deeper and richer. The communion of earth is very precious, as we turn over the Bible pages or sit at the Lord’s table—but it is nothing to compare with the fellowship of heaven. "To depart and be with Christ—is very far better!" Every true Christian we see is carrying on his shoulder a cluster of Eshcol grapes gathered from heaven’s vines. Heaven is full of just such blessings. The best spiritual things of earth—are but hints of the glorious things that wait for us!

There must have been great excitement when the spies were seen returning. Crowds would run to meet them. Then came their report. They spoke enthusiastically of the country; it was a land flowing with milk and honey. Its fruits were luxuriant. It produced golden harvests. Its soil was rich. Its hills were full of minerals. They could not speak too enthusiastically of what they saw. But they went on to speak of things not so pleasant. They were afraid of the inhabitants. It was a good country—but it would have to be conquered, and they feared that they were not able to conquer it. They had seen giants there, and they were dismayed at the thought of meeting these men in battle.

It is easy to find something like this in these days of ours. People stand by the edge of the new life and look over into it. They cannot help seeing that it is a good thing to be a Christian, that the Christian life has many comforts and blessings, which those living a worldly life can never have. But they are afraid of the opposition they will have to meet if they accept Christ and come out on

His side. There are enemies to fight, too, strongholds to conquer, evils to overcome. There are even giants—giants of temptation—and these seem terrible to the timid people, who fear to move forward.

Too many see only this side of life, the dark side, the side of trial and hardship, of sacrifice and cost—and do not see the side of help, of promise, of victory. They magnify all difficulties, and the commonest forms of opposition become great hobgoblins of terror to them. It is a poor, cowardly way to live, unworthy of anyone who wears the human form, especially of those who are God's children. Of course we shall have our battles. Of course there are enemies, even giants, to meet. But if God is for us, we need not fear any enemies.

It is to be remembered that we need opposition and struggle, if we are to grow into moral and spiritual strength. Jesus Himself was tempted, tried, put to the test—that His life might be developed and made strong. He was "made perfect through suffering." A soldier can learn to fight—only by fighting. Without the exercise which comes through meeting enemies, we never could attain the stature of full-grown men.

We know also that the opposition we have to meet in our Christian life, is not an evidence that God is fighting against us. He is not trying to defeat us. James says: "Blessed is the man who endures temptation." There is a blessing, therefore, in being tempted—only thus can we win the crown. Again James says: "Count it all joy, my brethren, when you fall into manifold temptations." Temptations work patience in us. God's intention when He allows us to be tempted, is not to cause us to sin—that is Satan's object—but God's is that we shall be made stronger and that we may endure and be victorious and receive the crown of life! Of course, there are giants—but we shall overcome them, and the overcoming will make men of us.

There were two brave men among the spies, two men who believed in God in spite of all the obstacles and difficulties they saw. These were Caleb and Joshua. Joshua here reminds the people of what Caleb had said to them that day: "Caleb stilled the people... and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it—the land of promise—for we are well able to overcome it." That was the right kind of talk. Caleb was a true hero. He did not make little of the dangers and difficulties—but he believed in God and in the invincibility of the human courage that is faithful to duty and obedient to the Divine command.

We should learn much from Caleb's splendid heroism of faith on this occasion. We should learn never to doubt God's power to help us to do whatever He has commanded us to do. We have nothing to do with dangers and difficulties—our whole duty is to believe in God and obey what He commands. Every Christian young man should get Caleb's ringing words and Caleb's sublime courage, into his heart. But Caleb's words were not sufficient to turn the tide of discouragement in the hearts of the people. There were ten men against two, and the ten still persisted in saying: "We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than us!" There is something very pitiful in the behavior of these men as we see it here. They ought to have been leaders of courage and hope—but, instead, they were discouragers.

It is easy to dishearten people—but we have no right to do so. It is said that during the South African War a civilian was arrested, tried by court-martial, and sentenced to a year's imprisonment for being a discourager. He was a loyal Englishman and did nothing against his government—but

he had lost heart himself, had given up, and felt that there was no use in trying to hold out, and then he went about among the soldiers who were conducting the siege, saying discouraging things which made it harder for them to be brave and strong in the face of danger. The court-martial adjudged that the discourager was guilty of disloyalty, and inflicted upon him severe punishment. And the court-martial was right! It is a crime against others to be a discourager.

These ten men brought disaster upon their whole nation. They started a panic of fear among the people, the result of which was a revolt. The people even went so far as to organize for a return to Egypt, intending to depose Moses and put a new captain in his place. The penalty for this sin was the shutting of the gates of the promised land upon all that generation. For nearly forty years the people wandered in the wilderness, until all the men who rebelled that day had died. The lesson should not be lost upon us. We never should be discouragers of others—we should always be encouragers. Emerson says: "It is cheap and easy to destroy. There is not a joyful boy or an innocent girl, buoyant with fine purpose of duty, in all the streets full of eager and rosy faces—but a cynic can chill and dishearten with a single word. . . . Yes, this is easy; but to help the young soul, add energy, inspire hopes, and blow the coals into a useful flame; to redeem defeat by new thought, by firm action, that is not easy—that is the work of Divine men." The Brazen Serpent

Numbers 21:1-9

"They began to murmur against God and Moses. "Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die here in the wilderness?" they complained. "There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this wretched manna!" Numbers 21:5 When the time came at last for the people to go into the land of promise, they found the way blocked. The Edomites refused to allow them to go through their country, which was the direct route, and they were compelled to make a long detour, going around the land of Edom instead of across it. Besides being long, this way was also very hard, being through sandy wastelands. The people got discouraged, and hence the murmuring.

It certainly seemed a most unnecessary piece of journeying. A glance at the map will show us that from Kadesh-barnea over into Canaan was only a short distance, while the route the people had to take led them by a long and circuitous course. What made all this harder, was that it was made necessary by the unbrotherliness of a brother. Edom would not allow Israel to pass through his country. Moses asked this favor courteously, offering to pay for everything the people used—but the king refused, and in a very surly fashion, too, to permit them to pass through his country on any terms or conditions whatever.

Very often in the experiences of life, this same thing happens; brothers are disobliging to brothers, refusing to be kind, and thus make their burdens heavier. There are many who constantly make life harder for others by their selfishness. This is not right. Life is hard enough at the best, for most people—and it should be our desire and effort to bear one another’s burdens, certainly never make burdens for others.

It is not surprising that the people "were much discouraged because of the way." "The Arabah was a stony, sandy, almost barren plain, and subject to sandstorms. It was not, however, merely the heat and drought and ruggedness of the route which depressed them—but the fact that they were marching directly away from Canaan, and knew not how they were ever to reach it." We cannot blame the Israelites for feeling discouraged because of the way. Yet we may say frankly, that they

should not have given away to the depressing feeling. Nothing was gained by this. It did not make the way any smoother. It caused no flower to grow in the path. It spread no shelter over their heads to ward off the sun's fierce heat. It did not shorten the long road. It did not soften the hearts of the unbrotherly Edomites and make them relent. It only made the people themselves less fit for the hard journey, less brave, less able to bear the strain! When we find ourselves in hard conditions which we cannot ameliorate, the best way always is to face them with courage and energy. They have got to be mastered, unless we mean to consent to be beaten; and there is no use wasting time and strength in fretting over them. Beaten, defeated—we never should consent to be; and therefore the only right thing to do, is to stand like a rock. Only those who overcome win the prizes of life. These prizes lie always beyond battle lines. In the letters to the seven churches, in the Book of Revelation, only those who overcome reach the rewards and blessings of spiritual life. We need ever to be strong—if we would be victorious. Discouragement does not nerve us with strength; it only makes us weak and less able to be overcomers. A discouraged man never can be a hero. The moment we allow ourselves to let discouragement into our hearts—we have opened our fortress gates to a traitor who will betray us!

Besides, there never is any real need for discouragement. At least, there would not be—if we could see things as God sees them. He never allows any of His children to be tried above that which they are able to bear. The troubles are hard—but the grace is always sufficient. The thing we think we cannot master—we can conquer with God's help. Nothing is impossible to one who is working with God. The difficulty or the hardship that looks to us unconquerable, we can put under our feet if we meet it in Christ's name.

We should learn to sing in the most disheartening conditions, in the dreariest ways of life. We should be absolutely undiscourageable. There will always be experiences in which we seem to fail. Jesus appeared to fail when He was arrested and led to His cross. But it was not real failure. The resurrection on Easter morning was the end of what seemed utter defeat on Good Friday. There is no need, therefore, in any experience for yielding to discouragement. The way may be very hard for us—but if we are God's children nothing can go really wrong with us, unless we fall into sin.

We see in this story to what discouragement led. "The people spoke against God, and against Moses." At first the discouragement was only a depressed feeling—but it grew until it became bitterness, bitterness against Moses and against God. Perhaps we have not thought of discouragement as a sin, or as leading to such sins as we find growing here as its ripe fruit. We think of it as a quite harmless mood, a mood into which it is quite natural and very easy to fall. Some people seem even to enjoy it, as if it were a luxury. They would rather be murmuring than singing, complaining than rejoicing.

They begin early in the morning. They did not sleep well last night, they tell you at breakfast. They heard the clock strike every hour. The weather is wretched, too warm or too cold, too wet or too dry. The breakfast is not palatable. The oatmeal is not cooked well. The cream is garlicky. The eggs are boiled too hard. The coffee is too weak or too strong. All day, this monotone of murmuring goes on—now about things, now about people. Nothing ever goes quite right. There is a modifying "but" to every sentence of approval that is spoken. The clearest sky is spoiled by a speck of cloud which they find somewhere. Nothing that either God or man does, is altogether

satisfactory.

People who live in this way, do not imagine that they are sinning. They think of themselves as deserving of compassion. They do not dream of their incessant complaining as being grievous wickedness before God! But so it is. It was to punish such murmuring as thousands of Christians engage in continually, that God sent the fiery serpents. The evil all came, too, from yielding to the feeling of discouragement. Discouragement is sin. It is temptation yielded to. Here we see its baleful ripe fruit!

Punishment followed. The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and the serpents bit them. Of course, God does not always send fiery serpents when He hears any of His children murmuring. If He did, serpents would be rather numerous. Yet murmuring is no less a sin with us—than it was in the wilderness, and murmuring always brings penalty in some form. It is sin, and sin is like a fiery serpent. Its fangs leave poison in the blood. Its venom proves fatal—if there is no antidote found!

Discouragement has penalties of its own. It lowers the tone of the life in every way. It poisons the blood. The eye is less clear. The brain is less vigorous. The heart pulses less normally. The discouraged man is sick. He has lost his enthusiasm. His courage is gone, and he is timid and fearful. He is no more the force he was in the world.

He is not the same man in his home. His wife misses the brightness and boyishness that used to make his presence such a fountain of gladness. She wonders what is wrong, and thinks he is not going to live long. His children miss the playfulness that used to make them watch so eagerly for his home-coming in the evening. They were sure then of a royal time in romp and frolic. Now he comes in wearily and without any of the old-time gladness. He is too tired now to play with them. He is even disagreeable sometimes, showing impatience and irritability. He is not the same man anywhere he used to be.

He is not the same in business. Things are running down in his office or store or shop. Unless there is a change, the end will be disastrous. In his Christian life, too, a similar tendency is apparent. The old-time enthusiasm is gone. He is no longer the joyous, optimistic Christian he was. He has given up many of his church activities. His voice is not heard in the meetings. He is missed from the services. He is no longer the force he once was in good works.

He is a discouraged man, and his discouragement has robbed him of the things that formerly made him a blessing in the community. The many deaths from the bites of the serpents, alarmed the Israelites, and they came to Moses with confession. Penitence wakes people up to a consciousness of their guilt. A great many people go on in evil ways, never thinking of the wickedness they are committing, until they find themselves suffering the evils of their sins, enduring the penalties of broken law. Then they begin to cry for forgiveness.

Moses became the intercessor for the people, asking the Lord to take away the serpents. It is a good thing when one has gone astray, falling into sin, or when one has trouble—to have a friend to whom to go, who will listen to the confession or to the burden of sorrow, and then go to God in supplication. We need human helpers, and never can be thankful enough for them. But we have a greater Intercessor than any human friend could be. "If any man sins—we have an Advocate with the Father." Jesus Christ is our Advocate. He is human, and thus can enter into our experiences.

He is Divine, and thus can reach up to God for us. We should seek always to have Christ as our Mediator.

It was a strange method of cure, that the Lord provided—a bronze serpent, set up on a pole. Then everyone who was bitten, when he looked at the image of the serpent, was healed. This was the way God answered the prayer of Moses for the people's forgiveness. He did not take away the serpents—but he provided a cure for their bite. They must lift up their eyes and look towards the serpent on the pole, thus exercising their faith. This illustrates the way of salvation. God did not take sin out of the world—but he sent Jesus Christ to be a Savior of sinners.

Jesus made use of this strange incident in the wilderness, as an illustration of the salvation which He had brought into the world. He said: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life." As the serpent was lifted up so high that it could be seen from every part of the camp, so Christ was lifted up on the cross, that from any part of the world, where a sinner becomes conscious of guilt, the Redeemer can be seen.

We can imagine the bitten people, in the agonies of death, when told about the serpent on the pole and how they could be healed, turning their feeble eyes towards the wonderful image, and at once feeling a thrill of life in their veins. So whenever a dying sinner turns his eyes towards Christ on His cross—he feels instantly in his soul the arresting of the tides of sin and the beginnings of life eternal.

Moses' Death and Burial

Deuteronomy 34

"Moses the servant of the Lord died." The death of Moses was a sore disappointment to him. He wanted to live longer. He thought his work was not finished. There is a story of a man who had wasted his years in sin. At last he came back to God and was saved. He rejoiced in the hope of eternal life. Yet he was unhappy. He longed to live. When a friend asked him if he was afraid to die, he replied: "Oh, no, I am not afraid to die. I know that I am forgiven. But I am ashamed to die. I have nothing but a wasted life to bring to God." That was not the feeling of Moses. He had filled his one hundred and twenty years with noble service. But he longed to finish what he had begun. He had brought his people out of Egypt. He had given them their laws. He had trained them for national life. He had led them through the wilderness. He desired to take them now into the land of promise. But this was denied to him. He besought God to let him go over to see the good land beyond the Jordan. But the Lord would not relent, would not change his purpose. "The Lord was angry with me for your sakes, and hearkened not unto me. . . . speak no more unto Me of this matter." So he had to go away and leave his work incomplete—that is, as it appeared to himself. The people were ready at last to enter the land of promise, and he who for forty years had been training and leading them—could not go over with them, could not share in their final triumph, could not enter into the joy of conquest. No wonder Moses was bitterly disappointed. But when we think of it, no one ever leaves his work finished in this world. No matter how diligent we may be in duty, how careful we are to leave nothing unfinished, when we are called away—our hands will still be full of things not finished. One sows, another reaps. One lays the foundation, another builds up the wall. Only one Man who ever lived, could say He had accomplished all that had been given

Him to do. A business man went home one evening, expecting to come back to his office in the morning to take up his work again. But he died that night. There was a letter on his table half written —indeed, it ended in the middle of a word. All about were things he had begun. It will be so with all of us. We will leave engagements unmet for the next day, plans that we have made which we cannot carry out, hopes that have filled our minds and hearts, which we have not realized.

Moses was disappointed when he had to die. But there was more than disappointment—there was tragedy as well. It was sin that prevented him from taking his people over and finishing the great work of his life.

We turn back and read the story. It was at Meribah, in the Wilderness of Zin. There was no water, and the people became clamorous, grew angry with Moses and blamed him, wishing they had died back in the wanderings. The Lord bade Moses to take his rod and then speak to the rock that it might give out its water for the people. Moses obeyed—but he was angry and seems to have failed in the exactness of his obedience. He said to the people: "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?"

It was a pitiful sight. Moses was called the meekest man. His task in dealing with his people was a hard one. They were always complaining and murmuring. For all the forty years, Moses did not once lose his temper with them nor say one impatient word. Now, however, in an unguarded moment, he lost his self-control and spoke impatiently, unadvisedly. He showed his passion also in his words: "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" forgetting to honor God. He had been commanded also to speak to the rock. Instead, he lifted his rod and smote it—not once only—but twice, pounding it in his anger! The Lord’s anger was kindled against Moses. Instantly the sentence was uttered: "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."

We may think this a small sin—to be so severely punished. We must remember, however, that Moses stood for God, and it was his duty to bear with the people as God Himself did. God would not have lost patience and temper as Moses did, and Moses disappointed God. We may not say, either, that any sin is small. And the holier the man and the more sacred his mission—the greater is even the least departure from right.

There is something startling, too, in the form of the punishment. The sin of Moses made him unfit to finish his work. Do we know that our sins may not leave their hurt upon us in such a way—that God cannot depend upon us for the delicate work He had been expecting us to do? A great surgeon said that he did not drink—never tasted liquor—because he was a surgeon, and any moment might be called to perform some operation on which life depended. He had found that drinking wine, however moderately, made his hand less steady, and thus less ready for the work of a surgeon. So he never tasted alcohol that he might never be unfitted for his work. There are things that unfit us for our duty, and which we must scrupulously shun.

We do not know how many of us are living below our best—because sin has hurt us. Sin means missing the mark—it means failure. The sin of Moses came between him and the completion of his work. It is sin that makes the work of so many of us so imperfect, that prevents us from reaching the fulfillment of our highest dreams.

"Moses . . . died there . . . according to the Word of the Lord." When it is said that he died according to the word of the Lord, one thought is that a word of God called him away. It is sweet to know that the death of no servant of God is accidental. No holy man dies—while God wants him to live.

There are other things to notice in this account of the dying of Moses. He died alone. No one accompanied him as he went away from his people and friends—no one but God. We are inclined to pity him, thus lacking in his last moments, the companionship of loved ones. Like pathos was there in the dying of Livingstone, in the depths of Africa, in his hut at midnight, alone. It seems to us that death is robbed of much of its bitterness, when loved ones sit by the departing one, holding his hand, hearing his last words, breathing their prayers and speaking their thoughts of comfort. But really every one of us must die alone. Our friends may sit round us, singing songs of faith, imprinting kisses of farewell—but there can be no companionship in dying. Dying is always a lonely experience.

Never was there such another funeral as that of Moses. No such honor was ever given in burial to any other man. There have been funerals in which the world's pomp was magnificent, but never before nor since was there such pomp as there was when Moses was buried. No one saw it, and no one can describe it. The record is in a single line: "And He buried him." God buried him.

"He buried him in a valley near Beth-peor in Moab, but to this day no one knows the exact place." An old writer says: "God buried him and then buried his grave." We think it a comfort to know where our loved ones sleep—that we may go and stand by their graves and think of their beautiful lives, and that we may keep the spots where they sleep beautiful by our gentle care. But no pilgrim feet ever went to the grave of Moses, since no one knew where to find it. But his is not the only unmarked grave in the world. In soldiers' cemeteries, on battlefields, are many mounds with no name on the little board or stone, with only the word "UNKNOWN" to mark them. Thousands, too, have gone down in the sea, and countless others have perished on desert sands, and no man knows of their sepulcher. God buried these, too, and God knows where they sleep.

There was a wreck on the sea, and among many bodies gathered by gentle hands, was that of a baby. There was nothing to identify the body. Its name could not be found. So they put it in a little grave and set up a little stone, on which they cut the words: "God knows."

Moses died and was buried—but was not forgotten. "The children of Israel wept for Moses . . . thirty days." No doubt their grief was sincere. When he was gone from them—they saw how true a friend he had been to them, how he had loved them and given his life to them and for them. We cannot but remember, however, how they had treated him, how they had broken his heart many, many times while he was with them. We cannot help saying that it would have been far better if they had shown their love in obedience, gratitude and kindness when he was living and serving them—instead of in wailings of grief when he was gone. Let us not keep our flowers for our friends' coffins. Let us strew them along the rough paths on which they walk in life!

Moses died—but his work for the Lord was not interrupted. He grieved because he could not lead his people into the promised land. He thought that was part of his life-work. But it was not—that was Joshua's work. We think the taking away of this or that person—will prove an irreparable loss. So it seems—but God's work does not depend on men. "God buries the worker—but carries on

the work." Moses died—but Joshua is ready, and as soon as the thirty days are over, the people cross the Jordan. Let us do our little part of God's work faithfully and well—that is all we have to do.

Moses died—but he is living yet. No one knows where his grave is—but it is not a grave, which enshrines a man's influence. Think how Moses lives in the world—in the nation that he led out of bondage, trained, educated and founded; in the laws that he formed and gave to the world; in the institutions that he established; in the influence of his life among men and upon them. No grave of Moses is needed to keep his name alive.

Let us seek to make our lives immortal—not in monuments, not in riches and earthly honors—but by making the world better, by putting touches of beauty into other lives, by teaching and blessing little children, by encouraging the weary and disheartened, and by comforting human sorrow. Then we shall need no grave, with its marble memorial, to keep our name alive. We shall live—in the things we have done!

Some day, people will be talking of our death and burial. We need not dread the end. Let us live faithfully while we live. Let us be indeed servants of Jehovah, servants of Jesus Christ. Let us give our lives unsparingly, withholding nothing that we have to give. Then it will not matter what day or what hour God calls us apart—and tells us our work here is done and that we are wanted at HOME!

Joshua Encouraged

Joshua 1:1-9 The work of Moses was done—and he was laid to rest. Now Joshua is called to take up the unfinished task. We need not fret and vex ourselves over having to leave things half finished, if only we are diligent and faithful in doing our duty while we have it in our hands. We have only our allotted task, and when that is done—it is another's turn. We should not concern ourselves about what we meant to do—and could not. It was not our duty at all, this part that remains. God looks after His work, and always other workers are ready to take up the things which drop out of the hands of His servants, when they are called home or set aside. All we need concern ourselves with—is the doing well of our own little part, while it is ours. The character of the work done by Moses and Joshua respectively is suggestive. Moses represented the law; and Joshua the gospel. Moses could not bring them over and into full possession of their country. The law can bring us only to the border of salvation, to the edge of the spiritual kingdom. It cannot give us the inheritance, it cannot bring us into God's family, it cannot give us rest or peace or heaven. Then Jesus comes, the true Joshua, and leads us into the fullness of the promise. We cannot be saved by the law; it is but a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. It leaves us still outside the door—when it has done its best. "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." The story of Joshua's life is full of practical interest, especially to young men who are eager to rise to places of honor. Joshua attained highest honor, though he began in a very lowly way. He worked his way up, step by step, and did it, not by trick or cleverness—but by simple faithfulness in each position he was called to fill. He began as a slave in the brick fields of Egypt. Then he became a soldier when the cause of his people needed service in war; and as a soldier he was valiant, brave and loyal. By these qualities he rose, proving by faithful and effective service in the lower duties, that he was ready for higher responsibilities. At length he became Moses' aide. Serving faithfully in this position, he was promoted to the place of Moses, when that

great leader died. There was no luck in Joshua's success. It was by simple faithfulness that he rose. He filled well every place in which he was tried. If he had failed as a soldier or as a subordinate officer, he never would have been promoted to the higher trusts which at last were reposed in his hands. This bit of personal history, ought to have its lesson for the boys and young men who study it. There is an impression abroad, that success in life can be achieved by smartness, by strokes of good luck, or in some other way—than by honest hard work and simple devotion to plain duty. There never was a falser idea abroad. The only way to rise to success and honor, and to the higher places—is by starting where God puts us, and doing with faithfulness, the humblest duties of our lot. Success is a ladder, and we must go up step by step to reach the top.

"Moses my servant is dead. Now then, arise you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses." Joshua 1:2-3. It was a sharp, startling call that came now to Joshua. Moses was dead, and the people were mourning for him. It was right to mourn for so good and great a man—but possibly Joshua and the people were allowing their grief so to absorb them—that they were neglecting their duty; hence this call came to arouse them.

Sorrow is not a duty of many days—the Lord's work is waiting meanwhile. There is a lesson here for all who are called to mourn the death of friends. They are not to sit down in inconsolable grief and spend the remainder of their lives in tears. They are to arise and take up the work that waits for them. Our duties do not fall out of our hands, when our friends die. Our grief is not to be allowed to break up our work. Ofttimes, indeed, the death of a friend puts upon us new responsibilities and new duties. When a father dies, the son is called to take up the burden that the father has carried heretofore. The death of a husband, lays on the wife new responsibilities which she must now assume. There is a very important lesson in the ringing call: "Moses . . . is dead; now therefore arise." The command seemed hard to obey. Joshua was bidden to lead the people over the Jordan, into the land which God would give them. The river was overflowing its banks. There were no bridges, and no ferry-boats plied between the plain of Moab and the plain of Jericho. How could they get over? Still the command was: "Arise, go over this Jordan." The land of promise lay beyond, and they could not get possession of it without crossing the swift-flowing stream. So always for us the promised land of peace and blessedness, lies beyond the river. We may feel that we never can go over—but there is a country of promise on the other side, and unless we cross the stream—we never can set our feet upon it. God puts many of the best things of life, His best blessings—beyond rivers and roaring streams, to try our faith and to see if we are earnest enough to cross to get them.

Then we may always be sure that where God bids us to go, we can go; and what He gives us to do, we can do. Duty is never impossible. No commission is ever given to us that we cannot fulfill. "With God all things are possible," we often quote—but we sometimes forget that the meaning is "To us with God all things are possible." The land of promise was God's gift to the people. They did not have to buy it from the previous inhabitants. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." He gave Canaan to Israel, and yet they had something to do in order to obtain it. They must take possession of it. It was all for them—but they would really get only so much of it as their feet trod upon—that is, as much as they conquered and took possession of. This same principle applies to all blessings of Christian faith. We are children of God, and all things are ours because we are God's heirs. But we really get only the blessings and privileges which we claim and make

our own—by actual occupancy.

Here is a library of good books to which young people have free access. The books are given to them—but only such books really become theirs—as they make their own by reading and research. God gives us the harvests of the fields—but we must reap and gather them. The conquest of Canaan was not easy. Yet the promise is that no one would be able to stand before Joshua and his army. The reason was that God would be with them and would help them to overcome. We all have enemies to meet in our spiritual life, enemies who are stronger than we are, more skillful and more experienced in fighting. But this same promise comes to every young Christian who has set out with Christ. "No man shall be able to stand before you." The reason is that Christ Himself is always with each one who goes forth in His name. He never can fail or be defeated, who is fighting under the banner of Christ.

Why is it, then, that so many Christians fail in temptation, and fall? Does the Master sometimes withdraw himself? Or is he not able to help them in their difficulty? No! The trouble is with ourselves. Our faith fails, or our obedience, and then we faint before danger. God’s help is always conditional—we must believe and obey—if we would get it.

It is important to study the counsel given to Joshua. He was bidden to be strong and of good courage. He had a great task to perform, and he could perform it only by summoning all his powers. Weaklings and cowards never win any sublime victories. Every young man should learn to take hold of duty with energy, and to stand like a rock in the face of all opposition and in the presence of all danger. A young man must learn that it is not enough to be good—he must be good for something. Many a good man never amounts to anything, because he has neither energy nor firmness. Joshua’s life is the best illustration of the counsel here given to him. He had strength of character and he was firm as the everlasting hills. Therefore he succeeded.

God gave Joshua assurance of final and complete success. He told him that he would divide the country among the people for an inheritance. This vision of final success must have been very inspiring to Joshua as he set out. It was no mere experiment to which he was going. His dream of conquest was no vague, uncertain thing, like too many of the dreams of human ambition. God had pledged him full success—if he would do his part faithfully. It must many a time have been a great inspiration to Joshua in times of discouragement, when he remembered that he was destined to finish the work. He could not by any possibility fail.

Every Christian has the same assurance as he receives Christ and sets out to follow Him, and as he enters upon any new duty assigned by Him. There are hardships, obstacles and enemies. But he has the assurance at the very beginning, that he will not fail in the end—if only he is faithful. "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." This should be a strong inspiration with every Christian. The way may be hard—but the promise is sure that we cannot possibly fail. Everyone of us has a mission in life, a mission on which God Himself sends us. If we accept this mission and go forth on it in faith and with earnestness and fidelity—we cannot fail.

"Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded

you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:7-9

There were conditions which were made very plain to Joshua. The book of the law was not to depart from his mouth; he must meditate on it continually and follow it implicitly. These always are the conditions of a true life and of any worthy success. We must study the book of God—to find out what the will of God for us is. Then we must obey His commandments. Only those who obey the words of Christ, are building upon the rock. Only he who does the will of God shall abide forever. Any success or prosperity which is reached by dishonesty or disobedience, is only a dream which will vanish away and leave nothing behind.

Crossing the Jordan

Joshua 3

Before crossing the river, Joshua sent spies to enter Jericho secretly and learn all they could learn about the city. The Divine promise that Jericho would fall into the hands of Joshua in a supernatural way—did not make it unnecessary that due precautions should be taken by the commander, that he should learn all he could about the city. God always requires human diligence and faithfulness on the part of his people, when he would do great things for them. The result of the visit of the spies, made the Israelites braver and more confident. They learned from Rahab, that the inhabitants of Jericho were afraid of Joshua's coming. They had heard what the Lord had done for the Israelites in other places, and their hearts had melted in fear. This information gave fresh confidence to the Israelites.

Before the people crossed the river, Joshua gave directions concerning their provisioning. For forty years, they had been fed with manna. The reason for this was that bread could not be procured in natural ways in the wilderness. No food supplies grew in that desolate region. Hence it was necessary that special provision should be made. Daily, all the forty years, the manna fell. But now they have come out of the wilderness, and it would be easy to get supplies of food in ordinary ways. God never works an unnecessary miracle. Joshua provides, therefore, for feeding the great multitude, before they cross the Jordan. The day before they were to move, Joshua called the people to sanctify themselves. Tomorrow they were to cross the Jordan. God would open the way for them—but they must be ready. If we would receive God's blessings, we must prepare ourselves for receiving them. God is willing to work through us and to use us as His servants—but we must be in condition to be used. To sanctify means to cleanse. God will not send His gifts to others, in unclean vessels. It was ceremonial cleansing which Joshua required. With us the preparation should be in heart and life. Every morning as we set out for the day's duties, we have promises of help and favor—but these promises are dependent upon ourselves. We must be in proper frame of mind and heart, to receive the Divine blessing. We must be right with God.

We must have pure hearts and clean hands—if we would work for God. When we go to God in prayer, we must be sincere. If while we pray, we are cherishing sins which are unconfessed and unrepented of—we cannot hope that God will answer our requests. Jesus said, that if we bring our gifts to the altar and there remember that our brother has anything against us—we must leave our gifts unoffered on the altar, and first go and be reconciled to our brother, and then come and offer our gifts. In one of the Psalms we are told that if we regard iniquity in our hearts—the Lord will not

hear us. No doubt the secret of many unanswered prayers might be found in sins cherished, or in bitter, unkindly feelings in the hearts of those who pray. The ark was to be carried before the people as they crossed the river. The ark was a symbol of God's presence, and the meaning of this act was that God Himself would lead them that day—as they went through the Jordan into the promised land. God is always ready to go before us. Indeed, we never can go anywhere safely, wisely or victoriously, unless He leads us. To go without Him into lifes experiences, struggles, dangers or duties—is to fail.

There is something very suggestive in what Joshua said, when he gave the people their instructions about crossing the river: "You have never been this way before." Joshua 3:4. Therefore they must keep in sight of the ark, which would be carried in advance. The same may be said of every day's experiences. We have not passed this way before. The path is new and strange. We have lived thousands of other days—yet each new day presents an unknown path to us, a way over which we never have gone. We know not what new experiences it may bring to us. We may meet sorrows, sore temptations, sudden trials. It will have its own problems, its own perils, tasks we have never had to do before. It will bring us to face sudden surprises of duty, of struggle, of responsibility, for which we cannot at the moment make any preparation. The only safe thing to do—is always to keep the ark in sight—and to follow it implicitly in faith and obediently. Then whatever it is that comes—we shall be ready for it.

One of the invariable marks of true Christians everywhere, is that they follow Christ. Christ's sheep know His voice and follow Him, and He goes before them. Young people should learn in their earliest years, that Christ desires to be their Leader, and that every morning they may put their hand in His, for guidance for the day.

It is essential that we have God's direction at every point in life. Joshua called the people to come to him and hear the words of the Lord before they crossed the river. He then assured them that they would have God's presence with them. "Hereby you shall know that the living God is among you." The miracle of the crossing would be a pledge of unfailing guidance and full and final victory in taking possession of the new land. The crossing of the Jordan is a fitting type of the beginning of the Christian life. We hear the Divine call and go forward at God's bidding—and as we go He opens the way for us. We stand then on the edge of our land of promise. It is ours with all its riches and blessings, and yet it is held by enemies and must be won by our own valor and faith.

God promised Joshua and the people that He would not fail to drive out the Canaanites—but it must be before them—that is, through their courage and valor. God promises to give us the victory—but we must do the fighting. He will bruise Satan for us—but it must be under our feet. We sometimes say: "I never can conquer the giants of temptation which are in my path. I never can gain possession of the blessings and privileges which are offered to me." This is very true—if we have only our own strength. But God never intended that we should go against our enemies unhelped. He means to fight the battles for us. God would drive out the inhabitants of the country; so always it is God's power which expels the enemy. The promise is that we shall be more than conquerors through Him who loved us. But someone reads on in the story and learns that the people of Israel did not drive out all the inhabitants of the land, that many of them were left and for centuries plagued and troubled God's people there. Yes—but the fault was not God's. The people made compromises with the old inhabitants and let them stay. They failed to make the thorough

work of extermination they were commanded to make. They made compromises with the enemies of God. In many instances, fragments of the old Canaanite tribes were allowed to remain. These undestroyed Canaanites are types of the evils in our own hearts and in the world, which we are bidden to vanquish and utterly destroy—but which we allow to remain. If we will go forward with strong faith, making no compromise, not one enemy shall be able to stand before us. The trouble is, however, that too often we are willing to let certain pet sins stay, thinking we can live with them. But in the end we shall find that all evils which are tolerated, will become troubles to us and will mar the beauty and comfort of our Christian lives. The manner of the opening of the river for the people of Israel to cross over is suggestive. The promise was that when the soles of the feet of the priests should rest in the waters, that the waters should be cut off. The river was not to be opened while the people were yet in their camps, or even when they had come down to the banks of the river. They were to walk by faith, not by sight. The priests must take up the ark and bring it down to the river's edge, even stepping into the edge of the flowing stream, before the way would be opened. The people, too, must break camp, pack up their goods, form in line to march, and move down to the very banks, before the river would be opened. This required strong faith. If they had come down near to the edge of the river, and then had stopped for the stream to divide before they would step into it—they would have waited in vain. They must take one step into the water—before the river would be cut off.

We should not lose the lesson that is here taught. We must learn to take God at His Word and go straight on in duty, although we can see no way in which we can go forward. The reason we are balked by difficulties, is that we expect to see them removed before we try to pass through them, while the promise is that they will melt away only as we advance. If we would move straight on in faith, as if there were no hindrances, the path would be opened for us. We fail in overcoming difficulties many times, because of our lack of faith. We stand still, waiting for the obstacle to be removed, when we ought to go forward, knowing that God will remove every barrier in the right way and at the right moment. For example, death. People often tremble with fear when they think of dying. The truth is, however, that when the Christian moves quietly forward with faith, without fear—there is no river to be crossed. Some people are anxious because they do not have what they call dying grace. They read of certain Christians who have passed through the experiences of dying, triumphantly. They say: "I could not do that. I have not grace enough to meet death in that way. I fear I shall fail in the hour of trial." But why should they have grace for dying—when death yet lies far on in advance? There was no occasion to work the miracle of Jordan for the Israelites, when they were still staying quietly in their camp. We do not need dying grace for today's active life—but rather grace for duty, for battle, for perseverance, for holy living. Then when we come to the door of death—we shall receive the grace we need for the dying hour! The Fall of Jericho

Joshua 6 The city of Jericho was at the entrance to the promised land. The people had now crossed the river—but Jericho stood as a great iron gate into the promised land, and the gate was shut. They could not safely go round the city and leave the hostile stronghold behind them. It was necessary, therefore, that Jericho should be captured before they could advance. This is a parable of many situations in life. Each man's own natural heart is a Jericho—which is the key to all his life and to his destiny. Nothing can be done in the conquest of the man—until his heart has surrendered. So long as Satan holds the key—none can reach any part of the man's being. Hence God asks always first for the citadel of our life. "Give Me your heart!" is His call. When He has this,

all the life is open to Him.

It was a strange military procession which marched around Jericho one morning. We can imagine the people of the city looking at it from the walls with wonder. They could not understand the movement. Probably they laughed at the unusual procession—a few soldiers, then some priests with rams' horns, then more priests carrying a chest on their shoulders, then a few more soldiers. This marching column made no attack on the city, did not try to batter down the walls, only walked around it—and then returned to their camp. It really was not a military procession at all. Yet there was tremendous power in it. But what was the use of calling out the men to make this daily march about the walls of Jericho? Since God was to give the city into their hands without any fighting on their part, why should they be called to do anything at all? For one thing, by doing the seemingly useless thing they were commanded to do, they showed that they believed in God. If they had not marched around the city—the walls never would have fallen, and they would not have taken Jericho at all. The Lord's part waited for the people's.

While all blessings come from God, we have something to do before they can be given to us. God gives us harvests—but we must til the soil, and sow the seed. God has given us salvation—but we must have faith in His promise and must show our faith by rising up and beginning to follow Christ. He will give us victory over temptation—but we must put on our armor and go against temptation, as if the victory altogether depended upon ourselves. Every promise of God has its condition, which requires us to exercise faith. The march about the city was in silence. That was about the hardest part of the command to obey—to keep perfectly quiet all the time as they marched about the walls. There was to be no conversation on the way, no noises or shouting, until the work was finished. There are several suggestions here. We should not do our exulting when we are only halfway through with our battle, still less when we are only beginning it. We would better save our breath for struggle, until the work is finished.

Some people talk so much at their tasks—that they cannot do them well. Some people boast too soon, when the victory is not yet assured. Then there is, in general, much value in training one's self to keep quiet. Words are good in their place, if they are fit words, right words—but there are times when eloquent silence is infinitely better than the most eloquent speech. The command to march silently also required self-control. The men must have wanted to talk a great many times as they went on—but their lips were sealed and they suppressed the words they were inclined to utter, and controlled their speech. We ought to have our speech so thoroughly under control—that we shall never say anything rashly. Then we shall be able to check the angry word that flies to the door of our lips so quickly, when we are hurt in some way by another. We never can estimate the great value of any self-discipline, which results in perfect self-mastery. It is for lack of self-control that many of our battles are lost and many defeats are suffered. He who can rule his own spirit—is greater than he who captures a city.

There was a meaning also in the trumpets which the priests carried. The blowing of these trumpets may fitly represent the utterance of the gospel message as the Church of Christ goes forth to conquer the citadels of sin. This spiritual army carries no weapons of earthly warfare. "Put up your sword," was the Master's command to those who were fighting with the sword. His marching-order is: "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation." Not by the thunder of cannon and the rattle of musketry, will He have us subdue the fortresses of sin—but by the

trumpet-blasts of the gospel of peace. The means ordained may seem inadequate to the end to be accomplished—but it is not by might nor by power—but by the Spirit of God, that the work is to be done.

There is something else to be noticed here. Close behind the priests blowing the trumpets, came the ark of God. This was the symbol of God's presence, the real power by which the overthrow of the walls of Jericho was accomplished. God's hand did it. We have the same secret of power in all preaching of the gospel. When Jesus commanded His disciples to go out and win the world for Him, His promise was: "Lo, I am with you always." We need not fear to go against the strongest powers of sin. We have only to utter our message, and the power of God will break down the walls. For six days this procession moved in silence about the city, going round the wall once and then returning to their camp. These daily marches put the faith and patience of the soldiers and priests to the test. There seemed no possible good in such idle circling around the city. There were no indications, either, of any results, as day after day passed. The fortified walls frowned down upon them no less defiantly than at the beginning. There were no suggestions of surrender from within, indications that the courage of the garrison was wavering or weakening. Some of the brave men in the lines must have longed to make an assault on the walls. They wanted to be doing something soldierly. It was hard to restrain their enthusiastic patriotism. This marching around the city seemed like child's play. Yet day after day they had just the same seemingly useless thing to do. At length, however, patience had its reward. In all our Christian life we need to practice this lesson. There is a great deal of dull monotony in all duty. It is the same routine over and over again, not for days only, or weeks, or years—but for a lifetime. Then there are many good works which it requires a long time to complete. That is the way character is built. It is not the growth of a night. It is not the result of a decision, a choice, a determination. We cannot merely will ourselves into a beautiful manhood—we can only grow into it, slowly, patiently. A genial author has given us a new beatitude, "Blessed be drudgery," telling us that we get all the finest things in our character and life out of the dull routine of the drudgery we too often despise. At first there is no apparent impression made, no visible result achieved, and it seems vain to try any longer. But perseverance wins at length. Had the people of Israel wearied of the monotonous and unavailing march about Jericho, and at the close of the fifth or the sixth day given up—all would have been lost. The Divine command, was that the city should be compassed about seven days, and anything short of that would not have received the promise, for it would have shown a failure of faith. Success depended upon continuance to the very end. So it is in all Christian life and work. We must persevere unto the end. We must carry our work through to the close-if we would succeed in it. Many things fail in our hands because we tire and give up too soon. "He who endures to the end—the same shall be saved." Spurts amount to but little; it is the steady stroke and the long pull that at length come in ahead. The strongest wall yields to the pounding that never intermits. The silence was broken at length—on the seventh day. Of course, it was not the shouting that knocked the walls down. Joshua says plainly: "The Lord has given you the city!" The shouting was part of the obedience of faith on the people's part, just as the marching round the city was. If they had not shouted the wall would not have fallen. They obeyed God, and He did as He had promised to do. Before the walls fell, these Israelites shouted in rejoicing over a victory that God was going to give them. The story of the saving of Rahab is very interesting. It is a story of faith. The spies had told her of the promise of God to the Israelites—that the country of Canaan would be given to them. Rahab believed what they told her, and showed kindness to the spies; indeed, saved their lives. Then she

asked a pledge from them that they would show kindness to her when they came to capture the city. The men promised. She was to fasten in the window of her house on the wall—the scarlet cord by which she had let them down that they might escape. They would know her house by this sign and would spare her and her family. The men kept their promise, and Rahab was spared. We find her name in the first chapter of the Gospel by Matthew in the genealogy of Jesus. Thus faith was highly honored. Its splendor shines down through all these long centuries. Faith is always blessed and always honored.

We may get a lesson from the devotement of the spoils of Jericho. Nothing was to be touched, everything belonged to God. It is a great sin to take what has been devoted to the Lord, and apply it to our own use. An eagle swooped down upon an altar and carried off a piece of flesh, flying with it to her nest. But a coal from the altar had clung to the flesh, and this coal set fire to the nest, consuming it. So was it when one took of the spoil of Jericho, which had been devoted to God. A curse clung to the stolen treasure, and it destroyed him who took it. So it is always when we appropriate to ourselves what should be given to God—we get a curse with it!

Joshua and Caleb

Joshua 14 The story of Caleb is interesting. He was a man of the heroic type. He was one of the twelve men sent by Moses to spy out the land of Canaan. Ten of the twelve spies brought back an evil report. They spoke enthusiastically of the wonderful richness and fruitfulness of the land of Canaan—but they were discouragingly impressed with the warlike character of the inhabitants, their fortifications, their armor, their military equipment and the fierce giants they saw among them. The feeling of these spies, was that the Israelites were not strong enough to conquer the country.

Two of the spies, however, made a different report. They said that they could conquer the Canaanites. They had faith in God, who had given them the land and would help them take possession of it. The two believing spies were Caleb and Joshua. The people of Israel were dismayed by what the spies reported. Ten men by their unbelieving words, alarmed and discouraged more than two million people, and led them to rebel against Moses and to seek to return to Egypt. The result was the sentence of death on the whole generation, that none of those who had rebelled, should enter into the promised land. Joshua and Caleb alone were excepted, because they had believed.

It was now forty-five years after the return of the spies. A new generation had grown up. At last the people were in the land of promise, and the country was being divided among the tribes. Caleb comes to Joshua to claim the portion which Moses had promised him. He is eighty-five years old—but he is every inch a man and a hero still.

Forty-five years was a long time to keep a promise in remembrance—but the old man had a good memory. Not only did he remember the promise—but he believed it. He had no thought, but that the promise would be fulfilled. We should remember what God has promised us, and in its own time expect it to be fulfilled. Often we forget the things the Lord has said concerning us. Indeed, some of us do not seem even to know that God has ever said anything concerning us—has made any promises to us. How can we know—if we do not look into our Bible and search there for what God has said? The memory of a good act is a sweet comfort to one’s heart in after years. Caleb had been faithful when sent as one of the spies, and that good and brave deed when he was a

young man, was a joy to him all through his life and in his old age. It would have been very much easier at the time just to vote with the majority of the committee of search, and not to stand out alone, as Caleb and Joshua did. But the easiest way is not always the best way—it never is, unless it is the right way. "Nothing is ever settled—until it is settled right."

Sometimes the majority is wrong, and then it is far better to be in the minority and right, however small the minority may be—than with the wrong majority. Doing right always makes happiness in the end. It gives joy to the conscience, and peace in the conscience sheds a holy blessing throughout the heart and life. It makes sweet memories, too, through the after years. Caleb never forgot that day when he made a true and loyal report to Moses, while the other spies were reporting their cowardly fears. Forty-five years afterwards, he speaks of it with great satisfaction.

All young people are making now in their bright and happy days—the memories amid which they must live in their mid-life and old age. If they do wrong things, if they do evil things—because the right things are hard and would require sacrifice, if they go against their consciences, they are making bitterness for themselves by-and-by. But if they do the right things at whatever cost, if they follow the Lord wholly, though they go alone, if they do brave, noble, unselfish deeds—they will walk all their after days in the light of their early faithfulness, and their hearts will be blessed with sweet recollections. The good thing in Caleb’s noble act, was that he "wholly followed the Lord." That was a great thing to do. It cost much at the time—it almost cost Caleb his life—but he never was sorry for it. There are too many who follow the Lord only partially. They follow Him while it is easy, while the crowd runs that way, while no great sacrifices have to be made, and no dangers encountered. But the moment the first hard pinch comes, when something has to be given up, when friends have to be parted with, when scoffs and sneers have to be endured—they falter in their following, drop behind, even turn back. That was the way many people followed Jesus when He was on the earth. One young man ran to Him and kneeled down, eager to be His disciple. But when the Master said: "Go and sell all you have and give it to the poor, and come, follow me—just yourself, empty-handed," the young man got up and went away sorrowing. He wanted to follow Christ—but he could not accept such a condition as that. The only true way—is to follow Christ wholly, with all the heart, without question, evasion, hesitation or faltering, without abating one jot or tittle from what He requires.

Caleb remembered God’s goodness to him in keeping him alive all the years, until the time came for the fulfilling of the promise. When the Lord promises to give a man anything in the future, He always keeps him alive to get it. Caleb could not have died in the plague when the other spies died, nor in the wilderness when death was so busy among the tribes, when six hundred thousand men of the nation sank down into early graves. God had promised that Caleb should receive as inheritance, a certain portion of Canaan—and no plague, no sweeping away of a generation, no accident of war, could touch his life until he had actually taken possession of his promised portion.

There is a similar illustration in the promise of God to Paul, in the midst of a terrible storm at sea. He was told that he must stand before Caesar—and therefore could not possibly be lost in the storm. The life of everyone of us, is as truly and safely in God’s keeping as was Caleb’s or Paul’s. The Lord has His purposes for us, blessings waiting for us, and missions for us to fulfill in the future, just as really as He had for these men; and while we are waiting for these purposes to ripen, for the time to come for the doing of these tasks or errands, there is no disease and no

missile of death that can touch us. "Every man is immortal, until his work is done."

If God has a piece of work that a boy of today was born to do fifty years from now—that boy will be preserved against all accidents, pestilences and other dangers—until the time comes when he can do the work assigned to him. If a young girl of today is, according to God's plan and purpose, to live in a certain place twenty years from now, found a certain society, or establish a certain orphanage or school—if this is God's plan for her life—she will be preserved alive to fulfill the mission which God has marked out for her, if only she is faithful in doing the Divine will.

Another good thing in Caleb, was that he claimed the promise when the time came for its fulfillment. "Now therefore give me this hill-country, whereof the Lord spoke in that day." If Caleb had not come forward and asked that the promise should be fulfilled, he would not have got his portion. We must claim the things that God has promised us—and must ask for them. If we do not care enough for them to ask God to give them to us, and then also seek to obtain them—we must not be surprised if we fail to get them. People are all the while missing blessings, too, which are theirs by Divine promise and intention—simply because they do not ask for them. In the post-offices many packages, sometimes valuable ones, lie for a long time, and then are sold because the people to whom they are addressed do not come to claim them. Sometimes great estates are left to heirs—who never appear to claim their inheritance. In the spiritual kingdom, there are many similar cases. There are promises of great good addressed to those who never come to claim them.

Another fine thing in Caleb, was that he was not afraid of hard tasks. He did not seek easy things. He did not ask for an inheritance in some quiet valley, out of which the enemy had been driven. He asked for a mountain which fierce giants still held, saying that he would drive them out. Though he was an old man and had done useful service, he did not ask that he should be given a pensioner's bounty—that his portion should be cleared of encumbrance and given to him without any effort on his part to get it. He was willing to drive out the giants who held it, and with his own hands prepare it for his home. This showed splendid courage in the old man. Some people think of old age, as a period in which a man cannot do much. But Caleb's old age was really one of the best portions of his life. He did not have to be nursed, coddled and taken care of. He never did better work, than after he was eighty-five.

Young as well as old, should get an inspiring lesson from Caleb's independence in wishing to win his own portion. He said he would drive out the giants. We do not prize things that come to us without effort, without cost. Besides, God would have us show our faith—by striving after the blessings. It develops our own abilities and graces—to have to fight to get possession of our inheritances. God puts the gold deep down among the rocks—that we must dig and search for it if we would get it. He gives a man a farm—but the farm has to be cleared and cultivated before it is ready to yield its harvest. He gives a young man the opportunity for a fine education—but he must study hard to get it. He gives a young girl splendid musical talent—but it is only a talent, and to get it developed into its possibilities she has to spend months and years in weary practice. God gives us great grace, holiness, likeness to Christ, power in Christian work, meekness, patience—but we must struggle long with our old nature to obtain these gifts!

Cities of Refuge

Joshua 20:1-9

There has always been need for mercy in this world. There has also been need always for law—for the protection of men from wrong and cruelty. But in the infancy of the race, there were no institutions of any kind. Life was most simple and primitive in the beginning. There is special interest in the subject of the cities of refuge, because the establishment of these refuges is one of the first suggestions of the institution of laws for the securing of full justice, in the case of a man who had killed another by accident, unintentionally. Previous to this the "avenger of blood" smote down, without reference to the circumstances, without any effort first to ascertain the manner of the slaying—the man who had caused the death of his friend. The provision for cities of refuge, was not intended to shelter crime; it was meant only to secure justice by ensuring a fair and impartial trial. This provision in the Hebrew code, is the germ of the laws now in force in all Christian lands by which a fair trial is assured to every man accused of crime. In directing that these cities of refuge should be provided, the Lord taught the people and the world, a great lesson in justice. While God hates sin—He loves mercy. Then nothing is more abhorrent to Him—than that the innocent should be punished. Human life is very sacred in His sight. The original command, Divinely given, was that "Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed." Thus God built a strong wall round every life. But the nations had perverted that Divine command until all justice was lost sight of. It might have been by the simplest accident, that a man caused the death of another, perhaps of his best friend. Yet he was struck down by the avenger as mercilessly as though he had slain the other in cold blood. This new provision was appointed to ensure security against the occurrence of such fearful wrong and injustice.

We should notice that this merciful provision originated with God Himself, and was not a mere kindly thought of Moses. It was in the heart of God, also, that a thought of a refuge for the sinners of a lost and guilty world, had its origin. It was because "God so loved the world" that "He gave His only begotten Son" to be the world’s Redeemer. God loves to forgive. No words that rise to heaven from earth find such welcome, as the cries of penitence. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God—over one sinner who repents."

Yet Divine mercy is not indiscriminate. We must notice carefully that these refuges availed only for "anyone who kills a person accidentally and unintentionally." They were not meant to shield the guilty. The heathen nations of those times had their temples, groves, altars and even cities, to which offenders might flee for protection. But in these, no distinction was made between the guilty and the innocent. Even willful murderers, might hide within the gates of these asylums, and there was no way to bring them to justice. But there was no such indiscriminate and unregulated protection provided in these cities of refuge. They were designed to shield only the innocent manslayer. He who had killed another intentionally might flee to one of them—and the avenger could not then strike him down until he had been tried; but when it was shown to the judges that the slaying had been a murder, premeditated, deliberate and intentional, the murderer was at once given up to receive just punishment. The intention of the whole arrangement was to shield the innocent and secure a fair trial to all. In Christ there is the same mingling of justice and mercy. The refuge in Him is open for all sinners, and there is no one who ever can justly claim to be innocent; yet only those whose guilt has been washed away in the blood of the Lamb—can find shelter even in Christ. No mercy is promised to those who continue impenitent. It is only to those who confess their sin and repent of it—that forgiveness is assured.

There is an "avenger of blood" pursuing everyone of us in this world. Conscience is every man's personal avenger—one we cannot get away from. There is no power anywhere so terrible, as that of an accusing conscience. With its condemning voice, it fills the boldest with dismay. The law is inexorable in its demands. There is no escape from its penalties. In a poem by Victor Hugo, Cain walks thirty days and nights after the murder of his brother, until he reaches the shores of the sea. "Let us stop here," he says—but as he sits down, his face turns pale. He has seen in the mournful sky, the searching Eye. His sons, filled with awe, try to erect barriers between him and the Eye—a tent, then a wall of iron, then a tower and a city—but all is in vain. "I see the Eye!" still cries the unhappy man. At last they dig a tomb, and the father is put into it. But, "Though overhead they closed the awful vault,

The Eye was in the tomb—and looked on Cain."

Men hide for a time or may evade punishment for a season—but they cannot escape from the avenger. It is when we understand the terrible meaning of this truth, that we are prepared to appreciate the glad word that announces a refuge from sin and from guilt. Christ is our refuge from the avenger! The person who had killed another by accident, had something to do to secure safety. "He shall flee unto one of these cities." It would not do for him to stay just where he was, depending upon his innocence to protect him. He must flee, and flee with all his might, for he would find no protection until he had passed through the gate. If the avenger outran him and overtook him on the way—he could strike him down. The city afforded him no refuge, while he remained far away from it, or even close to it—yet outside the gates. He must flee into it. He must not loiter on the way—but must make all possible haste to get within the gate, lest the pursuer come upon him. Christ is a refuge, with the door ever open to the sinner—but He is not a refuge to those who do not flee to Him.

Everything was done to facilitate the safe and swift flight of the innocent manslayer to the refuge. Much is said in the old Jewish books about the roads which led to these cities. They were to be broad and good, and were always to be kept in the best order. There must be nothing in them to impede or obstruct the flight of him who would reach the gate of the refuge. Then they were to be plainly marked with guide-signs, showing at every turning, and wherever there was any possibility of the fleeing man making a mistake which was the right way.

All this illustrates the great pains at which the Bible is to show the way to God, and to make it plain, so plain that no one, not even the smallest child or the simplest-minded and most ignorant person—can possibly err in seeking the right path. Jesus says: "I am the way." He does not say merely that He will make a way, or point out a way—but that He Himself is the way. He is the way to God, the road on which men may walk to God. "No one comes unto the Father—but by Me." This way has been prepared at great cost, and is so easy and so perfect, that the feeblest foot need not stumble in it. Every obstacle has been taken out of it, every rough place has been made smooth, every hill has been leveled down, every valley has been bridged over. Then at every turn, there is a signpost telling which way to take to the refuge. No one ever can say truthfully that he could not find the road to Christ.

There are a thousand paths in this world, leading in all directions, inviting us to walk in them. Some of them are flower-strewn, some of them lead among thorns. There are paths to pleasure, paths to honor, paths also to sin. But there is only one path that leads to blessedness. "Thus says the Lord,

Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way; and walk therein, and you shall find rest for your souls!" When the fleeing manslayer had stepped across the threshold of the gate, he was safe. The authorities dared not now give him up for punishment, until he had been fairly tried. The avenger could not pass beyond the gates of the refuge to touch a hair of the head of him who had passed inside.

Neither can the law lay a hand upon him who has fled to Christ for refuge! "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it, and is safe!"

Another of the provisions for safety was that the man, even though innocent, who had found refuge in one of these cities—must remain therein. He must not leave it on any pretext. If he wandered outside in the green fields, and the avenger found him anywhere beyond the walls, he was at liberty to strike him down. He had forfeited his right to protection.

Here again the analogy is suggestive. Christ is our refuge—but only while we abide in Him. It is not enough for us to run into this refuge once, and register our names and then go out again, at liberty to run wherever we please. We must stay under the shelter—if we would be secure. This means that a life of faith and obedience, must follow the first coming to Christ. We must continue in Christ. The distribution of these cities of refuge throughout the country was such that at no point in the whole land would a man be at a great or impracticable distance from one of them. If there had been but one such refuge—for example, in Jerusalem—it would have been so remote from some portions of the country, that no one could hope to reach it in case of danger. But wherever one might be so unfortunate as to kill another by accident—he could by an easy flight reach safety in some one of the cities. This represents the nearness and the accessibility of Jesus Christ to sinners. He is never far off—but always near. In the Book of the Revelation we are told that heaven is foursquare, with walls, and that on each of the four sides there are three gates. From all quarters, north, south, east, west, heaven is easily accessible to him who desires to enter into it . No one has far to go—to find a gate into the place of eternal love and safety!

Joshua’s Parting Advice

Joshua 24:14-28

It is a good thing to get safely to the end of one’s life, to have done its work well, to have been victorious in its battles, and to have kept one’s self unspotted from the world. The true time to judge of a life is at its close, when the work has all been done. We cannot be sure of the final outcome, until the very end. The very last step may be a false one. The last day may mar all.

Joshua’s career was one of great strength and usefulness. His parting words to the people were full of wisdom. He saw that they were in danger of drifting back into the old life, through the influences that were about them—and he calls them very earnestly to make a new start and to continue to be faithful to God. Joshua’s words, spoken when he was about to leave this world, must have made a deep impression upon the people.

He calls them first to a renewal of their devotion to God. Evidently they were not blameless in their loyalty, since he calls them to put away the gods which their fathers served—and to begin again to serve the Lord. They could not do the latter—until they had done the former. They had been enamored of the sensuous worship of the heathen people about them, and Joshua tells them that

they must break away absolutely from all that they have been adopting from this worship. This lesson is for all worshipers of God. It is not likely that there are images hidden away in any of our homes, as there probably were in the houses of some of the Israelites when Joshua spoke to them. Yet there may be idols, nevertheless. Anything which we keep in our hearts in the place which God ought to have—is an idol, whether it is an image of wood or stone or gold, or whether it is money, or a desire for fame, or love of pleasure, or some secret sin which we will not give up. If God does not really occupy the highest place in our hearts, controlling all, something else does—and that something else is an idol.

Joshua put the case very plainly before the people, telling them that they must make their choice. He did not mean that it makes no difference whether we choose to worship the true God or a false god. It does make an infinite difference. To leave God out of our life—is to lose all. To be a true worshiper, is to be in the family of God, one of His children, and to inherit all the blessings of Divine love. What Joshua meant was, that this is a matter which must be settled by us for ourselves. God does not compel anyone to love Him and obey Him. Joshua required the people to make their choice of the God they would serve. If it seemed evil to them to serve the Lord, they were told they must choose for themselves the god who would be a better friend to them, than the Lord would.

There are some people who think that serving the Lord is not the best thing. They look upon the Christian life, as the turning away from all that is bright, beautiful, joyous and inspiring, and the burying of one's self away in a life of gloom and shadow. They think it would be a great mistake to make a choice of such a life in preference to the happy, unrestrained life of this world. But is this true?

Think a little of the blessings which the service of God brings—pardon, peace, the sense of God's favor, Divine help at every point, precious promises for every experience, victory over every enemy, the Divine love and companionship. Set over against this inventory, that which this world has to offer—a few pleasures, with thorns for a pillow afterwards; a few cups of indulgence, with bitter dregs at the bottom; a few victories which yield no permanent result; a few gains which leave the hands empty at the last; a life of unrestraint and license which in the end binds the soul in chains; a dark death-hour, and a hopeless hell hereafter. Of these two pictures, which is the evil one? It surely does matter whether we choose God or not, whether we believe or doubt, whether we go in sin's ways or God's.

We must settle the question for ourselves—each one for himself—the question of how we shall live, and what we shall do with God. No one can choose for us, not even God Himself. Joshua called the people to make choice then and there, whether they would serve God or idols. Of course, we owe allegiance to God as our only rightful Lord and Sovereign, and we never can throw off this allegiance. We may refuse to recognize it; we may live on as if there were no God anywhere in the universe, giving Him no love, no obedience, no worship ; but we do not thereby get clear of Him or of His claims upon us. We may disregard His laws—but we shall find ourselves at last fast bound in their penalties. In this sense there is no liberty of choice between God and Baal. Still we must make a choice. God never compels allegiance. He tells us what our duty is, what His claims are, what He desires of us, and shows us the blessings of obedience and the cost of disobedience. But we are free to decide for ourselves whether we will serve Him or serve the

world. We cannot serve both. It must be the one or the other.

It is only the life devoted to God—that can go safely through this world's ways of temptation. The heart that is fixed with absorbing love upon God—will not be attracted by the fascinations of the world. It was Christ who said: "If your eye is single, your whole body shall be full of light." If with all our heart and with intense earnestness we follow Christ, we shall not be greatly troubled by the evil things about us.

Example is always most effective in leadership. There is little use in our telling people to go—where we ourselves are not willing to go; or to do—what we are not ready to do. But Joshua asked no decision from the Israelites which he himself was not ready to make. He said: "As for me and my house—we will serve the Lord!" What he would do, was not dependent upon the people's decision. If they all went in the wrong path—he was going in the right path.

It is a noble thing to be able to stand up in the face of all the world and dare to do right, though all the world does wrong. This is a courage that every person needs in these days. "No matter what the crowd does—I will do my duty. All the boys smoke—but I am not going to smoke. All the others go to evil places—but I am not going. All the others swear—but I will keep my speech reverent. The crowd is running after sin—but I am going to cleave to Christ, though I am the only follower Christ has."

It requires unusual moral courage to be true—when all others are false; to be honest—when all others are dishonest; to keep one's life pure and clean—when everybody else is drifting away into impurity; to be alone in our faithfulness. The true thing to do in all circumstances, is not to ask what anyone else is going to do—but to ask what God wants us to do, and then fearlessly do that!

We do not know, either, what our choice means to others. There is always somebody waiting and wavering in making his decision, who will decide—as you do. Then you do not know the influence of your true, beautiful life in the world, in the midst of the evil and the blackness that are everywhere. It gives hope when hope is nearly dead.

One was speaking of being almost driven to the belief that no one is true, that everyone is false, and then there came under observation, one plain, lowly life which in varied and most trying experiences proved sweet, lovely, true, keeping itself unspotted and never failing in any testing. This life saved the person from utter doubt. There was one who was faithful, and this one life restored faith in the power of Christ to save unto the uttermost. We do not know what it will mean to the world—for us to be faithful and true.

It is not easy to serve God. We cannot serve Him at all—unless we come out and break with the world. Joshua said to the people that day: "You cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God." He meant to say, that they could not serve God without giving up the idols which so many of them were secretly worshiping. We cannot serve God—and keep our sins. We cannot serve God—and the world.

Turning away from God—always brings trouble. "If you forsake the Lord," Joshua said, "He will turn and do you evil." We cannot keep our sins—and enjoy the favor of God. He is always a God of love—but He is also a God of justice, and His attitude towards men is either that of mercy or of judgment, according to their attitude towards Him. If we are true to the Lord and do His will—we

will find in Him mercy and grace. But if we rebel against Him and serve other gods—we shall find in Him wrath and severity. If we want the Divine favor and blessing—we must do God's will. The people were deeply impressed that day by Joshua's strong words and renewed their covenant with God. Then Joshua reminded them that they themselves were the witnesses of their own covenant. "You are witnesses against yourselves, that you have chosen you the Lord." We all are witnesses against ourselves, if we do not faithfully follow God. There will be no necessity of calling other people to stand at the bar of judgment, to bear testimony against those who have not obeyed nor served God, or those who have promised to obey Him and then have broken covenant with Him. Every man's conscience will witness against him if he has been unfaithful. It will testify that he knew his duty—and did it not; that God called him again and again—and he heeded Him not; that he sinned against his own soul, resisting and crushing under his feet—the sense of right that was in him. No one in a Christian land who is now living in sin—needs any outside witness to condemn him. He remembers a mother's prayers and teachings, and all the gentle influences of a loving home. He remembers the family altar, where in childhood he daily bowed before God. He remembers his own promises, made in life's solemn moments, that he would yield his heart to Christ and follow Him. Such memories are witnesses against everyone now living in sin, whose youth was passed amid holy scenes and Divine impressions. The outcome of this teaching should be the making or renewing of the covenant with God—by everyone who studies the words. That is, we should choose at once, finally and irrevocably, whom we will serve—whether God, the God of love and grace and truth—or evil, with all its darkness and bitterness. The Curse of Meroz

Judges 5:1-23

It was in the days of the judges. The Israelites were suffering sore oppression under their ancient enemies, the Canaanites. Deborah was raised up as a deliverer. She called Barak, a brave general, to her aid, and an army of ten thousand men was gathered. With this army, Deborah and Barak went against the army of Sisera and were victorious. Sisera's horses and chariots were put to flight and his men slain in battle. Sisera himself, after playing a timid and unsoldierly part, was slain by a woman, who drove a nail through his head. Thus a great victory was achieved under Deborah's leadership of her people. In this battle nearly all the people were loyal and enthusiastic. They "willingly offered themselves." But there were some that held back. One village, or hamlet, in particular, is mentioned which took no part in the effort to cast off the oppressor's yoke. When the call for men went forth over all the country, the call to patriots to arise and come to battle with the foe, Meroz did not respond. In Deborah's song of victory after the battle occurs this solemn anathema:

'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the Lord. 'Curse its people bitterly, because they did not come to help the Lord, to help the Lord against the mighty.' Judges 5:23

What was the cause of this curse? What had the people of Meroz done? They had not joined with the enemies of the country. They had not harbored the foe within their gates. They had not spoken disloyal words when the nation was in danger. They had only not come to the battle when the call rang in their ears. Almost the whole land responded. From north, south, east and west they came—the patriot Israelites—to help drive out the enemy and bring deliverance. But amid this universal outpouring, there was one place from which no soldier came. The curse was for not doing. The story is old—but the lesson is always timely. Every good cause is the cause of God.

The battle is forever going on in this world, and the trumpet is evermore sounding, calling men to the help of the Lord against the mighty. It is not enough not to be against the right, the true and the good; God wants us to come to His help in every contest. Not to act for God—is to act against Him. "He who is not with Me," said the Master, "is against Me."

We are not told why the inhabitants of Meroz did not come to help in the battle that day. We may think of several possible reasons: It may have been from cowardice. Perhaps the men of Meroz feared to go to battle against such strong and cruel enemies. However it may have been that day—there is no doubt that the cause of the inaction of many men in the Lord's work in these times, is moral cowardice. No man wants to be called a coward. It is an insult to his manliness. Yet moral cowardice is a great deal more common than most of us would like to confess. Too many people are held back by it—from faithful service for Christ. Men are not brave enough to be peculiar, to stand out alone, to wear their colors where other people do not wear them. They do not take an active part in Christian work—because somebody would laugh or sneer. Or the inhabitants of Meroz may have thought there were so few of them that they could be of little use, and that it was not worth while for them to go up to battle. "We cannot do anything to help. We are not warriors. We could not add to the force of the army. We may as well stay quietly at home." That is the way many Christian people talk about the Lord's work. They have no talents. They would be no strength, to the good cause that lacks assistance. They are not talkers, or they have little money to give, or they cannot do any church work. So they stay in their tents and come not to the help of the Lord. Their conscious littleness is a burden to them. It is a large tribe—this tribe of Meroz. We find them everywhere. They are not of any use to God, because they think they could not do anything, and therefore fold their hands and sit still.

Israel won the battle that day without the men of Meroz. But it might easily have been that the absence of a handful from the ranks had caused defeat and disaster. There are times when the failure of one person to do his duty in his place—has brought disaster to a cause. Miss Havergal tells her experience in a girls' school at Dusseldorf. When she entered the school she discovered that she was the only Christian in a company of a hundred. Her sensitive heart shrank from confessing Christ there. What good could it do? One little voice for Christ, could not make itself heard amid all the din of worldliness and triviality. Her second, better thought, however, was: "I dare not hide my religion. I am the only one Christ has in this school to represent Him among these girls, and I dare not hide my light. I must own myself as Christ's friend." No one can tell what a loss it would have been to the cause of Christ if this one young girl had not come to the help of the Lord in that school. Perhaps you are the only one Christ has at some particular point, where your failure to come to His help would cause irreparable hurt to His Kingdom, perhaps be the occasion of the perishing of a soul. You are the only one to stand for your Master in your home, in your class in school, in the office or store where you are engaged. In our schoolbooks we have read of the boy who, one evening at his play, found a little leak in the dike that walls the sea off from Holland. He stopped the leak with his hand until help could come, calling meanwhile as loudly as he could. But no one came, and all night the boy held his hand to the place and kept back the floods. Soon the tiny stream would have washed a wide break in the dike, and the waters would have poured over fields and homes. All night long there was nothing between the sea and the ruin of the people's homes, but a boy's hand. Suppose the boy had failed? Suppose he had said: "I cannot do anything. I am not able to keep back these floods"? Who can measure the disaster that

would have followed his failure? Do you know that your life may not stand, any quiet day, and be all that stands between some great flood of moral ruin, and broad, fair fields of beauty? Do you know that your failure in your lowly place and duty—may not let in a sea of disaster, which would sweep away human hopes and joys? Or even if it would make no difference to the cause of Christ whether we do our part or not, it makes infinite difference to ourselves. You remember the cost to the man with one talent of his failure to use his talent. He lost it! It was taken from him. Not using our gifts, however small, is the sure way to the losing of them. The penalty of indolence, is the loss of the power to be useful. Meroz was cursed because her people came not to the help of the Lord. The battle was won without Meroz—but Meroz never got again what it lost that day. Or the inhabitants of Meroz may have stayed back from sheer indolence. They had their own little affairs to attend to—their vineyards, their gardens, their fields. They were comfortable in their pleasant homes among the hills. They were interested in the saving of their country. They hoped that Deborah would conquer and that the cruel yoke of the Canaanites would be thrown off. But almost everybody was going to the battle, and the people of Meroz felt sure that victory was certain without them. So they self-indulgently kept out of the conflict, stayed at home and looked after their own personal interests. They seemed to be saving their lives and sparing themselves much cost and loss and sacrifice. Yes—but when it was all over, when the battle had been fought and the victory won without them, this curse rang out: 'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the Lord. 'Curse its people bitterly, because they did not come to help the Lord, to help the Lord against the mighty.' This was the outcome of the self-saving of Meroz. No doubt if the thoughts of men's hearts were read, it would appear that much of the uselessness of people's lives could be traced to this cause, self-indulgence, unwillingness to make sacrifices for the sake of Christ's Kingdom. We are all the time in serious danger of living for SELF, of putting our own affairs first, of neglecting the duties which we owe to others, of withholding ourselves even from service and sacrifice for Christ. The centering of our thought and effort on SELF is always a fatal error in any life—and always brings a curse with it.

It is easy to allow self-indulgence to come to rule in our habits. Others need us—but we are busy with our own affairs, and are not willing to put ourselves out to help them. That was the trouble with the priest and the Levite on the Jericho road. They did not want to give up their time and to be at the expense and pains necessary to assist the wounded man. Who does not ofttimes commit the same mistake? We see about us those who are in need, perhaps of spiritual help, perhaps of help for the body. But to do that which is required, we would have to miss some engagement, some good time, some season of rest, to give up some ease or gain or comfort or pleasure of our own. There is a little struggle in our heart, and then we decide that we cannot turn aside from our own business, or give up our own convenience, or make the self-denial. The result is that we come not to the help of the Lord. We have saved our life. We are spared the discomfort or the sacrifice. Our hands are not soiled with the rough work. We have our money still in our pocket. But as we go back to our self-seeking pursuits we hear the words ringing out: 'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the LORD. 'Curse its people bitterly, because they did not come to help the LORD, to help the LORD against the mighty.' We have saved our life—but we have failed God—and received a curse instead of a blessing!

Gideon and the Three Hundred

Judges 7

Gideon is one of the most interesting characters of his time. The days were troublous for the people of Israel. It was their own fault, too; they had sinned—and thus had lost God's protection and help. Our first glimpse of Gideon shows us the condition of the country. He was beating out wheat in a hidden wine-press, instead of in the midst of an open field. He was trying to keep out of sight of the Midianites, for if any of them saw him threshing out his scant harvest—they would steal it all.

One day the angel of the Lord was seen sitting under a tree in Ophrah. Whether Gideon recognized his visitor as a heavenly being is not clearly apparent. If he did he certainly was not startled by his coming to him as usually people were when they saw an angel. Gideon talked to this messenger very naturally. Perhaps the angel wore only a human form, although later he is spoken of as the Lord Himself. God is always coming to us, though we know it not. William Cullen Bryant said he thought of everyone he met—as an angel in disguise. We may go further and think of everyone who comes to us—as God Himself. It would change the meaning of life and give a new sacredness to all our meetings with others, if we did this. The angel began his conversation with Gideon with a cheerful greeting: "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." Gideon was a modest and plain man who probably never had thought of himself as having any special ability. The best men are least aware of their own greatness. No wonder Gideon was surprised and abashed by the greeting. God always sees the best that is in us. He recognizes the power that slumbers in our brain and heart. He knew the grandeur of character that was waiting for development in this sturdy farmer. The greeting of the angel was not, therefore, an idle compliment. Gideon was a mighty man of valor and the Lord was indeed with him.

Yet evidently Gideon was not happy that day. He was not in a cheerful mood. The troubles in the country had disquieted him. The angel's words, "The Lord is with you," did not seem to describe his condition. "Oh, my Lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?" There did not appear to be much evidence of God's presence or favor in the condition of things then prevalent in the country. The people were suffering grievously from the enemies who were doing them such harm. It seemed to Gideon that if God really was the friend of His people—He would show His friendship in a more kindly way. He did not seem to be present with His people—as He had been in past days. "Where are all His wondrous works which our fathers told us of? . .. Now the Lord has cast us off, and delivered us into the hand of Midian." This same question is often heard in our own days. If God is our Father, why do we have to suffer so much? Why do we have so many losses and disappointments?

Instead of answering his complaint, the angel spoke to Gideon a startling word, calling him to become his people's deliverer. "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" This is ofttimes the Divine answer to our fears and questionings concerning our troubles. Instead of fretting over our disasters, it is ours to set to work to repair them. God does not want us to yield to what is hard or discouraging in our experiences—but to pray for courage and strength to rebuild what has been torn down.

It is a Divine Being that now speaks, and Gideon is awed. He shrinks from the call that has come to him. It did not seem to him possible that he should deliver his people. "Oh, Lord, how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." Gideon's humility was commendable—but we need never fear that God has made any mistake—when He calls us to

a duty. It may seem too great for our powers—but it is not really so. He who calls us knows what we can do. Besides, He never sends one alone on any errand. "Surely I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."

Now we see Gideon at the head of his men, encamped by the spring of Harod, about to meet the Midianite army in battle. "The people that are with you are too many," said the Lord to Gideon. If with such a force they were victorious, they would boast of their own valor, and would not give God the glory. One of the greatest dangers to which poor, vain human nature is exposed—is self-conceit. God takes many ways of making us humble, for there is no human feeling that is more repugnant to Him, than pride. Sometimes He allows us to be defeated—that is the way He cured Peter of his stubborn self-confidence. He let him fall into the hands of Satan to be sorely beaten. Peter never boasted again of his own strength and his ability to stand. After that, he was one of the humblest of men, and because he was humble—he was strong. No doubt many a defeat comes in our lives because we are too strong. God cannot allow us to succeed, because if we did, with our own self-sufficiency, we would give Him no praise—but would keep to ourselves all the honor.

Many times God pursues precisely the same course with us, that he did with Gideon’s army. He weakens our strength until we are reduced to absolute powerlessness, and then He gives us the victory. Jacob was lamed before he overcame the wrestler and got his new name. But his lameness was his strength. It meant less of Jacob and more of God. The true secret of spiritual strength, is a consciousness of weakness on our own part, leading to full dependence on the Divine help. When we get to this point—God is ready to give us victory.

It is interesting to study the way God thinned out Gideon’s army. Though He wanted only a few men to fight the battle, He wanted the best. He would not show His power by giving the victory to cowardice and inefficiency. So the first thing He bade Gideon to do, was to weed out the incompetent. There were twenty thousand cowards in that army, men who were willing to confess that they were afraid, and these were sent home. They would have been no strength, only weakness and peril. One coward—may make a whole battalion into cowards. The ten thousand men would be stronger alone—than the thirty thousand with these timid ones still remaining.

Many a church would be stronger—if it were weeded out just as Gideon’s army was. Its weakness lies in its great numbers, not because numbers necessarily weaken—but because there are so many half-hearted people on the roll, people who are not ready to make sacrifices, to endure suffering and loss. One irresolute and vacillating man—may make a score of other men irresolute and of little use as witnesses for Christ and the truth. Men of courage are needed, and there would be new strength, in sifting out the ranks. There are too many in our churches who would withdraw if they could from the army of the Lord, in the time when it is no longer easy to be faithful. They have lost their hearty interest, if they ever had any, and are indifferent, cold, without the spirit of true consecration, mere hangers-on. A great commander tells the story of one of his men in battle. In the hottest of the fight this soldier saw a frightened rabbit running with all its might through the bushes. "I would run, too," the man cried, "but for my character." He would not be branded as a coward, and so for his name—he stood at his post. It ought to make us brave in our loyalty to duty—to remember that only by being faithful unto death, can we win the crown of life. Even their character was not enough to keep Gideon’s men from confessing that they were afraid to go into

battle.

It was an amazing thing that the Lord said to Gideon after twenty-two thousand cowards had gone away. Certainly the army was small enough now—ten thousand to meet a countless army in battle. But the Lord said: "The people are yet too many." There were two reasons for this further sifting. God would remove the last ground for boasting from the people themselves. Then He would still farther sift the quality of the men, rejecting many who were brave enough—but lacked other elements of the highest soldierly character. God ofttimes thins the ranks of His Church, when he wants some great work done.

Christ kept the number of His disciples small, by continually presenting the hard demands of the service He required of His followers. He declared that he who would come after Him must take up His cross. He talked about the baptism with which He had been baptized, and asked those who proposed to follow Him if they were able to accept that. When ardent, enthusiastic men came, offering to follow Him wherever He would lead them—Jesus spoke of His homelessness: the Son of man has nowhere to lay His head—and asked: "Can you accept that for your worldly expectation?" So it came at the last, that he had only twelve apostles (and one of these turned traitor and sent Him to His cross), and a little handful of faithful women who clung to Him with loyal love. With that small holy band He conquered the world. The method of sifting the men in this second reduction, was remarkable and very suggestive. "Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there." The men themselves did not know that they were being tested. God is always trying us, trying us when we do not dream that He is. He never entrusts anything into the hands of anyone—until He knows that the person will do it well. So He tries His servants beforehand in such ways—as will reveal their fitness or unfitness for the duties required. These trials are being made when we are doing our simplest duties, when we are quietly moving about in the common walks of life.

Here, the way the men drank water from the brook was the test of their fitness for the work of conquering the Midianites. It seemed to make the smallest difference in the world how a soldier might drink; yet it was a difference which settled the question of fitness or unfitness for the great work before the army, because it revealed an essential quality of true soldierliness.

It is in just such little ways and in just such matters of everyday and commonplace conduct and manner, that God is always testing us and deciding whether we are fit or unfit for the greater works for which He wants men. By the way a boy lives at home, by the way he treats his parents, by the way he performs his duties at school, by the spirit he shows on the playground, by the diligence which he displays in the store or the office where he is first employed—by the way he acts in all these relations and duties, the question is being settled to what greater work or responsibilities the Lord will call him in after days. In a large business institution at the last New Year, one young man missed his promotion because the timekeeper’s records showed that he had been coming in a few minutes late a good many mornings. He was one of the best young men in the place, did excellent work, had ability and skill, was trustworthy and faithful—but he had fallen into the habit of coming in frequently two or three or five minutes behind time, and it cost him his annual advance. He was angry, and talked about unfairness—but he had only himself to blame. The testing goes on almost automatically in all life. A young girl, by the way she deports herself in her girlhood, at home, in school, at play, in society, and in all her experiences, is settling the place in life which she will fill in

the days of womanhood and strength. God is always trying us and selecting the men and the women He wants for the important duties of life—from those who stand the test well. This should make us careful how we live and act every moment, for we cannot know when these tests are being made, or what future honor and glory may depend on the way we do the simplest and most commonplace thing today.

Little things test character, little things done unconsciously. Character is revealed in the way people walk, in their handwriting, in their handshaking, and in all the familiar actions of everyday life. A coarse jest—tells of coarseness in the nature. Thoughtlessness anywhere, shows a character lacking in noble quality. Carelessness in little things, reveals a careless man.

There are boys with a careless habit. They think they need not always do their best. It will be a small matter if they omit one duty, if they trifle just one hour, if they waste one day. Yet the trail of the one neglect—may follow them to the end.

Ruth and Naomi

Ruth 1 The Book of Ruth is one of the most delightful pastorals ever written. It is full of charm and beauty.

It is related, whether on indisputable authority or not, cannot be positively stated, that on one occasion when Benjamin Franklin was living in Paris as American Minister to France, this pleasant incident occurred: One evening, so the story runs, there was a great gathering of distinguished literary people, at which Franklin was present. He was asked to contribute in some way to the enjoyment of the company. Drawing from his pocket a little roll of manuscript he explained that in a very old book he came upon a beautiful story, one which had greatly interested him. He said he would like to read this story to the company, if they were willing, as his contribution to the exercises of the evening. He then read the little story of Ruth. There was not one of those present to whom it was familiar, and no one had any thought of the source from which it had come. All were loud in their praise of the story, agreeing that it was the most charming pastoral ever they had heard, and all were eager to know the name of the book in which it had been found. When Franklin told them that the story was from an old book called the Bible, they were amazed that a volume so despised should contain any piece of literature so delightful.

Some time during the period when the judges ruled, there was a great famine in Canaan. A man of Bethlehem, by name Elimelech, took Naomi, his wife, and his two sons and went to the country of Moab to escape the famine. Soon sorrow entered the home—Elimelech died. Comfort came again in due time. The two sons married. There, may have been an element of bitterness in these marriages for the mother, for the wives were Moabite girls, and the Israelite law forbade marriages with foreigners. Evidently, however, the mother quietly accepted the disappointment. Ten years of happy life followed, and then again sorrow came. Both the young men died. It was a sad home in which the three bereft and lonely women dwelt.

Then Naomi, hearing that the famine was over in Canaan, resolved to return to Bethlehem. Her heart still clung to the old home land, and now that none of her own loved ones were left to her—she felt the loneliness in the land of Moab very keenly, and longed to go back to the scenes of her earlier days. Both Orpah and Ruth expressed their desire to return with Naomi. This speaks well for Naomi. She must have been a good woman to win her daughters-in-law to herself in such

devotion. The chatter of parlors and social circles, is full of jibes about mothers-in-law. The newspaper writer likes to write bright and cruel things on the same subject. A great deal of injustice is done to mothers-in-law by these flippant words. The impression is made that a true, sweet friendship between son-in-law and mother-in-law is impossible. The impression is most unjust and untrue. This relation is ofttimes one of sweet and tender affection. There are daughters-in-law who have no more faithful or unselfish friends than their husbands' mothers. This story of Ruth and Naomi shows that there may be such holy friendship. It may be said that these were exceptional women. Naomi must certainly have been an ideal mother-in-law to win the heart of the young and beautiful Ruth as she did, and to hold her to herself so indissolubly. She must have been most discreet and self-restrained. We may be sure that in the sacred wedded life of her son and his wife, she never intruded with her advice nor intermeddled with her suggestions. This is one relation in life, into which even the gentlest and best beloved mother may not press her claim for confidence nor interpose her counsel. We are quite sure that Naomi was a most wise and unselfish mother-in-law.

Ruth, too, must have been an ideal daughter-in-law. She must have honored and loved Naomi. She must have pitied her sorrow and brought to her in her lonely widowhood, all that her sweet young life could bring of sympathy, of cheer, of patient thought and tender care, and of helpful kindness. She must have taken the unfilled place of an own daughter in Naomi's life, in all honor, affection, humility, confidence and dutifulness, bringing to her in her grief and broken-heartedness, truest strength and comfort. So warm a place had the Israelitish mother won in the hearts of her daughters-in-law, that they could not bear to have her go away from them, and were willing to break all their own home ties and to go back with Naomi to her old home. At first both the young women set out to go with Naomi. They all went some distance together. Perhaps at first their thought was only to go with her a little way to see her off, as friends often do with one who is departing. But when the time came for them to return, they both declared they could not part from Naomi—but would go back with her to her own country. She told them what sacrifices they would have to make if they accompanied her. They must give up whatever there was beautiful, hopeful and joyous in their own home and country, and would have only poverty, desolateness and sorrow for their portion in the land of Israel, since Naomi had nothing to promise them. She was very honest with the two women. She would not have them return with her—thinking they would find wealth, ease and joy there.

Orpah hesitated. She had warm affection for Naomi and did not want to tear herself away from her. The memories of her dead husband also bound her to the noble mother-in-law. But as she stood there on the border and looked forward and back, her courage wavered. Behind her were country, home, hope, friends; before her were poverty, toil, sorrow in a strange land. She hesitated, she wept, she decided, she kissed the mother-in-law she had learned to love, and said farewell to her, turning back towards the old home.

"Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-by, but Ruth clung to her." Ruth 1:14. We may take some lessons from Orpah while we watch her walking sadly back towards her own country. She illustrates much human friendship. It is devoted—up to a certain point. So long as loyalty costs little—it cleaves with fondness and tenderness. But it is not ready to give up pleasure or profit, so it turns back. You can get plenty of people who will be your friends—while you have favors to dispense, and while attachment to you makes no draft on their money or their ease, nor breaks

into their selfish enjoyment. But when friendship means forgetfulness of self, when it will cost something to cleave to you—they have only tears and regrets, and turn away and leave you.

Orpah also illustrates a class of professed friends of Christ. We see some of them in the story in the Gospels. There is one, for instance, a rich young ruler, who came running, who was very eager and earnest in his desire to follow Jesus—but who did just as Orpah did. He was told that he must give up all, sell all he had and distribute among the poor, and then go empty-handed into a path of hardship, self-sacrifice and service with Jesus. He heard the conditions, he weighed the two alternatives: staying at home and keeping his money, his position—or going with Jesus and giving up all. The struggle was hard, for he loved the Master and wanted to go with Him—but he loved himself and his money still more. He stood hesitating, looking both ways, and then made his choice, and with tears said farewell to Jesus.

There are many such followers in every age. They want to be Christians. They have some conception of a better life. They have some love for Christ, and while no severe and costly self-denial is necessary, they follow Him. But when they come to the borders of the old natural life, where they must give up everything and go out with their new Master on paths of toil, cross-bearing and personal sacrifice, like Orpah, with sorrow they go back to their gods and their possessions, while Jesus is left to go on alone. The story of Ruth, however, is altogether different. She saw all that Orpah saw of the cost of going with Naomi to the country of Israel. She heard all that Naomi said about the sadness of her future—that she had nothing to promise her daughters if they went with her. Ruth knew well that she was leaving all, and so far as human eye could see was choosing only a life of sacrifice and sorrow. Yet she never wavered for a moment. She saw Orpah turn homewards—but her own resolution weakened not. She clung to Naomi.

Ruth illustrates true human friendship. Her strong and faithful love for Naomi caused her to cleave to her with an unwavering and unalterable attachment. She did not stop to count the cost of constancy and fidelity. She did not look forward to ask where her devotion to Naomi would lead her—into what sacrifice or loss. Her love for Naomi was such that she would cleave to her, though it would lead her to death.

All love is measured by what it will do or give or suffer or sacrifice. Ruth’s love stood the sorest test. Ruth illustrates true friendship for Christ. Orpah loved, wept—and went back. Ruth loved, wept—and clung. Christ’s true followers cling to Him, though He leads them into paths of poverty, trial and cross-bearing. They do not stop to consider the cost of faithfulness. They make choice of Christ without conditions, and where He goes—they follow Him. Christian history is resplendent with the names and stories of countless friends of Christ who have followed Him at the cost of all their personal comfort, pleasure and profit.

Ruth’s words of devotion are very beautiful. "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." This is a noble formula of faith, for every friend of Christ. Wherever Christ goes we should go. We are to attach ourselves to Him so closely, so faithfully, so unalterably, that we shall never ask into what experiences He is taking us, whether it will be pleasant or not, whether it will be easy or hard. We must simply cleave to Him and follow wherever He leads.

We make choice, also, of Christ's people when we choose Him. We cut ourselves off from our old ties if they are not Christly, our old friendships if they are still in the old life, and we take Christ's people as ours henceforward. We enter a new family, with a new name, a new hope, a new home. If we follow Christ, we must identify ourselves with His Church and friends, separating ourselves from the world. We must take God to be ours, giving up our idols and yielding our hearts fully to the Lord.

Naomi had many sorrows. When the people welcomed her back to Bethlehem, their words were like mockeries on her ears. "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara," she said, referring to the bitter things she had endured. The belief in those days, was that when people had peculiar sorrows the Lord was punishing them for peculiar sins. "The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me!" she said. Christ brought better comfort than Naomi found. He assures us of God's love in our sorrows and teaches us not to be troubled. Those who have Christ for their friend may learn to rejoice even in their sorrows, finding blessing and good—in loss and trial.

Alexander Whyte says: "The women are so delightful in this delightful little book that there is no room left for the men. The men fall into the background and are clean forgotten." Yet Whyte extols Boaz as a man who ought not to be forgotten and the lessons from whose life ought to be impressed and remembered. Boaz is one of the truest gentlemen who ever lived. He is courteous to his people and his servants. He is kind to the poor. He is as chivalrous as any knight. He is hospitable and kind. There is not the slightest blemish on his name. When we read the story through to the close, we have a revealing of the blessing and comfort which God brought to Naomi and to Ruth after all their sorrow. Ruth never was sorry for the choice she made, and for her sacrifice in giving up her own country for Canaan. Choosing Naomi's people and Naomi's God, she found human friends, a home, an honored place in the nation, and she herself became a link in the ancestry of Jesus Christ. Those who choose Christ are exalted to high honor in the family of God—in this world and also in heaven.

Samuel the Judge

1 Samuel 7

Samuel grew up from very young childhood in the House of the Lord. The atmosphere was good in a way, although we cannot think of Eli as really a very good man to bring up a boy. The priest who could speak to a praying woman as Eli spoke to Hannah when she was pleading with God, we cannot think of as having a sweet and beautiful spirit. He certainly was lacking in gentleness and in all the elements of graciousness. Dr. Whyte thinks Eli never forgave himself for his hasty words to Hannah, and that the memory of his insulting language gave him lasting bitterness. Possibly, however, this made him all the gentler to the boy Samuel in the effort to atone for his unpardonable roughness and rudeness to the boy's mother.

Then Eli was not successful as a father in his own family. His sons did not turn out well. Indeed, they were wicked men. One hears a good many unkindly things said of ministers' sons—but the truth is, the majority of them grow up into worthy and useful men. Now and then, however, a minister's family or members of it, are not what they should be. Eli's sons certainly did dishonor to their father's name. They were brought up amid the holy influences of the House of God—but "knew not the Lord." Writers, trying to account for this, say it was because their father was away

from home so much, attending to his duties as judge, that he had no time to look after his own home affairs. It is bad when any father is so busy looking after other people's matters—that he neglects his children! Eli was a failure as a father, and the result was most pitiful.

We might say that Samuel did not have a good chance for a godly upbringing, in such a home as Eli's. But there were other influences that counteracted what was wrong in Eli. Samuel's mother visited her son at least once every year, and no doubt instructed him. A good mother's influence over her boy, is well near omnipotent. Then we know that very early Samuel was called by the Lord to begin his ministry as a prophet. So God Himself became Samuel's teacher. He trained him to be a prophet and established him in his place. He was a noble patriot, a wise ruler, a faithful friend, a true-hearted man. When Eli was very old, his people went to war against the Philistines, who had long been their enemies. This battle was most disastrous for Eli and the Israelites. When they were in danger of defeat the leaders sent for the ark, hoping it might turn the tide. But it availed not. Israel was beaten, the people fled, there was a great slaughter, the ark was taken, the sons of Eli were slain. When the news was carried to Eli, the old man sat waiting. The messenger told the story of the disaster item by item—the defeat, the flight of the soldiers, the great slaughter, the death of Eli's two sons—but when he said: "the ark of God has been captured," the aged priest fell backward, broke his neck and died. When Eli was dead, Samuel became the judge. He comes before us in a time of great trouble. The ark has been returned. Samuel calls upon the people to return to God. Samuel was a noble patriot, a wise ruler, and a true-hearted man. In the incidents of his life given in the history, Samuel appears often in the attitude of intercessor. He did much of his work as judge on his knees. It is a great thing to have a friend on close and intimate terms with God, to pray for us when we are in trouble or when we have sinned. We do not know what blessings come to us—through human intercessors. Nor should we forget that we have another intercessor, our great High Priest, who in heaven makes continual intercession for us. When Samuel called the people to return to God, they began right—they said: "We have sinned against the Lord!" The first step in returning to God—is to make confession of our sins. Until we have done this, we cannot be forgiven, and until we are forgiven, there can be no restoration to the Divine favor.

If we have sinned, there is no gift we can bring to God that is half so precious in His sight—as a penitential tear. It will open heaven's gates to us when all the gold in the world or all the good works of a hundred lifetimes would not cause it to move on its hinges! No wonder the Israelites were frightened when they knew the Philistines were coming against them. They had suffered terribly in the past at the hands of these enemies. Their faith was yet weak in its new beginnings. But in their alarm they did the right thing—they turned to Samuel and begged him to cry to God for them. They knew that they could not save themselves from their fierce and cruel enemy, and that help must come from God. That man is a fool—who is not afraid of sin! Especially if one has been long under the power of some sin and is trying to get away from its clutches—he is a fool if he has no dread of it and thinks himself able to meet it in his own strength. We have no power of our own to break sin's power and to deliver ourselves!

Recently the papers told of a man who in some way stumbled into a swampy bog beside the sea, when the tide was flowing out, and sank almost to his neck in the salt mire. It was night, and there he lay, his head merely above the surface, unable to extricate himself. For a time the waters continued to flow away—but by-and-by they turned and began to flow towards him. Weak, faint,

and bewildered, he lay there through the darkness. Morning dawned and the tide was still rising. In a few minutes more it would sweep over his head and bury him forever in the fatal swamp. A workingman hurrying on his way to some early duty, walking on the railroad trestle, saw a man's head in the bog, with the water up to his chin. He hastened to his rescue, and with difficulty extricated him from his perilous position. Had not help come that hour—the poor man must have perished in the swamp. He had no power to fight the mighty oncoming tides, with all the great sea behind them. Just as helpless is a human life in the grip of sin and temptation, with only its own strength to meet the enemy. The only hope is in God.

Samuel began with an offering. He took a lamb and offered it to God, and then prayed. The way to God—is by the blood of the Lamb. Sacrifice comes before intercession, and prepares the way for it. After he had offered the lamb, Samuel was ready to pray for help from God. When we seek help from the Lord in our dangers, we do not need to bring a lamb to offer, for the one great offering has already been made. Christ, the Lamb of God, has been slain, and His blood has been sprinkled on the mercy seat. Now we need only to come in His name. Yet we must not forget that there is no other way of acceptance, and that if we do not plead the blood of the Lamb we cannot receive any help. The Philistines had no thought of being afraid of the Israelites, knowing how weak they were. They did not realize that a reinforcement had come to them; that God Himself was fighting their battle that day. No earthly enemy can stand before God. The Israelites in their weak and broken condition, could not have beaten the Philistines—but it was nothing to the Lord to defeat them. He heard the prayer of Samuel for them and sent help. He is the same God today, and is just as able to give deliverance now—as He was that day. We need never be afraid of any enemy—if we are abiding in Christ. The victory was complete, and Samuel set up a stone, calling it Ebenezer, "Hitherto has the Lord helped us." This was not only to mark the place—but to honor God, who had wrought the deliverance. It is well to set up memorials on the spot where God has done some great thing for us. Where was it that you first met Christ and formed with Him the covenant of life and peace? Where was it that you were delivered from the power of some great temptation? Should not all these places be remembered? It will keep alive the gratitude in your heart. The conquest over the Philistines was complete and final. This troublesome enemy was conquered, the captured cities were retaken, peace was made with other nations, also, because of the favor of the Lord that rested upon Israel. When one has truly repented and returned to God, as Israel did here, God gives blessing and favor. Old enemies, have no more the power over them they once had. Temptations once mastered through the Divine help, have no more the same terrible strength as before. Then, as he enters upon his new life, the victorious Christian gets back again the lost powers that sin had taken away from him in the days of his wandering. When God has taken an erring one back into His favor and fought the battle with sin for him and got the victory for him—it is easier for the man to live afterwards. He lives then on a new plane. He is no longer a weary, struggling, broken man—but a victor, strong, hopeful, courageous, with the power of God resting upon him, and the grace of God in his heart. It makes a vast difference in living whether we are the poor slaves of the Evil One—or have him under our feet.

Samuel was the greatest of all the judges of Israel. His character was spotless. Dedicated to the Lord in infancy, he never departed from the Lord. Samuel was strong in his moral character. His left hand did not tear down what his right hand had built up. He was a manly man, courageous and firm, as well as godly. His influence was not gained by the sword—but by the power of truth. He

was a prophet and teacher, and taught the people the Word of God. He delivered them not by victories in war—but by leading them back from their wanderings to new allegiance to the Lord. Instead of weakly allowing idolatry to spread through the land, he made himself felt as a force against all idolatry, cleansing the land of its false worship and restoring the worship of the true God. Eli saw the results of his long life all swept away at one terrible blow. Samuel had the joy of seeing his work stand and the nation rise into noble power and influence under his rule.

Israel Asking for a King

1 Samuel 8

It was when Samuel was old, that the people began to talk about wanting to have a king. It takes a great deal of grace to grow old sweetly and beautifully. It is not always possible to carry the alertness and energy of young manhood, into advanced years. There is much talk in our days about the "dead line," which seems to be set down at about fifty. It is not easy for a man who has crossed that line to get a position in business. Yet if we live wisely and rightly all our lives, old age ought to be the best of life. We certainly ought to make it beautiful and good, for our life is not finished until we come to its very last day.

We ought to be wiser when we are old—than ever we have been in any former years. We ought to have learned by experience. We ought to be better in every way—with more of God's peace in our hearts, with more gentleness and patience. We ought to have learned self-control and to be able to rule our own spirit better. We ought to have more love, more joy, more thoughtfulness, to be more considerate, to have more humility. The 'inner man' should be taller, stronger, Christlier. Old age never should be the dregs of the years, the mere cinder of a burnt-out life. One may not have the vigor and strenuousness of the mid-years—but one should be every way truer, richer-hearted, better. If the outward man has grown weaker, feebler—the inner man should be stronger.

We expect to see a good man's sons reproduce their father's nobleness and worth. They ought to walk in his ways. They ought to continue the life he has begun, to carry on the work he has started, to keep his name bright and add to its luster. A father has lofty hopes for his sons. He dreams brilliant dreams. He expects his sons to be the true inheritors of all for which he has toiled and sacrificed. It is a bitter disappointment to him when they fail him, when they are not ready to be his successors, when the business he has built up passes to other hands, because they cannot continue it.

"Samuel's sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice." 1 Samuel 8:3. They had enjoyed every advantage. Their father had set before them a godly and consistent example. Samuel was not like Eli. To the very close there was not a single stain upon his name. There is no evidence, either, that he had failed in parental discipline, as Eli did. Yet in spite of all these advantages and privileges, Samuel's sons had forsaken the paths in which they had been brought up. Godliness is not hereditary; it does not necessarily descend from father to son. The fact that one has a godly parent—does not guarantee godliness in the child. A father may bring up his children most carefully, and yet he cannot compel them to follow after God, and they may turn entirely away.

Samuel's sons loved the world. The record says they turned aside after lucre. It takes a steady hand to carry a full cup. Many young men who would have lived well in lowly places—fail when

they are promoted to positions of power. The sons of Samuel were not able to stand the temptations which office brought to them. Political positions are always full of peril. Many men who are upright in private life—have proved unable to resist the temptation to dishonesty in official places where money passed through their hands. Money seems to have been the root of the evil which destroyed these sons of Samuel. Even in those crude times there were men who were willing to pay for legislation or for judicial decisions, and these men prostituted their offices to the love of gain and sold their influence for money.

It is pathetic to see Samuel's old age saddened by the corruption of his sons. The children of godly men, owe it to their parents to live so as to bring honor and blessing upon them in their declining years. There are many ways of doing this—but the best is by living noble, beautiful lives, and being such men and women as their parents will be proud and happy to own before all the world.

There seems something most ungracious and ungrateful in the way the elders of Israel came to Samuel to tell him of the people's desire for a king. "They said unto him, Behold, you are old." The elders meant that Samuel's old age made him incapable or inefficient as a ruler. It was a broad hint to him that he would better lay down his authority and let them choose some other ruler. They seem to have forgotten that he had grown old in their service; that he had given his whole life to the cause of the nation, and that they owed him whatever of grandeur or real glory there was in their land. Their conduct towards Samuel was ungrateful in the extreme. This fault is too common in our own days. We are lacking in reverence to the aged. We are too ready to ask them to step aside when they have grown grey in serving us, to make room for younger people to take up the work they have been doing. We ought to venerate old age, especially when it has ripened in ways of righteousness and self-denial for the good of others. No sight is more beautiful than that of a young person showing respect and homage to one who is old.

Yet there is another view of the case that we may not overlook. Old men cannot always retain their places. They must give way to others, who in turn shall take up the tasks they have done so long. The old ought not to be afraid of the young. The oncoming host should not terrify them. When we have done our part well—we should be glad to surrender our places to those who may carry on the work we have begun. All any man can do—is a little fragment of a great work, the laying of a few stones on the wall. We follow others, and still others will follow us. The old must recognize this law of life and should neither grieve nor complain when they are called to surrender their places to make way for those who will come after them.

There are few severer tests of the Christian spirit than this, and the old need special grace and a large measure of the mind of Christ, in order that they may meet the experience sweetly. The lesson of gratitude and deference towards those who have served well, is greatly needed—but so also is the lesson of submission and resignation in those whose work is complete. Sometimes an old man, after a life of nobleness and great usefulness, mars the beauty of his record by the ungracious way he leaves his place. If he is wise and recognizes the Divine law for advancing age, he will retire in such a way as to crown his work by the beauty of its closing, and make the influence of his last days a holy aftermath, in which the best things of all his years shall continue to live in the glow and ripeness of love. The demand of the elders was very explicit: "Now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." They wanted to be "in fashion". They were growing tired of their plain, old-fashioned kind of government, and longed for the pomp and

splendor which other nations had about their government. At the bottom of it all, however, was a discontent with what God had given them, and a feeling that what others had was better. Besides, there was a worldly spirit which craved to he in the world's parade and fashion. This same spirit is still alive. There are many professing children of God who look longingly at the world's fields and sigh to get over the fence to try the world's enjoyments. Many Christians are not satisfied with the spiritual things of grace for their portion—but crave to have what the world has. The hour was a very trying one for Samuel. He was displeased. Yet his conduct was very beautiful. This request of the people for a king hurt him sorely. It was a painful slight upon him. After all his lifetime of service, they had asked him to step aside because he was getting old. Samuel knew also that they had made this request in a wrong spirit—that they were also slighting God and rejecting Him. The natural thing for Samuel would have been to answer the elders sharply, and tell them in plain language what he thought of their request. But instead of this, notice how nobly he bore himself. He would give no answer at all until he had carried the whole matter to the Lord. When others hurt us by their sharp speeches, by their ingratitude, or in any other way, or when they are about to do us harm by their acts—our first duty is prayer. God is far more deeply concerned in any matter that concerns us—than we ourselves can be. We do not know what His will may be about it. Perhaps the things we think should not be done at all—He may want to have done. Perhaps He wants us to submit to the wrong or the injustice. Perhaps our part in the work has been completed and God Himself would have another take our place. At least, we should always carry every such matter to Him and ask what His will is before we give any answer or do anything in return. The example of Samuel in this case teaches us important lessons. The lack of gratitude and graciousness in the people and their elders—did not affect Samuel's bearing in the matter. We must be Christians, however unchristianly others may have done their part towards us. Then God had far more concern in the change the people desired than Samuel had. They were setting Samuel aside—but they were also setting God aside. It often happens even in church work, that people have to be superseded. They are not altogether satisfactory, and it seems wise that a change shall be made. Or there is personal animosity in the desire. Whatever the motive, we should never resent such changes, if they apply to us—but should accept them sweetly and cheerfully as Samuel did. The Lord bade Samuel to let the people have their choice in the matter of the king. They were persistent in their demand—and God let them have their own way. The thing they asked for was not pleasing to Him—and yet it was granted. God sometimes grants men's prayers, even when what they ask—is not really the best thing for them. He sometimes permits things which He does not approve. Even God, with all His omnipotence, may not compel us to take His ways. According to the prophet Hosea, God says: "I gave Israel a king in my anger."

It is not safe to make demands of God in prayer, to pray insubmissively and rebelliously. The thing we take as by force from God—may not bring blessing. The true way to pray, is to lay our requests at the feet of God—and leave them there without undue urgency. We do not know what is best for us. A pastor sat by the sick-bed of a child who seemed to be near death. Turning to the parents, he said: "We will pray to God for your child. What shall we ask Him to do?" After a few moments of silence the father said, amid his sobs: "We would not dare choose—leave it to Him." This is the only safe way to pray in such matters. The thing that seems to us most desirable—may be in reality the very worst thing we could get. Life may not be the best thing for our child. We know not what would lie before him if he lived. The thing that seems to us most desirable—may be in reality the very worst thing we could get. There is no wrong in our praying for money—but it must be in

the spirit of Gethsemane: "Not my will—but may Your will be done." In praying for our friends, we dare not dictate to God what they shall have, for we cannot tell what is best for them. Unsubmissive prayers are always wrong. And God may sometimes let us have what we are determined to have, and the receiving may prove an evil rather than a good to us! The Lord reminded Samuel of the wrong the elders had done to Him also. Thus the matter concerned God even more than Samuel. We should learn a lesson of patience and forbearance towards others—from the way God bears with men's sins—perchance with our sins!

God is very patient with the wicked in all their sins. Why should not we likewise be patient with them? We are not their judges; they do not have to answer to us for their sins. We should show them God's patience.

Saul Chosen King

1 Samuel 9-10

It had been decided that Israel should have a king. How was he to be found? The story is graphically told in the Scriptures. There was a man named Kish, "He had a son named Saul, an impressive young man. There was no one more impressive among the Israelites than he. He stood a head taller than anyone else."

It would not have been worth while to put into the Bible the story of the lost donkeys, except that it was through this incident that Samuel came to meet Saul. Here we have an illustration of Divine Providence. The straying of some donkeys from a farm in Benjamin, brings the future king of Israel to the prophet who was to anoint him. There is no 'chance' in life. God is moving everywhere. The smallest events of our lives any common day—may become important links in the shaping of our career. The coming of two prisoners from the palace to Joseph's prison one day, prepared the way for the calling of Joseph to be prime minister of Egypt, with all the great history that followed.

Just so, the most casual meeting of two strangers in traveling or in a social way, is often the beginning of some most important event. If the donkeys of Kish had not been lost, humanly speaking, Saul would not have met Samuel and would not have become king of Israel. God is always weaving the web of life for us out of the minutest threads, using even the pains and disappointments of our experience to help make up the beauty and the goodness of the finished fabric.

"With mercy and with judgment

My web of time He wove.

And yes the dews of sorrow

Were lustred by His love:

I'll bless the hand that guided,

I'll bless the heart that planned,

When throned where glory dwells

In Emmanuel's land."

It is beautiful to see how quietly and cheerfully Samuel goes about the preparations for the finding of the new king. It was hard for him to be set aside after his long, faithful service. It is not easy for any man to come from a high position which he has long filled with efficiency and honor—and take a place in the ranks and go on serving, doing his duty just as well and as sweetly as if he were still in the exalted place. Some men, after being chairman of a committee for a time, are of little use afterward when they are back again in the ranks. But Samuel continued to be just as happy, as deeply interested in the affairs of his people, and as active in promoting his country's good, after he had been asked to resign his judgeship, as he was when in the height of his power and at the zenith of his honor. He was as eager in securing the new king for the people—as if it had cost him nothing to give way to the new ruler.

Samuel called a convention of the people together at Mizpah to have the new king take his place. It was not yet publicly known who the new king would be. Samuel knew it and Saul knew it—but the people had not learned of it. They were now called together to choose a king. This illustrates further the way of God's Providence. We go about in our daily duties and work freely, without restraint. We think we are making all our own plans and doing the thing which only we ourselves had purposed. But all the while we are carrying out the secret purposes of God!

Samuel began his address to the people by reminding them again that they had rejected God in demanding a king. He recalled to them the long history of Divine goodness which had marked their career from the beginning. Most of us are very quick to feel the hurt of the ingratitude of others. If we have befriended anyone and he returns unkindness for our kindness, we do not like it. We sometimes quote the fable of the serpent frozen by the wayside, which the benevolent passer-by took up and put in his bosom to warm, which returned his kindness by striking its deadly fangs into his flesh as soon as it revived! We complain very sorely of lack of gratitude in those we have helped in trouble.

Let us be fair towards God. Let us judge ourselves in relation to His mercies and favors to us—by the same rule which we so inexorably apply to our fellow-men in their treatment of us. What has God done for us? What mercies and favors have we received from Him? From what troubles has He delivered us? Well, how are we treating this Deliverer and Friend? Do we recognize Him as our King? Or are we rejecting Him and giving our allegiance to another? It is well that we should sit down quietly while we are studying this part of our story—and see whether we are free from the sharp blame which the prophet here lays upon these ancient people. The people were to have a part in the choosing of their own king. The lot was used in those days as the means of finding out what the will of God was. It was regarded as a Divine ordinance. Its decision, therefore, was considered infallible. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." So it came that the lot pointed to the very man who already had been named and secretly anointed. How are we in specific cases, to find out what the will of the Lord for us is? At one time when Henry Drummond was settling a grave question, he studied carefully the teaching of the Bible about the will of God and how to find it. The result of his study he summarized in eight maxims, which he wrote upon the flyleaf of his Bible: "To find out God's will—

1. Pray.

2. Think.

3. Talk to wise people—but do not regard their decision as final.

4. Beware of the bias of your own will—but do not be too much afraid of it. God never unreasonably thwarts a man's nature and liking, and it is a mistake to think that His will is in the line of the disagreeable.

5. Meantime, do the next thing, for doing God's will in small things is the best preparation for knowing it in great things.

6. When decision and action are necessary, go ahead.

7. Never reconsider a decision when it is finally acted upon.

8. You will probably not find out until afterwards, perhaps long afterwards, that you have been led at all."

It will always seem to many people a mystery that Saul was divinely pointed out as the man who should be the first king of Israel. When we have read the story of his reign, it seems to us that it was in many respects a failure and that his selection was a mistake. How then can we explain the fact that the Lord appears to have approved of his appointment? Several things seem clear. At the time Saul became king, he was the fittest man among all the people for the position. He was physically qualified. He was brave and skillful. He had the capacity for kingship. He might have been a successful ruler. His failure came through his not accepting God's plan for his life and not obeying God's commandments, he was a disappointment to God, as Judas was to Jesus Christ.

Saul had many excellent things in his character. He was humble and modest. He knew already what the result of the lot would he, and he hid himself out of sight so as to escape the ordeal which would be his when his choice became known to the people. True modesty is always a lovely trait. It is far better that we let honors seek us—than that we should seek them. A man who tries to get himself elected to a position of honor and power, is precisely the man who ought not to be elected. Saul had not sought to be king, and his conduct at the time he was elected cannot he condemned. This, however, is one of the "illusive presages" of the opening of Saul's reign which failed to indicate truly the real character of the man. In some way the matter of finding the hidden king was taken to the Lord, and it was learned that like a bashful boy he had concealed himself among the luggage. There are a good many young men in our own days who are hiding away from God's appointments and from God's call to service. They are not ready to take the place in life for which they were created or to carry out the Divine plan and purpose for them. Sometimes they are so engrossed in the world's business and pleasure, that they cannot hear the Divine voice calling them to things that are higher and nobler.

One young man whom Jesus called could not follow Him because he could not give up his money. The ideal life is the one that lives out the thought of God for it. Our Lord in one of His parables tells of a man, who if he did not hide himself, at least hid his talent, failing to use it. We need to be careful lest we fail to hear God's calls, or lest, hearing them, we fail to answer them.

Samuel altogether forgot himself and the bad treatment he had received when he presented the new king to the people. "Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people." Saul was a kingly man, at least in a physical sense. He had a magnificent opportunity. He was chosen of God for a high position, and if he had been faithful would have

achieved great success. But we know that he missed all—because he would not take God's way.

It is pleasant to contrast our King with this kingly man who stands before us. In Him every beauty of character blossoms out in perfection. He was the only perfect man who ever lived. All others have been only fractions of men—but in Him all loveliness, whatever things are true, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely—are found in perfection. Saul began well—but his glory soon became dimmed. The bright promise of his early years was not fulfilled. We read on a few pages, and we find him anything but a kingly man—selfish, ignoble, envious, full of murderous hate, willful, and then, as a consequence, forsaken by God! But there was no such sad and bitter disappointment in the after career of Jesus Christ. His star grew brighter and brighter as the years went on. Now He is the King of glory, and all the holy angels bow down to Him. The great mass of the people accepted the new king with loyalty and enthusiasm. "Saul also went to his home in Gibeah, accompanied by valiant men whose hearts God had touched." Not all the people were Saul's friends that day—but all the noble and worthy men seem to have rallied about him. It strengthened him to have this company of brave men gather about him in faithful friendship and devotion. At any time it is a great comfort to a man to have friends; but there are times when the value of friends is simply incalculable. We are not told that these friends of Saul's did anything for him, or gave him any real help. All that is said about them is that they went with him that day to his own home. Even this was a great encouragement and inspiration for him. They thus took their place on his side before all the people and avowed themselves his friends.

One of the best things we can do for our friends is to stand by them, giving them honor. Our truest friend is not the man who talks most about his friendship for us—but the man we are sure of, knowing that whenever we turn to him in any circumstance of need, we shall find him there.

There come times in the life of every man, when simply to go with him is the greatest favor another can show to him. One writes: "Were you ever in circumstances when simply to go with you was the kindest and bravest thing any friend could do for you, including and pledging every other kind and courageous thing which there might yet be occasion to do? Then you can understand what it was to Saul that day, to see his band of men, 'whose hearts God had touched,' going with him to his home."

There were some of the people, however, who were not the new king's friends, who failed to give him their loyal support. "But some troublemakers said, 'How can this fellow save us?' They despised him and brought him no gifts. But Saul kept silent." Saul revealed self-control and wisdom in the way he bore himself at this time. It is a great thing to know how to be silent—when silence is the first duty. Saul failed to show the same patience in the later years of his reign. Power spoiled him. Here, however, his conduct showed fine self-restraint. Amid the sneers and scoffs of these worthless fellows he was as though he were deaf. We are reminded of Jesus Himself, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again.

We are too apt to resent insults and retaliate when others say or do evil things to us. The Christian way is either not to speak at all, or to give the soft answer that turns away wrath. Not only is this the Christian way, it is also the way of wisdom. The quickest way to conquer an enemy—is to treat him with kindness in return for his unkindness. Stopping to resent every insult—keeps one continually in trouble; whereas ignoring slights and going on with our own duty quietly—is the way to get the better of them. The best answer to sneers and scoffs and abuse—is a sweet, quiet,

beautiful life of patience and gentleness. "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult—but with blessing." 1 Peter 3:9 Samuel’s Farewell Address

1 Samuel 12 In all the narrative of Saul’s election and coronation as king, the character of Samuel shines out brightly. Though himself set aside by the election of a king to rule in his place—he yet made the great renunciation cheerfully, manfully, leading the people in each step in their new departure and guiding them with his clear vision and his steady hand. He did not sulk in his tent, as too many men do in such experiences. He did not withdraw from public life because Saul was made chief ruler—but continued to serve the people as Prophet and Counselor, giving them still the benefit of the wisdom he had learned in his long and rich experience. The time came, however, when he must lay down the office of judge, delivering the authority into the hand of the newly-chosen king. The farewell address of Samuel is worthy of careful study. He reminded the people again of the way in which the king had been given to them, that they themselves were responsible for the change in government. He had listened to their request and had not resisted their desire, nor stood in the way of their wish. He had keenly felt the reflection upon himself in their urgent demand—but he had set that aside in his wish to have that done which would be the best for the nation. He had felt the ingratitude and injustice to God in their wish—but God had overlooked their course and given His consent and sanction.

Samuel then referred to his own career as ruler, claiming that it had been honorable, and challenging them to show that even in the smallest matter he had defrauded or oppressed anyone. It is a great thing to be able to say at the close of a long or a short life—what Samuel said at the opening of his farewell address. It is the ending of a life that tests it. How does it appear when it is looked back upon amid the gathering shadows of the grave? What kind of a dying pillow do its memories make? Samuel was able to stand up before all the nation and before God and say these words—because his life, from beginning to end, had been upright, true and pure. There were no skeletons hidden away in any secret transaction of his life which could come up in after days to shame him. His words have a noble ring in them: "Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the Lord and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these, I will make it right." "You have not cheated or oppressed us," they replied. "You have not taken anything from anyone’s hand." Who does not want just such a life-ending as Samuel’s? It is possible to have it, too—but possible only in one way. Only a noble and faithful life—can give such comfort and satisfaction. Old age is the harvest of all the years that have gone before. What you sow in your youth and prime—you gather when your hair is white and your steps are feeble.

Samuel reviewed the history of the people from the time of Moses, and then pointed to the king they had chosen and whom the Lord had set over them. He assured them that if they would be faithful to God—He would show them favor. "Now if you will fear and worship the LORD and listen to his voice, and if you do not rebel against the LORD’s commands, and if you and your king follow the LORD your God—then all will be well." This standing "if" precedes all God’s promises of blessing, and conditions them. Everything of Divine blessing and good depends upon our obedience. If we will not walk in God’s ways—we cannot expect God to walk with us.

There is a distinct indication of mercy here also —God is always willing to give us a second chance. We may rebel against Him and take our own way instead of His, tearing ourselves by our willfulness out of His perfect plan; yet He comes to us again and tells us that He will still be our Father and will help us to succeed in the new course we have insisted upon taking if we will be obedient and faithful. The people of Israel had refused God's way for them, demanding a king. He gave them their demand and then gave them another chance with it. That is what God is always doing. What could any of us do if God never gave us a second chance, and a third, and a hundredth? But while the people were assured of blessing—if they would be obedient, Samuel assured them just as positively that disobedience would bring punishment. "But if you rebel against the LORD's commands and refuse to listen to him—then his hand will be as heavy upon you as it was upon your ancestors." This is very plain. There can be no mistake about the meaning of the words. It is impossible to have God's favor and blessing—if we are not faithful to Him. What an absurdity it is, therefore, to pray for favor and help—when we know that we are living in disobedience and are willfully disregarding God's law!

Samuel sought to make such an impression on the people that day that the lesson would never be forgotten. So he bade them stand still and see the great thing that the Lord would do before their eyes. The harvest-time was not the season for thunderstorms—but thunder and rain came, and the storm frightened the people. It gave them a glimpse of God's awesome power, which could destroy them in a moment. There are many people who are waked up from their indifference by some severe judgment—but who are not touched nor impressed by the Lord's ordinary workings. Yet really the everyday Providences are far more wonderful, than the extraordinary things now and then that God does. A shower of rain sent out of season in answer to a prayer—brings a whole nation down on its knees in trembling awe; while years and years of seasonable showers of rain, refreshing the earth and making it fruitful, produce no impression upon the same people. Yet this is infinitely more wonderful than that. It is neither superstition nor fanaticism that sees God in the unusual; but it is atheism that does not see Him as well in the usual. Every shower of rain, every morning's miracle of sunrise, every day's bread, should inspire in us loving adoration! The people were alarmed and they said to Samuel: "Pray for your servants unto the Lord your God, that we die not." It is a great thing to have a friend who lives near to God and is on familiar terms with Him, and has influence at the throne of grace. It is a great thing to have someone to whom we can turn with confidence, asking him to pray for us. Of course, we all can pray for ourselves—but many of us live too far from God—to have the greatest power with Him. Samuel was a man of prayer and the people were sure that if he would pray for them, God would spare their lives. At the last supper Peter wanted to ask a question of the Master—but he was down towards the foot of the table. John, however, was close to Jesus, his head leaning upon the Master's bosom. So Peter beckoned to him to ask the question because he was so near and could whisper it into Christ's ear. Those who live nearest to God have easiest access in prayer, and if you are in sore trouble you are quite sure to want one of these to speak to God on your behalf. When you are dying you will not send for a companion with whom you have trifled and sinned—but for one who knows how to pray.

Samuel did not try to lessen the people's alarm and anxiety because of their sins. We are always in danger of this weakness when our friends confess to us wrong things they have done. The other day a man of the world made sport of the remorse and penitence of one who was under deep

conviction, saying: "You are only frightened and morbid. Cheer up and come out with me for a drive, and your bad feeling will soon be gone." That was not the way Samuel talked to his people when they were distressed because of their sins. He told them frankly that they had surely done the wickedness which they confessed. He would deepen in them the sense of unworthiness and the feeling of penitence. Then he told them also of the mercy of God. Though they had sinned, they need not despair. They must not give up trying to serve God, because they had made such a failure of it. They must not turn away from Him altogether, because they had turned away once. They must get back again to God and start anew. When a Christian has been overtaken in temptation and has fallen into sin, one of his dangers is despair, giving up. Many who fall once never rise again, never try again to serve God. They do not know God's mercy. Judas went out in despair after betraying his Master. Peter went out after denying Christ, weeping in bitter sorrow—but he turned to God in his grief and found mercy.

There is something very noble and beautiful in the way Samuel answers the people's pleading that he would pray for them. "Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord—in ceasing to pray for you." The people had been most ungrateful to Samuel and had rejected him as their ruler; yet he would not on this account cease to intercede for them. He told them that it would be a sin in him, a sin against the Lord—for him to cease to pray for them! Love triumphed over the sense of injury and wrong.

Samuel's case may often be paralleled in common experience. Those for whom we have done much, who owe us honor and love, may turn away from us in ingratitude; but we must not on this account cease to love them and to do all in our power for them. This may become our temptation. We may feel that they do not deserve our prayers, that they are not worthy of our intercession. But we must remember that on His cross—our Lord prayed even for His murderers. This word of Samuel's shows us what an important duty of friendship, intercession is—so important that it is a sin against God to cease to pray for others. We should always pray for our friends. That friendship does not reach its best—which lacks intercession. No matter how much we may do for our friends in other ways, if we do not speak to God for them we are wronging them. Then we should pray for those who have hurt us or wronged us. The feeling of resentment, if there is such in our heart, should take the form of interceding. The Master's command is specific and definite, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also." Luke 6:27-29 Saul Rejected as King

1 Samuel 15

Saul began his reign with enthusiasm. He had a splendid coadjutor in his son Jonathan. Jonathan was brave and popular with the people. The Philistines made an effort to crush the Israelites. They gathered in vast numbers against them. The men of Israel were afraid, and followed Saul tremblingly. Samuel had appointed a time to come to Saul at Gilgal to offer sacrifices before the battle should begin. But Saul became impatient of Samuel's delay and offered the sacrifices himself. Just as he had ended his offering Samuel came. Saul went out to greet him—but Samuel said to him: "What have you done?" Saul explained his action—but Samuel said: "You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God." He said further to him that if he had obeyed—his kingdom would have been established forever. "But now your kingdom shall

not continue: the Lord has sought a man after his own heart, and the Lord has appointed him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept that which the Lord commanded you."

Samuel continued to be prophet and guide to Saul, and brought him a Divine message, commanding him to smite the Amalekites. Very definite instructions were given to the king: "Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys." The battle was fought, and Saul's victory was complete. But Agag, the king, was spared, also the best of the sheep and oxen, and all that was good. What was vile and worthless, was utterly destroyed—but what was choice and valuable, was spared.

After the battle was over came Samuel with sharp reproof. Saul met the old man graciously. He was greatly pleased with himself and with what he had done. He regarded his victory over the Amalekites as a splendid achievement. He had already set up a monument to himself, perhaps a stone, to commemorate his victory. He heard that Samuel was coming to see him, and went to meet him with patronizing words and manner: "The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions."

He had indeed performed the Lord's bidding in a way, in his own partial and imperfect way, doing just as much of what God commanded, as he had felt inclined to do, then leaving out such parts of the commandment as he felt disinclined to perform.

There are a good many people in every age who obey God in the same way. They render a general obedience—but pay no heed to the exact requirements of the Divine law. They tell the truth as a whole—but are not concerned about slight deviations from it. They are honest in a large, general way—but do not think that their little dishonesties count against them. Saul thought he had come near enough to what God had told him to claim to have been obedient and to merit strong commendation for his fidelity. What God thought, however, of Saul's way of obeying—we learn a little farther on.

Just as Saul was telling Samuel how well he had done his errand for God, there came ominous sounds from some place near-by, and Samuel said: "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?" According to the command, all the sheep and oxen of the Amalekites were to be killed. What then were these noises of sheep and cattle? We cannot hide our sins. We may think we have covered up our disobediences so deftly, that detection will be impossible. Suddenly something tears away the veil and they are exposed to the gaze of the world. A man carries on a series of dishonesties and conceals them by expert bookkeeping, thinking he is safe from detection. But some morning he is startled to find that the stolen sheep have been bleating, and all the world knows of his thefts and embezzlements. It is the nature of sheep to bleat and of oxen to low, and they have not sense enough to keep quiet when they are wanted to. Indeed, they are almost sure to make a noise just when they are expected to keep perfectly still. It is the same with sin. It is a poor friend. It professes well when it offers its solicitations—but when it has been committed, it is a most unsafe confidant. It cannot keep a secret. It is sure to betray the man, who depends upon it for discreet silence. In many people's lives there are some bleating sheep and some lowing oxen, which tell the story of the imperfectness of our obedience.

It is a good rule, when something goes wrong, in matters in which we are interested, to take the blame upon ourselves. That is the manly way, at least. But that is not the common way—it was not Saul's way. Saul said: "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God." Saul could not deny the disobedience now, with the evidence sounding in the prophet's ears—but he threw the blame on the people. "They spared the best of the sheep and cattle," he said. The king thus showed a spirit of baseness and cowardice and lack of fine manliness. Would the people have brought them if he, the king, had forbidden it? Had he not at least connived at their disobedience by his silence? A command had been given to him, and he was the responsible leader. Nothing is more contemptible than the attempt to throw the blame of our sins and mistakes on other people. Yet few things are more frequently done" Adam set the example at the beginning, and many of Adam's children follow him! The true, manly way—is to take the blame of our own sins. In God's sight—and that is the way always to look at our acts—everyone must bear his own burden of sin. If we have done wrong—let us be frank enough to confess it.

Saul went still farther and sought or invented a religious reason for what the people had done. "The people spared the best of the sheep and cattle—to sacrifice to the LORD your God." We do not know certainly whether this was a true statement of fact or not, or whether the reason given for the disobedience was only an invention of the king's—to excuse himself. If the people had really planned the matter, they probably thought that if they used the spoil, although disobediently spared, to make a great triumphal offering to the Lord, He would overlook the disobedience. That is, they would propitiate the Lord after they had broken His command, by a generous sacrifice and by effusive devotion. What pitiful mockery!

Let us be careful that we never repeat the mockery. We never can satisfy God for one failure in duty—by extraordinary zeal in some other direction. We cannot appease Him when we have sinned—by bringing to His altar the fruits of our sin. For example, God will not overlook a man's dishonesty—if the man lays part of what he has made by the dishonesty in the collection plate or gives it to some holy cause. Men can play all manner of tricks with their own consciences—but not with God.

"Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys!" 1 Samuel 15:3

"Saul and the troops spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, cattle, and fatlings, as well as the young rams and the best of everything else. But they did destroy all the worthless and unwanted things." 1 Samuel 15:9. They utterly destroyed all the common spoil—but spared whatever was especially good. They kept all the fat, plump sheep and oxen—and destroyed the poor, lean and worthless ones. That is the way with a good many people. They are quite ready to devote to God the things they do not care much for—but the things that are desirable for their own use, they keep. This spirit is shown in the way many give to the Lord's service. The gold and silver and the banknotes they keep for themselves, while they put the nickels and the pennies in the collection plate. It is shown, too, in the way they treat their own vices and lusts. Those that they do not particularly love—they crush out with amazing zeal. But their favorite vices and fat, rich sins—they spare for their own indulgence!

Men may go on and do as they will—but that is not the end of the matter; the Lord has something to say about their acts. If they could leave Him out of their life altogether and get clear of meeting Him, if there were no final and eternal judgment, disobedience would not be such serious business. But they cannot eliminate God. He stands in their paths as they return from their sins and utters His Word and tells them what He thinks about them. We never can avoid meeting God after our sinful acts. We cannot go through life by any path so as to miss His final judgment. Indeed, the voice of conscience tells us at once, as God's prophet here told Saul, just what God has to say. If we are wise we will ask beforehand what God will have to say—and will then shape all our acts so as to have His approval on whatever we do.

Samuel was growing old, and he was a gentle, kindly man—but he never grew lenient towards men's sins. As he listened to the king's excuses for disobedience, instead of frank and honest confession, Samuel's indignation grew hot, and he spoke to him with sternness: "Stop! Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night!" He compels Saul to stop and listen to the rehearsal of the story of his sin. "The Lord sent you on a mission and said: Go and completely destroy the sinful Amalekites. Fight against them until you have annihilated them!" 1 Samuel 15:18 The evil things in us—are our Amalekites, and we are to destroy them! Yet how many of us, like Saul, cut away at the little Amalekites and spare the big Agags? Do not some of us also see the story of our own disobediences and failures—in the way Saul treated God and His commandments?

He owed everything to God. He had been taken from a lowly place and exalted to high honor. He ought to have shown his gratitude in unwavering obedience. But his promotion, instead of making him humble, had turned his head. When Samuel asked him why he had not obeyed the Lord, but had seized the spoil that God had devoted to destruction, Saul still insisted that he had obeyed, repeating the assertion that the people had spared part of the spoil to sacrifice unto the Lord. The king showed anything but a submissive and docile spirit. He was willful, impenitent, haughty and insolent. To Saul's words Samuel replied: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice." In its reference to Saul's act the meaning of his words is plain. The king had not propitiated God, in proposing to offer the fruits of his disobedience in sacrifice. Nothing would satisfy God, but obedience. But there are other applications less obvious.

Many people set a great deal more importance upon religious ceremonials than upon practical obedience. They will be very faithful in attendance upon all church services and very devout and reverent in worship—and yet in their daily life they will disregard the plain commandments of God! They fill the week with selfishness, with pride, with bitterness, with evil speaking and all manner of little deceptions and falsehoods—and then come on Sunday, with great show of devotion, to engage in the worship of God! When God tells a mother to care for her child, He is not satisfied if she neglects that duty in order to write a book or to look after a sick woman, or to go out to a religious meeting. When God wants a man to help a poor family in some obscure street; He is not satisfied if instead of that lowly service—the man does some excellent thing which seems to bring ten times as much honor to the Lord. The supreme thing in Christian life—is to obey God, and without obedience nothing else counts at all.

There is a story of a father and his child which illustrates Samue Saul Rejected as King

1 Samuel 15

Saul began his reign with enthusiasm. He had a splendid coadjutor in his son Jonathan. Jonathan was brave and popular with the people. The Philistines made an effort to crush the Israelites. They gathered in vast numbers against them. The men of Israel were afraid, and followed Saul tremblingly. Samuel had appointed a time to come to Saul at Gilgal to offer sacrifices before the battle should begin. But Saul became impatient of Samuel's delay and offered the sacrifices himself. Just as he had ended his offering Samuel came. Saul went out to greet him—but Samuel said to him: "What have you done?" Saul explained his action—but Samuel said: "You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God." He said further to him that if he had obeyed—his kingdom would have been established forever. "But now your kingdom shall not continue: the Lord has sought a man after his own heart, and the Lord has appointed him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept that which the Lord commanded you."

Samuel continued to be prophet and guide to Saul, and brought him a Divine message, commanding him to smite the Amalekites. Very definite instructions were given to the king: "Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys." The battle was fought, and Saul's victory was complete. But Agag, the king, was spared, also the best of the sheep and oxen, and all that was good. What was vile and worthless, was utterly destroyed—but what was choice and valuable, was spared.

After the battle was over came Samuel with sharp reproof. Saul met the old man graciously. He was greatly pleased with himself and with what he had done. He regarded his victory over the Amalekites as a splendid achievement. He had already set up a monument to himself, perhaps a stone, to commemorate his victory. He heard that Samuel was coming to see him, and went to meet him with patronizing words and manner: "The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions."

He had indeed performed the Lord's bidding in a way, in his own partial and imperfect way, doing just as much of what God commanded, as he had felt inclined to do, then leaving out such parts of the commandment as he felt disinclined to perform.

There are a good many people in every age who obey God in the same way. They render a general obedience—but pay no heed to the exact requirements of the Divine law. They tell the truth as a whole—but are not concerned about slight deviations from it. They are honest in a large, general way—but do not think that their little dishonesties count against them. Saul thought he had come near enough to what God had told him to claim to have been obedient and to merit strong commendation for his fidelity. What God thought, however, of Saul's way of obeying—we learn a little farther on.

Just as Saul was telling Samuel how well he had done his errand for God, there came ominous sounds from some place near-by, and Samuel said: "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?" According to the command, all the sheep and oxen of the Amalekites were to be killed. What then were these noises of sheep and cattle? We cannot hide our sins. We may think we have covered up our disobediences so deftly, that detection will be impossible. Suddenly something tears away the veil and they are exposed to the gaze of the world. A man carries on a series of dishonesties and conceals them by expert bookkeeping, thinking he is safe from detection. But some morning he is startled to find that the stolen sheep

have been bleating, and all the world knows of his thefts and embezzlements. It is the nature of sheep to bleat and of oxen to low, and they have not sense enough to keep quiet when they are wanted to. Indeed, they are almost sure to make a noise just when they are expected to keep perfectly still. It is the same with sin. It is a poor friend. It professes well when it offers its solicitations—but when it has been committed, it is a most unsafe confidant. It cannot keep a secret. It is sure to betray the man, who depends upon it for discreet silence. In many people's lives there are some bleating sheep and some lowing oxen, which tell the story of the imperfectness of our obedience.

It is a good rule, when something goes wrong, in matters in which we are interested, to take the blame upon ourselves. That is the manly way, at least. But that is not the common way—it was not Saul's way. Saul said: "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God." Saul could not deny the disobedience now, with the evidence sounding in the prophet's ears—but he threw the blame on the people. "They spared the best of the sheep and cattle," he said. The king thus showed a spirit of baseness and cowardice and lack of fine manliness. Would the people have brought them if he, the king, had forbidden it? Had he not at least connived at their disobedience by his silence? A command had been given to him, and he was the responsible leader. Nothing is more contemptible than the attempt to throw the blame of our sins and mistakes on other people. Yet few things are more frequently done" Adam set the example at the beginning, and many of Adam's children follow him! The true, manly way—is to take the blame of our own sins. In God's sight—and that is the way always to look at our acts—everyone must bear his own burden of sin. If we have done wrong—let us be frank enough to confess it.

Saul went still farther and sought or invented a religious reason for what the people had done. "The people spared the best of the sheep and cattle—to sacrifice to the LORD your God." We do not know certainly whether this was a true statement of fact or not, or whether the reason given for the disobedience was only an invention of the king's—to excuse himself. If the people had really planned the matter, they probably thought that if they used the spoil, although disobediently spared, to make a great triumphal offering to the Lord, He would overlook the disobedience. That is, they would propitiate the Lord after they had broken His command, by a generous sacrifice and by effusive devotion. What pitiful mockery!

Let us be careful that we never repeat the mockery. We never can satisfy God for one failure in duty—by extraordinary zeal in some other direction. We cannot appease Him when we have sinned—by bringing to His altar the fruits of our sin. For example, God will not overlook a man's dishonesty—if the man lays part of what he has made by the dishonesty in the collection plate or gives it to some holy cause. Men can play all manner of tricks with their own consciences—but not with God.

"Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys!" 1 Samuel 15:3

"Saul and the troops spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, cattle, and fatlings, as well as the young rams and the best of everything else. But they did destroy all the worthless and unwanted things." 1 Samuel 15:9. They utterly destroyed all the common spoil—but spared whatever was

especially good. They kept all the fat, plump sheep and oxen—and destroyed the poor, lean and worthless ones. That is the way with a good many people. They are quite ready to devote to God the things they do not care much for—but the things that are desirable for their own use, they keep. This spirit is shown in the way many give to the Lord's service. The gold and silver and the banknotes they keep for themselves, while they put the nickels and the pennies in the collection plate. It is shown, too, in the way they treat their own vices and lusts. Those that they do not particularly love—they crush out with amazing zeal. But their favorite vices and fat, rich sins—they spare for their own indulgence!

Men may go on and do as they will—but that is not the end of the matter; the Lord has something to say about their acts. If they could leave Him out of their life altogether and get clear of meeting Him, if there were no final and eternal judgment, disobedience would not be such serious business. But they cannot eliminate God. He stands in their paths as they return from their sins and utters His Word and tells them what He thinks about them. We never can avoid meeting God after our sinful acts. We cannot go through life by any path so as to miss His final judgment. Indeed, the voice of conscience tells us at once, as God's prophet here told Saul, just what God has to say. If we are wise we will ask beforehand what God will have to say—and will then shape all our acts so as to have His approval on whatever we do.

Samuel was growing old, and he was a gentle, kindly man—but he never grew lenient towards men's sins. As he listened to the king's excuses for disobedience, instead of frank and honest confession, Samuel's indignation grew hot, and he spoke to him with sternness: "Stop! Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night!" He compels Saul to stop and listen to the rehearsal of the story of his sin. "The Lord sent you on a mission and said: Go and completely destroy the sinful Amalekites. Fight against them until you have annihilated them!" 1 Samuel 15:18 The evil things in us—are our Amalekites, and we are to destroy them! Yet how many of us, like Saul, cut away at the little Amalekites and spare the big Agags? Do not some of us also see the story of our own disobediences and failures—in the way Saul treated God and His commandments?

He owed everything to God. He had been taken from a lowly place and exalted to high honor. He ought to have shown his gratitude in unwavering obedience. But his promotion, instead of making him humble, had turned his head. When Samuel asked him why he had not obeyed the Lord, but had seized the spoil that God had devoted to destruction, Saul still insisted that he had obeyed, repeating the assertion that the people had spared part of the spoil to sacrifice unto the Lord. The king showed anything but a submissive and docile spirit. He was willful, impenitent, haughty and insolent. To Saul's words Samuel replied: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice." In its reference to Saul's act the meaning of his words is plain. The king had not propitiated God, in proposing to offer the fruits of his disobedience in sacrifice. Nothing would satisfy God, but obedience. But there are other applications less obvious.

Many people set a great deal more importance upon religious ceremonials than upon practical obedience. They will be very faithful in attendance upon all church services and very devout and reverent in worship—and yet in their daily life they will disregard the plain commandments of God! They fill the week with selfishness, with pride, with bitterness, with evil speaking and all manner of little deceptions and falsehoods—and then come on Sunday, with great show of devotion, to engage in the worship of God! When God tells a mother to care for her child, He is not satisfied if

she neglects that duty in order to write a book or to look after a sick woman, or to go out to a religious meeting. When God wants a man to help a poor family in some obscure street; He is not satisfied if instead of that lowly service—the man does some excellent thing which seems to bring ten times as much honor to the Lord. The supreme thing in Christian life—is to obey God, and without obedience nothing else counts at all.

There is a story of a father and his child which illustrates Samuel's words, "To obey is better than sacrifice." They were living a little distance from a lake whose shores were lined with beautiful and brilliant shells. The father was absent the greater part of the day, and had bidden the child never to go near the water while he was away, fearing that some harm might come to her. One day the little girl broke her father's commandment and wandered to the lake shore. She dreaded to meet her father in the evening, knowing that he would be very much grieved to learn of her disobedience. She thought, however, that she might appease him and make him feel less angry—if she would show him some special kindness. So she gathered a basketful of the loveliest shells she could find, and took them to give as a present to her father. When he came home she told him what she had done, and then producing the shells, she gave them to him as a present, asking him if they were not very beautiful. With great sadness on his face he flung the shells away, saying: "My child, to obey is better than sacrifice!" No gifts, however lovely, could please the father, since his child had disobeyed his command.

Saul understood now, that his sin was a most grave and serious matter, and he made confession. "I have sinned!" The same words have been spoken in such a way as to bring instant pardon. When David said to Nathan, "I have sinned!" he heard the answer at once: "The Lord has taken away your sin." But in Saul's case there was no real confession in the words, no deep sense of sin. Saul was not sorry he had done wrong—but was sorry only for the consequences, the punishment which had been declared.

God is merciful and gracious—but Saul's sin could not be forgiven. A second time he had disobeyed the Lord when he was sent with specific directions on a definite duty. The doom was final and irrevocable. "You have rejected the Word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king!" No one is fit for God's service who will not obey God's commands. If we would be employed as His servants, to work for Him—we must do what He bids us to do. Saul was thrust from the throne of Israel, because he persisted in taking his own way—instead of God's. May this not be a reason in many cases—why men with great abilities do not rise to high spiritual influence and power? God will entrust His servants with responsibility, only so far as they prove worthy to be trusted. When one fails in smaller trusts, the larger will not be given to him; and the smaller, too, will be taken away. If we want to be used in the work of the Lord—we must learn to obey implicitly and unquestioningly. No other kind of servant can stay in the Lord's service!

Samuel Anoints David

1 Samuel 16

Saul had failed because he would not accept God's way for his life—but insisted upon having his own way. The result was that he wrecked everything. God set him aside. He continued to reign until his death—but he no more had God's help and blessing.

It was a sad hour in Samuel's life when the Lord sent him to anoint another in Saul's place. We see here another glimpse of the nobleness of Samuel. It grieved him to have Saul rejected. Some men in Samuel's place would have been quite satisfied at Saul's failure. But Samuel had a generous heart. It should grieve us to see even the worst man do wrong and come under the Divine condemnation.

Samuel seems also to have been afraid. "If Saul hears it, he will kill me," he said. The Lord then reproved him for his hesitancy. "How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from being king?" Our first duty even in sorrow—is submission to the Divine will. When God renders a decision, we should accept it as final, however it may cut into our hopes or plans. It ought to have been enough for Samuel—to know that the Lord had rejected Saul. When God acts, His servants should be silent. It ought to be enough for anyone in private or public sorrow—that the Lord has so ordered it. Grief is not unfitting, for Jesus wept; yet grieving may become sin. It is sin when it is unsubmissive. Even when no ray of light can be seen—God's wisdom and love should be trusted. The best cure for grief and disappointment, is found in promptly taking up one's duty.

"Labor is rest from the sorrows that greet us;

Rest from all petty vexations that meet us." The Lord smoothed the way for Samuel, as he went upon his errand. He sent him to Jesse, telling him He had provided a king among Jesse's sons. God's choice of the king was not to be made public. Indeed, no one but Samuel himself knew the meaning of his visit to the Bethlehem home, or of the anointing that took place. Samuel's errand to Bethlehem was an act of worship, a sacrifice, and a feast. Samuel was not to worry about how the matter would come out. One step at a time, was enough for him to know. God usually does not show us all our way—at once. He gives us our work piece by piece.

"The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come in peace?" Samuel replied, "Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD." The elders of the town were somewhat disturbed when the old prophet came to their town. They feared that his coming meant punishment to them for something they had done.

Like these Bethlehemites, we, too, are sometimes terrified by the coming to us of God's messengers. They do not all wear gentle faces as they approach us; ofttimes they come in a garb of sternness or of pain. Yet they come always with a blessing for us. Sickness is one of those dark-visaged prophets. We cannot welcome it. Yet if we ask this messenger in our trembling: "Do you come in peace?" the answer is: "Yes, peaceably." Sickness always brings messages of peace, of blessing, of good—to those who will receive them, and God's messenger should always be received with reverence and trust. The same is true of all the hard things in our lot. We do not like to have to struggle and deny ourselves. Boys and young men who are poor, ofttimes think they scarcely have a fair chance in life when they see the sons of rich men reveling in ease and luxury, with plenty of money and with no necessity to toil and save. Yet really, the stern prophet of poverty who comes to the sons of the poor—brings a holier message and a truer blessing—than the smiling-faced, silken-robed messenger brings to the youth of the fine mansion! The best things in life—can be drawn out only by work and discipline. Hence, whatever compels a boy or a young man to toil, to deny himself, to depend upon his own efforts—is a blessing to him. The prophet of necessity comes, therefore, to him peaceably. In all of life it is the same. We never should turn away from our doors, any prophets whom God sends, however stem they may appear. They all

come to bring us some good, to give us more life, to make better men of us. "The beautifully grained wood that makes our finest furniture is not taken from the trees that grow in peaceful, sheltered situations—but from those that are in exposed places, beaten about by the storms. So it is that the noblest natures, are those that have had to contend with many trials."

Samuel began at once to look at Jesse's sons, in order to discover the one who was to be the king. "Samuel took one look at Eliab and thought, Surely this is the LORD's anointed!" 1 Samuel 16:6.

Eliab was a splendid specimen of a man—just the man for a king. He was tall and majestic in his bearing. If physical strength was still to be the requisite for kingliness, no better man could have been found. But there are many men with splendid bodies—who are far from regal in their souls! Intellectual capacity is also one of God's noble gifts—but many a man with a superb mind—is most unkingly in his character. What could such men as Byron and Burns and Napoleon have been before God—if they had not so prostituted their magnificent power? Neither physical beauty like that of Apollo, nor intellectual greatness like that of a Bacon, makes a man great in God's eyes.

God looks for moral and spiritual greatness, and many a poor cripple or hunchback is more kingly in His sight—than the man or the woman whom people turn to gaze after on the street, attracted by beauty of person and grace of movement.

"Man looks on the outward appearance—but the Lord looks on the heart." When soldiers are needed, those who offer themselves are measured and weighed and their health is tested. When God wants soldiers—He applies moral measurements. In these modern days a great deal of attention is paid to physical looks. Some of the boys would rather stand well in the games—than in their classroom. They think more of fine muscles—than of a fine mind or a beautiful soul. Physical health is good—God wants us to take care of our bodies and make the very most of their strength, keeping them in health and vigor.

It may be well, however, to inquire what really makes a man—muscle, or mind and heart. Eliab was a fine fellow in his body—but he was not the man the Lord chose when He wanted a king. Evidently his heart had not in it the kingly qualities. We do not know in what qualities Eliab was lacking. We know only that he was not a man after God's heart. God knows who has the ability for any particular task—and whom He can trust with sacred responsibilities.

One by one Jesse's sons were looked upon by Samuel—all but one. But the one the Lord was looking for, had not yet appeared, and Samuel asked Jesse: "Are these all your children? . . . There remains yet the youngest," said Jesse, "and, behold, he is keeping the sheep." The shepherd lad did not seem to his father, to be of any importance. He was only a boy, while his brothers were fine young men. He could look after sheep well enough, and thus he was not present for Samuel that day. It was not thought even worth while, to call him in for the feast or for the religious service. Apparently he came very near being overlooked. He would have been overlooked altogether, if it had not been for Samuel. It is often the case that those the Lord chooses for important places in His Kingdom, are the ones whom men have overlooked. The stones which the human builders have rejected, God has built at length into the very foundations of the walls of His great temple. He knows the men He wants, and He recognizes their worth, though clad in shepherds' garb—or in fishermen's plain dress.

There ought to be encouragement here for boys who are in lowly or obscure places. They may think they have no chance in life, that nobody will ever discover their talents and abilities—but God knows all about them. He knows, too, where He wants to use them, what place He made them for, what work is theirs in His infinite plan—and He will also find a way to bring them out and lead them to what He wants them to perform. This is our Father's world, and there is no danger that we shall be lost in its vastness, however little we may be. The way to be sure of recognition and promotion to a higher place, is to be faithful and energetic in the lowly place in which one begins. God will find you there when He wants you. He found Elisha plowing in the field. Jesus found His disciples fishing. The Lord found David keeping sheep.

It is interesting to know that God has a place for every life. We are not born in this world—and then left to find our way through it into whatever place we may be able to scramble to. We are made by God, thought about before we are born, and given the qualities that will fit us for the place we are meant to fill, and the talents for doing the work that we are made to do. We ought not to have to scramble to get a place in which to live and make our career. If only we do God's will day by day—we shall come at length to our place. David was born to be a king. Samuel found him caring for sheep. But he was led at length to the throne. We may trust God with guidance in the making of our career—if we simply obey and follow Him. When the one the Lord had chosen among Jesse's sons appeared, he was anointed. "Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him . . . and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David." Thus the boy was set apart for God. The oil was the symbol—the real anointing was the coming of the Divine Spirit upon him. That is what we all need to fit us for our duty. Natural gifts and capacities have their place—but they are of no avail—unless the anointing of God is upon us. Power must come down from above. The Divine Spirit alone, can take these poor earthly lives of ours—and make them ready for Divine service. This lesson is very important for the boys who are keeping sheep or working on farms and in shops and factories and stores, or plodding on in school, sighing for places of influence and power. Bow your heads to obey the Spirit of God, and His anointing will fit you for whatever place God made you to fill. Probably David did not then know to what God meant to call him. He knew only this: that he was now set apart for some service for the Lord. You do not know what God made you for. You may be sure, however, that it was for something very noble. Any place in God's plan is glorious. Then even the lowliest place is noble, as the world rates places—if it is God's assignment.

David and Goliath

1 Samuel 17 The story of David and Goliath is one with which every reader of the Bible is familiar. It is full of interest. It reveals much of David's character, and throws light on the training of the boy in his shepherd life. It is suggestive also for all of us, for we all have giants to fight, and we may learn from David, how to meet them and conquer them.

David had been chosen to be king. Now he was to be trained for the great task. All the incidents and events in his life—were lessons set by the great Teacher. The Philistines had gathered for battle with the Israelites, and Saul and his men were facing them. One day there stalked out from the Philistine lines—a great giant, named Goliath, and proposed that one from Saul's army should come out and fight him, and that the outcome of this duel should settle the conflict between the two armies. At first no one of Saul's men responded to the champion's defiance. The king and his men were dismayed and greatly humiliated.

Then David came to the camp. He did not belong to the army. He was only a boy, and his place was at home with the sheep. His older brothers were with Saul.

Jesse one day sent David to the camp with provisions for his brothers. For forty days, morning and evening, Goliath had been coming out and calling across the valley, demanding that someone from the Israelite army should accept his challenge. David had just found his brothers and was talking with them—when the giant made his appearance. The shepherd lad heard his haughty words. He learned also what had been promised by the king—to the man who would kill the evil champion. David became greatly interested in the matter—but the boy's inquiries irritated Eliab, David's oldest brother, who spoke scornfully to him. The king heard of the lad's interest and sent for him. David proposed to the king—that he would fight the giant. Saul tried to dissuade him—but David persisted, and at length Saul consented. "Go, and the Lord shall be with you." "Then Saul put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head." David's simple shepherd's garb did not appear to the warrior king to be suited for the battle with the great giant—who was outfitted in all the armor of a man of war. Saul thought David could not fight a soldier, without a soldier's armor. He did not know that he was better armed as he was than if he had helmet and coat of armor and shoes of brass to protect his body. David was clad rather in the panoply of God. The best protection anyone can have in time of danger—is the garment of truth, sincerity and holiness. Paul tells us of the Christian's armor, which, he says, every follower of Christ should wear, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. Life is a constant warfare—if it is life really worth living. Not to fight—is not to try to get forward and struggle upward. The king thought David should be armed before going out to meet Goliath, so he put on him his own helmet and coat of armor. But David told Saul he could not fight in armor. "I cannot go with these; because I am not used to them! So he took them off." He tried to move about in Saul's heavy armor—but staggered under the weight. In a contest of pure arms—sword and spear and helmet and coat of armor—David would have been no match for Goliath; but armed with his sling—the giant was no match for him. This was the one weapon which David had been trained to use to perfection.

Just so, stick to your little sling when you are fighting giants, and do not attempt to throw anything but choice stones out of the gospel brook. Too many of our modern Davids persist in fighting Goliaths in Saul's armor, and it is no wonder they are defeated. One who knows how to use the Word of God—is more than a match for any giant in the world. That was the weapon Jesus used when He met the great Goliath, Satan, and utterly vanquished him!

"Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine." We should remember that David's fine throwing that day was not accidental, nor was it by a miracle—that the stone went so straight to its mark. David had learned in his shepherd life—to do this thing easily and surely. He had practiced with his sling until he could strike a hair's breadth and never miss. He had spent his leisure to some purpose while watching the sheep. He did not know then what splendid use his skill would one day be to him—but unconsciously, in his pleasant pastime, he was preparing for the great crisis of that day. Wellington used to say he learned on the Eton playground, how to fight the battle of Waterloo. This teaches young people the importance of improving every moment, and taking every opportunity to acquire knowledge and skill. Someone may say to them, that they will never find any use for this or that branch of study in the curriculum,

and might as well omit it—but this is bad advice. Some day they will need all the knowledge and skill they can acquire. They will find need, too, for the particular bits of learning and knowledge they think they will never have occasion to use. David could not have met Goliath victoriously in that momentous hour—if he had not unconsciously prepared for such a conflict in the quiet hours of his shepherd life.

Many a man fails in important moments in the critical experiences of life—because he has failed to be diligent in his boyhood. If you would be ready for such occasions in your life—you must prepare for them in the quiet days of boyhood and youth. If David had not been an expert slinger before that morning—he could not then, in the hour before the giant came out, have prepared himself for the battle, nor could he have brought down the champion by any mere lucky stroke. Learn all you can in youth, omit no opportunity for acquiring skill in doing things, become skillful in whatever you do. You do not know what good service your experience, even in little, mundane things—may some day do you!

We should not neglect spiritual training. When Jesus met the tempter, He fell back on the preparation He had made in His silent years at Nazareth. To each assault He replied with a verse of Scripture. But He did not go to His Bible scroll to get His text. He had the Words of God in His heart, hidden away in the storehouse of memory.

Some people have to take their concordance and look up the Scripture text they want, when any need demands it, either for their own use or in helping others. A concordance is a good thing to have—but it is better if we become so familiar with our Bible and have it so in memory, that we can quote its words. It may seem to us that we do not need the Divine promises now—but some time we shall, and if we fail to learn them—we shall not have them ready in the day of distress. When the Philistine "looked David over and saw that he was only a boy, ruddy and handsome, and he despised him." He saw only a boy, unarmed, and scorned to fight with him. So the world disdains the Christian. It asks with contempt: "What can he do? What strength has he in his feeble hands? Where are the weapons he is going to fight with?" The giant saw only a shepherd’s staff in David’s hands; what was that—against his own enormous spear? The world sees only a Bible in the Christian’s hand; what is that—against all its philosophy and science and reason? Yet the Christian is not so defenseless and powerless as he seems. His weapons are not of the earthly kind and do not appear formidable—but are really powerful, and, like David, he is able with them to subdue giants!

David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty!" The giant blustered, boasting of his own power and disdaining David’s littleness. He was angry that he had to fight with a mere boy. "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" Yet David was not scared by Goliath’s pitiful scorn of him. It was the Lord’s battle he was about to fight, and he knew the Lord would give victory. The law of the heavenly kingdom is, "Not by might, nor by power—but by My Spirit, says the Lord." There are a great many things that human power can do—but when we turn to the really essential things in life—it is strengthless, and can do none of them. With all its boasted philosophy, science and wisdom—it cannot convert souls nor change hearts; it cannot lift up the fallen; it cannot overcome sin and Satan; it cannot comfort sorrow nor give peace to the dying. Not one of the really great things of life, can it do. The Christian comes in the name of the Lord, and that name has in it—the

strength of omnipotence! Jesus said: "I have overcome the world." He is Master of all things, and therefore is able to subdue all things unto Himself.

David talked very confidently to the Philistine—but not boastfully. He gave God all the honor of the victory he was about to win. "I come to you in the name of the Lord Almighty!" "This day will the Lord deliver you into my hand." "That all the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands." We can conquer—only as we fight in the name of Christ.

"As Goliath moved closer to attack, David quickly ran out to meet him. Reaching into his shepherd's bag and taking out a stone, he hurled it from his sling and hit the Philistine in the forehead. The stone sank in, and Goliath stumbled and fell face downward to the ground!" Just so, the believer in God may prevail over every Philistine that stalks out to meet him—if he goes against him as David went that day against Goliath. The battle that wins the victory is the Lord's. If we go in His name—we shall conquer. Paul said: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

There are giants in our own hearts, even after the most thorough conversion. Like the Philistines in Canaan, the Philistines of sin also are terribly hard to subjugate. Your besetting sin, whatever it is, is a Goliath. It may seem to you that it never can be vanquished, and it never can until David comes—our David—Jesus. Call for Him to come and slay the giant for you!

There are giants in the world outside. Intemperance is one. Unbelief is another. Worldliness is another. These giants stalk out and hurl their defiance at the army of God's people—and there seems to be no one who can overcome them. Now is the time for faith in God. We must go out against these giants in the name of the Lord, not with philosophy, science and education—but with the Cross, and then we shall prevail.

"And since he had no sword, he ran over and pulled Goliath's sword from its sheath. David used it to kill the giant and cut off his head!" We should not fail to get a lesson on the importance of thoroughness in the conquest of evil, from David's manner of dealing with Goliath. David was not satisfied with seeing the giant fall to the earth when the smooth stone struck him—but ran and drew Goliath's own sword from its scabbard—and with it cut off his head. If he had not done this—the old champion would probably have gotten up by-and-by, and walked away, for he was only stunned—not killed, by the stone. David made sure that his work was completed. A great many of our attacks upon sin in our own hearts, and in the world—only stun and temporarily disable—but do not kill the evil. We walk away, thinking we have done a fine thing, won a splendid victory; and presently we meet the old giant again, stalking abroad as before! He soon recovers from our blow, and we have to fight the battle over again, and perhaps we fight it again in the same half way, and thus on and on—to the end of life.

Most of us have had just such experiences as these with our own lusts and passions. We overcome them often, and each time we think that we have entirely subdued them and that we shall have no further trouble with them; but they are soon active as ever again! We need to learn from David—to finish our victories by cutting off the head of every giant we strike down! There is no other way of destroying our sins. The life is in the head—and the head must come off—or the

enemy will be facing us again in a day or two with only a scar on his forehead! The only way to get a real victory over vices—is to decapitate them! Bruises and wounds are not enough. There must be thorough work done, in the name of the Lord. Half-way measures will not avail.

"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry." Colossians 3:5 David and Jonathan

1 Samuel 18 The story of the friendship of Jonathan and David is a Bible classic. As such, it takes rank with the finest friendship stories in any literature. Without detracting in the least from the character of David, or from his part in all the delightful story, there is no doubt that it is to Jonathan, that the chief honor belongs. He was the prince of Saul's house, and therefore of rank far above the shepherd lad whom he loved. It was in Jonathan's heart, too, that the friendship first began. He recognized in David noble qualities which won first his admiration and then his affection. If there was a man in the whole nation who had reason to be envious of David—it certainly was Jonathan. He was a brave and popular soldier, the son of the king—yet here was another man whose one achievement made him the hero of the people. In ordinary men the feeling of envy would have risen in the heart when David sprang suddenly into such popularity. Jonathan was the man, too, who had everything to lose by David's promotion, and yet he was ready to lose all, even to let David become king, because of the love he bore to his friend.

Jonathan here sets a lesson for us, in the overmastering fullness and richness of his love. Such generous friendship, it must be confessed, is rare in even the best men and women. Not many of us can experience such overshadowing in others, such winning by others of honor and affection which naturally belong to us—and keep our hearts sweet and our love for the one who is so honored, as strong and loyal as ever. Such triumph of love is Christlike. It is an attainment we should strive to reach. SELF must die in us—and love must reign, and then we shall have learned our lesson.

Thus the first honor in this matchless friendship, belongs to Jonathan. He loved David with a pure and unselfish affection, which stood the severest test and never failed. As time went on and David became still more the nation's hero, casting Jonathan himself in the shadows, there was no envy or jealousy in Jonathan's heart. When at last he knew that David was to be king instead of himself, his friendship faltered not. When his own father turned against David and sought to kill him, Jonathan risked all—in order to save his friend's life. The beginning of this friendship was very interesting. The young shepherd was brought into the king's presence after his victory over the giant. As Jonathan looked on him, heard him speak and saw his beauty, his modest, simple bearing—his heart went out to him in a burst of affection, and from that hour "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul."

Jonathan's friendship was based on the true and simple worth of David. It was not the fascination of a moment—but an enduring attachment, having its roots in the heart, a love that would stand the sorest tests and not fail. It was unselfish affection, ready for any service or sacrifice, telling of a princely spirit in the king's son.

True friendship has always its reserves. The best is not revealed at the beginning. We touch but the edge of its ocean fullness, when we first taste its sweetness. We have to know our friend better—to find the best of love that is in him. Jonathan's affection for David was wonderful in its

first revealing—but the more it was put to the test—the purer and holier it proved. Some friendships are only emotional and soon burn out, leaving only cold ashes—but Jonathan's only increased in intensity as the days went on. So it should always be. When the love of Jonathan for David is described, it is said that he loved him as his own soul. There could be no higher measure of love than this. It was utterly unselfish. The whole story of Jonathan's friendship for David, showed the most complete self-forgetfulness and self-abnegation. David in his eulogy on his friend after his death, said that his love surpassed the love of women. Woman's love is wonderful in its tenderness, in its strength, in its devotion—but Jonathan's love for David surpassed anything in the love of women that David had ever known. The more carefully we read the story as it is told in fragments in the chapters in the Book of Samuel, the more noble does the friendship appear. At the very beginning of their friendship Jonathan and David made a covenant. It was Jonathan who proposed this covenant, and it was because he loved David so intensely—as his own soul —that he did it. In this covenant, "Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt." These tokens of his friendship Jonathan gave as pledges of his loyalty and faithfulness. When David saw them they would keep him in mind of his friend and all that he had promised. When Jonathan was out of his sight—these gifts would assure him that he was true, whether present or absent, as true in absence as in presence.

David sometimes grew discouraged when Saul pursued him so persistently and sought so bitterly to destroy him. Once David spoke to Jonathan of this. "What have I done?" he asked. "What is my iniquity? and what is my sin before your father, that he seeks my life?" Jonathan assured David that no harm would be done to him by his father. "Never! You are not going to die! Look, my father doesn't do anything, great or small, without confiding in me. Why would he hide this from me?" David was still fearful. "Your father knows very well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said to himself, 'Jonathan must not know this or he will be grieved.' Yet as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death." Then Jonathan, to reassure David, agreed to find out his father's feeling and let David know.

Jonathan's position was most delicate and difficult. He was loyal to his father, and yet while his father was determined to kill David, he was loyal also to his friend. To maintain these two loyalties in such circumstances, required the greatest care. Yet Jonathan never failed in either.

"But if my father is inclined to harm you, may the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away safely." Saul tried in every way to turn Jonathan against David—but Jonathan's affection for David wavered not. At last Saul discovered, or at least came to believe, that David was the one whom God had marked out as "the neighbor more worthy than you," to be king in his stead. Surely now, he could break up Jonathan's friendship for the young shepherd. So he told him that as long as David lived, he, Jonathan, could not become king. It must have required a terrible struggle for Jonathan, to give up all the hopes of royalty, and to know that his friend, not he, would wear the crown. But his friendship stood even this test, too. Instead of combining with his father to prevent David's accession, he went out and tried to save David's life from Saul's rage. There could have been no severer test of friendship than this.

Jonathan showed his confidence in David's friendship for him, at this point. "But show me unfailing kindness like that of the LORD as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family—not even when the LORD has cut off every one of David's enemies

from the face of the earth." Jonathan foresaw something at least of what was coming upon his family, and sought to provide for them so that they would not suffer. He committed them to his friend, who was to be in the place of power—knowing that David would be kind to them.

We see here two noble things—first, a father's love for his children, seeking shelter for them in a great coming calamity; second, Jonathan's confidence in David's friendship. And David was equal to his friend's confidence. One of the most interesting incidents of his reign, is his gentle care of the lame son of Jonathan, whom he took into his own household and cared for as tenderly as if he were his own brother. The friendship that has a pious basis, where both the friends love God and serve Him, is doubly sacred and sure. Both Jonathan and David believed in God. Once Jonathan refers to an oath he and David had taken thus: "We have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord." Thus the friendship was sealed before God. They both loved God and trusted in Him, and it was as God's children that they had made their covenant of friendship. There is no sure and lasting friendship which has not a Christian basis. In choosing friends, we should choose only those who will be one in Christ with us, and whose companionship we can have in all the close and holy relations of life and also when this world is no more. The hope that cheered Jonathan here, was that a friendship cemented in God could not be destroyed; that whatever might come—they would still be friends and would meet again.

"I will shoot three arrows ... as though I shot at a mark." There were no telegraphs in those days, no telephones, and that he might let David know at once Saul's attitude towards him, Jonathan arranged a way of signaling, which would not be apt to arouse suspicion. What seemed to onlookers as only a bit of archery practice, had a secret meaning which only the two friends understood. Jonathan was signaling to his friend in his hiding-place, the result of his interview with his father. In this way he was warning David of his danger and bidding him flee for his life.

It should always be the part of faithful friendship—to give a friend warning of danger. There are many kinds of danger of which we should let our friends know. Most of us would give notice if we knew of a plot to assassinate our friend; but there are other dangers—from evil companionships, false friends, temptations, bad habits—and faithful friendships ought in some way to give quick and honest warning of these also.

These are but a few of the suggestions that come from this noble friendship of Jonathan's and David's. Such friendships are very rare. Yet every young man is better—for having a strong, true and noble friendship. Young men have many temptations, and there is a wonderful restraining and constraining power in the life of one we love. We dare not do wrong in the sacred presence of a trusted friend. We all know how unworthy we feel when we come with the recollection of some sin or some baseness, into the presence of one we honor.

Saul Tries to Kill David

1 Samuel 18 At first Saul was strongly attracted to David. David's valor that day in the conflict with Goliath, which won the friendship of Jonathan, also won the king's admiration. The noble service he had rendered in his victory over the champion, aroused Saul's gratitude. But soon the evil nature in the man asserted itself.

It seems to have been soon after David's anointing, that Saul fell under the influence of melancholy and became subject to fits of insanity. It was thought that music might be beneficial,

and when one who could play well on a harp was sought for, the boy David was found, and he was brought to the king's court. When Saul saw David, he loved him and made him his armor-bearer. When Saul's distress came on, David would take his harp and play before him, and the music soothed the king and drove away the evil spirit.

David did not remain continuously with Saul, for he was at home at the time of the war with the Philistines and had come up from his father's house on a visit to his brothers, when the incident of his duel with the giant occurred. After this David was again with Saul. "Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house."

David had had no military training or experience—he had been a shepherd lad in the quiet fields about Bethlehem from his boyhood. His heroic deed in meeting the champion brought him from his obscurity into the public eye. It is interesting to follow the story of David's training from the time we first meet him. All his experiences were part of his preparation for the kingship. He was taken into Saul's household, then into the army and sent out over the country in military excursions. For years he was the object of the king's hatred and was hunted from place to place. All the while he was in God's school, however, and God was making of him the man who was to rule His people. God is always making men. He has a plan for everyone's life, and the events, circumstances and experiences of life make the school in which the man is trained.

There was something in David which won hearts for him wherever he went. He was popular everywhere. Whatever he did "it was good in the sight of all the people." He was a favorite from the first. He had a winning personality. His victory over Goliath made his name known throughout the whole country. The people were pleased, therefore, when he was honored by the king.

It is a great thing to have the power of making friends. It is the secret of many men's success. No doubt people naturally differ in the possession of this power. Winningness is in a measure, a natural gift. But it can also be acquired and cultivated. It is told of a well-known English writer of books that in her early youth she was the homeliest girl in the town where she lived. She was aware of this and resolved that lacking physical attractions, she would cultivate the qualities which give beauty to disposition and character. She became known at length as a very angel of kindness. She went everywhere on errands of love. She was the friend of the sick, the sorrowing, the poor, the troubled. Love grew to such sweetness in her disposition and spirit that people forgot her homeliness and saw only the beauty of her character. The only way to make friends—is to be friendly. David loved people—and the people loved him.

Great honor was shown to David when he returned from his victory over the Philistine. It would have been in any country. Heroes are always applauded. "Saul has slain his thousands—and David his ten thousands." David had proved himself a true hero. Heroes are lauded everywhere. But the battlefield is not the only place where brave deeds are done. There are other heroes, and nobler ones, than those of war. Every man who loves truth and stands up manfully for right against wrong, is a hero. Everyone who follows Christ through opposition and persecution, standing firm and unmoved in his loyalty, is a hero. The missionaries who died in the Boxer rebellion were heroes, and no less heroes were they who went out to take the places of those who had fallen at their posts.

There are many heroes in common life, too, whose brave deeds pass unrecognised and unpraised. It is always pleasant to have the approval of one's neighbors and friends. It cheers us and makes us braver and stronger, inspiring us to other worthy deeds, to hear the commendation of men. We wrong others when we withhold the words of appreciation which it is in our heart to speak—but which we do not speak. We ought to cheer each other on the way, for ofttimes the way is hard and the burdens are heavy.

Popularity has its disadvantages. David would have been happier in the end if the people had not gone wild over his triumph. It always costs to be successful. "Saul was very angry" when he heard the women sing the praises of the boy David. While the people sang his own praises, Saul was well pleased. But as he listened he heard another name, the name of David. And as he listened still more closely he found that the refrain ran: "Saul has slain his thousands—and David his ten thousands." The first line was sweet to the king—but the second was bitter as wormwood to him. The people had ten times as much honor for David as for their king, and this made him very angry. All his former love for David changed to bitter hate.

It takes a good deal of grace—to hear others receive praise which we have been accustomed to receive. Some people cannot bear to hear others commended at all, even when it takes no honor from themselves. But it is harder still to see another coming into the place in people's plaudits which they have held before. "The bright day brings out the adder." There are many people who feel just as Saul did—when others receive honor and appreciation, though they may hide their feelings better than he did. In contrast, however, recall how Samuel bore himself when he was set aside as ruler and Saul was made king, displacing him. He accepted the humiliation meekly and helped to find the king and to put him on his throne. Recall how sweetly John the Baptist decreased as Jesus increased. All of us some time in our life will have occasion to try, in a smaller or greater way, whether we can behave any better than Saul.

"Base envy withers at another's joy—

And hates the excellence it cannot reach." The Bible tells us that man was made but a little lower than God. Yet man is capable also of descending until he is but little higher than demons! Whatever Godlikeness there was originally in Saul, seems now to have been changed into flendishness. The record says: "Saul eyed David from that day and forward." That is, he set his heart on destroying David. Saul had a splendid chance to show a noble spirit when he heard David's heroism praised above his own. If he had joined in the honoring of the young man who had saved the day for the army and the country, if he had rejoiced in David's success—he would have proved himself a truly manly man. But he lost his chance. The only secret of keeping bitterness out of one's heart in such a case as this—is to keep love in the heart. If we love on, no matter what comes, our hearts will never grow bitter. But Saul did what so many other men do—he let the evil spirit of jealousy and envy into his heart, and that drove out love. Evil spirits and bad passions are always watching, ready to enter into a man when they see a chance to make mischief. There is no other time when one is so open to these malignant messengers as when some bad temper or passion has possession of us. When envy or jealousy is cherished in a heart and allowed to abide—no one can tell what the result will be. The worst crimes start in just such dark passions. We know how it was with Cain. Abel had never done him any harm. The only thing Cain could ever say against Abel—was that he was good and that his life pleased God. Yet that

was enough to change love into hate in Cain—and lead him to the dark crime of murder. Saul saw David honored and heard him praised. David had done nothing against him. Yet Saul let the envy get into his heart and possess it—and drive him into deeds worthy of a madman.

It is a pitiful story, this of Saul's bitter envy, as we follow it in its various phases. "Saul made him his captain over a thousand." This promotion was not made to honor David—but almost certainly was prompted by the hope that David would fall in battle and thus be taken out of Saul's way. Nothing would have pleased Saul better, than to have David killed! This shows the depth of wickedness in his heart. If he suspected at all that David was the "neighbor" who the Lord said should be king in his place, then Saul's effort to destroy David was not merely to get a rival out of the way—but was also an attempt to defeat the Divine purpose.

Usually bitterness kindles bitterness—but Saul's cruel persecution did not stir the least measure of vindictiveness or resentment in David's heart, "David behaved himself wisely in all ways; and the Lord was with him." The true thing to do when one has enemies and persecutors, is to move right on in the path of duty, day by day, leaving to God the ordering of His steps, His protection from harm and the outcome of the whole matter. That is what David did. He did not meet plot with counterplot. He did not try to match stratagem with stratagem. He simply attended to his own business with courage and fidelity, and gave himself no concern whatever about the king's wicked charges. The result was that Saul became afraid of David, and the people loved him.

David's self-control in all this matter was wonderful. He never lost his self-mastery. He had learned how to rule his own spirit, and this meant more to him than any of the achievements of his courage of which the people praised. He who has learned to be master of himself, is the truest hero and the princeliest man. Everything in David that was beautiful, made Saul's jealousy the more bitter. The secret of this feeling was his overweening self-love. He saw things only in their relation to himself. If he could have used David to advance his interests and to bring new laurels to his brow, he would have been quite content. But when he saw that David's advancement was drawing away the people's eyes and hurrahs from himself, he determined to get him out of the way. We all need to be on our guard against this pitiful perversion of life. We must learn to overcome evil with good. Thus did Christ Himself meet the hate of enemies. His heart kept its sweetness amid all the wrong and cruelty that He met.

Set side by side with Saul's spirit—was that of Jonathan, magnanimous, self-forgetful and large-hearted.

We never can know what evil may come to self-adoration. It may be noticed here also that nothing came out of all Saul's scheming and plotting. He did not pull David down. He did not defeat the Lord's purpose for the kingdom. He only made himself wretched and brought shame and ruin upon his own soul. It is always so. Wrong done to others—rebounds and hurts him who does it.

David Spares Saul

1 Samuel 26

Twice at least David had Saul in his power and might have killed him—but each time he magnanimously spared him. On the former occasion Saul was seeking David in the wilderness of Engedi, and entered a cave, not knowing that David and his men were that very hour hiding in the

inner recesses of the same cave. When it was discovered that the king was in the cave, David's men tried to induce their master to take advantage of the opportunity and kill him. But David refused, only stealing up to the king and cutting off the skirt of his robe, that he might have evidence to prove to Saul that he had no hostile purpose towards him. When Saul had passed out of the cave, David also went out and called after him, telling him that he must no longer believe that he was his enemy. He then held up the part of the king's garment in his hand to let him know how easily he could have killed him if it had been in his heart to do so. Saul was deeply affected, and the two men then made a covenant of friendship. But Saul's kindly feeling, like all the good things in him, was transient only, and before long he was again hunting David among the mountains. In this second sparing of Saul's life by David, the king and his men were pressing their relentless pursuit and lodged one night close to where David and his men were hiding. If Saul had known that David was near he would have sought to capture him. He had allowed his envy to drive all the love out of his heart. The lesson our Master teaches us—is to bear wrong patiently, to forgive injury, to return kindness for unkindness, good for evil, love for hate. It is a fatal injury to his life when one allows himself to grow bitter, to cherish resentment, to let envy or any hurt feeling rankle in his heart. At last love is utterly driven out, and dark and malign passions take full possession. It was thus with Saul. Envy is one of the most perilous passions, and one which if cherished, may come to a fearful growth. When Abishai, who accompanied David on the visit to Saul's camp, saw the king sleeping within the camp, and all his men asleep, it seemed to him that it was now time for David to put an end to his enemy's efforts to kill him. Abishai put his own interpretation on what seemed to him a clear Providence. He inferred that God would not thus have brought Saul into David's hands, if He had not meant that he should kill him.

Many of us are too apt to interpret Providences in accordance with our own wishes. When we are desiring guidance in a certain matter, and there is one way we very much want to take, we frequently find what seem to us to be Providences which favor our preference. This incident shows us that we need to be careful in interpreting the meaning of events. We are not to enter every door that stands open. Opportunity does not always indicate duty. When you find in some trouble, a person who has done you a grievous wrong, there is an opportunity to repay his wrong by refusing to help him. But does the opportunity justify the retaliation? The "Providence" in this case affords a test of character rather than a Divine commission to do wrong. In interpreting Providences we must remember that no opportunity to do anything in itself wrong, must ever be regarded as a Divine leading. Abishai's inference was not justifiable. It was a misreading of the thought of God. An opportunity for revenge is never a voice of God commanding revenge. Our duty always is to be kind, to bear wrong patiently, to return love for hate.

David's temptation to give heed to the words of Abishai was great. Saul had been pursuing him with cruel hatred, with no reason whatever. His life was continually in peril. It would be easy to listen to Abishai and end it all. The suddenness of the opportunity also made it harder to resist the impulse. Nothing is more critical than a sudden opportunity of indulging an ardent passion. With scarcely a moment for deliberation, one is apt to be hurried blindly along, and at once to commit the deed. But David refused to listen for a moment to the voice that counseled the destruction of the king. The plausible suggestion that God had put Saul into his power, in order that he might smite him, had no influence upon David. He buttressed himself in his refusal upon the sacredness of the person of the king, the Lord's anointed. "Destroy him not; for who can put forth his hand

against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?" In this heroic rejection of the temptation, David showed admirable self-control. He restrained himself, and he restrained his hot-headed men. He would not put forth his own hand to touch the king, and he would not allow any of his followers to do it. In the first instance David may have hoped to soften Saul's heart, by sparing him—but this second time he could cherish no such hope. He acted here purely on principle, from regard for the sacredness of the king.

One feeling which must have been strong in favor of David's destroying Saul, was that he would thus open his own way to his place as king. He knew that he was to be Saul's successor. He seemed now to have a short, quick way to the throne—it was necessary only to take advantage of his opportunity and kill Saul. But David would not dare take the throne—until God gave it to him. This is a very important lesson.

There often are things that God intends to give us—but which we must wait to receive in God's way. Short-cuts in traveling often bring us into trouble. Short-cuts in life's paths are always hindrances in the end. Jacob's mother knew that Jacob was to have the blessing of the first-born—but if she had waited it would have come without being stained as it was, by her own and Jacob's deception. Young men are ambitious, and their ambition may be pure and right—but sometimes they are in such feverish haste to reach what they wish—that they take the short-cut of dishonesty or selfishness to get sooner to the coveted place. But it never pays. It was far better that David should wander on in exile for a time longer, and then reach the throne by a clean path. It is pleasant to see young men get on in life—but we must always ask how they get on—before we can know whether their elevation is really an honor or not.

David practiced here also, long before Christ came the teaching of returning love for hate, kindness for unkindness. "Would it not be manly to resent it?" said one who had received an insult. "Yes," was the reply, "but it would be Godlike to forgive it." David did the Godlike thing. He had a chance to avenge himself. He had his cruel and relentless enemy in his power. The opportunity was most favorable. One stroke, and Saul never would have troubled him any more. His life would then have been safe. He would have become king at once. His men were urging it. Yet he overcame the temptation and allowed Saul to pass out of his hand unharmed. He listened to the voice of God speaking to him in his own conscience, and restrained the impulse to avenge himself. No lesson is harder to learn, than that which David's example teaches us. The first impulse, even of a child when wronged or hurt by another, is to seek revenge. Sometimes older people encourage this spirit in children, by telling them to whip the chair or rocking-horse by which they have chanced to be hurt. In older people, too, the desire for revenge is natural, and can be repressed only by the higher law of love which Christ teaches. The lesson to learn is that the punishment of injustice or wrong done to us—does not belong to ourselves—but must be left in God's hands. "Vengeance belongs unto Me; I will recompense, says the Lord."

"The Lord will render to every man according to his deeds." There are apt to be wrong views about bearing injuries. People ask: "Is there to be no justice in cases like David's? Must we quietly bear wrongs, and must the person who does the wrongs never receive any punishment?" Our sense of right is sometimes so outraged, that our souls cry out in remonstrance when we are told that we never should resist—but should turn the other cheek when one cheek has been smitten.

We are not the judges of other men and their actions. There is but one judge, that is God, and we must leave in his hands all the right and the wrong in our lives. Our clumsy hands are not skillful enough to adjust such delicate matters as these. We are not required to say that a certain person's treatment of us was beautiful when it was outrageous; that no wrong was done to us when we know there was infamous wrong; that the person deserves no punishment when it is clear that he deserves severe punishment. But we are to recognize the truth that that is God's responsibility, not ours; that we are to be patient, meek, and non-resisting, leaving the whole matter in God's hands. We have the example of our Master. When He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not—but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously. We may commit into God's hand, as David did here, all the matter of the wrongs or injuries others have done to us, and leave it there with perfect confidence. "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"

Death of Saul and Jonathan

1 Samuel 31 The story of the last days of Saul's life is very sad. God had departed from him, and he had no heavenly guidance. He was drifting like a crippled vessel on the ocean. In the great crisis, when he must fight his decisive battle with the Philistines, he turned in his despair to superstition and imposture. He had cried to heaven—but no answer had come.

Saul had been most fierce and zealous in driving from the land all those who claimed to know the secrets of the future and of the invisible world. He did not dream that the time would ever come when he would search the country for a sorcerer for himself. The account of the king's visit to the witch of Endor is most pathetic. The Philistines had gathered their forces together for battle against Israel. When Saul saw the great army that he must meet, consternation seized him. In numbers they were far beyond his own army. In his fear he went to God—but only in formal ways. His heart was not penitent—but in a mechanical way he tried the means that were in common use to get guidance and help from God. "But the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." This may seem strange to some readers, when it is remembered how gracious God is—and how He loves to answer prayer. The trouble was with Saul himself. God had not failed—but Saul's heart was so hardened, that there really was no true prayer made by him to God. When Saul had gone under cover of the night to Endor, he found the witch and implored her to bring Samuel to him from the dead. She had no power to call anybody from the dead—but, to her amazement, Samuel appeared before her. God seems to have sent him in a supernatural way—to tell Saul of his awful doom. Saul heard the hopeless words from Samuel's lips, and then, with despairing heart, went back through the darkness to his tent. When the battle was on next morning, Saul led his army to defeat and disaster, because he had sinned and lost the Divine favor. It is idle and useless to fight against God. Then it is just as idle and useless to try to live without the Divine help. The battle went against Saul from the very beginning. "The men of Israel fled before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa." The hottest fight was against the king and his sons.

"The Philistines slew Jonathan." We cannot but grieve at this sad record. We have learned to love Jonathan, as we have seen in him so much that was noble and beautiful. It adds to the pathos of Jonathan's death, too, to remember that he was dragged down by his father's sin. Had Saul proved himself a true and worthy king, Jonathan would have been his successor on the throne.

But on account of his father’s failure, he lost the crown, and not only this—but died in the disaster in which his father fell. The sins of parents may cut off and destroy the hopes of their children and rob them of their birthright honors and blessings. There are thousands of children whose lives are blighted, sometimes for both worlds—by the evil ways of their parents. In this case, the brave, noble, manly Jonathan perishes in the calamity brought on by his father’s persistent disobedience. The guilty father drags down with him—his pure, noble and blameless son. No man can go on in a sinful life, without involving his family as well as himself in sorrow.

Saul’s sons appear to have fallen early in the battle. Saul became the center of the assault. "The fighting grew fierce around Saul, and when the archers overtook him, they wounded him critically." There are few sadder pictures in all history than this of Saul on Mount Gilboa rushing on to his doom with the madness of despair. Judgment will surely come to those who persist in sin. Saul wrecked his own destiny. God’s plan for him was that he should be a worthy king. He was the goodliest man in all the nation. His mission was to lead his people to victory over all their enemies. Instead of this noble record, however, the story of his life is one of defeat and disaster. The reason is not far to seek.

God made no mistake in naming Saul as king. He might have been all that was in God’s plan for him. The failure was his own. He would not accept God’s guidance, and thus he failed to fulfill the Divine purpose for himself. Many years before this time, the doom of Saul had been pronounced upon him by the prophet. Judgment lingered—but did not fail in the end. Men may live in sin—and no disaster come to them. God may seem to be taking no account of their evil deeds. The sun may shine brightly over them, the rain may fall gently upon them, prosperity may continue to follow them. But let them not think that God has forgotten to be just. "He who being often reproved hardens his neck—shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy!" When Saul saw that there was no hope of retrieving the battle, he knew that he must soon fall into the hands of the Philistines, and he knew also that they would inflict upon him all the insults and indignities they could possibly devise. Terrible as war always is, its horrors have now been greatly mitigated by the advance of civilization. Prisoners are now treated with as great a measure of kindness as is possible in the circumstances.

Prisoners taken in war in ancient times suffered untold tortures and humiliations. On Assyrian monuments, for instance, are found representations of kings compelled to carry the heads of their own sons, or pinned to the ground by stakes driven through their hands and feet, or being flayed alive. If the Philistines treated captive kings as the Assyrians did, it is no wonder that Saul had a horror of being taken alive by the enemy. It is no wonder, perhaps, either, that he resorted to suicide to save himself from the hands of the Philistines. First, he besought his armor-bearer to thrust him through, and when the armor-bearer refused, he took his own sword and fell upon it.

Suicide is a violation of the sixth commandment. Human life is sacred in God’s sight, and to touch it is a crime. Life is the gift of God entrusted by Him to each one of us, and it is to be cherished and preserved, until He Himself calls back His gift. Suicide is unfaithfulness to this trust. We are required to use our life in the work assigned to us, and cannot without gravest sin—lay it down until the time God has appointed.

Suicide is also an act of moral cowardice. It is committed usually, as in Saul’s case, to escape meeting some other trouble or danger. Saul killed himself, rather than fall into the hands of the

Philistines to be tortured and humiliated. A man commits a crime, and, rather than face his deed before men—he takes his own life. He forgets that in doing this—he is rushing into another Presence far more terrible than the presence of man! Saul escaped the cruelty of the Philistines that day—but went, stained with this last crime of self-murder, to meet his God!

It has been said, "Saul had really prepared for himself this wretched death. He had disregarded the prophet, and so was without consolation. He had killed the priests, and so was without sacrifice or intercession. He had driven away David, and so was without the help of the best soldier in the nation. He had lived, in his later years, at least, like a madman; and like a madman he threw himself on his sword and died. As a man sows—so shall he reap. As a life is shaped by its own deeds, so is the death determined. One lives a selfish life, hardening his heart against appeal and reproach—and his doom is to lose all experience of sympathy. He passes through the world winning no love—and he passes out of the world leaving after him no regret." The defeat of the Israelites was complete and overwhelming. In the humiliating treatment of the bodies of the king and his sons, we have a hint of the cruelty the Philistines would have practiced upon Saul, if they had taken him alive. Saul’s head was cut off and put in the temple of Dagon, his armor was hung up in the house of Ashtaroth, and his body was fastened to the wall of Beth-shan. The bodies of his sons were treated in the same barbarous way.

There is only one incident in all this terrible story of the death of Saul, which has any brightness in it. This is what is told of the men of Jabesh-gilead: "And when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard concerning him that which the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan; and they came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. And they took their bones, and buried them under the tamarisk-tree in Jabesh, and fasted seven days." It was a brave and noble thing which these men did. It is especially beautiful because of the motive which inspired it. Once, when Saul was just beginning his reign, he did a great kindness to the people of Jabesh-gilead. Now, when Saul was dead, forsaken, without friends, his body mutilated and dishonored, the memory of this kind act revived, and under the spur of gratitude these valiant men, at the risk of their own lives, did this heroic deed. The worst men always have someone to mourn them. Never was there a tyrant who did more crimes and cruelties than Nero. One would say that he was incapable of kindness to anyone, and that no one mourned his death. Yet it is recorded that on the morning after he was buried amid universal execration, some unknown hand strewed flowers upon his grave. There was one person, at least, who remembered Nero gratefully. When we read of the kindness of the men of Jabesh-gilead to their dead king, we cannot but recall another instance of a King who hung dead on a cross, when two friends, long secret and silent, came forward to do honor to the torn and dishonored form. It was a brave and noble deed, and it saved that sacred body from being cast away with the bodies of common malefactors, giving to it, instead of such dishonor, most honorable and loving burial.

Saul owed all the honor he received in his burial, to one kind deed which he had done many years before. Had his reign continued as it began—he would have had the gratitude of a whole nation when he came to die. One of the most pitiable things in history—is the terrible failure which Saul made of his life. We should try to live so that we shall be remembered with gratitude, and leave behind us a memory of good deeds. This is one lesson.

Another is that we never should fail to show gratitude to anyone who has conferred a favor upon us. Then, let us be sure that we so live as to obtain honor from God when we come to the end of our life. If we miss that, earth's most brilliant honor will be failure and mockery. The way to get the crown from God's hand at last—is to do God's will always here.

Amid all the sad things in the story of Saul, the incident of his kindness in his early years to the people of Jabesh-gilead lives like a rose in a field of thorns. It is told of a noted criminal, that once in his young manhood days, he had caught a runaway horse in the street and saved the lives of a woman and her child in the carriage the wild animal was dragging after him. His life was a long list of evil things, with nothing in all its years that could be commended. But when waiting in his prison for the death penalty, his mind would revert continually to the memory of the one heroic kindness done in his youth, finding in this a gleam of hope. So does Saul's one brave kindness shine in the dark story of his life. We should seek to fill our whole life with deeds of love, and then we shall have glad memories to give us comfort in looking back over our life. One of the sayings of Lincoln suggests a noble aim for life. "Die when I may," he said, "I want it said of me, by those who know me best—that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower—where I thought a flower would grow."

David Becomes King

2 Samuel 2:1-10

Saul was dead. David was out of the country when the fatal battle on Mount Gilboa was fought. Indeed, he was with the Philistines when they were preparing for the battle. He had been dwelling in their country as a place of refuge from Saul, and when the Philistines were gathering at Aphek, David seems to have intended to go with them to fight against his own people. But some of the princes of the Philistines objected to the presence of David and of his men in their army, mistrusting them, lest they might prove adversaries in the day of battle. The king apologized to David for not allowing him to remain to join in the battle, and then sent him away.

We can scarcely understand how David could in any case have gone with the Philistines to war against his own people. It certainly was well that he did not go, when we consider the results of the battle. There seemed also a Providence in his return to Ziklag, for he was just in time to go to the rescue of his family, who had been carried away in his absence.

David learned of the death of Saul from an Amalekite stranger, who came to him with his clothes torn. The story the Amalekite told concerning his own part in the tragedy of Saul's death, seems to have been fabricated for the purpose of winning favor with David. In wandering over the field of battle, he had found the corpse of Saul and stripped it of its ornaments. With these he hastened to David, and invented his fictitious story in the hope of securing an additional reward for having with his own hand, rid David of his bitterest enemy and removed the obstacle which stood between him and the throne. But he had made a grievous mistake in his estimate of David. David may or may not have believed the man's story—but he took him at his word and visited upon him instantly the penalty of his impious crime.

David's lamentation for Saul and Jonathan, is full of tender words. Not a breath of bitterness against Saul is found in it, and David's love for Jonathan is beautifully expressed. Dean Stanley says of this elegy: "It is needless to dwell on the poetic beauty, the chivalrous loyalty, the tender

love—which characterizes this most pathetic of funeral odes. Saul had fallen with all his sins upon his head, fallen in the bitterness of despair, and, as it might have seemed to mortal eye, under the shadow of the curse of God. But not only is there in David's lament, no revengeful feeling at the death of his persecutor, . .. but he dwells with unmixed love on the brighter recollections of the departed. He speaks only of the Saul of earlier times, the mighty conqueror, the delight of his people, the father of his beloved and faithful friend; like him in life, united with him in death. Such expressions . . . may fairly be taken as justifying the irrepressible instinct of humanity which compels us to dwell on the best qualities of those who have just departed." For many years David had been waiting to become king. He had waited very patiently and had made no effort to hasten the Providence of God. Now Saul was dead, and David knew that the kingdom was to be his. Still he shows the most obedient and patient spirit, not taking even a single step until he had inquired of God concerning his duty. We get a good lesson here. We should always wait for God, never hurrying His Providences. We should ask for guidance continually, not entering upon any course until we have sought the Divine direction. There is a Bible word which counsels us to acknowledge the Lord in all our ways, promising that if we do this—that He will direct our paths. We should move reverently through this world, praying continually, "Show me the way." In even the smallest matters, we ought to seek to learn God's will, and then we shall be sure of blessing. The Lord commanded David to go up to Judah—and with his family, he went to Hebron. "And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah." It takes a long while to make a good man. It is interesting to think of the training of men for important positions. The making of Peter or John or Paul occupied a long while, and the process was by no means easy. It is especially interesting in this connection to think of the making of David. God was a long time in preparing him to be king. He was anointed by Samuel, and thus set apart for his office when only a shepherd lad. He was not then fit to be a king. He knew something about taking care of sheep—but nothing about governing men. It was necessary that he should be trained. Soon came the challenge of Goliath, when David showed his skill and courage. Then he was taken into Saul's court, where he learned much about men and the ways of kings. The friendship of Jonathan brought a new experience into David's life, an experience which proved most enriching. The envy of Saul seemed a bitter and cruel thing to break into such a happy career as David's. It seemed to set him back in his preparation and to block his way to success. But no doubt this, too, had its place in his training. It taught him many lessons. He learned from it patience in enduring wrong and injustice. He learned self-control, one of the most important lessons anyone can learn, for if one cannot control his own spirit—he cannot be a leader of men, nor can he ever make the most of his own life. Saul's bitter enmity drove David away from luxury and refinement, where his experiences were rough and hard. He hid in caves and on the mountains. He learned how the common people lived, and was taught sympathy with men in their hardships and trials. No doubt, David was a better king afterwards, because of his long years of persecution and exile. He learned also the art of war through his experiences during this troublous period. Living constantly in danger, he was trained to watchfulness and alertness. He became wise and tactful also in dealing with men, and was thus fitted for the place he afterwards filled as king of a great nation. In all this and in other ways—was David trained and prepared for his duties as king. Then, at last, God called him to the throne.

We must not think it strange if we are called to endure trials, disappointments, hardships, temptations and sufferings in our earlier years—for it is in this way that God would train us for

noble character and for large usefulness. The life that is all ease and luxury, with no hardness, no strain or struggle, no trial of endurance, no wrong or injustice, may be the most pleasant—but it is not being most effectively trained for beneficent service. A deed of heroism and loyalty stirs the people to patriotic admiration wherever it is wrought. Evidently the people were proud of what the men of Jabesh-gilead had done. David was not long in hearing of it. "They told David, saying, The men of Jabesh-gilead buried Saul." We have already learned that when the Philistines found the bodies of Saul and his sons on the battlefield of Mount Gilboa they carried them away and hung them on the wall of the town of Beth-shan, exposing them to public gaze. This was their way of exulting over their victory.

Jabesh-gilead was a town east of the Jordan, which Saul had once helped in time of trouble, delivering them from cruel enemies. The people remembered this old-time kindness, and now, when they heard that the bodies of the king and his sons were exposed in such an inhuman way, they determined to rescue them from this dishonor. Accordingly, they entered the enemy's lines, and removing the bodies from the wall, took them away and burnt them to save them from further indignity and dishonor, and buried the ashes under a tree. We should keep ever warm in our hearts the memory of kindnesses, and never should fail of gratitude to those who have done deeds of love for us. It would make this a sweeter, happier world—if all men were ever mindful of the kindnesses they have received from others. When David learned of the kindness that the people of Jabesh-gilead had shown to the bodies of Saul and Jonathan, he was very glad. So he sent messengers to say to them, "May the LORD bless you for being so loyal to your king and giving him a decent burial." This praise of the people of Jabesh-gilead showed a noble spirit in David. We must remember how Saul had treated him, trying to kill him, hunting him among the hills as if he had been a wild beast, driving him from the country, and compelling him for seven years to live as an exile. Yet through all these years, David had never shown any resentment towards Saul. He had never once retaliated nor sought in any way to do harm to Saul. Twice, at least, he had spared the king's life, refusing to injure him when Saul was in his power. Through all his bitter experience, David's heart remained gentle, free from resentment or bitterness. Now, when he learned of the honor which had been shown by the people of Jabesh-gilead to Saul's dead body, his heart was glad, and he was deeply grateful, as if the kindness had been shown to his own father.

All this is evidence of a noble and magnanimous spirit in David. It is the very spirit which Jesus a thousand years later commended as that which belongs to the kingdom of heaven. The problem of true living—is to keep the heart always sweet, whatever the circumstances and experiences of life may be. We all need to cultivate generosity and large-heartedness. Nothing reveals finer nobleness of character than such a spirit shown to one who in his life had been a bitter and relentless enemy. Yet it is not natural to endure wrong without resentment, to return love for hate, kindness for unkindness. Only those whose hearts are under the influence of Divine grace are capable of such love.

"And now that Saul is dead, I ask you to be my strong and valiant subjects like the people of Judah, who have anointed me as their new king." Thus David took the opportunity to say a word of cheer to the men who had proved themselves so loyal to their king, exhorting them also to continue to be brave and strong for their country. That was good counsel to give to the people of Jabesh-gilead. It is good counsel to give to the young men today, for courage is one of the finest

qualities in true manhood. Thomas Hughes puts it down as the first element of a manly character. Neither do we need to wait for war to give us opportunities to be valiant and courageous. There is a higher courage than that which shows itself in brave deeds on the battlefield. It takes courage to be true—amid the world's many temptations to be false. It requires courage to do what is right—when all the people about us are doing things that are wrong.

It requires courage to confess Christ before the world. It is not hard to rise up in a company of Christian people and be received into their number as a church member. All about the young confessor, then, are those who are in full sympathy with him—his friends, and other Christians who love him and are ready to help him, to cheer and encourage him and stand by him in all his life. The hardest test, however, in confessing Christ is out in the world, where sympathy is lacking, when upon every side are those who have no care for spiritual things, and often are openly hostile to the religion which they represent.

We all need to have our hands strengthened continually, even for common life and service—but much more for duty and faithfulness in the face of opposition and enmity. When human encouragement is lacking, we are sure that God will stand by us and make our hands strong by His own strength. We are set to fight the battles of the Lord. We have victories to win against evil, against wrong. It takes courage to be a true man, a true woman, in this world. But God will help us if we trust Him and lean upon Him in all our weakness and need.

David did not find an unobstructed way to the throne. Saul was dead—but there were those who were not willing that his dynasty should perish with him. Abner was the captain of Saul's army, and, besides, was a relative of the king's. After the fatal battle on Mount Gilboa, Abner took Ishbosheth, and under military power made him Saul's successor. "Meanwhile, Abner son of Ner, the commander of Saul's army, had taken Ish-Bosheth son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim. He made him king over Gilead, Ashuri and Jezreel, and also over Ephraim, Benjamin and all Israel." In a sense the crown belonged to Ish-Bosheth. He was the natural heir to the throne. If Saul had been a good king, the throne would have continued in the family. Thus we see how Saul wronged his own children by his unfaithfulness to God.

Every parent has a large responsibility for the good, the success and the honor of his children. He should pass down to them the privileges and blessings which he himself has enjoyed. If he fails to do this—he has sinned against them. It was not God's plan that Ish-Bosheth should be king, since, on account of Saul's disobedience, the kingdom was taken from him and given to David. It was the ambition of Abner, the general of Saul's army, that sought the promotion of Ish-Bosheth against the Divine will. He was fighting against God in trying to continue the house of Saul. The true King in this world, the only one who rules by Divine right, is Jesus Christ. All who reject His sway are in rebellion against God. All who try to advance any other one over Christ are resisting the Divine government and sway. We must bow to the Messiah and own Him as our Master and our Lord!

David Brings up the Ark 2 Samuel 6; 1 Chronicles 13 The continuance of Ish-Bosheth's reign was brief. It had no moral strength from the beginning, and was kept in existence only by the ambition of Abner. The story of the short years is one of battles, quarrels and assassinations. At length Ish-Bosheth was murdered, and then the tribes over which he had reigned came to David and desired him to be their king. So the kingdom was again consolidated. David had reigned over Judah only seven and a half years; now he became king of all Israel. Jerusalem then was made

David’s capital. Until now this stronghold had remained in the hands of the Jebusites, although it had been attacked and partly captured before. At length David gained full possession of the noted citadel and made his home in it.

David prospered greatly. Hiram, King of Tyre, was friendly with him, and the two kings exchanged courtesies and favors. David won a great victory over the ancient enemies of his people, the Philistines. Thus he was established in his kingdom. His fame went out into all the lands, and the Lord brought the fear of him upon all nations. When David came to the throne, he found the religious life of the kingdom in a discouraging condition. For a long time the sacred ark, the symbol of the Divine Presence, had been lying in obscurity in a private house. Those were dark and calamitous days for the nation. Disaster followed disaster. The neglect of true religion always brings trouble. We may see it in a smaller way in a home where there was once a family altar—but where the altar is broken down, where the family gathers no more to worship God, where the voice of prayer is no longer heard. The members of the household scatter away in the morning without kneeling to commit themselves to God’s keeping for the day, and in the evening they gather home to rest again, seeking not the Divine blessing for the night. There is many a home of which this is a picture. The world has come in—and Christ has been driven out!

After David had become king of the whole nation and had fixed his capital in Jerusalem, he called the chief men of the tribes and went to bring up the ark. He had already done many things to elevate the character and the standing of the nation. He had built a capital city and a palace of cedar for himself, and had instituted many reforms. Prosperity was coming, and all was hopeful. But something was yet lacking. Something is always lacking when God is left out. An artist had invited a few friends to his studio for the first look at a new painting. The picture was beautiful—but all who saw it felt that something was lacking. There seemed to be a vagueness, an indefiniteness, a mistiness, something lacking. The artist himself saw the defect, and taking his brush, he put a touch of red upon the canvas. This changed everything. So it is when God is left out of anything in life. With the largest prosperity and the best material comforts, there is still a lack. What is needed is a line of red in the picture, the bringing of Christ with His Cross into the life of the individual, of the home, of the church, of the nation. The best blessing anyone can give to a land or to a community, is to set up God’s altar in its midst. Nothing else that David wrought for Israel in those days did so much for his people—as his re-establishing of God’s worship among them.

There is nothing else we can do for a place which is suffering from the waste and ruin of sin, which will mean so much for it—as to set up there the worship of the true God. Here is a community sunk in degradation. The people are idle and thriftless, without lofty ideals, without interest in each other, steeped in sensuality. One way of trying to lift them up would be to build them better houses and to put into their lives the refinements of civilization. Something may thus be done for their improvement in temporal things. But the best way to help them, would be to bring the gospel of Christ into their midst, to start a Sunday-school, a preaching service, to send the Christian missionary into their homes. The ark had been at Kiriath-jearim for a long time, ever since its return from the land of the Philistines. David desired now to establish true religion in his kingdom, and planned to bring the ark to his capital. He prepared for this event with great enthusiasm. All the chosen men of Israel were gathered together. He consulted with his leading men. "Let us send abroad everywhere unto our brethren, . . . and let us bring again the ark of our God to us—for we sought not unto it in the days of Saul." The king had prepared for a very joyful time in bringing up

the ark. He meant it to be a great occasion. He led the procession in person. Thirty thousand men of rank were present to take part in the ceremony. There were great choirs of singers, with musical instruments accompanying them. It was a grand day. It opened in splendor—but it closed in sorrow and bitter disappointment. The reason was, that God can be honored only by obedience, and this was lacking in the moving of the ark. The Lord cared nothing for David's brilliant pageant—so long as the Divine commandments were not regarded. The whole business that day seems to have been done in a negligent way. The law required that the ark should be carried by Levites—but instead of this it was put upon a cart that was drawn by animals. The religious ceremonials prescribed had so fallen into disuse, that the Divine instructions seem to have been entirely overlooked. The carrying of the ark on a cart may have been regarded as a very small deviation from the prescribed way—but it was a deviation, nevertheless, and in God's sight marred all the great ceremony. We must worship and serve God—only in the way He has marked out for us, otherwise our costliest services and our most imposing ceremonies will be only an idle show in His eyes. We may do our right things in such a wrong way—as to mar all the beauty of our acts by not doing them as God commands us to do them.

Uzzah was probably a Levite, and ought to have known the instructions concerning the care of the sacred ark and the manner of carrying it. The Levites were to bear it on their shoulders—but they might not come near it until it had been covered by the priests, nor touch it—except with the staves provided for carrying it. The ark had been under Uzzah's care—perhaps he had come to treat it familiarly. "But when they arrived at the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen stumbled, and Uzzah put out his hand to steady the Ark of God. Then the LORD's anger blazed out against Uzzah for doing this, and God struck him dead beside the Ark of God!"

It was a natural thing for Uzzah to do. The road was rough, and it seemed as if the ark would fall off the cart. Uzzah instinctively and impulsively put out his hand to steady it. If the Levites had been carrying the ark—the only proper way—Uzzah could not have committed this sin. One irreverence prepares the way for another—almost makes another necessary. The breaking of one commandment, leads to the breaking of others. The first sin is like the little leak in the dam, which grows until it becomes a flood. If we would be safe from the final ruin, we must guard, against the smallest beginning of evil.

David was greatly affected by the occurrence. At first he was angry because of the interruption of the ceremonies. The record says that "David was angry because the LORD's anger had blazed out against Uzzah." His second thought seems to have been one of awe and fear—that if the ark was such a holy thing, it was too terrible to have it near him. He does not appear to have thought of the sin which had been committed. Instead of penitence and sorrow, he showed wounded pride. He abandoned at once the taking of the ark to Jerusalem. He left it where it was and hurried away home.

We never should blame God—when we have been punished for our sins. We should not question His justice or love—in any of His dealings with us. We should accept punishment at His hand with humility and contrition, seeking to learn wherein we have sinned—that we may no more displease Him. Then, we need never be afraid of God's holiness, nor reject any ordinance He has appointed, because of the evil it may bring upon us to use it irreverently. Sometimes good people stay away from the communion, dreading that it may bring condemnation and not blessing upon them. But no

ordinance of God will ever bring hurt to those who receive it in humility and reverence. Instead of declining to take the Holy Supper lest we may not receive it worthily, we should come to it with penitence, repentance, faith and love—for then we will find in it only blessing and joy.

"The Ark of the LORD remained there with the family of Obed-edom for three months, and the LORD blessed him and his entire household." David would not take the ark to Jerusalem, as he had set out to do, and it was left in the house of Obed-edom. For the three months it remained there, special Divine favor came upon the man who sheltered it. It was the same ark which had wrought such disaster when irreverently touched—that now brought blessing to a home in which it was received in meekness and love. Obed-edom was not afraid to have the ark taken inside his door, and the result was good and not evil upon his household. This incident suggests to us, the blessings of true religion in a home. Some people think religion is a hindrance to happiness. It stops some pleasures. It drives out some amusements. It interferes with some ambitions. But those who open their doors to Christ, the rejected and despised One, will always be rewarded. True religion in a home, blesses it. It sweetens the home life, enriches the home affections, deepens the home joys, lightens and comforts the home sorrows. It brings true prosperity, for the blessing of the Lord makes rich. It brings protection, for the angel of the Lord encamps round about those who fear Him. It brings comfort when sorrow has entered the home.

Heathen religions have no hope, no solace, no consolation, in time of bereavement—but Christianity lights the lamps of heaven in the gloom. When the home is broken up, true religion gives assurance of a meeting beyond the grave, and reunion where there will be no separation forever. We should have the ark of God in our homes, whatever else we may not have in them.

Word came to David in due time, that no calamity had come to the home in which the ark had been left—but that, instead, the Divine favor had been visited upon it. The king was surprised to hear this. He probably expected to hear of trouble brought to the family, like that which had stricken down Uzzah on the way. But, on the other hand, it soon became evident that Obed-edom was being greatly blessed.

Then David began to see that the trouble that day had not been with the ark—but with himself and the people. So his heart turned again to his former purpose. He would bring the ark to the capital. Then the procession which began one day and ended in calamity—was finished another day, not many months later, in the midst of great rejoicing. So blessing came to the whole people—as the ark of God was brought into the Holy City.

God’s Covenant with David

2 Samuel 7:1-16 The ark was in its place, and the worship of the Lord had begun. David had prospered greatly. He was living now in a palace of cedar. One day the king was sitting in his beautiful home, enjoying its comforts and luxuries, when suddenly he thought of God’s House on the hill. David was startled when he thought of the contrast between his own fine palace—and the weather-beaten tent which was the home of the ark.

Nathan, the prophet, came in, and David told him that he was going to build a palace for God. Nathan himself approved the king’s thought. "Go, do all that is in your heart; for the Lord is with you." But that night Nathan was bidden to tell David that he should not build a house for God. There are several things to be noticed in this incident.

One is that the Lord does not reprove David for his desire to build a temple for Him. It was an honorable desire. We should not make our own houses beautiful and luxurious—and then let our churches be cheap and dilapidated. Five hundred years later the Lord rebuked the people through the prophet Haggai—for living in fine houses and letting His House lie waste.

Elsewhere we learn that God said distinctly to David concerning his desire: "Whereas it was in your heart to build a house for My name, you did well that it was in your heart." God approves of good intentions, even when He does not permit us to carry them out. This ought to be a cheering and encouraging thought to those whose plans God interrupts and sets aside. He is satisfied sometimes with the intention. If we are desirous of doing for God some service which, however good, it is not His will that we should do—He is pleased with our wish to honor and serve Him, though He declines the offer. We are better, too, for the desire. Every lofty wish lifts us nearer to heaven for the time.

There are other important suggestions in the refusal of the Lord to have David build the temple. One is that everyone has his own particular and definite part to do in the Lord's work. David was not to build the temple—that was Solomon's mission; but David had other things to do which were equally important. He had to fight the battles of the nation and subdue the strongholds. Then, he had another work to do far greater than the building of the temple. Part of his mission was to be a hymn-writer for the Old Testament Church. The influence of his songs in all ages, has been most wonderful, and is going on yet, extending and deepening wherever the Bible goes. His mission was great enough, though he was not permitted to erect the temple. Solomon built the temple—but he never could have written David's Psalms. To every man his work.

There are things you cannot do. You have no skill for them. You see some other one do these things brilliantly, and you are grieved because you cannot do them. But they are not part of your work. There are certain things which you can do better than any other person in the world could do them. We need not vex ourselves because we cannot do everything. It never was God's intention that we should be able to carry the whole range of tasks and duties. David could write the Twenty-third Psalm—and Solomon could build a splendid temple.

Another thought here, is that it is the part of some to plan and prepare, while others carry out the plans and complete the work. The temple was born in David's heart; it was one of his thoughts. Then he made costly preparations for it. He bought the site for the great building. He gathered gold and silver in vast abundance and stored them away for the work. Solomon, when he came, had little to do—but to build the house; the materials were ready to his hand. Thus David's part in the temple was, after all, very large.

We are apt to undervalue preparatory work. It is like the foundation of a house. It is buried away, and no one sees it nor admires it. Yet we know that there can be no house for men to admire and praise—unless there is first a foundation strong and secure, laid deep in the earth and covered up. It is the part of many people, to do only preparatory work. Others complete the building and get the glory, while the foundation builders are forgotten. The same thing goes on continually. One sows—and another reaps. One man gathers a church, another organises and builds it up. To each one his work. We should learn to be content with our own particular work, that which has been allotted to us, and not vex ourselves because we cannot have given to us the work of some other.

It is interesting to think of the kind of temples God really wants us to prepare for Him. He has never blamed us for not building houses of cedar for Him to live in. He does not care for houses of wood, even the finest. He dwells in heaven's glory, and no earthly building can ever be worthy of Him. It is right to erect churches in which we may assemble for God's worship—but God does not really dwell in these. He meets with His people there, when they gather to call upon His name—but He does not live in any earthly structure—whether the plain meeting-house, or splendid cathedral. "This is what the LORD says: Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me?"

God tells us that He has two homes—one in heaven and the other in certain people's hearts. "For this is what the high and lofty One says— he who lives forever, whose name is holy: I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite." We need not trouble ourselves to build houses of cedar for God—but we ought to make our hearts such places as He will choose for His abode.

"This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel." God reminds David of His thought and care for him through all his days. Our lives are plans of God. It will be interesting to the boys—to remember that God thought about David when he was only a boy, that He chose him to be king of Israel when he was only a shepherd lad. God is always watching the boys in their work and in their play, looking among them for men to fill important places in life. If a boy would be called to one of God's high stations and entrusted with a great mission when he is older, he must begin well and be diligent when he is young.

God saw in David, out there in the fields, abilities and habits which he knew would make him a good king when the throne was ready for him. If David had been indolent, negligent, self-indulgent, unfaithful or unkind as a shepherd, he would never have been chosen to be the king of God's people. A boy who was not a good shepherd—would not make a good king. The boy who is a good cash boy or office boy or messenger, or who shows promptness, good sense and fidelity on a farm, in a store, or in lowly duties anywhere else—God will put down for something greater by-and-by. God's eye is ever upon us—to discover whether He may entrust some great task to us.

God is always an encourager. He speaks to David now as if He knows his disappointment in not being permitted to build a temple, and He gives him cheer. David would not build a house for God—but God would build a house for him. This would be a greater honor than the building of a temple would have been. He would be the founder of a line of kings which would have no end. His throne would be established forever. David did not understand it—it was too glorious to be understood then—but the Divine promise included the Messiah and all the glorious blessings which have come from the Messiah— Christianity and all its wonderful triumphs.

We ask for some common earthly thing. God does not give it to us—but he says: "You shall have this in place of it." Then He gives us a spiritual favor, which includes all heaven's glories! We may safely leave in God's hands—the form of the answer to our prayers. He will always do for us what is best. Many times when we ask only for bits of tinsel, He gives us heaven's gold and jewels instead!

God’s plans go on beyond the measure of any little life. David would soon pass away from earth, and he would see no temple built for God. But a son would be born to him who would build a house for the honor of God. Men pass away—but God’s work goes on. One falls with his plans unfulfilled and his hands full of work; but another is raised up to perform the unaccomplished tasks. The succession never is broken in God’s ministry. He has one great plan, which embraces all His servants from the beginning to the end. Our plans may be set aside—but it is because God has a work which is better. Nothing will fail if we each do but our own little part; another will be ready to begin where we leave off.

We live on in our children. If they are faithful to their responsibility, they carry on the work their fathers have begun. In Solomon, David’s house and kingdom should be continued and then made sure forever. As men read history, this promise was not fulfilled. David’s personal throne was not established forever. No one can find it now. Antiquarians are searching amid the ruins of centuries for the landmarks of David’s and Solomon’s reigns—but no throne is in Jerusalem today, nor has there been a throne there for ages. But Bible lovers know well that the promise has in reality been gloriously fulfilled. It did not refer alone to an earthly succession. Christ was the "seed" promised in its full and final meaning. His was the "kingdom," and His the "throne" that should be "established forever." So the line fulfillment passed from earth up to heaven. Christ came of the seed of David, and the throne which we would search for in vain in the city of David stands amid the glories of heaven, and all the redeemed worship and bow down before it.

David and Absalom 2 Samuel 15:1-12; 2 Samuel 18:24-33 The narrative of the rebellion of Absalom is one of the saddest stories in the Bible. The flight of David from his home, driven away by the rebellion of an ungrateful son, is most pathetic. The sin of Absalom stands in blackness, almost next to the treason of Judas Iscariot.

"In the course of time, Absalom provided himself with a chariot and horses and with fifty men to run ahead of him," and thus sought to make an impression upon the people and attract attention. The display he made was also intended to reflect upon his father’s plainness. David was too old-fashioned; Absalom would show the people what real royalty was like. He was a dashing young prince. There are many young men, not princes of the blood, walking in the same way. They look upon their father’s plain, quiet ways—as entirely behind the age. The old man is too slow, and does not know much about the world.

Most people who study this lesson will think of someone who fills out the picture of Absalom. Possibly it is yourself. If so, you must not fail to read the story to the end. These splendid horses and chariots generally drive to about the same place.

Absalom rose early those days. Early rising is a good thing when one rises to begin a day of beautiful living and good to others. But when one rises early to do mischief and make trouble, to sow the seeds of sorrow—one would better stay in bed all day. Absalom rose early to do harm, to ply his art of treason, to poison the people’s minds towards his father. Early rising for such purposes is not to be commended.

"Your claims are valid and proper," said the false-hearted prince, "but there is no representative of the king to hear you." Sympathy is a good thing—when it is sincere. One can do no sweeter Christian work, than to go among those who are overburdened and those who are suffering,

speaking cheering and strengthening words to them. To take by the hand someone who is down, one who has fallen in some misfortune, and be a brother to him, helping him to rise—is a splendid thing to do. But such sympathizing as we see in Absalom is anything but Christlike. He only pretended to be the people's friend—that he might get their confidence, and then use them in his wicked plot to seize his father's throne! It was the flatterer's base art, not the friend's, that he used.

"Oh that I were made judge," he said, "that every man who has any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!" He poisoned the minds of the people towards David, by making them think that their king was neglectful, and that they were suffering wrong and injustice through his neglect. Then he suggested how different matters would be if he were judge in his father's place. Absalom cared nothing for the people's real or imaginary wrongs. He had no true sympathy with them. He was the worst kind of a demagogue. He thought only of destroying the people's confidence in David, and winning them to himself.

There always are people, alas! who think of no way of getting up—but by pulling others down! It is easy for any of us, by careless words, even unintentionally, to disparage others by indirectly suggesting how much better we would perform these duties—if they were ours. It requires a noble heart and most watchful care, to be always loyal to others.

"So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." When we see a young man rising in the world, we have a right to know by what means he is rising—before we can admire his success and approve it. Is he getting up honestly—or dishonestly? Is his prosperity fairly and legitimately won—or is it won by treachery, by deceit and falsehood? For such advancement as Absalom's, is as a palace built on sand. Before any man follows Absalom's example, he would better ask what became of Absalom's fine palace in the end. On this matter of stealing hearts—we should linger also a little. To steal is to take something which is another's, to which we have no right. We have a right to make friends—but not to steal hearts. We steal a heart when we get a person to be our friend—by influencing him against another person, and making him think we will be a better friend to him than the other. We have no right to interfere with the friendships of others—to get people to love us. We need to guard against doing anything dishonorable, to win friends.

"Absalom said unto the king, I pray you, let me go and pay my vow." He stole the people's hearts and induced them to care for him more than his father. Then he stole the garb of heaven to hide his vile treachery! He must get away from Jerusalem to sound the signal of revolt, and the best way to get off would be on a religious errand. He easily fabricated such an errand. He said he had made a vow when he was in exile—would his father permit him now to go and pay that vow? He knew this would please his father. David would think that Absalom was growing penitent, and that soon he would be a better man. There is nothing baser possible in this world—than such a use of the name of religion.

"With Absalom went two hundred men ... in their simplicity." Absalom had attached these men to himself, no doubt, by flatteries and favors. Now he invites them to go "with him to Hebron, and to be present at the princely feast he would there give. It was a high honor. The men were complimented by the invitation. All Jerusalem would envy them. They had no thought of Absalom's real design, and yet, without intending it, they seemed to enter with him into the rebellion. This is an illustration of the way in which men still try to lead others into evil. They cover up their real object, and under the profession of friendship, draw the innocent and unsuspecting into their

schemes. When the true nature of their design is disclosed, it is too late to withdraw. Compliments from bad men or women should be accepted charily, for ofttimes they have some evil design behind them. We ought never to allow ourselves to be led blindfolded into any wicked scheme. We need to be ever on our guard against designing people—plausible flatterers, professing friendship—but insincere in their profession. The story of Absalom's plot is told in much detail. David seems to have been utterly unmanned when he was told of his son's treachery. He lost his courage. He arose at once and fled. There is none of the old-time heroism in his conduct. Each incident in the flight is described. "All the country wept with a loud voice." The route of the fleeing king was over the Kedron, the same path over which a thousand years later, David's greater Son passed on the night of his betrayal. The priests and the Levites came with the ark—but David bade them to return to Jerusalem. "David walked up the road that led to the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went. His head was covered and his feet were bare as a sign of mourning. And the people who were with him covered their heads and wept as they climbed the mountain." The story of those terrible days is most pathetic. At length David reached Mahanaim, over the Jordan, and preparation was made for resistance. The army was organized and the day of battle came. David would have gone to the field—but his officers did not allow him to imperil his life. "David was sitting between the two gates." Never did a ruler watch more anxiously for news from a battlefield, than David watched that day. It was not only his kingdom that was imperiled—the fact that the rebel leader was his own son, terribly complicated the issue. Either defeat or victory—would bring anguish to his heart.

Children who go away in sin, never know with what bitterness loving parents at home think of their evil courses. There are parents who pace the floor many long nights, and look out at their windows into the streets, watching for the return of those who are dearer to them than their own life. If children knew how they crush the hearts of devoted fathers and mothers by going into sin—they would never choose such a life!

All David could do that day, was to sit between the gates and wait and watch. He could put forth no hand to save his son. He could only sit there in utter powerlessness and wait for the tragedy which would end the sad story. Years ago he might have prevented this terrible catastrophe—but now it was too late. At length a messenger came. The king said: "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" The king was lost in the father. David's interest in the safety of the country—was swallowed up in his anxiety for the fate of his rebel son. He heard of the victory of his army—but that availed him nothing, unless he knew that Absalom was safe.

There is a story of a mother, hearing of the coming of a messenger from the battlefield. The woman hastened out into the street to ask him what news he bore. With gentle words, so as not to add to her sorrow, the messenger said: "Your five sons are dead." With a look of withering scorn, she replied, crushing down in her heart her own personal grief: "I did not ask you of the welfare of my sons. I asked if the country is safe." Patriotic feeling was stronger in her—than parental love. In David it was the reverse. Yet there were reasons in David's case for this difference. His son's name was dishonored, and, besides, David knew that Absalom's ruin was, in part at least, his work. This added to his bitterness. The one question that persisted that day on the king's lips was: "Is it well with the young man?" We may put other names in the place of Absalom's, and ask the question concerning young men we know: "Is it well with the young man?" It is never well with the young man—if he is living sinfully, if he is not following Christ. This is a world of danger. Every

young man must meet countless perils!

Storms sweep the sea and the wrecks go down, bearing noble lives beneath the waves, and there is sorrow in the homes when the missing ones come not. The battle rages and many a brave soldier falls to rise no more, and there is grief in the homes where the cruel blow strikes. But there are fiercer storms raging than those upon the sea! Our noblest young men are exposed to these. There are more terrific battles than those history records.

"Is it well with the young man?" We mourn for those whom death claims; should we not mourn for our living, when we remember to what perils they are exposed?

They tried to have the news broken gently to the king. The first messenger, Ahimaaz, told the story so timidly that the king seems not to have grasped the worst. Then came the blunt Cushite and told all with terrible plainness. "My lord the king, hear the good news! The LORD has delivered you today from all who rose up against you." The king asked the Cushite, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" The Cushite replied, "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man." The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!" 2 Samuel 18:31-33

We see in this picture of the weeping king a glimpse of the father’s heart. Some might say that long before this, David would have ceased to love such a son as Absalom had been, and would not have been so affected by his death. But no one who knows a parent’s heart will say this. This intense love which had loved on through such a history of crime as had darkened Absalom’s name—is the same kind of love that all true fathers and mothers have for their children. It never unclasps its arms. It loves unto the uttermost.

David’s love also gives us a glimpse of God’s love for His children. Even their worst sins—do not change His love. In David’s grief over his lost child, we see how our Heavenly Father feels when His children go astray. Christ weeping over Jerusalem shows this phase of Divine experience. He wept because the people He loved and had come to save—had rejected Him and His love and refused His mercy.

"O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!" No doubt David would gladly have died for Absalom, as he said. In a burning mine, when there was room for no more in the car that was starting up on its last trip, one brave lad stepped off and gave his place to another lad, saying: "He is not ready to die—and I am." David would have taken Absalom’s place for the same reason—but it was impossible. If David had lived for Absalom more faithfully, when his son was younger—he might never have had this terrible sorrow to bear. The time for parents to show their love for their children most effectively, is when they have them in their hands in tender youth, and not when they are dead! No doubt the bitterest element of David’s grief, was the thought that if he had lived differently himself—this might never have happened.

There is a story of an old ship-wrecker whose son had long been a wanderer on the sea. One night the father set his false lights on the coast, and a ship came ashore on the rocks. As the old man went along the beach, gathering up the booty, he came upon the body of a sailor washed up by the waves. One glance told him it was his own long-lost son. It was his son’s ship coming

home—that the wrecker had lured upon the rocks! His anguish was indescribable. Some such feeling must have been David’s in his pathetic grief that day. In our sympathy with David in his grief, we must not lose the lessons from Absalom himself. He had splendid gifts and opportunities—but he threw them all away! He gave loose rein to his passions, and was carried headlong into ruin. He was a type of what are called "fast young men." We need only to study Absalom’s story through to the end—to see the outcome of all such lives!

3. Volume 3

Volume 3

Volume 3 Gleanings from the PSALMS

PREFACE

The Book of Psalms is wonderfully rich in devotional matter. It would be easy to extend the one volume to many. The few readings that are given, are without critical notes of any kind and are altogether of a practical and devotional nature. They are given in the hope that they may help in the enrichment of the spiritual life of those who shall read them.

The Way of the Righteous

Psalm 1

The King in Zion

Psalm 2

Living up to Our Prayers

Psalm 5:3

Show Me the Path

Psalm 16:11

God’s Works and Word

Psalm 19:1, 2, 14

The Way of Safety

Psalm 19:12-13

The Shepherd Psalm

Psalm 23:1-6

Into Your Hands

Psalm 31:5

Refuge from the Hurt of Tongues

Psalm 31:19-20

David’s Joy over Forgiveness

Psalm 32:1-2

Under God’s Wings

Psalm 36:7

The Desires of Your Heart

Psalm 37:4

Waiting for God

Psalm 37:7

The Living God

Psalm 42:2

David’s Confession

Psalm 51:1-2

Blessing from Life’s Changes

Psalm 55:19

Awake Up, My Glory

Psalm 57:7, 8

Messiah’s Reign

Psalm 72:1-2

Delight in God’s House

Psalm 84:1-2

The Home of the Soul

Psalm 90:1

Numbering Our Days

Psalm 90:12

Sowing Seeds of Light

Psalm 97:11

A Call to Praise

Psalm 103:1

Forgetting His Benefits

Psalm 103:2

Speak out Your Message

Psalm 107:2

The Dew of Your Youth

Psalm 110:3

The Rejected Stone

Psalm 118:22-23

Looking unto the Mountains

Psalm 121:1-2

Joy in God’s House

Psalm 122:1-2

God’s Thinking of Us

Psalm 139:17-18

Looking One’s Soul in the Face

Psalm 139:23-24

A Morning Prayer

Psalm 143:8-11

The God of Those Who Fail

Psalms 145:14 The Way of the Righteous

Psalm 1

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."

Marvin Vincent has written a delightful book on certain of the Psalms, which he has happily called "Gates into the Psalm Country." It is pleasant to notice that the gate into the whole Psalm country, the very first word in the Book of Psalms, is the word "Blessed." All who enter this wonderful enclosure are blessed. It is interesting to note also that our Lord’s first sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, begins with the same word "Blessed"—the gate into the Gospel country. This country is the kingdom of heaven, the Father’s house, and it abounds with blessings for all who come into it. The "Blesseds" of the Bible shine as thickly on its pages, as stars shine in the sky. A most interesting and profitable Bible study is to go through the Scriptures to find the passages which tell who are the "blessed" ones. It is pleasant to remember that the last glimpse this world had of Jesus—that

He was in the attitude of blessing. He had His hands stretched out over His disciples on ascension day, blessing them, when He began to ascend. Ever since that moment, blessings have been raining down from those pierced hands upon a sorrowing earth! The "Blessed" of the first Psalm belongs to the godly man. In what his blessedness consists, we are told in several particulars.

First, we learn what kind of man he is NOT: "Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful." It is well for us to know the things we ought not to do. The Decalogue consists chiefly of "You shall nots." The three clauses of this verse stand like three angels at the entrance of paths that lead to danger, to turn us from them. The Bible "Do nots" and "Shall nots" are all friendly. If they prohibit certain things—it is because those things are not good for us, and would harm us.

Druggists write "Poison!" on bottles and packages which contain substances or mixtures which it would do us injury to use. God takes care to warn us of things that would hurt us. He says, "There is death in that!" "There is sorrow in this!" "This path leads to ruin!" We are wise if we always pay most careful heed to these divine warnings. We are very foolish if we disregard them, saying, "I am not afraid," and then press on in the way of peril.

It is interesting to notice the progression in sin indicated in the three clauses of this verse. First, a man walks in the counsel of the wicked, then soon you see him standing in the way of sinners, and a little later he is sitting among those who scoff—open sinners.

There is another progress in the words "counsel," "way," "seat". And there is still a third progression in the words "wicked," "sinners," "scornful." The beginnings of evil-doing are usually small. A man follows some wrong counsel first. He does things he knows to be contrary to God’s will. Later he is standing where evil men gather. Still later he is seen taking his seat in the company of the openly profane, and associating with them. First, he listens to bad advice; next, he goes in bad ways; third, he is in bad company—gone clean over to the enemy! The place to shut the gates of evil—is at the entrance. The only true safety is in avoiding the beginnings. It is hard to stop—when one has started. Every time we repeat some evil thing, it becomes easier to do it again, and still easier with each repetition, until a habit is formed, until the evil has wrought itself into the life and becomes ingrained, a part of it. Good habits are formed in the same way. Do beautiful things, and they will fashion themselves into a beautiful character. Not doing evil things—is one way to be godly. But negatives are not enough. One may be free from vices—and yet not be godly. Not sowing tares may keep the ground from being infested with weeds—but it will not fill the field with wheat. Not speaking angry words may keep our language free from bitterness, falsehood, impurity—but silences are not enough. We must keep out the weeds—and then plant our garden with flowers. We must cease to do evil—and then learn to do good. We must refrain from angry and all wrong words—and then fill our speech with gentleness, kindness, and cheering words. We must be godly, in an active way. The second verse gives one strong characteristic of the man who is blessed: "But his delight is in the Law of the LORD, and on His Law he meditates day and night." Psalms 1:2

It is not said merely that he obeys the Law of the Lord—but that his delight is in it. He loves to obey it and to meditate upon it. We get a lesson here on the right study of the Bible. Do we love it? Do we delight in reading it? Do we meditate upon it day and night?

Meditation is well-near a lost art. We do not take time to think, to ponder great thoughts. We would rather read newspapers, than meditate in silence on God’s Word. It would be a good thing for us to be alone for a season every day, without a book or newspaper in our hands, quietly pondering some portion of the Word of God. This is the kind of Bible study that blesses the life. A perfumer bought a common earthen jar, and filled it with attar of roses. Soon every particle of the substance of the jar was filled with the rich perfume, and long afterwards, and even when broken, the fragments retained the fragrance. So it is, that a Christian’s life becomes filled, saturated with the Word of God—when he loves it and meditates upon it continually. His thoughts, feelings, affections, dispositions, and his whole character, become colored and imbued with the spirit of the Holy Word.

There is in the third verse, a beautiful picture of the life of the godly man: "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper."

"Like a tree." We think of the beauty of a tree, for one thing, and a Christian life is beautiful. A tree consists of two parts—a root; and then the trunk, branches and foliage. The root is unseen, hidden away in the ground, and is not admired; yet it is essential. It holds the tree firmly in its place, and it nourishes it. There is also a hidden, an unseen part of a Christian life. The world does not see when you bow in prayer, when you meditate in secret. It does not see your inner heart-life of faith and love. Yet as the root is essential to the tree, so is this unseen life, essential to the Christian. The other part of the tree is the trunk, with its branches and foliage. This is what people see. Here is where the beauty is. Every Christian life has also a visible part—the character, the conduct, the acts.

"Like a tree planted." There is a suggestion here of culture and care. The tree is planted by someone . Jesus said, "My Father is the gardener;" God plants each Christian life. We are therefore in the right place, since our Father has put us into it. People sometimes say that if they had circumstances different from those they have, if they had less trial, and more ease—that they could be better Christians. But if God plants us—He has not placed us wrongly, and we can grow just where we are—into beauty and fruitfulness. Some trees are made for warm climates, some for cold, and each must have its own zone. Just so, some Christians need severe experiences, and some need gentle skies. God knows best where to plant His trees—and where to place His children.

"Planted by the streams of water." Trees need water; they cannot live without it. God’s people must have grace to nourish them. Some trees grow in bare, dreary places, far from flowing streams, and we wonder how any water gets to them. But wherever a tree grows, water gets to its roots in some way, through some underground rills, and nourishes it.

We sometimes see people who appear to have no joy, no blessing. Their lives seem full of trouble. Yet they are happy and grow beautifully in Christian life. Here is one who lives and works among wicked people, yet lives sweetly and honors God. Here is one who is sick for years, shut away from privileges, suffering continually. Yet his face shines with the light of peace, and he is patient and joyful. God sends streams of grace and love to the roots of these lives, and blesses them. Wherever God plants us He will nourish us, and we can live beautifully.

"That brings forth his fruit in his season." Fruit is the purpose of existence in a tree. If it bear not fruit it is cut down and cast into the fire. Jesus makes it very emphatic that fruit is the test of discipleship. What is fruit? In one of his epistles, Paul shows us a cluster of fruits. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." These are fruits of character. Christian services are also fruits. The acts of kindness we perform, the words of love and cheer we speak, plant seeds where they will grow into beautiful things.

What is the purpose of fruit? It is not merely to decorate the tree. It is not hung on the branches merely to be ornamental. Fruit is to be eaten, to feed the hunger of men. The test of a Christian life, therefore, is that by its sympathy, love, comfort, helpfulness, cheer, influence, and service in all ways—it is a blessing to others, feeds their heart hunger, makes them happier, stronger, better.

Two little words in the clause are important—"his fruit." Every tree bears its own fruit; every Christian life is designed to be a blessing in its own particular way. Trying to do what somebody else does—is the weakness of many good people. If we could all be content to do good in our own way—we would do the most possible for Christ and for the world.

"In his season." Each season has its own fruits. So it is in life. The forms of usefulness and helpfulness continually vary. Each period of a good life also has its own particular fruit—youth, manhood, old age. Some fruits do not ripen until frost comes. In many lives there are fruits that come to ripeness only in sorrow.

"Whose leaf does not wither." The unwithering leaf is another feature of the tree that here stands as a picture of a godly life. There are some whose activity depends entirely upon their circumstances. When all things go well with them, they are happy—but when trouble comes they are down in the depths. In revival times they are all aglow with fervor—but in hot summer days, or in times of spiritual inactivity they become lethargic and indolent. But the ideal Christian is always trustful and at peace, and abounding in the work of the Lord.

"Whatever he does shall prosper." Success is the outcome. Not always in the earthly sense, for ofttimes the best men fail in their worldly plans and efforts. But there is a prosperity that goes on, even in worldly failure. A man’s business may be wrecked—and he himself may come out unharmed, made holier and better by the disaster. If we always live right, our souls shall prosper—whatever may become of our earthly interests.

Another picture, a picture of the WICKED man, is shown in the fourth verse. He is compared to chaff: "The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind drives away." The contrast between a fruitful tree and chaff, is very striking. Chaff is worthless. It has no beauty. It feeds no hunger. Its destiny is to be separated from the wheat and driven away before the wind. The wicked are "like the chaff." In the last verses of the Psalm, we have the end of the wicked. They "shall not stand in the judgment." The righteous are the object of God’s watchful, loving care. The way of the wicked leads to eternal destruction! The King in Zion

Psalm 2

"Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord

scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him."

"Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed."

Men have always been ready to conspire against God. They think of Him as like themselves, as one they can oppose, one whose authority they can reject. To us, with our thought of God as the glorious King of all the world, opposition to Him is the worst folly. What can puny man do to resist God’s power, or to interfere with His sway? Yet evermore does heaven behold the spectacle described in the opening of this Psalm: "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?"

There are two possible meanings in this "Why?" It may suggest the folly of such opposition. Or it may indicate the enormity of it It does seem strange that the world so hates God. What has He ever done to hurt anyone? If He were a cruel despot, like many of earth’s own kings—it would not be strange if men hated Him. If He were a Nero, or a Caligula, or a Diocletian, or a Napoleon, it would not be surprising if the nations dreaded Him and if His name aroused rage. But never was there any other king so gentle, so loving. The prophet foretold the reign of the Messiah as most kindly and gracious. He would not break a bruised reed. He would not lift up His voice in the street. He would not strive nor cry out. He comes not to destroy men’s lives—but to save them. His reign is one of love. A glance over the pages of the Gospels will show us how He fulfilled the Messianic prediction. He went about doing good, healing all manner of sickness, comforting sorrow. The "program of Christianity," the work of Christ in this world, is mapped out in these words of the prophet Isaiah: "He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair." Does it not seem strange, therefore, that the mention of the name of Christ causes such rage among the nations and peoples of the world? Why do the people not love Him? Why does the gentleness of His reign not win men to loyalty and affection? What is there in Him—that makes the world dislike Him? Yet from the day He came into the world unto the present—He has been rejected and despised. When Herod heard of the birth of the King—he trembled with anger and slew all the infants of the town in which He was said to be, in hope of destroying the hated One.

All through His life it was the same. He did nothing but good, and yet the rulers ceased not to plot against Him, until at last they nailed Him to the cross! It is not otherwise today. The gospel breathes only love, and yet it is met by many with hate, scorn, and rage. Why is it? Why do the nations rage? "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." The words

tell of revolt. They will defy His rule and cut themselves off from obedience to Him. They treat Him as if His rule were cruel and inhuman.

"He who sits in the heavens shall laugh! The Lord shall have them in derision." The picture of God sitting on His throne in heaven, laughing at man's puny efforts to frustrate His plans—is a very striking one. It suggests to us the calm quiet of God—in the face of men's opposition. Can a man put up his hand and arrest the lightning bolt as it flies athwart the sky? Can he stand beside the sea and with his puny arm hurl back the waves that come rolling from the great deep? And can man resist omnipotence or defeat the divine purpose?

Look at the outcome of Herod's plot to kill the infant Jesus. What came of the rage of the Jewish rulers who finally nailed Jesus on the cross? It only carried out God's counsel and exalted Him to be a Prince and a Savior. So always, persecution has but advanced Christianity, not destroying it, not hindering its progress. The rage of infidels has resulted in strengthening what they sought to destroy. We need not be afraid, when the enemies of Christ seem to triumph. God is not disturbed on His throne. His plans go on in unbroken fulfillment. He laughs at men's plots and schemes against Him.

"Ask of me, and I shall give you the heathen for your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession." It is a suggestive thought that even this Son of God, exalted on His throne, must ask for the inheritance that was promised to Him.

We get the lesson—that no blessing comes to us—but through our own prayer. The clearest, plainest promises must be taken up and claimed. They are checks which must be presented at the bank, before payment will be made. Promises do not mean anything to us—until they are believed and then pleaded before God.

We know that Christ claimed the Father's promise. Before He ascended He said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Paul tells us that having humbled Himself to death on the cross, God has also exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord. So all nations are Christ's. He is the rightful King of all lands. This ought to be an encouraging truth for all missionaries, and in all missionary work. India and China and Africa and the islands of the sea belong to Christ. They have been given to Him by His Father. In going into those lands and preaching the gospel, the missionary is but claiming Christ's own for Him. So in offering Christ to any man and asking him to accept Him as Savior and Lord, we are only asking one of Christ's rightful subjects to own his allegiance, to receive his true King. This word has also its glorious assurance of the success of Christ's kingdom on the earth. God will surely give Him the nations for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession, because He has promised to do so. Not a Word of God can ever be broken. Heaven and earth may pass away—but not the smallest of God's Words shall ever pass away.

"Kiss the Son, lest he be angry—and you perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in him." The only true and wise thing to do—is to submit in love and reverence to this glorious King. Those who will not yield to Him, shall be broken with a rod of iron. Gentle as He is, He is also just. Defiance of Christ can have only one outcome. It can end only in the utter destruction of those who lift up their hands in rebellion. Easily as a

potter’s vessel is dashed in pieces when hurled against the rock—shall the proudest human strength be crushed and destroyed by the power of Christ!

Submission, therefore, to this heaven-ordained King—is the only wise course for anyone. Submission brings life and great gladness. "Blessed are all those who put their trust in him." He makes them joint-heirs with Him. They sit with Him on His throne. They enjoy all the privileges of sonship. "All are yours; and you are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s." We should all therefore submit to Christ, the Son of God, and become His subjects.

Living up to Our Prayers

Psalms 5:3

"My voice shall you hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto you—and will look up."

"In the morning will I direct my prayer unto you—and will look up." That is, he would watch to see the answer coming. One interesting illustration of this watching for the answer to prayer—is in the case of Elijah’s prayer for rain. The prophet bowed himself on the ground, and began to pray. Then he sent his servant up to the crest of the mountain to look out toward the sea, to keep watch, and tell him what he saw. The servant came back and said he saw nothing. Seven times did Elijah pray, each time bidding the servant to go to the mountain-top to look. At length the servant reported that he saw a little cloud as small as a man’s hand coming up out of the sea. The prayer was answered. The prophet believed that rain would come when he prayed, and he looked up and watched for the rising of the cloud, until it appeared. That is the way we should always pray. "In the morning will I order my prayer unto you—and I will keep watch."

Must we not confess that ofttimes when we pray—we never think again of our requests, and would be greatly surprised if what we asked for, would come to us? But if we really desire the things we ask for, we will expect them and will eagerly watch for their coming. Our prayers should be part of our life. They should rule and influence all our living. Always when we pray—we should look up, expecting to receive what we have asked for.

There are some of our prayers which if answered, will work deep and radical changes in our lives. If we tried seriously to live up to them, we would be rising every day into higher spiritual altitudes. We pray to be made unselfish. Do we mean it! Do we really want to become unselfish? If we put ourselves under discipline, to grow into unselfishness, we would constantly find a restraining hand upon our desires and dispositions, upon our conduct and acts, and would feel in our hearts evermore an impulse toward love and all serving of others. "Love seeks not its own." It lives for others. It forgets self. "As I have loved you, that you also love one another," is the Master’s statement of the law of Christian life.

We pray to be made unselfish. Dare we let the prayer be answered? It would change many things in our conduct, in our treatment of others. It would set us in new relations to all about us. It would check in us the crafty desire, so common in dealing with men, to get the better of the other man in all transactions, to have the best place. What would happen in our lives—if these prayers would he answered?

We pray to be made patient. If we are sincere, and then begin to live up to our prayer, what will the effect be? We shall find our tongues checked and restrained again and again, on the very edge of angry outbursts, when about to speak unadvisedly. We shall have our harsh and bitter feelings softened continually, by an irresistible influence toward quietness and gentleness. If our prayer to be made patient were to be answered at once, by one mighty access of grace in our hearts, what a change it would make in us!

There is no prayer that most Christians breathe out to God oftener than that they be made like Christ. But if we really wish to be transformed into Christ's likeness, the desire will burn like a fire in us, cleansing and purifying us, and the new life will become so overmastering in us—that it will possess us body and soul, until Christ shall indeed live in us! If while we pray to be made like our Master—we live up to our prayer, old things in us will pass away and all things will become new. The prayer will affect every phase of our behavior and conduct. It will hold before us continually the image of Christ and will keep ever full and clear in our vision—a new standard of thought, of feeling, of desire, of act and word. It will keep us asking all the while such questions as these: "How would Jesus answer this question about duty? How would Jesus treat this man who has been so unkind to me? What would Jesus do if He were here today, just where I am?" When we pray to be made like our Master, are we truly willing to have all in us that is unlike Him, taken out; and all His beauty now lacking in us, wrought in us! Our Lord has given us some specific and very definite instructions concerning praying and living. For example, He teaches us that if we would have our own sins forgiven, we must forgive those who have sinned against us. The prayer runs, "Forgive us our sins—as we forgive those who sin against us." There is no mistaking the meaning of this petition. Each time we sin and make confession, asking God to forgive us—it commits us to an act toward others, which we ask God to perform toward us. We solemnly pledge ourselves to show the same mercy to our fellow men, which we beseech God to show to us. Yesterday someone wronged us, injured us, treated us unkindly, did something which stung us, hurt us. Last night we looked back over our day and it was blotted and stained. We prayed God to forgive us all these wrong things. He is very merciful and loves to forgive His children. But after our prayer—we still kept in our hearts the bitter feelings toward the man who wronged us yesterday—the resentment, the unforgiveness.

Jesus tells us very plainly what we should do when praying, if we discover a wrong feeling in our heart, or if in the bright light we remember something we have done that was not right. He is exhorting against anger in any form, telling us in words that should startle us if we are indulging in any harsh feelings against any other—that hatred, bitterness, and contempt of others are violations of the commandment, "You shall not kill." Then He illustrates His meaning by an example: "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you; leave there your gift before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." When we approach God's altar a glorious light shines upon us, the light of the divine Presence. If in this intense brightness we remember that today or yesterday we did something to another that was not right, that we were unjust to him, that we wronged or injured him, we should seek to get right with our brother before we go any farther with our worship. In order to do this—it may sometimes be necessary for us even to interrupt our devotion and go away and confess what we have done and obtain forgiveness, before we can finish our worship. An old Psalm writer says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart—the Lord will not

hear." So we really cannot go on with our prayer if there are bitter feelings in our heart. We must get these out—before we can find an open way to God for ourselves. We must get right with God—before we can be right with men. "First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." This might stop the easy flow of our words sometimes, while we go out to get something right which we see in God's presence to be wrong. But it would save us from some of the mockeries of prayer which now mar our worship.

Take another phase of the subject. "In the morning will I order my prayer unto you, and will keep watch." There are prayers which we cannot finish on our knees. They can be ended only in some field of duty. When the Hebrews were leaving Egypt, they seemed to have been caught in a trap beside the Red Sea. Moses was lying on his face, crying to God for deliverance. The Lord called to him, "Why are you crying unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." Clearly, duty, for Moses, that moment, was not to stay on his knees, crying to God for deliverance. He must rise and lead the people forward.

There are many illustrations. Your neighbor is in some trouble. You hear of it, and being a believer in prayer, you go to your place of devotion and plead that God would send him the help he needs. But almost certainly, prayer is not the duty of the hour. Rather, it is to rise from your knees and go to your neighbor and with your own hands do for him what he needs to have done. If a friend of yours is taken suddenly ill, or is injured in an accident, your duty probably is not to go to your closet and spend a season in prayer for him—but to hasten for a physician.

It is our duty to pray always, to take everything to God. But usually prayer is not all our duty. Ofttimes, we must go out to answer our own prayers. There is too much selfish praying—praying only for ourselves. Such prayers are not heard. The Lord's Prayer teaches us that we must include all men in our supplications. Love never ends with ourselves, nor does prayer. We must pray for others, and if we pray for our neighbors, we must go forth to answer their cries for help. While we pray for those in distress, we must open our hand toward those who need.

It is the weakness of many people's prayers—that they end with their utterance. We may think we are keeping watch for the answers—but we are only idly waiting for God to do—what He is waiting for us to do! We ask God to give bread to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, not remembering that the Master will say, "For I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in; I was naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not take care of Me." Prayer for the relief of others in distress—must be followed at once by personal ministries of love. We are to pray and then to hasten out, filled with the Spirit, to do the work that needs to be done.

Take another phase of the lesson. All praying has for its highest reach, its divinest attainment, perfect submission to the will of God. Every true prayer we make must end with "not my will—but Yours, be done." Many prayers therefore never become prayers, because they never become acquiescent in God's will. Before we can look up and see the answers coming, we must learn the great lesson of self-surrender. We know not what to pray for as we ought. We do not know what is best for ourselves. Only when we are ready to commit all things that concern us into the hands of God, and let Him order our ways—are we sure that they will be well-ordered. When we are ready to pray thus, we are ready to look up and watch for the answer which God will give.

Such consecration of the will is the supremest reach of faith and life. When we have come to this point we can always look up and know that the answer will come. Some things we hoped for may not come—but if not, then something better will come instead.

Show Me the Path

Psalms 16:11

"You will show me the path of life. In your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand there are pleasures for evermore!"

It is a wonderfully sweet song that sings all through this Psalm. It begins with fleeing to God for refuge, and ends with standing at God's right hand in glory at last! One strain of this song is enough for our present meditation. "You will show me the path of life." The word is singular—"me". Does the great God actually give thought to an individual life! We may believe that He directs the career of certain great men, whose lives are very important in the world; but does He show His common people the way? He feeds the sparrows. He clothes the lilies. He calls the stars by their names. Then the Bible is full of illustrations of God's interest in individuals. The Shepherd Psalm has it: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." "He leads me . . ." Then we have it here. "You will show me the path." The first thing, if we would have divine guidance, is to realize our need of it. Some people do not. They think they can find the way themselves. They never pray, "Show me the way!"

Here is an experience from Switzerland: Two men, one a military officer from Zurich, undertook the ascent of one of the Alps. They started off without guides, ropes, or any other appliances for safety. Their conduct attracted attention, as they were foolhardy, and the progress of the tourists was watched by many at the hotel, through binoculars. Soon they were seen to be in trouble, wandering aimlessly over the ice. In a little while one of the men disappeared, and not long afterwards the other one was lost to sight. A search party went out and it was discovered that the first man had suddenly fallen into a crevice, hundreds of feet deep. A guide was lowered and brought up his dead body. The other had a severe fall—but, more fortunate than his companion, he fell into the snow and was able to crawl out and make his way to the hospice, where he was found in an unconscious state.

It is foolhardy to try to climb the Alps without a guide. It is far more perilous to try to go through this world without a guide. Many people do. Jesus asked His disciples to follow Him—but there was one who would not follow, and he perished, "the son of perdition". He "went to his own place." If we would find the way—we must be conscious of our need of guidance and must walk obediently in the path the Guide marks out for us.

If we would have God show us the path—we must accept His guidance and trust it Sometimes we grow impatient of God's leading because He seems to take us only along mundane ways and gives us only commonplace things to do. We think we could do more good and make more of our life—if we could get out into a wider sphere and have grander things to do. Some people even chafe and fret, and spoil the lowly work that is given them to do, in their discontent with it, and their desire for some larger place and some more conspicuous work. The youth of Jesus teaches us that the truest and divinest life is the one that in its place, high or low—does best the will of God. The life of the carpenter's apprentice—is as holy as the ministry of a radiant angel close to God's

throne. God’s will for us is always sacred. When we say, "You will show me the path of life," we are not to expect that God will show us some other place to live and work—than that in which we are now living and working. Most likely He will leave us just where we are, only calling us to do our work better than ever before, to do it in a new way, with a new spirit, with a new warmth of heart. The work of the present—is always the duty to which God calls us. The way to be ready for the call to a wider field and to a more important work—is to more than fill the place in which we are now serving, and to do our present duty a little better than we are required to do it. After eighteen years of work in His lowly place as carpenter’s apprentice and carpenter, Jesus was led away to the wider field and the greater work. When we have done all the will of God where we are now—He will show us the path to something higher.

Again, the path which will be shown to us—may not always be an easy one. It is the path of life—but the way of life ofttimes leads through pain. The baby begins its life in a cry, and in some form or other we suffer unto the end. The old belief was that all pain was because of a person’s particular sin. If a man suffered greatly, his neighbor thought he must be a wicked man. There is some trouble which is the fruit of sin. We cannot do wrong—and escape suffering. The suffering is the revolt of your soul against the wrongdoing. It is the mercy of God trying to save you. But there is another kind of suffering, which tells of spiritual growth. The best things in Christian character, grow out of pain and affliction.

Sometimes there is inscrutable mystery in the trial through which good people are led. A few years ago a happy young couple came from the marriage altar. They were full of hope and joy. Their home was bright with love. A year later a baby came. It was welcomed by the young parents with great gladness. They gave the little one to God. From the beginning, however, the child was a sufferer. All its short years it has been sick. The young parents have done all that self-sacrificing love could do, all that money could do, in the hope that the little one would recover. The best physicians have been consulted and have exhausted their skill in vain efforts to cure the child. But at three and a half years, when other children are so bright, so beautiful, such centers of gladness and happiness in their homes—this little one is like a baby still in her helplessness, not seeing the faces that bend over her in passionate love, not responding to the caresses and tendernesses which are lavished upon her. The child was taken recently to one of the best physicians in the land. After careful examination, the doctor’s decision was that the case was absolutely hopeless. Until that moment, the mother had still hoped that her child might some time be cured. Now she understood that however long the little one may stay with her—she will never be any better.

"What shall I do?" was the mother’s question the other evening when her pastor listened to the story of the visit to the great doctor. "What can we do? What ought we to do?" she asked. What comfort can the minister give to such mothers and fathers as these?

Yes, it is hard to look upon the child’s condition, so pathetic, so pitiful, and to remember the great doctor’s words: "Absolutely hopeless. She never will be any better." Is there any comfort! Can this mother say, "You will show me the path of life"? Is this experience of suffering, part of that path? Does God know about the long struggle? Has He heard the countless prayers that have gone up from this home for the baby’s recovery? Does He know what the doctor said the other day? Yes, He knows all. Has He, then, no power to do anything? Yes, He has all power. Why, then, has He not cured this child? Why does He allow the agony to continue in the heart of the mother?

We may not try to answer. We do not know God’s reasons. Yet this we know—It is all right! God is love—God is never unkind. What good can possibly come from this child’s condition and from its continuation year after year? We do not know. But God knows.

Perhaps it is for the sake of the mother and father, who are being led through these years of anguish, disappointment, and bitter sorrow, and will be cleansed and transfigured. Many people are sufferers—for others’ sakes. At least we know that these young parents are receiving a wonderful training in unselfishness, in gentleness, in patience, in trust. Perhaps all this sore experience in their child is to make them holier. The disciples asked the Master whose sin it was—the blind man’s or his parents’, that he was born blind. Neither! "No one’s sin," Jesus replied, "but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." This blindness gave Jesus the opportunity to do a work of mercy. May it not be that this child’s condition finds its justification in the ministry of love it has called out in the mother and the father? It has been a wonderful training and education for them. They are being prepared for a blessed service to other suffering ones. Perhaps in the next life, they will learn that they owe to their feeble, blind child’s long and painful suffering much of what they shall then wear of the beauty of the likeness of Christ. In one of the famous lace shops of Brussels, there are certain rooms devoted to the spinning of the finest and most delicate lace patterns. These rooms are altogether dark,except for the light from one very small window, which falls directly upon the pattern. There is only one spinner in the room, and he sits where the narrow stream of light falls upon the threads that he is weaving. "Thus," we are told by our guide, "do we secure our choicest products. Lace is always more delicately and beautifully woven when the worker himself is in the dark and only his pattern is in the light." May it not be the same with us in our weaving? Sometimes it is very dark. We cannot understand what we are doing. We are not able to discover any beauty, any possible good in our experience. Yet if only we are faithful, fail not, and faint not—we shall some day know that the most exquisite work of our life was done in those very days. If you are in darkness because of some strange, mysterious providence, let nothing make you afraid. Simply go on in faith and love, never doubting, not even asking why, bearing your pain and learning to sing while you suffer. God is watching—and He will bring good and beauty out of all your pain and tears!

Notice, again, that it is "the path of life" which God will show us. He never shows us any other path. God’s paths are all right paths, paths of holiness. If you are prompted to go in some evil way—you may be sure it is not God that is leading. He leads you as far as He can—away from the evil. He leads in the path of life. It may be steep and rough—but the end will be so blessed, so glorious, that in its joy—you will forget the briars and thorns on the way!

"You will show me the path of life." There are days when you do not know what to do. You have perplexities, doubts, uncertainties. You lie awake half the night wondering what you ought to do. Something has gone wrong in your affairs, in your relations with a friend, in your home life. Or one near to you is suffering and you need help—but do not know what to do. Your days are full of questions. Do you know that there is One who is infinitely wise, never makes a mistake, nor misleads anyone, who wants to show you the way, no matter what the experience is? Instead of vexing yourself, just go to Him and say, "Show me the path!" and He will.

There is something else. It is told of Wenceslaus, King of Bohemia, that he was one night going to prayer in a distant church, barefoot, over the snow and ice, and his servant, Podavivus, following

him, imitating his master’s devotion, waxed numb and faint. "Follow me," said the king, "and set your feet in the prints of mine." The master’s words encouraged the servant and he followed on. That is what our Master says when we grow weary in the hard way, when the thorns pierce our feet, or when the path grows rough or steep. "Follow me. Put your feet into my shoe-prints. It is but a little way home!"

"You will show me the path of life." There is a path on which our Master wants us to walk. He has it all down among His purposes—where He wants us to go, what He wants us to do, the people He wants us to help. The path leads at last to the door of the Father’s house! Would it not be a sad thing if you should miss the way? Well, you will surely miss it and get lost in the dreadful tangles unless you ask Christ to show you the path. Like a little child, look up into the face of the Master and say, "Show me the path of life!" and He will.

God’sWorksandWord Psalms 19:1-2,Psalms 19:7-8

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge."

"The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes."

We have two Bibles. One is written on the pages of nature—and the other on the pages of the inspired Word. In this Psalm, we have the summaries of the teaching of both. In the earlier portion, the poet tells us about the teachings of the heavens: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge." And if in David’s days God’s glory was declared in the heavens, how much more now, since the telescope has revealed such marvelous things about the extent of the starry world that were not known then! Only remember that nearly all the stars we see are suns, probably centers of systems of planets; and that those we see, are but the merest fraction of the actual number—only those that our telescopes can bring into view. The truth is, that there are millions of suns in the heavens, some of them so far from us that it takes thousands of years for light to come from them to us.

Anyone who has given even a little attention to the study of astronomy is prepared to appreciate the thought of this verse. The heavens declare the glory of God. Think what glories of the night there are—which the day hides! If our sun never set—we would never see the splendors of the heavens. A poet imagines our first parent watching the sun nearing the horizon the evening of his first day. He was in great terror as he thought of the sun sinking away—and leaving the world in darkness! But when the orb of day disappeared quietly, lo! a new universe had burst upon his vision. Night revealed far more than it hid!

Think of the power that called into being, such a multitude of worlds, and that sustains them age after age. Think of the wisdom that made such a universe of flying suns, planets, and comets, so

perfectly adjusting their orbits and their motions—that they never clash in their orbits, that they move age after age, so that perfect harmony prevails among the spheres. Science, instead of being an enemy of religion, is its best friend. The more we learn of the marvelous things of God's world, the more do we see, for which to praise and adore the divine Maker and Sustainer. This is true of all things in nature. There is more beauty in a single little flower—than in the finest work of art ever fashioned by human hand! From the minutest insects to the vast stars, every department of the universe declares the wisdom, the power, the goodness, the faithfulness of God. We ought to study nature more; it is one of God's books.

"Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge." Evermore, nature speaks of God. DAY has its glories, when in the sunshine we see the beauties of field, garden, mountain, valley, forest, river, flower, and plant. Then NIGHT comes, and instead of making desolation in the darkness, it unveils to us its marvelous splendor of sky and stars. Creation widens then, in man's view, and to a devout mind—everything speaks of God! There are spiritual revealings in all nature's pages—to him who has eyes.

Then the Psalm passes from the teachings in nature—to the revealings of the divine Word. The works of God declare His glory—but not His will. For this—we turn to His Word. We never could learn by study the stars, the flowers, or the rocks—how we ought to live; what is right and what is wrong, what will please God or displease Him. We never could learn what God Himself is, what His attributes are, how He feels toward us. We may learn from His works—that He is great, powerful, wise, unchanging, good; but we could not learn from the stars—that He loves us with a tender, personal affection, that He is merciful and gracious. We never could find a gospel of salvation for lost sinners—in the works of God. How thankful we should be for His Word, which tells us all these things!

"The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes."

Here we have His law, revealed by His own Spirit. It teaches us how to live. It is a perfect law; not only perfect in that it is without flaw—but also in that it is complete as a revelation, containing all we need to know to be saved—and to reach the full stature of Christian men and women. We may turn to the Word of the Lord with every question of duty—and we shall always find the right answer!

Then, it is a beautiful statement also, of the ministry of the Word which we have. It revives the soul. Every human soul needs to be revived. It is ruined by sin; its beauty is tarnished, its grandeur is destroyed. The Word of God is able to build it up, to transform it, to revive the lost splendor, to bring back again the defaced image of God. We know the power the Word of God has over human lives. It first shows men that they are condemned and lost—as it holds up before them the requirements of the divine law. Next, it shows them the cross with its salvation for the guilty. Then it declares to them the will of God by which they are to learn to fashion their lives. As they begin to obey this holy will, it leads them on higher and higher, until they enter heaven's gates and wear the

likeness of Christ! Thus The Word revives the soul, transforming it into the likeness of God, which sin had defaced.

"The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart." Many people think that a godly life is gloomy. They suppose that Christians have no joy. They have to deny themselves many pleasures. They cannot have the 'good times' worldly people have. They have to live strictly. They have to follow conscience in all things. It must be very hard. Life must be dreary and joyless to them. So the people talk, who boast of being free from the restraints of God's Word, and who imagine that they themselves have the happiest times possible. But, as a matter of fact, the happiest people in this world—are those who are keeping God's commandments. Who ever heard of sin giving true joy to the heart? Disobedience never made anyone happy; but obedience always gives peace.

There are fresh-water springs in the sea, which always pour out sweet water beneath the brackish tides. So in the obedient heart, under all self-denials, there is a spring of joy ever flowing. The Christian has sorrows—but he has comforts which turn his sorrows into joy. He practices self-denials, and lives under the restraints of holiness—but he has rewards which far more than compensate for the cost of his service to Christ.

"Moreover by them is your servant warned." The Bible flames with 'red lights'. Every point of danger is marked. Every perilous path has its lamp hung up, warning us not to enter it. We are warned against the Devil and his helpers. We are warned against bad companions, against false teachers, against all wrong courses.

"Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults." There are different kinds of hidden faults. There are those which we try to hide ourselves, which are done in secret. Then there are those which have not been wrought out in act—sins of thought or imagination, which from lack of opportunity, have never been actually committed. But the reference here, is to faults or sins which are hidden from ourselves, of which we are not conscious. We all have faults of which we ourselves are not aware. Perhaps other people see them, although we do not. Certainly God sees them. We may be sure at least that there are faults enough in the best of us. Our aim in Christian life should be so high that we shall desire to be cleansed even from all these hidden faults and sins. No fault is so small as to be a trifle, or not to be a blemish in our character. Small faults grow.

We have a beautiful prayer at the close of Psalm 19: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer." There could be no higher standard of life, than is set for us in this prayer. The conduct may be blameless—while the thoughts are stained with sin. It is easier to keep our acts without fault—than our feelings, our desires, and our affections pure. We may do no outward act of cruelty or unkindness; while our hearts may be full of jealousies, envies, and all selfishness. We are to seek that our thoughts be so white and clean—that they will be acceptable in God's sight. The prayer covers our words, our thoughts, and our meditations; each a closer test than the one before. It is a great thing to be faultless in speech. But perfect grammar is not enough. Our words may be beautiful and graceful—and yet our thoughts may be full of hypocrisy, of deceit, of all evil! The prayer here is that our thoughts may please God. This is a higher spiritual attainment, than merely faultless words.

Then, a still higher test of life—is our meditation. Meditations are our deepest thoughts, the quiet ponderings of our hearts. Meditation is almost an obsolete word in these times of hustle and bustle. The word belongs rather to the days when men had much time to think—and think deeply. We meditate when we are alone, when we are shut away from others. Our minds then follow the drift of our own desires, dispositions, and imaginations. If our hearts are clean and good—our meditations are pure and holy. But if our hearts are evil and unclean—our meditations are of the same moral quality. Thus, our meditations are an infallible test of our real self. "As a man thinks in his heart—so is he." Proverbs 23:6 This prayer is, therefore, for a life of the highest character—one acceptable to God, not only in words and thoughts—but also in meditations. Such a life everyone who loves God and would be like God—should seek to live! This prayer is, therefore, for a life of the highest character—one acceptable to God, not only in words and thoughts—but also in meditations. Such a life everyone who loves God and would be like God—should seek to live! The Way of Safety

Psalms 19:12-13

"Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." The first sins mentioned here, are "hidden faults." "Cleanse me from hidden faults." They are secret sins which men commit, and of which they know. They think no one else knows of them. Perhaps their friends do not suspect that they are guilty of any secret sin. They wear the white garment of a fair reputation, while under it are foul spots they would not have anyone see. But such sins are not really secret. No sin can be hidden from God. Hidden sins are open to the eye of God. The worst thing any man can do with his sins—is to try to cover them up, to keep on committing them—but concealing them. The only safe thing to do—is to confess them and put them out of your life. "The one who conceals his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them will find mercy." Proverbs 28:13

There is a Scripture warning which says, "Be sure your sins will find you out." It is not said that your sins will be found out—they may never be in this world—but they will find you out, will plague and torment you, will poison and spoil your life. The only way to deal with sins is to have God cover them, as He does in His forgiveness. Then they never will trouble you again. But no one should ever rest with any secret sin cherished, hidden. Bring it out, repent of it, give it up, and begin a life that is sincere and true. "Cleanse me from secret faults" is a prayer for one who is doing anything secretly—which he would be ashamed to do openly. But the words in this little prayer do not refer to sins we are committing knowingly, and trying to conceal them from others. They refer to evil things in us of which we ourselves are not aware. "Cleanse me from hidden faults." There are in all of us many hidden evil things. There is in everyone of us a region which our own eyes cannot see, a desert of our life we never have explored, where evil lurks and hides undiscovered. "Who can discern his errors?" We sometimes say, when we hear of one who has done some evil thing, some dark deed of shame, some hideous crime, perhaps, which brands him with dishonor, "I could never do that! There is no possibility of such evil in me." But we would better not say this. We do not know what hidden possibilities of evil there are in us. You remember what our Lord’s disciples replied when the Master said to them, at the last Supper, "One of you shall betray Me." They did not accuse one another. They did not deny vehemently: "It is not me! I could never commit such a crime!" Each of the disciples was repulsed and overwhelmed at the

thought of the terrible announcement that one of them should do this vile thing. "Lord, is it I?" Not one of us dares to say, that it is not possible for us to do such wicked things.

We cannot discern the depths of our own hearts—to see what black things are there. Evil lurks in the dark recesses of our nature. It is not enough for us to seek to be cleared of the sins we are aware of, the sins of our habits, the sins of our appetites and passions and lusts, the sins we are conscious of doing. It is necessary for us to have our hearts cleansed of the tendencies to evil that are in us, the evil dispositions of which we are not conscious. Pride is full of hidden faults. Ambition has its unsuspected perils. Love is the noblest, the divinest of all the qualities of our life. God is love, and to love is Godlike; but love, too, carries in itself possibilities of evil. Think of the envies, the jealousies, the bitterness, the anger, the strife, the hatred, and all the degradation and ruin which may come from love. Home is earth's picture of heaven—but in the sweetest home there are hidden possibilities of peril. We may forget God in the joy and satisfaction of the ideal home. Home's perfections may shut out heaven from our vision. The hidden, undiscovered evil in our lives, our hearts and in our environments, is most dangerous because it is unsuspected and therefore can not easily be guarded against. There is no prayer that godly people, those who desire to live a pure, clean, white, spotless life, need to pray more continually and more earnestly than this: "Cleanse me from secret faults!"

These hidden faults are our greatest peril. They lie unsuspected in our path. They are enemies that we suppose to be friends, until suddenly they appear with their hurt for our lives. They are tares among the grain, which at first are thought to be wheat, not revealing their true nature until they have done their evil work. We cannot guard ourselves against these hidden evils—we can only ask God to keep us from the harm they may work in us. Every day we should ask God, who sees into our heart's deepest recesses, and knows all the hidden evil in us—to search us and find every flaw and fault, every tendency to wrong, the evil in our motives and desires, the peril lurking in our affections, in our appetites and passions, and to keep guard on us continually.

There is also here a prayer to be kept from presumptuoussins. In the Mosaic law, a difference was made between sins of ignorance, sins not intended; and those committed with knowledge and with a high hand. Atonement was provided for the former—but not for presumptuous sins. The prayer of Jesus on His cross for those who were putting Him to death was, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Here the Psalmist prays to be kept from committing presumptuous sins. He knows the danger there is in such sins—and so pleads to be held back from them, that is, from willful, conscious, high-handed sins.

Mark the teaching, too, that these presumptuous sins spring out of the minute hidden faults referred to in the previous words. From hidden, obscure, undiscovered faults—come presumptuous sins. Medical men tell us that some of the gravest ailments, ofttimes come from very slight causes. In the spiritual life the same is true. A slight moral weakness, grows into an evil tendency; and the evil tendency indulged, develops into a loathsome vice; and the loathsome vice, ripens into a presumptuous sin.

Sow athought—and you will reap an act;

sow anact—and you will reap a habit;

sow ahabit—and you will reap a character;

sowcharacter—and you will reap adestiny!

We need to guard against carelessness concerning ’little sins’. We may not suppose that because our life is sweet and pure and innocent, in the joy and gladness of youth, of boyhood or girlhood, there is no danger that ever we can be hurt by sin. We have seen many a beautiful dream of young life spoiled. The hidden fault lurking in the nature—may grow into a presumptuous sin. Young people do not begin to know the peril of little sins, and how soon they may disfigure and destroy all their moral beauty.

There are some people who are always courting danger. Sin seems to have a fascination for them. One of the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer is, "Lead us not into temptation." We have to meet temptation ofttimes in our paths of duty. The men cannot go through a day of business without being tempted many times. The women cannot live a day amid their holiest home duties and among their truest friends, without temptation. But we should never dare to meet temptation unless it comes in the path of our divine guidance—unless it must be passed through in duty. To expose ourselves needlessly to temptation, is presumption. Yet there are many who do this. They play with fire—and wonder why they are burned! They dally with "little sins", and end in shameful degradation at the last! They pay the penalty in moral and spiritual ruin.

One of the temptations of Jesus, was to presumption. The tempter suggested that He cast Himself down from a lofty pinnacle into the street, depending upon the divine protection and claiming a divine promise of angel guardianship. But God had never bidden Him do this, and there really was no promise for such uncalled-for risk. "You shall not tempt the Lord your God," answered Jesus. We dare not presume to ask God’s help in any venture or risk—unless we have God’s command to make the risk. If you needlessly run in the way of contagious disease, if you insist on entering a room where a child is sick with diphtheria, when you have no duty there as physician or nurse—you cannot claim divine protection. But if your duty calls into the presence of the most contagious diseases, you dare not refuse to go. Then God will keep you. The same is true of moral contagion. You may not dally with danger!

"Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins" is a prayer we need to have always on our lips and in our hearts. We can have God’s shelter and help—only when God unmistakably sends us into the danger. We dare not go into danger—unless we are divinely sent. If it is our duty, we dare not withhold ourselves. No earthly danger can touch us if God sends us, for then we are panoplied in steel and no harm can come to us. But unless we are led by the Spirit, as our Master was when He went into the desert to be tempted by the Devil, we dare not go!

After the prayers, "Cleanse me from secret faults," and "Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins," comes this expression of confidence, "Then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." The course of sin is terrible. The little beginnings of sin—grow into appalling consequences! If we do not have our hidden faults, the undiscovered evils of our natures, cleared, guarded—they will develop into presumptuous sins. But if we are shielded and led in true ways, our lives shall be kept upright, clean, and pure. So we have here the secret of a beautiful life. The world is full of evil—but we may pass through it all so sheltered, so protected, that not a breath of harm shall touch us. When He sent His disciples forth, Jesus said of

them, "They shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them." Wherever God sends us, whatever the perils may be, we are as safe as if we were in heaven. This is one side of the truth. But if we pay no heed to the law of God, if we rush into perils unsent, we go without divine protection. Be afraid of sin and temptation. Pray continually, "Cleanse me from secret faults." God discerns these hidden and obscure faults in you—ask Him to keep them under His omnipotent protection, to cleanse the evil He sees in them and make you pure and holy throughout. Pray also, "Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins." Do not allow these seeds of sin, these hidden evils in me—to develop into actual sins, into open wickedness! Living thus, you will be immune and may pass through the world safe and unharmed—with dangers ever about you. Through divine enfolding you are as secure as though you were in heaven itself! The Shepherd Psalm

Psalms 23

"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever!" The Twenty-third Psalm is the most familiar passage in the Bible. It is the children’s Psalm, memorized first of all the Scriptures by countless thousands. It is the Psalm of the sick room, dear to the hearts of sufferers, because of the divine tenderness revealed in the words. It is the Psalm of the deathbed. Rarely does a Christian pass from earth, without repeating the words, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." It is the Psalm of old age.

"The Lord is my SHEPHERD." Shepherd seems a homely name for God, yet when we know the story of shepherd life in the East, it is a very fitting name. The shepherd lives with his sheep. He guards them by night He defends them when they are in danger. He leads them out to find pasture. He takes the little lambs and the weary ones in his arms—and carries them. He seeks the lost or straying ones. He even gives his life in protecting them. When we know all this about the shepherd, we see how the name interprets God to us.

"The Lord is MY shepherd." It would not be the same to us if the words ran, "The Lord is a shepherd." He might be a shepherd to a great many people, all that that rich word means, and yet not be anything comforting to me. But if I can say with joy, "The Lord is my shepherd," I can sing the song through to the end.

"The Lord IS my shepherd." The present tenses of the Bible are rich in their meanings. That is the way the promises and assurances of the Scriptures are written. "The Eternal God is your refuge"—not was. It might, then, have been true a year ago, yesterday—but not to be true now. The other day, one was speaking of a person and said: "He used to be my friend. He was a great deal to me, did much for me. I went to him with my perplexities, my trials, my questions. But he is not my friend any more. He passed me yesterday on the street and did not even look at me." That is not the way with God. "The eternal God is my refuge; underneath are" —not were, not will be—that is too indefinite, "Underneath are the everlasting arms." "The Lord is our refuge." "Lo, I

am with you always." "My grace is sufficient for you." "The Lord is my shepherd." There will never come a moment when you cannot say this. "Loved once" is never said of Christ. He loves unto the end.

"I shall not WANT." The other day a man said, "I have a good portion of money laid up for my old age, enough to keep my wife and me as long as we expect to live." Yes—but that is not a sure portion. Earth's bags all have holes. The writer of this Psalm did not say, "I have plenty of good investments; therefore I shall not want." This is what he said, "The Lord is my Shepherd, and therefore I shall not want." When we have God, there is nothing we may ever need—that He cannot and will not give us. When we do not have God—we are pitifully poor, though we are millionaires. When we can say, "God is mine!" we are rich.

"He makes me to lie down in GREEN PASTURES." Pastures are for nourishment. In the East the matter of provision was always a serious one. There was but little rain and ofttimes the fields were parched so that pasture could not be found. Then the shepherd would lead his flock away, mile after mile, until they found in some quiet nook, in some shaded valley, green, lush grass. But also is implied in these words—"He makes me to LIE DOWN in green pastures." The sheep are fed and satisfied, and then they lie down to rest. We cannot go on forever in strenuous activities, and God is gracious and kind to us, giving us many quiet resting places on the way. Night is one of these places. We leave the toil and struggle of the day and draw aside to rest.

Sometimes there are enforced rests. "He MAKES me to lie down in green pastures." We do not want to rest. We think our work needs us, that we would be losing time if we stopped even a day. Then the Good Shepherd makes us lie down, because He knows we need the rest to renew our strength. Perhaps we are not doing our work well—and the joy is fading out of our heart. One was speaking the other day of a Christian man who was formerly a model of patience, kindliness, and peace. "He is growing irritable and querulous," the friend said. "He has none of his old patience with people. He seems cold and stern." He has been living so strenuously, driven by his work, that he has grown nervous and easily vexed. He needs to lie down in the green pastures. Perhaps more of us need to be made to lie down to feed and rest. Perhaps we are doing more work, running to more meetings, giving more money, talking more about religion—yet losing in peace, in sweetness of spirit, which is the real test of spiritual life. The shepherd makes his sheep lie down—that they may get rested and grow strong and beautiful in their spirit. That is what the Good Shepherd does with us sometimes, when we fall sick, for instance. We think we have not time to rest—and yet He calls us aside and draws the curtains, and shuts us in. Notice, it is in the green pastures that the shepherd makes his sheep lie down—and we find our sick room a bit of pasture. A friend who had been in the hospital several weeks and was convalescing, wrote, "I have found my little white cot here in this quiet room, a bit of God's green pasture." He never makes us lie down on the rough hillside, or on the dusty road, or among the rocks; it is always in the soft, rich grass, where we may feed while we rest. Be sure you do not miss the blessing of sickness, of sorrow, of trial of any kind. God wants you to grow in sweetness, in patience, in trust, in joy, in peace, in all gentleness and kindness; whenever He makes you lie down in the green pastures.

"He leads me beside the STILL WATERS." Green pastures suggest provision—the sheep must be fed. The streams of water suggest drink—the flock must have water. So the shepherd leads them to where the brooks flow. Often in the Old Testament, we have the picture of the shepherd

watering his sheep. Jacob found Rachel watering her father's flocks at the well. Moses found his future wife drawing water for the flocks of Jethro. Our Shepherd leads His sheep to the waters of quietness, that they may drink and be refreshed. The Syrian shepherd sometimes led his flock up steep paths, over rough roads, through dark gorges—but it never was to make the way hard for them—it always was to take them to a bit of green pasture or beside still waters, that they might be fed and refreshed. Sometimes we fret and chafe when we have had hard experiences. We are sick, or our work is hard, or we have keen disappointments or sore losses. We wonder why God takes us by such a painful and wearisome way. Have you ever thought that He is leading you along these rough paths—that you may come to green pastures, to streams of water? At the end of every steep pinch of road, beyond every day of struggle or pain, a blessing waits for you, something that will enrich you, make you stronger, holier, less selfish, more helpful.

"He RESTORES my soul." There may be several meanings in these words. A wolf may fly upon the flock and one of them may be torn. The shepherd takes the poor hurt sheep into his tender care and nurses it, as if it were a child, until it is well again, its wound healed, and the sheep restored. Or, in the hot sun one of the flock may faint in the road and sink down, unable to go any farther. Does the shepherd leave it there to perish, while he leads the stronger ones on in the way? No, he cares for the fainting one, he takes it up in his arms, lays it in his bosom, and carries it until it is rested and able to walk again. Or, one of the sheep may drop out of the flock and wander away. Does the shepherd let the lost one go, giving it no thought, not even missing it? No, one of the most touching stories in the Bible tells of the shepherd leaving the ninety-nine and going away to the mountains to find the one sheep of his that was lost. Then, you remember that exquisite picture, at the end of the story, of the shepherd finding his sheep, laying it on his shoulder, and carrying it back to the fold.

All these are illustrations of the words, "He restores my soul," and all suggest ways in which our Good Shepherd restores us. We are fallen upon by the prowling wild beasts of temptation; wounded, torn, hurt almost to death. The Shepherd with infinite gentleness and patience heals us, restores us. Or we faint by the way, get discouraged, and sink down. The Shepherd comes, bends over us, comforts us, speaks brave words of cheer to us, not giving us up—but getting us on our feet again, with a new hope and courage. Or, we err and go astray, like lost sheep, and the Shepherd follows us to the mountains and seeks us until He finds us, and then restores us.

If this little clause had been left out of this Psalm, much of its beauty would have been lost. It is because the Shepherd restores my soul, not once—but a thousand times, that I am going to dwell in the house of the Lord forever!

Very beautiful is that line in Dr. Matheson's hymn, "O Love, that will not let me go." No other love would suffice. If our Shepherd ever wearied of us—we could not be saved. "He restores my soul."

"He LEADS me in the paths of righteousness." We need guidance. We do not know which way in life to choose. We do not know where this path or that one will lead us—if we follow it. We all need guidance. If we will, we may have it, too, and walk in God's right way. It may not be the easy way—but it will lead us home.

"Yes, though I walk through the VALLEY of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil—for You are with me." This means a peculiarly dark and gloomy valley, a deep gorge, into which the sunlight

never pours. We have grown accustomed to applying this verse to death. But there are darker valleys in this world, than the valley of death. There are sorrows worse than bereavements.

Here are two homes where hearts are bowed. In one there has been no death-crape on the door. None of the neighbors know there is any grief there. Things are going on, to all external appearance, just as usual. But in that household there is a sorrow black and terrible. One life, fair and beautiful heretofore, honored and happy—has been touched by shame, and all the home lives are stricken with a bitterness which no comfort can alleviate. The other home has been marked recently with death-crape. People passing felt their hearts grow tender and lowered their voices. One day the house was thronged with neighbors and friends who came together to say their farewell. But there was no bitterness in any heart in that household. The sorrow was turned to joy by the Christian hope that filled every heart. Which of these two homes is the real valley of the shadow of death?

"For YOU are with me." The sheep need never fear any evil—when the shepherd is with them. A Christian man tells of an experience of his boyhood which illustrates this. He worked several miles from home. Saturday night he worked late, and then went home to be with his loved ones for the Sunday. On the way was one very dark valley, between two hills. No star shone into it, and there was no light from any window. It was called "the valley of shadows," and sometimes men lay in hiding to rob people passing through. The boy was at the blackest point of this lonely, dreary way one Saturday night, brave yet trembling, fairly leaping over the road, when he heard—a hundred yards before him—a voice strong, clear, and full of cheer, calling, "Is that you, John?" Instantly he knew the voice. It was his father’s. The good man knew that on that black night, that his son would have a hard ordeal in coming home through the valley, and so with a father’s love he was there to meet him at the blackest point in the way. All fear vanished, when the boy heard the voice and recognized it. Does not this illustrate how God’s children are comforted when they enter the valley of shadows? The way seems dark and strange. They have never passed through it before. But as they enter it—they hear a voice calling their name, and then see a Presence of Love. "Fear not!" the voice says, "I am with you!" Then all fear vanishes. As human faces fade out, the face of the Good Shepherd will appear, radiant with peace and warm with love, and all dread will vanish. "Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil—for You are with me."

We need not linger on the remaining words of this Psalm.

"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." There are dangers on every side—but the shepherd is not deterred by these from caring for his sheep. Our Good Shepherd is Master of the world, stronger than all enemies, Conqueror of all, and is able to provide for His sheep in any place! We remember that Jesus spread a table for His disciples the night of His betrayal, and we know in what peace He fed them—with enemies plotting, scheming, gathering for His arrest. No one could disturb Him or them until the meal was over.

"You anoint my head with oil." God does not want us to go through this world with sad faces. He wants us to rejoice.

"My cup runs over." A writer tells of a friend who literally kept a daily book account with the Lord. On one side he put down all he did for God; on the other side he put down what the Lord did for

him. If a friend helped or cheered him, he put that down. If he was sick and then was restored, he put it down. All favors and mercies he recorded. After a few weeks of this book-keeping he gave it up. "It’s no use," he said, "I can never get a balance. I am always hopelessly in debt." That is the story of every life—the divine goodness overflows.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." All the past has been goodness; all the future will be goodness. Goodness and loving-kindness from God all the days—the dark days and the days of pain, the days of disappointment, the days of sickness, the day when death comes to your home, the day of the funeral—goodness and loving-kindness all the days of my life—then—"I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever!" All the days of this life, goodness and loving-kindness—but that is not the end; indeed, that is only the beginning. "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever!" A mother came a thousand miles to the hospital to see her boy, who was dying. When she reached the office the doctor said the boy was sleeping and must not be disturbed. It might kill him. She must wait until he wakened. The mother begged to be allowed to go in and sit beside his cot—she would not speak to him. As she sat there her heart grew hungry and she reached out her hand and laid it gently on his brow. He did not waken—but instead he said, "Mother, you have come." And at once he began to recover. Christ lays His hand of love on the heads of suffering ones, weary ones, burdened, sorrowing ones, today. This Psalm is the blessed hand of Christ to you. Do you not feel it!

Into Your Hands

Psalms 31:5 "Into Your hands I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me."

These words are often quoted as if they were for the hour of death. Indeed, Jesus did use them as His last words on the cross, and they are fit words for any dying saint. But here the committal is for life, with its experiences. The words imply complete surrender. They are suitable for the beginning of a Christian life, just such words as one should use who accepts of Christ and devotes himself to Him as Savior and Lord. If any are asking how one is to be saved—here is the answer. Commit yourself, body and soul, for time and for eternity, into the hands of Jesus Christ. This committing of oneself means the committing also of one’s affairs into the hands of Christ. Some people trust Christ as their Savior—but do not commit to Him the interests of their everyday life. Yet life commonly is full of experiences which no human wisdom can make clear. We cannot choose our own ways. We cannot tell what will be the effect on our lives one year, ten years, thirty years hence—of a certain decision or choice which we make today. The only safe thing to do—is to put all this into the hands of One who is wiser than we are. A pastor was sitting at a little child’s bedside with the anxious parents. It seemed that the child could not live. They were about to pray, and the pastor said to the parents, "What shall we ask God to do for your child?" He had been speaking of God’s love and wisdom, telling them that their Heavenly Father makes no mistakes, that whatever He does will be right, that He knows what is best for the child and for them. So when he said, "What shall we ask God to do?" there was silence for a moment; then the father answered in sobs, "We dare not choose—leave it to Him." He could not have said a wiser, safer thing. No human parent can tell what is best for his child, whether to stay in this world and meet the battles, temptations, dangers, trials—or to be lifted over into the heavenly life, where there shall be no trial, no temptation, no peril.

It would be wise if we would trust God in the same way with all our affairs, never asking too earnestly, too importunately, certainly never unsubmissively—but leaving to God, what He knows to be best.

Christ teaches us the same lesson. He exhorts us never to be anxious. He points to the lilies and the birds. Your Father cares for the birds and clothes the lilies; much more will He care for and clothe you, His child. The other day one said, "I have at last learned how to live—just day by day. I used to worry about the future, looking far on into the years; now I have learned Christ's lesson—never to be anxious for the morrow—but to live as beautifully and as faithfully as I can today.

"Lord, for tomorrow and its needs,

I do not pray;

Keep me, my God, from stain of sin

Just for today."

"Into your hand." Of course, in a sense, God has no hands. He is a spirit—and a spirit has no flesh and bones. Yet all through the Scriptures, the hands of God are spoken of in a human way. Then Jesus Christ came, the Son of God, revealing in human life—the gentleness, the mercy, the helpfulness of God. We may speak, therefore, of the hands of Christ—as the hands of God. What wonderful hands they were!

They were gentle hands. They never caused pain to anyone. The other day in the hospital a friend who had passed through a serious operation, spoke with much feeling of the gentleness of the surgeon, how kind he had been, how careful his touch. But no most kindly surgeon ever dealt so softly with a wounded or diseased body—as Jesus dealt with wounded or sick hearts. No mother's hands were ever so careful with her child—as were the hands of Christ in His touches upon the weak, the troubled. We may trust ourselves absolutely to those hands—and know they will never hurt us. A prophet said of Him before He came, "He shall not break a bruised reed." What could be more worthless than a reed? Then a bruised reed—of what little value is it? Yet the hand of Christ is so gentle—that He will not even break off the reed that is bruised. We may trust our hearts in their sorrow, our spirits when crushed, our lives when bruised—to those hands, knowing that we will be most tenderly cared for. The hands of Christ were strong hands. While more gentle than a mother's, they were omnipotent in their strength. At their lightest touch, diseases fled away, the dead were brought back to life, the fruitless tree was withered to its roots, the wild storm was quieted in a moment, and the turbulent waves of the sea sobbed themselves into perfect calm at the Master's feet.

There is nothing that the hands of Christ could not do. At the end He said, "I have overcome the world; all the powers of nature, all the powers of evil, even the mighty sovereignty of death, stand subdued." Surely we may entrust ourselves, with all our needs, weaknesses, dangers—into the hands of this strong Son of God. No enemy ever can overcome us—when He is keeping us. No hurt can touch us—when He is defending us. A mountain guide said to a tourist, who was timid about crossing some dangerous spot, "This hand never lost a man." The strongest human hand may sometimes fail us—but the hand of God never shall. We may trust it implicitly and without

fear.

Christ’s hands were saving hands. The weak, the weary, the troubled, the sorrowing, the sinful, all came to Christ—and never one that came to Him went away unhelped or unblessed. A penitent woman crept to His feet out of her sin, and His hand touched her, cleansed her—and set her among the redeemed! She had seen Christ, and one glimpse of His holy face, had consumed all the old sin, at the same time starting in her a new womanhood, pure, true, and beautiful. Thus always the hand of Christ can take the vilest sinner, blot out his sins, and build up new beauty in him. The hands of Christ were safe hands. They never gave a wrong touch. They never led any one in the wrong way. Human friendship is shortsighted. The mother, in all her tenderness of heart, may do mistaken and foolish things for her child. The love may be most delicate and considerate, most strong and firm—and yet love does not always know what is best. No responsibility in life is more serious than that under which we come when we take another life into our hands. This is true of the physician or the surgeon to whom we entrust ourselves for treatment in physical needs. Life is full of experiences in which with the utmost gentleness and strength, there is also the necessity for something more than human. A baby is born and is laid in the mother’s arms. In its feebleness it says to her, with its first cry, "Into your hands I commend my spirit. Guard my life. Teach me my lessons. Train and discipline my powers. Educate me until I reach the strength of mind and heart and life which God wishes me to attain. Hide me from the world’s harm. Let no evil thing touch me. Prepare me for this life and for eternity." Can there be any more serious responsibility in life than this? Every mother that thinks at all knows that she, herself, with her weakness and ignorance, cannot keep her child’s life. Her hands are not skillful enough, not strong enough.

Christian parents, conscious of their own weakness and lack of wisdom and skill, bring their little ones and put them into the hands of Christ, that He may guard them, teach them, and train them. The very language of their act is, "Into your hand, O Christ, I commit my child. I cannot take care of it myself. Will you keep it for me?" Then the parents’ part is faithfulness in all duty to the child—example, teaching, restraining, guidance, training; to make the home atmosphere like the climate of heaven about the child’s soul. God comes to the little child first in the mother. Blessed is the mother who truly interprets Christ, in her keeping and training of her child. The same is true in its own measure in any human friendship. Think of the responsibility of being a friend! It is a sacred moment when God sends to you one to whom you are to be guide and guardian, one who trusts you, loves you, and comes under your influence. We are responsible for everything we do which may color, impress, or sway our new friend’s life. If our influence is tainted, if we fail to be absolutely true in our words or acts—very serious will our accounting be when we stand before God. So it is, when any of us commit our own life—to the love, the guiding care of another. Pure, wise, good, and rich human friendship is wondrously uplifting. But no human friend is perfect. None is wise enough to always choose the right things for us. None is wise enough to help us always in the truest and best ways. Some of the saddest wrecks in life, have come through mistakes in choosing friends. A gentle, unsuspecting girl trusts herself under the influence of one in whom she believes—but who proves unworthy, dragging her down to sorrow.

Then, even the sweetest and best human friends can stay with us only a little while. There is only one Friend to whom we can say with absolute confidence, "Into your hands I commit my life, unto the end, for you can guard me from stumbling and present me faultless before God at the last!"

The hands of Christ are safe and sure, both for present and eternal keeping. I am glad I have a Friend who will take me as I am, make me what I ought to be, then guard and guide me through all possible experiences, and bring me at last to heaven’s gate without blemish.

Christ’s hands are eternal. They never will be folded in death’s stillness. Beautiful are those words in Deuteronomy, "Underneath are the everlasting arms." Human arms may be strong and gentle, and may hold us fast in love’s embrace today—but tomorrow they will be folded in the stillness of death, and we can find no comfort in them. One of the saddest things one ever sees—is a little child crying bitterly by its mother’s coffin. Heretofore the cry was never in vain—but now there is no answer. But the hands into which we are asked to commit the keeping of our lives—are everlasting!

"Father, into your hands I commit My spirit." Jesus used these words when He was dying. He was about to pass into the strange mysteries of the valley of shadows. It was an unfamiliar way to Him—He had never gone that way before. But He was not afraid. So He said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." That was all dying meant to Him. That is all dying will be to us—if we are in the keeping of Christ—only the breathing out of our spirit, into the hands of our Redeemer. When we watch our friends passing out from us, it seems to us that they will be lonely, that they will be overwhelmed with the strangeness of the way. But no—a face like our own face—will beam its love upon them the moment the human faces vanish from their vision. A hand like our own hand—will clasp theirs the moment our hand lets go its clasp. We talk about the dark valley—but there is no dark valley for those who love Christ. Dying for a believer—is only coming up closer to Jesus Christ. We need not dread to lay our loved ones into His hands. He will take most gentle care of them, and will give them back to us in radiant beauty, when we come to the time of our home-going. This is our lesson: for life, for death—we commit ourselves into the hands of Christ, our Redeemer.

Life is full of danger—it is never easy to live in this world. It is never easy to send our children out into a world, of whose danger and evil we know so much and yet so little. Many a mother dreads to have her child go out from her safe and gentle home of love, even for an hour, to meet other children in the streets. The future is all dark to us. We know not what lies before us any moment. Here is the only ground of confidence and peace, "Into your hands I commit my spirit." Into Your hands, all blessed Christ, I commit my dear ones, my friends. Into Your hands, O Redeemer, I will commit my spirit as I enter the unseen world. "Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth."

Refuge from the Hurt of Tongues

Psalms 31:20

"You shall hide them in the secret of Your presence from the pride of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues!" The writer of this Psalm had suffered from people’s talk. It had broken upon him like missiles of war, like arrows shot through the air. The evil that is in the human tongue is described in the Psalms in very strong language. "Under his tongue is mischief and vanity." "Your tongue frames deceit." "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent." The writer had heard the slanders of many who took counsel together against him. He speaks here of the "strife of tongues"—a continual warfare of words going on about him.

"The strife of tongues!" How expressive the phrase! We all know more or less about it. Few people escape the hurt of tongues in their own life. Who is there that is not hurt at some time by slander! No name is pure enough to be forever safe against vile insinuations, cruel aspersions. Even the Lord Jesus, whose life was perfect, holy, harmless, did not escape the slanderer's tongue.

It is strange how many bitter and unloving words are spoken in this world. The tongue is a little member—but it is a source of much evil! James tells us that while all kinds of animals have been tamed—no man can tame the human tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison! We do not live long in this world, until we find that this is true. On the smallest provocation, men become angry and speak violent words. There are homes in which the chief talk is strife—the strife of tongues. There are children, children with gentle souls, who have to grow up in the midst of such a strife, hearing scarcely ever a loving word. The hurt of such sharp, bitter words is very sore!

"The ill-timed truth we might have kept—

Who knows how sharp it pierced and stung!"

Even the truth about us, may be so told as to be inhumanly cruel in its effects. Then, often, it is falsehood which barbs the arrow. The human tongue often secretes gall. You have heard envy talk. You have heard the mad ravings of jealousy. You have heard the invectives of anger. You have heard the bitter threatenings of revengeful passion. And every word is a damaging missile.

There is a strife of tongues about us—even when the words are not spoken against us. Think of all the speech one must hear as the days go by—speech that is not loving, not helpful, not encouraging, not comforting. The gift of speech is one of the noblest that God has given to man. It was meant to be loving, true, wise, enriching, and full of blessing. God gave us our tongues that with them we might speak to Him in praise and prayer—and to our fellow men in love, in hope—in all gracious, helpful, encouraging words. But what is the major part of the conversation that goes on in parlors, in clubs, during walks and rides? Is it wise, good, wholesome, useful talk? Does it instruct, edify, inspire, uplift? Is it upon important subjects? We know how idle much of it is. People chatter on forever—and say not one wise word. How much of the social talk of any day or evening, is worth writing down, worth remembering, worth printing? Yet we cannot get away from this strife of tongues. The speech about us is full of misrepresentations, too; reflections on others, innuendos, suspicions, criticisms, censures. It is strange how much of the talk we hear is about the absent—and with what ruthless abandon, do people say evil things of those who are not present. Characters are discussed and dissected, as if they were nothing more than bits of clay. Names are taken up and gossiping tongues whisper their hints of scandal, even concerning those whom an hour ago they were speaking kindly to. It is the rarest thing that a full, hearty, honest word—is spoken of any absent one. Evermore this sad and cruel chatter about people, goes on in society. You cannot but hear it, for you are not deaf. But if you are honorable, true-hearted, and charitable, these words hurt you, and you need a refuge from them.

"The pride of man—and the strife of tongues!" How truly these words picture the life which is about everyone of us! And men and women with sensitive spirits grow weary of it, and long to flee away to some quiet retreat, where they shall no longer be hurt by the unending strife of tongues. They grow weary of angry words, of false words, of censorious words, of words of suspicion and backbiting, of words of wrangling and quarreling. So much inharmonious talk hurts us. We grow

tired of hearing criticism and faultfinding. It worries and frets us to be nagged at continually. The words of the Psalm tell us of the refuge we want from all this strife and confusion of words: "You shall hide them in the secret of your presence from the pride of man: you shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues." A refuge has been provided into which we may flee, where we shall not be hurt by this strife. How may we find it?

It is not by falling in, ourselves, with all this stream of talk—that we escape its hurt. That is our danger. When we are with those who have only idle words, empty chit-chat forever on their tongues—it is easy for us to join them in the frivolous speech. When we hear others gossiping about their neighbors, telling bits of news, repeating derogatory stories, hinting suspicious things—we find it very natural to find a sort of pleasure in it all, and then add our portion to the common stock. When we are with people who are saying unkindly things of someone, casting arrows of censure, sneer, or aspersion at the good name of an absent person, making his faults a subject of conversation, holding a sort of clinic over his character and dissecting it for their own cruel delight—how easily we slip into the same groove of talk, unless we are most watchful! Have you ever caught yourself doing this, even laughing at the things people were saying about some dear friend of yours, and even adding little savory bits which your confidential relation of friendship had permitted you to learn about your friend? Or when you find yourself among those who are wrangling about questions, or quarreling about creeds, politics, or something else—it is not hard for you to take a side and contend and wrangle as vigorously as the others. In a home where there is strife, we are always in danger of taking part in it and adding to it the bitterness of our own excited and exciting words. This is not the refuge from the strife of tongues which God provides. It is no refuge at all. It may be the easiest thing, just to drop into the stream and drift along with it; but we are only hurt if we join in sin ourselves, to save ourselves from the evil of other men’s sins. This is only deserting our colors and going over to the enemy. It pleases the evil adversary—but it grieves the gracious Savior.

Then we may not seek a refuge from the strife of tongues, in indifference and contempt. If the talk we hear concerns ourselves and is critical and condemnatory, we would do well first to ask whether it is true, or whether the things said of us may not have at least some shadow of truth in them. There is an element of wholesomeness in living in an atmosphere of criticism. Too much praise is not good for us. If everyone always spoke well of us, commending and flattering us continually, it would make us proud and self-conceited. It is well that there always are those about us who are ready to see our blemishes and to expose them. We would never know our faults if this were not so. Francis Quarles said: "If any speak ill of you, flee home to your own conscience and examine your heart. If you be guilty, it is a just correction; if not guilty, it is a fair instruction. Make use of both. So shall you distill honey out of gall, and out of an open enemy create a secret friend."

Further, the divine refuge from the strife of tongues is not found in flight from the living world. Men have run away to the covert of the rocks and the caverns, to the monastery, to the hermit’s cell—to escape the strife of tongues. But that is not the way God wants us to do. He wants us to be in the world—and yet not of the world. He needs us in the midst of society, for He desires us to witness for Him. We are to let our light shine upon the world’s darkness, to dispel it. We are to live among those who are ungodly, to show them a pattern of true and beautiful living. Our duty bids us stay where we are. We have a mission there. God needs us in the place where He has planted us. Refuge by flight would be fleeing from duty—and we would both prove disloyal to our Master and

fail in our search for shelter, by such a course. But there is a shelter that we can find in the very midst of the trouble. "You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion, from the strife of tongues." They tell us that when the terrible cyclone sweeps over a country, there is a spot at its very center which is so quiet and still that a leaf is scarcely stirred, where a baby might sleep undisturbed and secure. So at the center of the sorest strife of tongues—you may find a pavilion, a place of peace, where no hurt can come to you.

Take the case of one who must endure abuse, reviling, unjust and bitter words in any form. Few of us go through many years of life without meeting experiences of this kind. Some time the tongue of the slanderer will assail us. There is a story that once three young Hebrews were cast into a furnace of fire—but came from the flames untouched, not carrying on their garments, even the smell of fire. That was better than if God had kept them altogether out of the fire. We may not keep ourselves from the furnace of burning words—but God will keep us from suffering harm in the furnace—if we will accept the refuge.

Part of this refuge must be in the consciousness, that we are blameless of wrong. This is a wonderful secret of peace in the heart, in the time when others are speaking evil of us. If the things they say are true, there is no refuge save in the mercy and grace of God. But when our own conscience testifies that we are innocent, there is a secret peace in our own heart which no false words can destroy.

Another element in this refuge, must be the keeping of love in our heart. Slander or bitter words of any kind can harm us—only when we yield to the feeling of resentment and anger. So long as we continue loving through all the strife of tongues—we are hidden away in a safe refuge. It is impatience that opens the door of the refuge and lets harm in. Sin is not in being tempted—but in yielding to temptation. Our Lord taught us to pray for those who despitefully use us and persecute us. While we pray for them—their cruel words have no power to hurt us. In no other way can this lesson he taught so well, as by looking at the example of Christ. Never about any other life, did the strife of tongues wage as it did about Him. Men’s cruelty knew no limit. Poisoned tongues emptied their envenomed bitterness upon Him. But none of this rage and bitterness disturbed Him. You know the secrets. There were two—love and peace. His heart was full of love, and the peace of God guarded Him.

We should understand these secrets. If we truly love men—we will not be affected by cruel words. They will hurt and sting—but they will not embitter us. We will forgive injury and wrong. We will answer back hate—with kindness, rudeness with gentleness. Then if we have love in our heart—we will seek ever to allay bitterness in others. One of our Master’s beatitudes is, " Blessed are the peacemakers." We can do much to lessen the strife of tongues, by always speaking gently ourselves.

Parkhurst, in his little book on "The Sunny Side of Christianity," tells this story: "One day on a trolley car there was a door . . . that squeaked every time it was opened or shut. A man, sitting near it, noticed this. Rising, he took a little can from his pocket, let fall a drop of oil on the offending spot, and sat down, saying, ’I always carry an oil can in my pocket, for there are so many squeaky things that a drop of oil will set right.’ "

Love carries an oil can and is ready everywhere to lubricate squeaking things. We all know a few men and women who are ever dropping oil to soften friction, and smoothing and quieting strife among others. They have some gentle word, some happy suggestion, some bit of humor, some way of changing the subject, when there is danger of strife. Blessings on the people who carry oil cans in their pockets! Not only do they add immeasurably to the world's sweetness—but they have found a refuge for themselves from the strife of tongues. Love is the secret. It was Christ's secret. Amid hate and cruelty—He loved on. If we keep gentle, patient, sweet, forgiving, and loving—the wildest clamor of harsh and angry voices will not disturb us. Our soft answer—will turn away wrath. Your good—will overcome evil. The Christian way to resist the strife of tongues—is with love. If anyone speaks evil of you—say something good of him in return. If the other person is angry—keep patient and sweet. If another has bitter words to say of an absent person—your task is to say a kind word of him. It was said of Starr King that if anyone did him an unkindness, or said a hard or bitter word of him—that was the very man he loved. His heart went out to him in yearning, and he would find ways to conquer him by love. That is what it is to be a Christian. That is the Christian way to quarrel—throw roses for stones; overcome evil with good. O for a Church that would honestly try this way of living with people! If your rights are not quite respected—why, it does not really matter! Just keep on loving. Love is the great secret refuge from the strife of tongues. The other secret of Christ's quiet—was the peace of God in His heart. Nothing unkind or cruel could reach Him, hidden away as He was in the bosom of His Father, in the secret place of the Most High, under the shadow of the Almighty. When the winds are wildly raging over the sea—far down beneath the surface is a place where perfect stillness reigns.

"You shall hide them in the secret of Your presence from the pride of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues!"

David's Joy over Forgiveness

Psalm 32

"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit."

Human biographers usually pass over matters that are not beautiful. They tell of the things that are attractive and honorable—but say little of faults and blemishes. One of the remarkable features of the Bible in writing biographies, is that it does not hide good men's faults nor conceal their sins. One reason is, that it would warn us against even the best men's mistakes. On the Alps, places where men have fallen, are marked for the warning of other tourists who may come that way. So we are told of the sins and falls of godly men—that we may not repeat their mistakes. Another reason is to show us the greatness of the divine mercy that can forgive such sins and then restore the sinner to noble and useful life. As terrible as David's sin was—the story of his fall and restoration has been a blessing to millions.

"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered." This is a most suggestive beatitude. If we had been writing it, we would have said, "Blessed is he who never has sinned." But if it read thus, it would have no comfort for anyone in this world, for there are no sinless people here. Holy angels might have enjoyed its comfort—but no others could. We may be very thankful that the beatitude runs as it does, "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven,

whose sins are covered." This brings the blessing within the reach of everyone of us.

It is the first in all the long list of Blesseds, for no blessing can come to any soul—until it has been forgiven of its sins. The gate of forgiveness is the first gate we must pass through, before we can receive any of the other blessings of God's love. Unforgiven sin lies across our path—as a mountain which no one can cross over. No other favor or gift or prosperity is of any avail—while our sins remain uncancelled. But with forgiveness, come all the blessings of life and glory. The word "covered" seems a strange word to use about anyone's life. There is one way of covering sin which can bring no peace, no blessing. We must not try to cover our own sin, so as to hide it from God. That is what David had been doing with his sins which at last he brought to God, and he tells us a little farther on in the Psalm how little blessing he found in that way. Says the wise man: "He who covers his sins shall not prosper. But whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy." Sins which we cover ourselves, even most successfully, as it appears, are not forgiven. They are like slumbering fires in the volcano, ready to burst out any moment in all their terribleness. But when God covers our sins—they are put away out of sight forever—out of our sight, out of the world's sight, out of God's sight. The Lord says He will remember our sins against us no more forever. So the covering is complete and final—when it is God's.

"When I kept silence, my bones wasted away, through my groaning all the day long." Sometimes we ought to be silent to God. This is the wise thing to do when sore trials are upon us, and we do not know what to do. "I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for You are the one who has done this!" There is a great blessing in such silence to God. It brings peace, joy, comfort. It means a submission to God's will—in time of suffering. But here is a silence to God, which does not bring blessing—silence about our sins. Unconfessed sins cause only bitterness and sorrow.

David's language here tells the sad story of the days when he kept silent about his guilt, when he tried to hide it, when he made no confession, was not penitent. It was almost a year. He went on with his work, keeping up the external show of royal honor, probably even engaging outwardly in the worship of God. But he could not put away the consciousness of his sins. This memory stayed on his mind and saddened every joy, embittered every sweet, and shadowed the face of God. His very body suffered, and his heart kept crying out continually. It will never do just to keep quiet about our sins and try to hide them and forget them. We should never keep silent to God, even a moment about any sin we have committed. We should tell Him at once—the evil thing we have done.

"Then I acknowledged my sin to You and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'— and You forgave the guilt of my sin!" The moment David confessed his sins, back on the very echo of his liturgy of penitence, came the blessed assurance of pardon. "I have sinned" — "The Lord has also put away your sin." "I will confess" — "You forgave." So we learn the only way to get forgiven of our sins—we must put them out of our heart—into the hands of God, by sincere and humble confession, and by true repentance. Then they will trouble us no more forever.

Some people try to hide away from God when they have sinned—but this also is a vain effort. Adam and Eve tried this, hiding in the garden after their transgression, when they heard the footsteps of God approaching. But God called them and brought them out before His face to confess their sin. The only safe flight for the sinner from sin and from God—is to God. In the divine

mercy and beneath the cross of Christ—there is secure and eternal refuge. "You are my hiding place." The Book of Revelation pictures men, in the day of judgment, calling upon the rocks and the hills to fall upon them—and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb. But the cry is in vain. In their despair many men and women resort to suicide, ending their lives in the effort to get away from their sins. Thus they only rush the more quickly and with added sin on their souls—into the presence of the Judge they so much dread! But God is the real hiding place from sin. His mercy is an eternal refuge. When He covers sins—they are covered forever. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." No pursuer or avenger ever can pass the door of that refuge, to drag the forgiven one out. Christ has died for him—and he is free forever.

"You are my hiding place; You will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance." God is also a hiding place, a refuge from trouble. "God had one Son without sin; but He has none without sorrow." But there is a hiding place to which sorrowing ones can flee, and where they will find comfort that shall give them peace. "In the world you have tribulation. In Me you may have peace," says the Master. The sorrow may not be shut out—but the divine peace comes into the heart and calms it.

God is also a hiding place from danger. In the wildest terrors and alarms we can run to Him, and lying down in His bosom, be safe. The danger may burst upon us—but we shall be safe; though we may suffer in our person or in our estate, our inner life shall be unhurt.

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you." Forgiveness is not the whole of Christian life. The forgiven one enters God’s school, and comes under His instruction. We are to go on increasing in knowledge. We have God Himself for our teacher. God is always setting lessons for us. The lessons are not always easy; sometimes they are very hard. God teaches us many of our best songs—in the gloom of sick rooms, or in some experience of sorrow. Life is full of lessons. Every day, new ones are set for us, and we should be good pupils, ready learners.

"Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle." Then, God also guides us in the way we should go. If we would have His guidance, however, we must be ready to follow, to do all He bids us to do. We must not be like the horse or mule, which have to be compelled by bit and bridle. Our submission should be willing and glad.

"Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!" JOY is a Christian duty. God wants His children all to be happy. Do they never have troubles? Yes, many of them. It is those whom the Lord loves—that He chastens. It is the fruitful branches—that the gardener prunes. Still God wants His believing ones to rejoice and be glad. No duty is enjoined in the Scriptures with greater frequency, than that of joy. We must learn to rejoice even in pain and sorrow.

We must notice, however, what kind of joy it is that we are so earnestly urged to have. It is not the world’s joy, "Rejoice in the LORD." The gladness has its source and fountain in God. It is God’s own gladness, communicated by the Divine Spirit. There is a gladness which is found in sin, which comes from evil-doing; but the gladness of the child of God—is found in obedience to God and in holy living. Those whose gladness depends only on earthly things, have no assurance of its continuance, for all earthly things are transitory.

Flowers make us glad—but tomorrow they have faded. When it is the love of Christ that gives us gladness—our joy is sure, for His joy is everlasting. So we need to give good heed to the grounds of our gladness. To be glad in the Lord, comes from putting our trust in Him, in accepting His salvation, His grace, in believing in His love—and then in doing day by day our simple duty, leaving to Him all care, all providing, all protecting, and never allowing a fear or a shadow of anxiety to cross our minds.

Under God’s Wings

Psalms 36:7

"How priceless is Your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge under the shadow of Your wings!"

Some of the most expressive illustrations of the divine love and care employed in the Bible, are taken from the ways of birds. For example, this beautiful figure of a bird sheltering her young under her wings, runs through all the Scriptures, as a picture of God’s sheltering love.

We find it often. Boaz welcomed Ruth from her heathen home to the land of Israel, "The Lord recompense your work, and a full reward be given you of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you are come to trust." In one of the Psalms we find the words, "My soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed." In another Psalm is the prayer, "Hide me under the shadow of your wings, from the wicked that oppress me." In still another Psalm is this word of confidence, "He shall cover you with his feathers, and under his wings shall you trust." Then, in the New Testament, our Lord gives the picture yet added beauty and sweeter and more sacred meaning, by His wonderful adaptation of it to Himself. Addressing those who had resisted His love, He said, with a great pain at His heart," O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings!"

Thus the image is a favorite one in the Bible. Here it is expressed in words of great beauty: "How priceless is Your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge under the shadow of Your wings!" While a picture of a bird sheltering her young beneath her wings is before us, let us think of the wings of God and what is beneath them.

They are wings of mercy. "How priceless is Your unfailing love!" This is mercy—kindness to the undeserving. Under God’s wings is a place for penitent sinners. If it were a place only for good people, sinless people—it would have little comfort for us. The angels might go in there—but we could not. But it is a place for sinners. When you look closely, you see that the wings of God are stained with blood. Some birds, when defending their young, put their own bodies between them and the danger, themselves receiving the stroke that was meant to destroy their offspring. Open your Bible and you find that Jesus has been wounded. Up there, amid the bright glory of heaven, He appears as One that has been slain. Look at His hands, those hands that always were so gentle—and there are great wounds upon them! Look at His feet, those sacred feet that bore Him on so many errands of love, that the penitent woman kissed and wetted with her tears, and there are wound-prints in them! Look at His side, over His heart, that heart which throbbed with so much tenderness and love and compassion; and there you see a spear-wound! You ask how Jesus received these five wounds, and you are pointed to the answer, "He was wounded for our

transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities . . . with His stripes we are healed." Then you understand it. Jesus interposed His own blessed body to receive the woundings that would have fallen upon us. That is the meaning of the blood upon the wings of God. The wounds were received in saving us. Beneath these wings is mercy, because LOVE has suffered for us! The wings of God are wide-spreading. You have seen a hen stretch out her wings to cover her brood; yet hers are not broad wings. They can shelter only her own little family. God's wings are infinitely broader. For six thousand years they have been gathering human souls under their blessed shelter—and yet there is room! In Malachi, there is a wonderful word which speaks of the coming Messiah as a Sun, the Sun of Righteousness, whose spreading beams are likened to wings, under which there is healing. Think how widely the sun's radiant beams reach, when that orb is in the zenith. God's wings spread over every spot on earth, in which is a penitent soul. We know how the invitations ring out to the weary, the sinful, the lost. The God of the Bible—is the God of the sinning and the sorrowing and of those who have failed and fallen. His love is as wide as the human race—and as free as the sunshine. No sinner has fallen so low—but that the wings of God can reach out over him. There is room beneath these wings for all classes—for the happy children, for the strong young people, for the feeble old people.

Sometimes there seems to be no place on earth for the aged. They cannot keep pace any more with the hurrying ranks, and drop behind. Sometimes even the children, whom they sheltered in infancy, for whom they toiled, suffered, and sacrificed; appear to forget to keep a warm nest for their parents in their old age. But there is one place where aged Christians are never in the way. There is one home from whose door they are never turned away. There is room under the wings of God for the aged. God's voice is heard saying: "I will be your God throughout your lifetime—until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you!" How many dear aged people, has God folded to sleep as gently as ever a mother folded her babe to her bosom! So there is room for all—the wise man and the ignorant, the strong and the weak, the healthy and the trembling invalid, life's victors and the defeated, the pure and gentle and innocent, and the worst sinners. These wings of God are wide-spreading.

God's wings are gentle. The warmest nests in this world, are those which human love prepares for its dear ones. We know how the mothers tuck their babes away in their little cribs, with pillow of down and soft blankets. We know how warm and gentle a place every true and happy home is for children to rest in and grow up in. We know what tenderness a noble, manly husband prepares for the wife he loves and takes into the shelter of his strength. We know what tenderness many a friendship makes for the life that it enfolds, throwing about it life's fondest gentleness, blessing it with all delicate thoughtfulness and attentive ministry, and sheltering it from life's rude storms and harsh contacts.

We all long for tenderness. To live without it—is dreary indeed. It is a blessed thing that it comes to us in so many sweet ways in life. But the love of God is gentler than the fondest human gentleness. Have you ever thought how suggestive of tenderness, warmth, and softness—the wings of a bird are? There is something almost human in the way the mother-bird cares for her young. What is softer than the downy feathers she spreads over them?

Some birds build their nests on a rock. Underneath it is bare, cold, and hard. But what do the young birds care, so long as over them they feel the warm covering of the mother-bird's feathers?

Some of God’s children find the earthly nest under them bare and cold. They have to endure the experiences of poverty. Their lot has in it many hardships. They have trials. At times afflictions are their portion. Not all have human love’s tenderness about them. Not every heart’s nest in this world—is lined with down. There are homes that are not gentle. There are lives with fine feelings and sensibilities, which move as amid briars and thorns and are hurt every day! There are many whose relations with others are not of the kind to give comfort. There are children who do not know what the refinements of gentle home-love are. There are hearts that are hurt by ingratitude, by coldness, by rudeness, by incessant unkindness, by unfaithfulness, by betrayal, by wrong and injustice. But the gentleness of God is over all who will nestle beneath it—and it never fails, never lacks in tenderness.

What a warm place this is—to which to flee in time of sorrow! Some of us do not yet understand this. We cannot see the stars—until the sun goes down and night comes. We cannot know the marvelous tenderness of God, while yet we are surrounded and overshadowed and blessed by rich and unbroken human tenderness. There are many things about the love of God—which we cannot learn until we lose earth’s good things.

Again and again people say in their times of bereavement and sore trial: "I cannot understand the experience I am having. I felt as the sorrow approached, that I could not possibly endure it, that my heart would break. But when it came, there seemed to be something enfolding me, so that I was not crushed—but could even sing in my grief and loss." A friend wrote once, when he was watching beside his brother’s deathbed, that he was learning not so much the meaning of sorrow—as he was learning the meaning of God’s comfort. Some of us understand this from our own experience. As we entered the valley of grief, and the darkness deepened about us—we felt a Presence we could not see; the darkness seemed to be struck through with a soft, heavenly light. There was something we could not describe, which strangely comforted us, keeping us calm and quiet.

We call sorrow a shadow, and we talk about it falling upon us, and deepening, until sometimes all the light of earth is obscured. But it is the shadow of God’s wings. What seems darkness—is only the darkening of earth’s dim lights, that heaven’s light may shine about us. Sorrow, for a Christian, is not God’s withdrawal; it is His nearer coming. We shall never know how warm and soft a place there is beneath the wings of love—until we creep there out of earth’s nights and blasts of storm. In this world we nestle only, as it were, under the outer edge of this broad shadow. We do not, therefore, experience the fullness, the best, the blessedness which lies up nearer the divine heart. Then, what we call dying is, for a Christian—only going in deeper beneath these wings. God’s grace is very sweet, even on the earth—but heaven is far better.

There is a great comfort for us in this lesson, when we stand by the bedside of our believing friends and watch them pass into the shadow which we call death. It is painful for us to have them go out of our arms—into the strange mystery. Yet they only nestled up closer up under God’s wings! That is the true meaning of dying.

Notice what this Psalm tells us is under these wings of God. There are four things.

Satisfaction is the first. "They shall be abundantly satisfied!"

Joy is the second. "You give them drink from your river of delights."

Life, larger, fuller life, is the third. "With you is the fountain of life."

Light is the fourth. "In your light—we shall see light."

These four great blessings are found beneath the wings of God—satisfaction, joy, life, light. When we are dwelling beneath the wings of God, and under these wings have such marvelous blessings—why should we ever be afraid? Why should we dread to see our Christian friends pass out of this life! To depart and be with Christ—is very far better!

God's wings are also wings of refuge. "How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings!" When the storm comes, the mother-bird gathers her young beneath her wings and shelters them, bearing herself the pelting of the hail—but keeping them safe and warm. So Christ gathers His people beneath the wings of His love—when the tempest breaks upon them.

"What tempest? From what do we need a refuge?" Does anyone ask the question! Have you never felt the need of a refuge for your own life? Have you never felt yourself driven by fears, by dangers, by alarms, by the wild tempests of sorrow or of doubt—needing some refuge, some secure place to hide, where you would be safe from the angry strifes? In all such times and experiences, there is a refuge beneath the wings of God! There is a refuge there, because it is mercy's place. Under the wings of the cherubim, was the mercy seat. We have sinned. We need atonement. Those who flee beneath God's wings, beneath the outstretched arms of the cross—have nothing to fear from their sins. They are forgiven. "There is now no condemnation." But this is not the only sense in which the wings of God give a refuge to men. You know the restful feeling that steals over one when after a day out in the world, amid its strifes, cares, and competitions, its babble of tongues, its insincerities, its disappointments; he enters his own sweet and happy home and shuts his door. Home is a refuge to his heart. He finds love there, sincerity, no enmity, no competition, no sharp dealing. God is home to the human soul that trusts in Him, "Lord, you have been our dwelling-place from all generations!"

There is a sense in which a noble, true, and faithful human life—is a refuge to many others. But the best human refuges are only frail and temporary. You turn some day for shelter—and find your friend dead. Then when the shock comes, the temptation, the sorrow, the fear, the danger—-and you want to fly to him, he is not there, and you are left to fall. Human refuges are well in their place, as gifts of God, as shelters for an hour; but you need to have the Rock of Ages for your refuge! Then you will never find your hiding place removed, when you need to flee into it. In any hour you can creep into that shelter, and sing:

Jesus, Lover of my soul,

Let me to Your bosom fly,

While the nearer waters roll,

While the tempest still is high:

Hide me, O my Savior, hide,

Till the storm of life is past;

Safe into the haven guide;

O receive my soul at last!

Other refuge have I none;

Hangs my helpless soul on Thee;

Leave, ah! leave me not alone,

Still support and comfort me.

All my trust on You is stayed,

All my help from You I bring;

Cover my defenseless head

With the shadow of Your wing. The Desires of Your Heart

Psalms 37:4 "Delight yourself in the LORD—and He will give you the desires of your heart!" The young people who have read "The Arabian Nights" will remember the strange story of 'Aladdin', who possessed a magic lamp—which commanded the services of certain genie. By rubbing the lamp, Aladdin got whatever he wished—and grew rich and great. But that is only an impossible story of fantasy.

Yet in this Psalm, we have a promise which seems to tell us of a way in which we can get anything we wish. "Delight yourself in the LORD—and He will give you the desires of your heart!" It is not by rubbing a magic lamp, however, that we can get what we desire. True religion is not magic. Yet some people seem almost to think that it is. Simon Magus thought so, and tried to buy the secret. A man who has lived a wicked life, never giving God a thought, when thinking that he is about to die—is greatly alarmed, sends for a minister, thinking that thus he can have heaven opened for his soul. It is not in this way—that a desire for heavenly blessedness can be gratified.

What is it to delight ourselves in the Lord? It means to love God—to love to be with Him, to love to please Him, to love His ways, to love His service.

We know what it is to delight ourselves in a friend. You love your friend so much that when you are with him, you are perfectly happy. You have no wish ungratified; you need nothing else to complete your contentment; your soul finds its home in him. This is the ideal in marriage—that the two who wed shall delight in each other. They should meet each other's desires and yearnings. They should be one in interest, in purpose, in the aims of life.

Yesterday I had a letter from the Pacific Coast, from one I have never seen—but whom I have sought to help. She is considering the question of marriage and she writes of the young man: "I love him very dearly and yet I hesitate to give my life into his keeping. He is noble and kind and worthy—but in some respects he is far from being the man I have always had in mind in thinking of marriage. There is something lacking. There is a need in my life which is not met in his—the perfect union in consecration to God." There may be true love there—but there is not yet full, undisturbed delight in the friend. There is not complete accord, there is not perfect confidence, there is not absolute trust. All these elements are essential in delight in a friend. To delight in God,

also implies the qualities of love, trust, confidence, accord of will. There is a cluster of counsels in this Psalm which belong together:

"Trust in the Lord."

"Delight yourself also in the Lord."

"Commit your way unto the Lord."

"Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for Him."

"Trust in the Lord." You cannot delight yourself in God—if you do not trust Him. Trust implies confidence. John leaned upon his Master's bosom that dark night of the betrayal. The distress of the disciples was terrible. They could not understand. It looked as if all their hopes were in ruin. Yet see John leaning on Jesus' bosom—calm, quiet, unafraid. You remember, too, what Jesus said to His disciples that night, as He comforted them: "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me." They could not understand, and He could not explain the mystery of their sorrow, so that they could understand. Then He asked them to trust in the darkness, just to believe that nothing was going wrong. We must trust God—if we would delight in Him. If there is not absolute trust, there cannot be delight.

"Delight yourself also in the Lord." Delight means joy, and if there is the slightest fear, there will be pain, a feeling of insecurity, a dread of something going wrong, or that something will go wrong. Trust in the Lord is necessary, to delight in Him.

"Commit your way unto the Lord." There will come hours of uncertainty in every life, Hours when we shall not know what to do, which way to take, where to find help. Then it is, that we should learn that Christ is not only our Savior from sin—but the Lord also who orders all our ways. There seem to be a great many people who can trust God for the salvation of their souls—but who have not learned to trust Him with the choosing of their ways, the direction of their affairs, the care of their lives. They fret and worry continually. We have not learned the full meaning of trust—until we have formed the habit of committing all our way unto the Lord. The reason for worrying, which is so common a habit, even among Christians, is that people do not roll their way upon God. If they only knew this blessed secret—they would not worry any more. Only think what it would mean to worrying people, if they understood this and instead of being anxious about every little thing—would take it to the Lord in prayer and let the peace of God keep their hearts and their thoughts in holy quiet.

Instead of trying to manage our own affairs, let us begin to commit them to God. Then there will be no blunders made. We will not any longer spoil the web—by ignoring the pattern and weaving our own way. If we learn to commit our way unto the Lord, down to the minutest matters—it will help us to delight in the Lord. It will add immeasurably to our feeling of safety—to believe that God is taking care of us!

Another of the words of trust grouped here in this old Psalm is, "Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for Him." One of the marginal renderings is, "Be silent to the Lord." Never answer the Lord in the way of protesting against His guidance, or questioning His providence. Never ask in the day of cross-bearing or pain or trial, "Why?" Some of us are not silent to God—when He leads us in ways that are rough and steep. The words mean full and complete submission to the will of God.

Silence to God is taught by our Lord Himself. It is woven into the daily prayer He gave us. "May Your will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." How is God's will done in heaven? Silently, songfully, sweetly. As in heaven, so on earth.

These are suggestions of the meaning of the words, "Delight yourself in the Lord." It means trusting in the Lord. It means committing our way unto Him. It means resting in Him, being silent to Him. It means having our home in God.

"Lord, you have been our home." The ideal home is a place of perfect love, of perfect accord, of perfect confidence and trust. There is no strife, no doubt, no fear, no bitterness. The ideal home is a place of delight. Men are telling us these days that we should get and keep our lives in tune with God. This means that we fall in line with God in everything. We are not to demand that God shall bring His way down to suit our whims and frailties; rather and always we are to bring all our thoughts, plans, feelings, desires, and ambitions into harmony with His will.

Someone tells of entering a church one Sunday as the congregation were just beginning to sing. At first it seemed as if no two of the hundreds of voices were in accord. But the visitor noticed one clear, sweet, true voice singing, not loud—but calm and undisturbed, amid the discords. As stanza after stanza was sung—all the other voices came into accord with this true voice—and the last part of the Psalm was sung in perfect accord. This is the way the will of God should rule in our lives. It finds us rebellious, discordant, out of tune with God, complaining, fretful, discontented, murmuring, even bitter against Him. But as we devote ourselves to God, to follow Jesus Christ, learn of Him, let His Spirit into our life—then little by little at first, then more and more, do the discords give way, do the murmurings and rebellings yield to submission, and does the music come into harmony, until our whole life becomes delight in God's will. That should be the ideal of every Christian life—perfect accord with God. A godly man said, "It takes a long time to learn to be kind." SELF lives so persistently in our hearts, we are so full of the old spirit of resentment, unforgiveness, uncharitableness, we are so touchy, so bitter in our prejudices, so prone to see the evil in others and not to see the good—that it does indeed take a long time to learn to be kind. It takes so long, that not many people ever really learn it. There are not many kind people—that is, who are always kind, kind to everyone, to disagreeable people as well as to those who are agreeable, to enemies as well as to friends, to bad as well as to good—and that is what it means in the New Testament sense to be kind. It takes a great while to learn to be kind. The same is true of every phase of the will of God. It takes a great while to learn to be patient, to learn to trust God, to learn to be absolutely true, to be rejoicing followers of Christ, to be helpers of others. It is a long lesson to delight oneself in God. Nevertheless, this is the lesson; it will take all your life to learn it well. But to learn it—is better than all riches, all power, all fame!

"Delight yourself in the Lord—and He will give you the desires of your heart." So this is the secret we have set out to find. This may seem a rather unusual promise. But the Bible is full of similar promises. The Lord said to Solomon as he began his reign, "Ask what I shall give you." Anything Solomon would choose for his life portion—God would give him. A young man says, "I wish God would give me a choice like that." He does! He says to every young person, "Ask what I shall give you. Delight yourself in the Lord—and He will give you the desires of your heart."

Remember, first of all, that you are delighting yourself in the Lord. You love Him supremely. You have committed your way to Him. All your desires are holy. One of the things that pleased God in

Solomon’s choice, was that it was unselfish. He had not asked for the death of his enemies. His choice was only that he might be a good king, might be a blessing to his people. If we delight ourselves in God, if He is our soul’s home, if our wills are in full accord with His—we will not have unholy desires, selfish desires. We will desire only the things that God approves. We will not desire the hurt or harm of any human being. Our desires will all be for the honoring of God—and the blessing of others. If we delight ourselves in God—we will love to do His will.

Desires turned toward God—are prayers. Some people suppose they are praying—only when they are on their knees, or in some reverent attitude of devotion. They think they pray—only when they speak in words. But many of the most real and most acceptable prayers—are never voiced in words. They are only breathings of the soul, longings of the heart, yearnings and aspirations, which cannot be put into language. In one of Paul’s epistles we are told that God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask and think. We can ask much in words, and then what a great field there is where our thoughts can go beyond our words. Thoughts, feelings, and yearnings—are prayers if they are turned toward God.

If we truly delight ourselves in God—all our desires will be sent up on faith’s wings to God. Any longing of ours which is not fit to be a prayer—is not fit to be in our heart at all.

One of our Lord’s Beatitudes is for those who long. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled." Hungers and thirstings after godliness, desires to be better, longings for more holiness, wishes for closer communion with God and growing likeness to God—are prayers, and prayers which God loves to answer. The true spiritual life—is full of longings. In the Psalms, the writer’s soul has intense cravings—not the cries for forgiveness—but the burning, passionate thirst for God Himself. We should cultivate spiritual longing. A holy longing, makes us holy for the moment. Longing for Christ, brings us into Christ’s presence for the time. Longing for righteousness, makes us righteous. But the same is true of evil desires. If we let sinful wishes occupy our minds—we will grow corrupt in heart. "As a man thinks in his heart—so is he." If you cherish wrong desires, impure feelings, unholy imaginations, you will get your desires, and your life will be vile. That is the secret of much of the world’s evil. Let the evil desires stay in your mind—and you will soon be a mass of vileness. Keep your thoughts clean and white. Keep your desires fixed upon holy things, right things, on wholesome and true things, on pure and lovely things. Then God will give you the desires of your heart; and they will build up your life in the beauty of holiness.

"Delight yourself also in the Lord—and He shall give you the desires of your heart." Jesus said, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you." This is a thousand times better than any Aladdin’s lamp. Delight yourself in the Lord, abide in Christ, let Christ’s words abide in you—and no desire of yours will be unsatisfied. All life will then be a song. Fullness of blessing here on earth—then eternal blessedness in heaven!

Waiting for God

Psalms 37:7 "Rest in the LORD—and wait patiently for Him."

We are told of certain men that they walked with God. If we are walking with anyone, we keep close beside him. We do not fall behind him. We do not go faster than he goes. We keep step and walk by his side. We are to walk with God. The word walk is suggestive. It does not indicate haste.

Only once does the Bible show us God running. The father ran to meet the prodigal. He runs to save, to show mercy, to welcome the penitent. But in all His other movements, God walks. He is never in a hurry. He walks slowly, and we are told to wait for Him. Unless we want to go alone, we must wait for Him. He will never hurry to please us. We may be sure, too, that we are not going too slowly if He is with us. "Wait for the Lord." In one marginal reading the words are, "Be silent to the Lord and wait patiently for him." In another it is, "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him." His work is not yet finished; you see it now only in process. An artist is painting a picture. You come into his studio one day and see him at work. You ask him what the picture is and he tells you. You say: "Well, I cannot see any resemblance. I do not think that the drapery is beautiful. That sky is not natural." So you go on chattering and criticizing. The artist says: "Wait until the picture is finished. You cannot see yet what it is to be. Just wait." That is the thought in this Psalm. The writer was in great perplexity. Things seemed to be going wrong. Evildoers appeared to be prospering. They brought their wicked devices to pass. They slandered the righteous. They crushed the innocent and the defenseless. The writer saw all this, and it fretted him. "Just be silent before God—and wait for Him," was the answer that came to him.

We should wait for God in His providences. It takes time to develop them. We are assured that all things work together for good to those who love God. But ofttimes we find ourselves in experiences which we think cannot possibly bring any good to us. They seem full of hurt. But the answer is, "Be silent before God—and wait for Him." This work which seems to our thought so unlike God—is not yet finished. When it is complete, then the beauty and the good will appear.

We are all quite sure of being in circumstances, sometime in our life, when things will seem to be against us. We may have wasting sickness, bringing suffering, loss of income, heavy expense. We may have adversity in our business affairs. Death may break in upon our happy circle of love. Our plans may be thwarted. Some day we may sit amid shattered hopes, the broken purposes, and faded flowers of our joys, and say, "There is nothing good in all this!" But then will come to us the divine word, "Be silent—and wait for God." This seeming confusion is not lawless tangle. The threads are in God’s hands, every one of them. But His work is not yet finished.

We must wait for God also—in all our work. Sometimes we grow impatient at the slowness with which results come. Parents have their experience as they train their children, in watching for the outcome of their discipline. Teachers meet the same trial of faith in their work with their pupils. When a man works in wood or clay or stone or iron, he sees the result of every stroke. He sees the fragments of the marble fly—and the figure of his vision coming out a little more clearly as he hews away. He sees the rough timber grow into smoothness and beauty of form, beneath his saw and plane. But work on minds and hearts is slow. We cannot take a crude life—and make it lovely in a day, as one can dress and carve a piece of wood. We cannot change a fiery, tumultuous, restless spirit—to peace, love, and gentleness in one hour, as the sculptor can hew a block of stone into grace. It takes years ofttimes, to teach one moral or spiritual lesson. Many times we do sad hurt to God’s work in human lives—by our want of patience. A boy plants his grains of corn in the garden, and at once begins to look for them to grow. The second morning, seeing no points of green pushing up through the soil, he digs the clay away and lays bare the seeds to see what is wrong. In his impatient haste—he kills the germs and the seeds never grow at all. He ought to have waited for God. A writer tells of his experience in hurrying God with the development of an insect. For nearly a year he kept the cocoon of an emperor moth. It was shaped like a flask, and in the

neck end of it was a little opening. That was where the creature was to crawl out when nature's time—God's time—came. But this opening seemed so small, so much smaller than the insect imprisoned within, that one wonders how it is ever going to get out. Then when it begins to come out of its cocoon, it is with great labor and difficulty that it escapes. This man at last saw the first efforts of the moth to break away from its prison. For a whole forenoon he watched it striving and struggling to get out. It did not appear able to advance beyond a certain point. The opening seemed too narrow. He pitied the poor creature, shut up and unable to escape—and thought he would help it. He supposed he was doing a kindness. He took his scissors and snipped the fine threads to make the opening a little wider. In a moment more, without any further struggle or difficulty—out crawled the moth. But it had a huge, swollen body—and little shriveled wings. It had not the graceful form it ought to have had. The gentleman watched to see the transformation take place, the dwarfed wings expand into their radiant beauty. But he looked in vain. The moth did not develop at all into loveliness. It never did. He had destroyed it—in trying to help it. His kindness—had proved the creature's ruin! It was never anything but a stunted abortion, crawling painfully through the brief life which it should have spent flying through the air on rainbow wings. This friend of the little insect, was guilty of cruelty instead of being kind.

God's slower way was the right way, and he would better have waited for God. If he had, it would have taken longer time and it would not have been so easy for the moth—it would have had to crawl out with great pain and difficulty—but the result would have been a beautiful butterfly, with brilliant wings, flying through the air—and not a poor, misshapen creature, crawling about on the ground. This is a picture of what we do many a time—in trying to help God bring souls into the light, or to bring out some spiritual beauty in the life we want to help.

We are not too eager to do good—we never can be that; our whole soul should be full of the desire to bless others. But we are in too great haste. We have not patience enough to wait for God. We try to hurry the results we seek. We cannot wait for the seeds to grow. We do not give hearts time to develop their love, their confidence, their gentleness; we try to hasten these fruits of the Spirit. The result is, that the lives we thus help to premature development are never so beautiful as they would have been—if we had waited for God.

We need to learn the lesson also in the living of our own life. We are apt to grow impatient with our own progress. Many a young person, in his eagerness to get on in his course and enter active life—mars his work and lessens his own efficiency. It is better to wait for God. Jesus was in no hurry to begin His work. He spent thirty quiet years in preparation, in study, in thought, in simple common duty, waiting patiently for God's time for Him to go forth to His public ministry. Thirty years of preparation—and then only three years of work. But we know what kind of work He did in those brief years! Every word He spoke—was a word of power. Everything He did—left an impression on the ages. Those three years of ministry have been more to the world—than a thousand years of the immature, imperfect, fragmentary work many of us do. If with His sinless humanity and His perfect powers—He waited thirty years, in preparing for three years of ministry; we need far more than He, to be patient and wait for God before we go out to speak and work for Him. If we put more time into preparation, the fewer years left us for work, would count for far more in the end—than do now our many years filled with immaturity, with work that counts for little, with words without wisdom and without weight. Let us wait for the Lord that our work, when the time comes for work, may have power and good in it.

We need to wait for God, also, in finding our way in this world. Duty is not always plain for us at once. We come continually to points where we cannot tell which way we ought to go. If we are God’s children and are faithfully following Christ, we shall never have to take one step in the dark. Jesus said, "He who follows me—shall not walk in darkness." This means that duty will always be made clear. We shall never have to stumble along in uncertainty. We shall be able to make the right decisions and the right choices. But we must always wait for God. If we insist on running on before Him, of course we shall be in the dark. It is just as dark in advance of God’s glorious leading—as it is a way behind Him. If we would know the way and see what our duty is—we must wait for the Lord. For example, if you come to a wise friend with a question about what you should do next year, or next autumn, or even next week, it is probable that all the friend can say will be, "Wait." You are not sure of having any next year, or next autumn, or next week. The question of duty—may be the one that must wait until the time comes. You are sorely perplexed about what you ought to do in some matter that touches your life in a very close and sacred way. Yet the answering of it is beset with difficulties. You cannot tell what you ought to do or say. On neither hand is the way open and plain. The Word of God to you is, "Wait for the Lord." But it seems to you, that the answer must be given now, at once. The question stands clamoring at your door and needs immediate decision. But no clamoring of any question, no pressure of friends for your decision, no impatience of your own heart for action—should he allowed to compel you to decide upon your course in the dark, or until the way is clear and the duty plain. God never requires us to walk in darkness, even for one single step. Therefore, inexorably refuse to answer any question or decide any matter—until you know what you are doing. Guess work and stumbling are never necessary. Wait for God. You are trying to go faster than He is moving. Wait until He comes up, and then the way will no longer lie in darkness.

There is a bit of Scripture which says, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord." Psalms 37:23. Mark, it is our steps that He orders. He does not give us a map of the world with all our paths traced out upon it, so that we can see our whole course for years. He orders our steps. And that means that He will always show us one step—but it is the next step that He shows, not one a mile ahead. And this next step will always lie in the light, although the second step may yet be hidden in the darkness, and must be waited for. But the one step is the only one you need to take this moment.

You may think that you must answer some question or decide some matter immediately, even though it is all dark to you, and your answer or decision must be only a guess. Nay, wait for God. When He comes—you will be able to answer or decide clearly. If you compel yourself to make a decision in the dark, in uncertainty, it is not God’s leading. You have decided too soon. Tomorrow or a few days or weeks hence—it may appear to you to have been a wrong decision—but then it will be too late to change it. Wait for the Lord.

Another application of this lesson is with, reference to suffering wrongs at the hands of others. Naturally we all like to take care of our own rights. We start up quickly in self-defense when we are assailed, when anyone speaks against us or harms us in any way. But this is not the Christian way. The gospel of Christ leaves very small room for self-defense. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also." "Do not take revenge, my friends." So runs the law of Christian life.

What shall we do, then, when others defame us, or say false things of us, or seek to harm us? Two things: our simple duty, and then, wait for the Lord. Vindication is better left with Him. That is what this same Psalm teaches in verses 5 and 6 (Psalms 37:5-6) : "Commit your way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday." We may safely leave our name, our reputation, our character, in God's hands—when we are innocent of the things men charge against us. If we quietly go on with our work and our duty—God will take care that in the end vindication shall come.

It is better usually that we should not meddle with the matter at all. Our impatience, our hurry to help God vindicate us, ofttimes only does harm. Be silent and wait for the Lord. We cannot go on without God; to do so is to walk in darkness. But if we would have God with us, we must wait for Him. We must wait for Him to work out His providences, until His purpose has been accomplished; meanwhile trusting Him and resting in His love. We must wait for Him to come to our relief, when we are in circumstances of trial and perplexity. We must wait for Him to answer our prayers, not losing heart because He sometimes delays. We must wait for Him in our work for others, in trying to help them, lest in our eagerness we hasten the processes of His will—and stunt or mar or destroy that which with patience would have been beautiful. We must wait for God in every step of our life.

Peace comes in waiting for God. It is our restlessness that makes life so painful for many of us. "Does your limb hurt you severely?" asked one of a friend who lay with a broken leg. "Not when I keep still," was the answer. If we would keep still when trial is upon us, and be silent to God—we would have power.

It is a lesson of hope, too, as well as of faith. The things that perplex and try us, are God's unfinished works. When they are finished, there will be no confusion, no evil, no hurt in them. Bear the pain now—for pain is God's way to health. Accept the cross now—for the cross is God's way to the crown. Endure the plowshare that drives now through your field—for it is God's way to a golden harvest. Be patient with the slowness of Providence, for God works for eternal years. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him. The finished work by and by, will explain all that is now dark and hard and slow. The Living God

Psalms 42:2 "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"

There were many gods among the ancient heathen. Every nation had its deities. It used to be said in Athens that it was easier there to find a god, than a man. The statues and shrines of these deities were everywhere. But these were not living gods. They breathed not, thought not, loved not. In another of the Psalms we have this picture: "Their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths—but cannot speak; eyes—but they cannot see; they have ears—but cannot hear; noses—but they cannot smell; they have hands—but cannot feel; feet—but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats!"

Such gods could give no help to those who trusted in them. They could hear no cries of distress. They could answer no prayers. They could not deliver from danger. They could give no comfort to those who were in sorrow. They could meet no cravings of hungry hearts for love, for sympathy, for life, for peace. But the God of the Bible, is the living God.

Then, He is our Father. There are those who tell us that there is a great central force at the heart of the universe, by which all things are held in their place. They call it a force—a mighty, mysterious force. But they give it no attributes which make that force dear to human hearts in their need and sorrow. It cannot hear prayer. It cannot love. It cannot trouble itself with our daily trials and cares. You could not pillow an aching head on it and find soothing. But the God of the Bible has more in His nature than power; He is more than omnipotence. We read but a little way in the Book, until we find that He has a heart of tenderness and love, like our mothers. He is revealed in the Old Testament as a God who thinks of His creatures and cares for them. He came and walked in the Garden of Eden with our first parents, sought their companionship, craved their confidence and affection, and was grieved by their sin. He was interested in the life and work of men, was willing to lead them, to help them. He cared for those who would obey Him and trust Him, defended them, provided for them, blessed them. He was revealed also as a God of mercy, forgiving sin. But it is in the New Testament, that the revelation is made in its fullness. Jesus Christ was a teacher come from God, and He uses only one name in telling us of God—the name FATHER. He told men that the God who made all the worlds and dwelt in glory—was their own Father! And then He put into that holy word, all that is sacred, tender, sweet, compassionate—all that love could possibly mean. It is when we see something of God's love for us, when we begin to understand that He is our Father, caring for us with all a father's tenderness and affection, that we realize the meaning of the name—the living God. He is the God of power, the God who made all things and keeps all in being—but He is the God of love as well. He has a heart of sympathy and tenderness. He pities us in our sorrow and need, and is quick to help. This truth of the living God is full of rich encouragement. It assures us of satisfaction for all our heart's deep cravings. "My soul thirsts for God—for the living God." No idol could ever satisfy a soul's longings; nothing but a personal God can do this. We are made for God, and we never can find rest until we find it in Him. Jesus Christ stands and calls to all this world of weary ones, saying, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "If any man thirsts—let him come unto me and drink." "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him—shall never thirst"

We know what a satisfying of the heart—even strong and deep human friendship gives. There are human friends who are to us like a great rock in a weary land. We flee to them in the heat of parching days—and rest in their shadow. A friend in whom we can confide without fear of disappointment, who we know will never fail us, who will never stint his love in serving us, who always has healing tenderness for the hurts of our heart, comfort for our sorrows, and cheer for our discouragements; such a friend is not only a rock for shelter—but is also rivers of water in a thirsty land! Yet this at its best, is only a hint of what Christ is, to those who bring their thirsts to Him. His love meets the deepest yearnings of our souls for love. His wisdom answers all the questions of human restlessness. His life fills up the emptiness of our lives. When a soul thirsts for the living God—its longings will surely be satisfied. Things will not satisfy. Even the best of God's blessings will not do it Nothing less than God Himself will satisfy. This truth of the living God, gives us confidence in prayer. Is there anyone to hear us when we cry out of a sense of need or danger or desire? Is there anyone who cares to help us or bless us? If there is not, there is no use in praying. If God is only a great central Force at the heart of things—like the sun, like gravitation—it is in vain that we bow down, morning and night, and tell out our heart's yearnings. Would a man pray to the wind, or to the sun, or to the attraction of gravitation? If there is no living God, there can be no prayer, for then there is no heart to feel, no ear to hear, no hand to help. One of the saddest

things in this world is to see men and women praying to idols, bowing before empty shrines, worshiping relies of saints—things that have no life and no power to do anything. But our God is the living God. He made the heavens, and has universal power. He is also our Father. "Your Father knows what things you have need of, before you ask him." It was Jesus Himself who taught us to come to God with the words "Our Father" on our lips. We know that there is One who hears our cries, and is interested and sympathetic, and pleased to grant us answers of peace and love. Our God is the living God.

What would we do, if there were no one to whom we could pray? What would we do, if there were no heavenly Father, no living God in the universe, no one who cared for us and could help us? Suppose you were to learn that all this cherished belief in your heart, was a mistake—that there really is no one anywhere to hear you when you pray, no one who cares for you, or thinks upon you, or can give you any help—how dark the world would become to you!

Those who have been reared in the simple truths of Christianity, believing in a God of love, in the cross of Christ, and in prayer, and then have lost their sweet faith, have confessed that in the fading out of these Christian beliefs in their hearts—they lost their brightest joys and their dearest happiness. So would it be if you were to learn in some way, that your childhood belief in prayer was a mistake, a delusion, and that no one really hears your cries or cares for you. The brightness would die out of the world for you! No other loss, no bereavement, no misfortune that you might possibly suffer, could compare for a moment with the loss of your faith in God as your Father and as the Hearer of your prayers.

What would you then do when you had sinned, and when the sense of guilt sweeps over you like a flood of dark waters—if there were no God of mercy to forgive? What would you do in the time of overmastering temptation, of great danger, of heavy loss, or of deep sorrow-if there was no one in heaven who loved you and would hear your call for help? What would you do in the hour of dying, when every human hand must unclasp yours, when every human face fades from your vision, and you must enter the strange mystery alone—what would you do then, if there were no living God to walk with you? But we need not vex ourselves with such suppositions. We need fear no such sweeping away of our childhood beliefs. Our belief in prayer is no illusion. Our God is indeed the living God, who loves us, knows our needs, thinks upon us, hears our feeblest prayer. The God at the center of all power—is our Father!

Again, this truth of the living God gives us assurance of divine thought and care in all our life. Suppose, again, you were to learn that there is no one with wisdom, power, and love interested in the affairs of this world—that all things come by ’chance’—that no wisdom directs, that no hand guides and controls events, that the world is only a vast machine, grinding on forever, that bad men and devils have no check in their power to hurt—and that all men and all lives are victims of this mighty, heartless, remorseless grinding; how it would darken all of life for you! No God of love directing! No Father thinking of His children and keeping them in the midst of disasters! No Providence watching over the lives of men in all the mighty rush of events, and overruling all things for their good!

Dark indeed would the world grow to our hearts—if such atheistic supposition were to be proved true. A world without a Father! A universe without love! But this is not the teaching of the Bible. There we learn that this is our Father’s world, one of the many mansions of our Father’s house.

We do not have to wait for heaven to find ourselves in God’s care; we are in His care, sheltered in His love, quite as really in this world, with all its storm and peril—as we shall be when we reach heaven. There is not one trusting child of God on the earth today—who is not watched over by the heavenly Father—as tenderly as any helpless infant is nourished and sheltered in a loving mother’s arms. The Lord is your keeper. He who keeps you shall not slumber.

God rules in all the events and providences of this world. Things do not run riot, like wild, restless steeds, treading all frail, gentle things under their iron hoofs. This is not a world of ’chance’. There is no lawlessness anywhere. No wave of the sea in wildest storm—is out of God’s control. No pestilence, no earthquake, no flood of trouble, no tidal wave of misfortune, ever gets beyond the power of Him who sits on the throne. In a great flood in the West, when the river swept far out of its banks, and houses and crops and timbers were carried away on its bosom, some men in a skiff saw a baby’s cradle among the drift. Rowing to it, they found a baby sleeping sweetly in its soft, warm blankets; unhurt, unawakened in the midst of the wild waste of rushing waters. So does God keep His little ones, safe and unharmed—in the midst of this world’s dangers and alarms.

It does not always seem so, even to Christian faith. Sometimes God’s children appear to be sorely hurt in life’s experiences. Prayers for relief seem not to be answered. There seems to be no divine hand directing, holding evil in check, overturning men’s wicked schemes, keeping God’s child in safety, guarding and nourishing the godly, the true, the holy. When we look only at the sorrow, the loss, the suffering, the apparent triumph of wrong, the pain, hardship, cruelty, and grief we see everywhere, we sometimes almost question the truth of the teaching, that God rules in all this world’s affairs and ever keeps His own people. But we must take wider views of the Divine Providence. Earthly evil is not the sorest evil. Sorrow, sickness, pain, loss, and personal suffering or injury—are not the things that really hurt our lives. It is possible to suffer every manner of trial and ill, and yet to be continually receiving blessing. God’s keeping of us from evil—does not necessarily mean His keeping us from pain and trial. Jesus Himself was kept in the divinest keeping, and yet all the world’s bitterness swept over Him. Paul’s life was one of suffering and loss to the very end, and yet his real life, which he had entrusted as a holy deposit to Christ, was kept untouched by harm, uninjured, untarnished, through all the experiences of enmity and suffering through which he passed. So it ever is—to those who commit their souls to Christ and abide in Him. Temptations come, and there may be persecutions, disasters, misfortunes, crushing adversities, torturing sorrows. But if the life is truly hid with Christ in God—no real harm can touch it. Property may be taken away, friends may forsake, pain may rack, the body may be mangled; but none of these calamities can touch the soul. The soul is in the keeping of the living God, who is faithful, and in whose hands we can never be harmed. On ships at sea, at night, when the bell strikes the hours, the watch on the lookout calls, "All’s well!" It may be a night of terror. The storm beats on the waters. The waves break over the decks. The passengers are in dread. Many are trembling and afraid. There is great distress on board. Yet hour after hour, as the night passes, and the bells ring, the cheerful words sing down from the little nest on the mast, where the lookout keeps his watch, "All’s well!" "Ten o’clock, and all’s well!" "Eleven o’clock, and all’s well!"

All is well indeed—in spite of the storm, the waves, and the sickness and terror of those on board. The great ship is riding in safety through the tempest. It is conquering wind and waves. It is bearing its precious cargo of human lives steadily toward the haven, in spite of adverse storms and tossing seas. "Twelve o’clock, and all’s well!" So the hours move, and morning comes at last,

the sun shines forth, the waves sob themselves into a calm, and there is joy once more among the passengers. So it is that the voice of Christian hope ever sings its song of cheer in men's ears, in the midst of this world's storms. "All's well!" Yet it is a sad world, full of grief and tears. The words seem to mock us as we sit in our darkness, with the waves sweeping over us and the tempest breaking upon our soul. How can all be well—while all things appear to be so against us? In the world at large, God's plan of wisdom and love goes on amid all human sin and failure. Good will come at last, out of all that seems evil. The morning will break, the sun will shine, and the great ship will be out of the storm, sailing on, with canvas untorn, with engines throbbing, triumphant over every danger. Let us never doubt that the destiny of the world is good, not evil; life, not death. God lives, God reigns, and He will bring this earth through all its darkness into light. Christ is the Pilot. He is keeping watch. It is His voice that we hear calling down as the hours pass, "Midnight, and all's well!" "Morning watch, and all's well!" Redemption will conquer. The good ship will master the storms and come safely to the haven. The voice of the Master is heard, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

There is only one way we can suffer harm in the world. If we lose faith, we will be hurt—not by the trial—but by the unbelief. Keep your faith strong. Lie like a little child in the hands of Christ. Let not your heart be troubled—only believe. Then He will keep you, not only in perfect peace—but also in perfect security. "Midnight, and all's well!" Our God is the living God, our Father, our Redeemer.

David's Confession

Psalm 51

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." Verses 1-2. The fifty-first Psalm tells the story of David's great sin. It tells of his penitence after his sin had been shown to him by Nathan. We see in it the path by which he returned to God. Since David wrote the words of this Psalm, thousands have used them, and they have become the liturgy of penitence for all who seek divine mercy.

Notice David's thoughts of God, as we find them in his confession. He saw Him as a God of unfailing love. In all the poignant sense of guilt that pressed upon his soul, there was not a shadow of despair. The moment he saw his sin—there poured upon him also a glorious disclosure of God's love. He confessed, "I have sinned," and at once Nathan said, "The Lord also has put away your sin." From this revealing of the divine mercy—hope came at once. Had David not seen God in this light when the sense of his sin overwhelmed him, utter, hopeless darkness would have come upon him, and he would have been lost in the gloom. Thus it was with Judas, after he had betrayed his Lord, when the terrible tide of conviction swept over his soul. He saw no ray of hope, and in his dark despair—he went out and hanged himself. On the other hand, when Peter had denied his Master, and when, beneath the grieved look of that holy Eye, a sense of sin overwhelmed him—he went out and wept bitterly. But through his tears—he saw God as a God of mercy and love, and instead of despair—hope sprang up in his soul, and he was restored, living to be a glorious apostle. It is most important that the convicted sinner shall see God—as a God of mercy and love—as David saw Him, as Peter saw Him.

Notice also David's thoughts of his sin. First, he thought about his sin as his own. "My transgressions," "my iniquity," "my sin," "I have sinned," are the words he uses. He does not try to lay the blame of his wrongdoing, on some other one, as our first parents did. He does not plead the peculiar strength of his temptation and try to excuse himself for sinning so grievously. He does not talk of his peculiar environment or circumstances. He does not try in any way to explain his fall, or to mitigate in any measure the degree of his guilt. He frankly takes the whole responsibility on himself. This shows the sincerity of his repentance. An old writer said, that nothing else in the world is so much our own—as our sins. We cannot push the responsibility off on any tempter or on any circumstances. Others may tempt us—but no one can compel us to sin. There is no sin in being tempted—sin begins when we yield to the temptation. Jesus was tempted in all points like as we are—but He was without sin. We are commanded to resist the Devil, and we are told that he will flee from us. Others may tempt us—and the guilt of the tempter is great. But no one can compel us to sin. Until we lift the latch—sin cannot enter our heart's door. We are responsible, therefore, for our sins, and must bear the burden of them ourselves.

We must also personally seek and find forgiveness for our own sins. No intercessor can obtain pardon for us; we must be penitent ourselves. Christ's expiation is for sinners—but even Christ's intercession will not bring forgiveness, if we do not personally repent and seek mercy. No one can obtain forgiveness for us—for any unconfessed sin of ours.

Another of David's thoughts about his sin, was that it was against God alone. "Against you, you only, have I sinned." The smallest wrong thing we do—is done primarily against God. If we speak a rude or impatient word to a beggar—it strikes God's heart, and the sin is against Him. If we are unkind to a dumb beast—we sin against God. Our unholy thoughts, which we think harm no one—grieve God. Every sin is a personal offence to Him. We may injure others and do wrong and injustice to them—but the sin is really and always against God. It is the law of God that we break, no matter what evil thing we do; and in breaking His law—we have struck God in the face. We stand in such relations to God all the while—that every act, word, or thought of ours affects Him personally: either pleasing Him and meeting His approval, or grieving Him and receiving His condemnation.

Another thought of his sin which David had, was that it was inborn. "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." He was not born holy. Sin is not altogether a habit which one acquires through years of living. It is not a result of bad education. It is not a little soiling of one's nature from the outside, by contact with an evil world. Sin is in the heart—and was born with us.

Notice also David's thought of the mercy he needed. First, there is a simple cry for mercy. "Have mercy upon me, O God." This was his greatest need. He did not begin his prayer by asking for favors, for prosperous circumstances, for many friends. Before any blessings could count in his life—he must get clear of his sin, and must have God's mercy. The words represent his transgressions as all written down against him in the book of accounts—and he pleads to have them blotted out, erased, rubbed from the page. There is something very startling in this thought that our sins are charged against us, and that unless we get the record expunged, we shall have to meet the penalty. But the blessed truth here, is that sins may be blotted out—no matter how many or how great they are.

"Wash away all my iniquity." Sin is represented as leaving a stain, and the prayer is that it may be washed off. That is, sin not only writes its record against us on God's book—but it also denies and pollutes our lives. We need not only to have the guilt removed—to be justified; but we need also to have our lives cleansed—to be sanctified. We need a cleansing which reaches the very center of the being. The stains are deep, and the purifying process must go on until they are all removed. The ancient method of washing clothes was by beating or treading, and David asks God even to tread him down if necessary to remove the foul spots. We should pray God to wash us until every stain is taken away, however painful the process must be.

"Cleanse me from my sin." It is the language used of cleansing lepers. The word "wash" refers to garments and surface stains, and the word "cleanse" refers to sin as a disease, a leprosy in the soul. This prayer, therefore, is for the cleansing of the very nature.

There is still another expression in the prayer: "Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow." In certain ancient ceremonies, the blood was sprinkled with a hyssop branch. We may not be able to read into this prayer all the New Testament teaching about Christ's sacrifice, and yet the idea is certainly present, and for us means cleansing of Christ's blood.

Notice, then, David's thought about the renewal which comes with God's forgiveness. It is inward renewal. When the love of God streamed into his soul—he saw how much he needed to have done in him to make him what God would have him to be.

First, he had a new conception of the divine requirement. "You desire truth in the inward parts." Truth is genuineness, sincerity, righteousness. God despises hypocrisy. No mere external reformation will avail—while the heart remains wrong. With this lofty conception of the divine ideal of character, there is a beautiful evangelical teaching in David's prayer for renewal. He pleads for the application of the blood of atonement, to his life, then for the assurance of forgiveness, that the lost joy might be brought back.

Next he prays for renewal of heart: "Create in me a pure heart, O God." He has discovered the black fountain of sin in his life, pouring up its defiling waters and polluting all his soul. He cannot himself purify this black well, and he brings it to God that He may purify it. The word "create" shows that David understood the necessity of a divine work in him, a work nothing less than a new creation. In this prayer for renewal, he pleads also that the Holy Spirit may abide with him, be with him. He remembered Saul's terrible fate, when God took His Holy Spirit from him, and pleaded that the same calamity might not fall upon him. "Do not cast me from your presence, or take your Holy Spirit from me." While he prayed for the continuance of God's Spirit upon him, he prayed also that his own spirit might be constant, steadfast, and free—that is, willing. In other words, he desires the spirit of entire consecration to God's will and service. Then he asks for the restoration of the joy of salvation.

Notice once more in this Psalm, David's thought about serving God. When he had been forgiven and the joy of salvation had been restored to his heart, he would begin to be a blessing to his neighbors and friends. We cannot bring others to Christ—when we have no joy of forgiveness in our own hearts. But the moment we are forgiven and the joy begins in us—we begin to desire to help others, to teach transgressors God's ways, and to lead sinners back home.

Other suggestions are found in the words which follow. The tongue of a forgiven man will sing aloud of God’s righteousness. His opened lips will speak forth God’s praise. The character of the service which God desires from us, is sketched in the closing words—not sacrifice of animals or any possessions. The sacrifice that pleases God—is a penitent spirit and contrite heart. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

Blessing from Life’s Changes

Psalms 55:19

"God, who is enthroned forever, will hear them and afflict them. Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God."

Some changes are grateful, adding to life’s pleasure. In travel, the ever-changing scene, with surprises at every turn, new vistas from every hilltop, give unspeakable delight. What a dreary world this would be—if it were only an interminable plain, with no variety of hill and valley, mountain and meadow, forest and field, river and lake! The change rests us. So with life itself. No two days are alike. Each brings its newness, its untried experiences, its hopes, its visions of promise. Change is the charm of life. Monotony is wearisome. Routine irks us. There is health in variety. Still water stagnates; the moving stream keeps sweet and wholesome. But there are changes which we dread. They break into our plans and hopes. The things we cling to today, slip out of our hands and leave them empty tomorrow. Nothing human or earthly is enduring. Circumstances are fickle. We abide not in one happy state.

There are some homes and some lives which appear for a long time to have scarcely a break. They have uninterrupted prosperity. They are not disturbed by sickness. They have no bereavements to break the circle of love. They seem exempt from the law of change. But this is rare. Usually sorrow and joy alternate. There are breaks in the prosperity. Life is not all gladness—sometimes tears choke the music. How pathetic are some homes, with their vacant chairs, their memorials of sorrows, their emptiness and loneliness, where once a happy household lived, joyed, sang, and prayed together!

We dread changes. We like to stay in one place. We shrink from dislodgements and unsettlements. We adjust ourselves to conditions, and it hurts us to be disturbed. We are like trees—we take root in the soil and when we are torn out, a thousand tendrils of our hearts are left bleeding. We get used to the friends with whose lives our life has become knit—and separation rends away part of our very being. We would like to keep things always as they are. We learn so to depend on the people and the things that make up our accustomed environment, that it seems to us life will be scarcely worth while if this happy environment is broken up. So it comes, that we learn to rate life largely by its changes—or no changes. But this Psalm-verse reads it all differently. It does not say that changes are marks of misfortune. Rather, it intimates that there is peril in no changes. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God."

"No changes" means unbroken prosperity—no troubles, no losses or sorrows, no adversities; year after year with no break in the happiness. You would not naturally consider such an experience one of calamity. The circumstances of the family have grown more and more easy. They have added to their comforts until they live luxuriously. There have been no long illnesses, causing pain and anxiety, and draining the resources of the household. There have been no deaths, breaking

the happy home circle. No one thinks of pitying such a family. We do not make special prayers for it. If a man has been in some affliction, or has met with some great loss—it is fitting to ask prayers of the church for him. But for a man growing rich, in great prosperity, why should we ask prayers? Yet this is the man who really needs most to be prayed for. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God."

There are several ways in which the absence of changes may work hurt to the spiritual life. Unbroken prosperity is apt to hinder our growth in spiritual experience. No doubt there are truths which cannot be learned so well—at least in light, as in darkness.

We would never see the stars—if there were no night to blot out for the time the glare of day. If there were no changes of seasons—if it were summer all the year, think what we should lose of the beauty of autumn, the splendor of winter, the glory of bursting life in springtime. If there were no clouds and storms, we would never see the rainbow, and the fields and gardens would miss the blessing of the rain. Thus even in nature there are revealings which could never be made if there were "no changes." The same is true in spiritual life. We do not learn the most precious truths of the Bible, in the bright glare of unbroken prosperity and human joy. Many of the divine promises are like stars which remain invisible in the noonday of gladness, hiding away in the light, and reveal themselves to us only when it grows dark round us. Older Christians will testify that the sweeter meanings of many portions of the Scriptures, have come to them amid the changes of life. We do not really understand God’s comfort—until some sorrow comes. To miss the sorrow—is to miss also the beatitude of comfort. The same is true of growth. There are developments of spiritual life which can come only through trial. The photographer takes his sensitized plate with your picture on it into a darkened room, away from the sunlight, to develop it. He could not bring out the features, in the brightness. There are many of us in whom God could not bring out His own image—if it were always light about us.

You know how certain song birds learn to sing new songs. They are shut away for a time in a dark room and the new melody is sung or played over and over where they can hear it. At length they catch it and when they come out, they sing it in the light. Many of the songs of peace and joy and hope, which we hear in Christian homes were learned in the darkness. Much of the spiritual beauty which illumines some radiant faces—is the work of pain and sorrow. The artist was trying to improve on a dead mother’s picture. He wanted to take out the lines in the mother’s face. But the son said, "No, no! Don’t take out the lines; just leave every one. It wouldn’t be my mother—if all the lines were gone." Then he went on to speak of the burdens the sainted mother had borne, and the sorrows which had plowed deep furrows in her life. She had nursed babies and had buried them. She had watched over her children in sickness. Once when diphtheria was in her home and no neighbor would venture near, she cared for her sick ones night and day, until they were well. Her life all its years, had been one of toil and care and sacrifice. The son did not want a picture with the story of all this taken out of the face. Its very beauty was in the lines and furrows and other marks, which told of what her brave heart had suffered and her strong hands had done for love’s sake. No woman of easy and luxurious life, with "no changes," could have had that holy beauty.

Paul speaks of bearing in his body, the marks of Jesus. He referred to the scars of the wounds of his scourgings and stonings, and the other traces left by his manifold sufferings for Christ. They were marks of honor and beauty in heaven’s sight, like the soldier’s wounds got in the battles of

his country. An easy, self-indulgent life—gets no such marks of glory. It is the life of lowly service, of self-denial, of sacrifice, that wins the lofty heights of spiritual experience. To have no change, is to miss all this.

Again, a life with "no changes" is in danger of becoming ungrateful. When there is no break in the stream of goodness for a long while, we are likely to lose out of our heart, the thought of God as the author of all. Luther somewhere says, "If in His gifts and benefits God were more sparing and close-handed, we would learn to be more grateful." The same is true in our common human relations. Children who live in a home of luxury and never have a wish denied them—are in danger of losing gratitude toward the parents who are the almoners of God's Providence for them. Perhaps children who receive less, because their parents are unable to give them more, who ofttimes must do without things they need, and who see what it costs their parents to provide for them—are usually more grateful than those who have everything they wish.

Breaks in the flow of divine favor, recall us to gratitude. We never appreciate the blessing of health at its full value—until, for a time, we are sick, and are called aside from active duty. It is only thus that we learn to be truly and worthily grateful for the blessing of health. We are apt to fail to recognize the rich blessings of our home—until there comes a break in the circle of loved ones. Those with whom we walk every day in close, familiar relations, and upon whom we depend for much of our happiness, are apt to grow commonplace to our thought. They are plain and old-fashioned to us. We see them at such close view, that much of their beauty of soul is lost in the little faults and imperfections which our eyes do not fail to see. We have always been so used to their love and its ministries and kindnesses, that we do not realize its richness, its tenderness, its thoughtfulness, its self-denials.

Ofttimes we are ungrateful for our home, even complain about its lack, and fret over our little trials—not appreciating what we have in our home, until a sad change comes. One of the plain, commonplace loved ones, who has been so much to us, although we knew it not, quietly departs. Then in the loss, we first learn the value of the life that is gone. The vacant place—is the first true revealer of the worth which never before was understood or appreciated. The most grateful households, are not always the unbroken ones. The praise that rises to God for home and its blessings, is often sweeter and richer at the family worship where the voices tremble in the hymns, and where tears sometimes choke the prayers—than where no memories of loss or sorrow mingle in the praise. When we have "no changes" we are in danger of forgetting our dependence upon God. When year after year the rains come in their season, the fields yield rich harvests, the barns are full, and the tables are well covered with provisions; men are apt to forget that they are dependent upon God for fruitful seasons and golden harvests and daily bread. When business prosperity is unbroken through long periods, when there are no reverses, no failure of plans, no misfortunes; when everything they touch turns to gold, and when they have no losses, then men are apt to forget that God has anything to do with their success, and cease to look to Him for it. When for a long time we have had no break in our prosperity—we are in danger of settling down into a feeling of security, which is by no means a good spiritual state.

It is needful for most of us, at least, to be baffled ofttimes, defeated, just to keep us dependent on God. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God," Whatever helps us to grow into complete subjection to the divine will, and entire dependence upon God—is a blessing,

however great its cost may be. It is a sore misfortune to any of us, if we are left without changes until we grow proud, self-conceited, and self-willed, and ask no more to know what God's will for us is. It is a sore misfortune if one has had his own way so long—that he has come to regard himself secure in his prosperity, intrenched in his place, impregnable in his power, and to think that he never can be moved, never can have any adversity or failure, that his position is sure and safe forever.

There is in Deuteronomy, a picture of the eagle and the young eaglets in the nest. The nest is cosy and warm, and the young birds do not care to leave it, to try their wings. Then the mother eagle stirs up the nest, making it rough—so that her young will not love it so much. Thus she compels them to try to fly away. For eagles are not made to live in soft nests—but to soar skyward. Thus God, too, when our place has grown too soft and satisfying, stirs up our nest with life's changes, that He may train us to fly heavenward. We think it very strange when Christ enters our sweet, happy home in a way that seems stern and ungentle for a Christ of love, breaking its joy. But afterwards we care more for heaven, and our heart, disenchanted with earth, reaches up and lays hold anew upon God. We are made, not for any soft nest of earthly contentment—but for glory and for God. Blessed are the changes that make heaven mean more to us!

Let us learn the changefulness and the transitoriness of earth, and all earthly things. Nothing here is abiding. Only God is changeless. Only Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes, and forever. The sweetest home—will be broken up. The strongest, truest love—will unclasp. The richest earthly joy—will end. Only God is eternal.

Awake, My Glory

Psalms 57:7-8

"My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. Awake, my glory! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn!" The fifty-seventh Psalm is attributed to David. The time to which it is set down in the title is, "when he fled from Saul in the cave." The writer cries to God for refuge. His soul is among lions. His enemies have prepared a net for his steps. Then he cries as if to arouse himself to joy. "Awake, my glory! Awake, harp and lyre!" The verses of the Psalm which follow give us the music which flows forth from the awakened strings. "I will praise you, O Lord, among the people. . . . For your mercy is great unto the heavens."

Many of us need at times to make this same call upon ourselves to awake. The harps are hanging silent on the walls. The figure of instruments of music sleeping is very suggestive. They are capable of giving forth rich melodies—but not a note is heard from them. There are two thoughts suggested by this prayer. One is that life is meant to be glad, joyous. It is pictured as a harp. The other is, the splendor of life, "Awake, my glory!"

It is to a life of joy and song we are called to awake. Life is a harp. There is a legend of an instrument that hung on a castle wall. Its strings were broken. It was covered with dust. No one understood it, and no fingers could bring music from it. One day a strange visitor appeared at the castle. He saw this silent harp, took it into his hands, reverently brushed away the dust, tenderly reset the broken strings, and then played upon it, and the glad music filled all the castle. This is a parable of every life. Life is a harp, made to give out music—but broken and silent until Christ comes. Then the song awakes. We are called to awake to joy and joy-giving.

Christ's life was a perpetual song. He gave out only cheer. He even started to His cross singing a hymn. When He arose He started songs with His first words, "All hail!" "Peace be unto you." What music did you start yesterday, as you went about? What song is in your heart singing today? "Awake, harp and lyre!" But there is something else. "Awake, my glory!" Glory is a great word. It has many synonyms and definitions. It means brightness, splendor, luster, honor, greatness, excellence. Every human life has glory in itself. Did you ever try to answer the question, "What is man?" It would take a whole library of books to describe the several parts of a life. Merely to tell of the mechanism of a human hand, to give a list of the marvelous things the hand has done, would fill a volume. Or the eye, with its wonderful structure; the ear, with its delicate functions; the brain, with its amazing processes; the heart, the lungs—each of the organs in a bodily organism is so wonderful, that a whole lifetime might be devoted to the study of anatomy alone—and the subject would not be exhausted!

Think, too, of the intellectual part, with all that the mind of man has achieved in literature, in invention, in science, in art. Think of the moral part, man's immortal nature, that in man which makes him like God, capable of holding communion with God, of belonging to the family of God. When we begin to think even most superficially of what man is, we see an almost infinite meaning in the word "glory" as defining life. "Awake, my glory!" No one, even in the highest flights of his imagination, ever has begun to dream of the full content of his own life, what it is at present; then what it may become under the influence of divine grace and love. Even now, man redeemed is but "a little lower than God." Then, "it is not yet made manifest what we shall be." The full glory is hidden, unrevealed, as a marvelous rose is hidden in a little bud in springtime. All that we know about our future—is that we shall be like Christ. We are awed even by such a dim hint of what we shall be—when the work in us is completed. The call to awake implies that the glory which is in us—is asleep. It is a call to all that is in us—of beauty, of power, of strength, of good, of love—to be quickened to reach its best. We are not aware of the grandeur of our own lives. We do not think of ourselves as infolding splendor, as having in us the beauty of immortal life. We travel over seas to look at scenes of grandeur, to wander through are galleries, to study the noble achievements of architecture; while we have in ourselves greater grandeur, rarer beauty, sublimer art—than any land under heaven has to show us. Let us pray to be made conscious of our own glory. "Awake, my glory!"

We are to call out these splendors. The harp is standing silent—when it might be pouring out entrancing music. The hand is folded and idle—when it might be doing beautiful things: painting a picture, that would add to the sum of the world's beauty; doing a deed of kindness, that would give gladness to a gentle heart; visiting a sick or suffering one and winning the commendation, "You did it unto Me!" The power of sympathy is sleeping in your heart—when it might be awakened and be adding strength to human weakness on some of life's battlefields, making struggling ones braver, inspiring them to victory.

Suppose, now, that all the capacity for helping others, lying unawakened in each one's heart and hand, were brought out for just one week and made to do their best—what a vast ministry of kindness would be performed! Suppose that all of each one's capacity, for praising God were called out, that every silent harp and every sleeping psaltery should be waked up and should begin to pour out praise—what a chorus of song would break upon the air! One of the Psalms begins with the call, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name!" That is

what this call, "Awake, my glory! Awake, harp and lyre!" means. If we truly wish our glory to be awakened, we must seek to have the best in us called out to its fullest capacity of service. This story comes from Japan and tells how only the Bible can prove itself true. A man had obtained a Bible and became much interested in it. After reading it, he said, "This is a fine thing in theory—but I wonder how it would work in practice." On the train on which he was traveling was a lady, who, he was told, was a Christian. He watched her attentively to see how she would act, how her conduct would illustrate the Book in which she believed. He said, "If I can see anything in her conduct like this Book, I will believe it." Before the day was over he had seen in her so many little acts of unselfishness and kindness, so many examples of patience and thoughtfulness, so much consideration for the comfort of her fellow passengers, that he was deeply impressed and resolved to make the Bible the guide and inspirer of his whole life. Thus it is that the glory of our life should be awakened. In one of Paul's letters to Timothy he gave this young man an earnest charge. Timothy was not living at his best. Paul bade him to stir up the gift of God that was in him. Timothy had abilities—but he was not using them worthily. God had put into his life spiritual gifts, capacities for great usefulness—but Timothy was not exercising His gifts to the full. The glory in him needed to be waked up. "Stir up the gift of God that is in you," bade Paul. The picture in his words, is that of a fire smoldering, covered up, not burning brightly, not giving out its heat. Timothy was bidden to stir up the fire that it might burn into a hot flame. Many Christians need the same exhortation. They have the fire in their hearts—but it needs stirring up. "Awake, my glory!" Do you think you have been doing your best? Can you think of a day in the past week, which you made altogether as beautiful as you could have made it? Could not the artist's picture have been a little more beautiful, a little broader and nobler in its technique, a little finer in its sentiment? Could not the singer have sung her song a little better, with a little more heart, a little more sweetly! Could not the boys and girls at school have done a little better work and have been a little gentler among their schoolmates? Could not the men have been a little better Christians out in the world; and the women better, kindlier neighbors? The best day any of us ever lived—might we not have made it a little holier, a little fuller of divine love, a little more sacred in its memories? Must not every one of us confess that the glory in us needs awakening? No doubt the body is a clog to the mind and the soul. Many of us have burning desires for holiness in our hearts—but somehow we have not the power to express the desires. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote to a friend, "You cannot sleep; well, I cannot keep awake." In the lethargic condition of his body, his magnificent intellectual powers were held as in a stupor. No doubt many men with great spiritual fervor are unable to express their earnestness of soul, because they are hampered by an unwholesome somnolence. We need to call upon our souls—to wake up! We need to call upon God—to wake us up.

"Awake, my glory!" The word gives dignity, splendor, honor, greatness, divineness to our life. It calls us to make our lives worthy of the name. The lowliest human life—is glorious in its character, in its possibility, in its destiny.

Recently a Sevres vase, some sixteen inches high, was put up at auction. It was dated 1763. No history of it was given. No one knew where it came from, who made it, or who its owners had been. But the vase was so exquisite in its beauty and so surely genuine, that it brought at auction twenty-one thousand dollars. Yet this rare and costly vase, was once only a mere lump of common clay and a few moist colors. The value was in the toil and skill of the artist who shaped and colored it with such delicate patience and such untiring effort. He did his best, and the vase today

witnesses to his faithfulness.

If we would only always do our best in all our work, we would live worthily of the glory that is in us. The Parthenon at Athens was encircled within by a sculptured frieze, five hundred and twenty feet in length. It was chiefly the work of Phidias. The figures on the frieze were life-size, and stood fifty feet above the floor of the temple. For nearly two thousand years the work remained undisturbed and nearly in its original state. By the explosion of a bomb-shell, the frieze was shattered about the close of the seventeenth century and fell upon the pavement. Then it was found that in every smallest detail the work was perfect. Phidias wrought, as he said, for the eyes of the gods—for no human eyes saw his work at its great height. It is in this spirit, that we should do all our work—not for men's eyes—but for God's. We should do perfect work, for no other work is worthy of the doer. "Awake, my glory!" Do your smallest task as beautifully as if you were doing a piece of heavenly ministry, and were working for the very eye of the Master Himself!

Let us set higher ideals for ourselves. We are not merely dust—we are immortal spirits. We are children of God—and this dignifies the smallest, lowliest things we do. Sweeping a room for Christ—is glorious work. Cobbling shoes may be made as radiant service in heaven's sight—as angel ministry before God's throne. The glory is in us—and we must live worthily of it. Let us call out our best skill, our rarest power, for everything we do. Our days should be ascending days in the scale, each one made more beautiful than the last. We never get to the best opportunity—tomorrow will bring us into a more heavenly atmosphere, than today's. This is the call to us in all life. There is no end to life. There is always something beyond. Life is immortal. When our glory awakens and presses on, it will always find something beyond. Only heaven is the end.

"Awake, my glory!" Shall we not make this demand upon ourselves! We are asleep—and cannot wake up. Yet we must wake up—or we shall perish spiritually. The parable speaks of those whom their Lord had set to watch—but whom He warned against sleeping. "Lest when he comes and finds them sleeping." We need to pray for nothing more earnestly, than for power to keep awake.

We must get awake first ourselves. "Awake, my glory!" Then it is a great thing to be an awakener of others. Some men have this power in large measure. Everyone who comes near them is quickened, becomes more widely awake, is inspired to live better. Christ awakened the glory of His disciples. They were plain men, without the education of the schools, without the art of eloquence; but they lived with their Master, and He taught them, put Himself into their lives, then sent them forth. Every particle of the glory in them—was awakened, and they went out and woke up the world. That is what God wants us to do. Get awakened yourself, and then wake up your friends. Shall we be content to stay asleep any longer? Must our harps still hang silent on the wall, giving out no music? Must the glory in us continue to sleep? Shall we not rather call upon ourselves to awake and then call upon God to awake us? Then our lives shall open into beauty and into power. Then shall we be the people God wants us to be!

Messiah's Reign

Psalms 72:1-2

"Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice." In the seventy-second Psalm, we have a wonderful description of the ideal king. "The historical occasion of the Psalm is to be kept in mind.

A human monarch stands in the foreground; but the aspirations expressed are so far beyond anything that he is or can be, that they are either extravagant flattery, or reach out beyond their immediate occasion to the MessiahKing."

Though we may not be justified "in attempting to transfer every point of the psalmist's prayer, to the Messiah," yet we may study the words of the Psalm, as a picture of Christ. He is a KING whom we need never fear to trust. He is most gentle and loving. The weakest one in His kingdom, is sure of protection and care. Those who have failed the most sorely, are sure of compassion and help—help that will restore them to strength and joy—if they will but cling to Him and follow Him.

"He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice." We are sure that our King will never be unjust to any of His subjects. He will judge always with righteousness. He will never wink at sin. He is holy, and must have holiness in His followers. This is one thought.

Another thought, is that no one will ever receive any injustice at His hands. The poor often fail of justice in human governments. They have none to plead their cause. They have no money to employ advocates. Besides, they are thrust aside by the rich and the strong, and ofttimes cannot secure a hearing. But under this King, the poorest and weakest are as sure of justice, as the richest and the strongest. The Bible from beginning to end represents God as the Friend of the weak, the unfortunate, the defenseless, the unprotected.

"The mountains will bring peace to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness." We may not read into this thought about the mountains, all that modern science has taught us of the ministry of mountains, in the physical economy of the earth. But we know that the mountains give beauty and strength to a country. They are also full of healthful influences. The mountains were ancient hiding places for men in danger. They are firm and fixed, emblems of perpetuity. We read of the "everlasting hills." They are the massive foundations of the earth. They carry the valleys in their bosom and hold up the great plains in their arms. Their tall peaks catch the first gleams of dawning day and are the last to wave farewell to the setting sun. They are sources of inestimable blessing to the plains below. Their storms and currents, purify and sweeten the air. Rivers are born amid their crags. From their melting snows, millions of streams flow down to water the gardens and valleys below. In all these and other ways, mountains are expressive emblems of God Himself. He is the refuge of men. In His bosom, the weary and heart-sore find most kindly shelter. He is the source of infinite blessing to the world. Rivers of goodness flow from His heart, bringing joy, life, and gladness to earth's homes.

Here it is said that the mountains bring peace. Probably the verse is only a poetical expression of the promise that peace shall prevail in the lands in which the Messiah reigns as King—peace in the widest sense. We know what a prominent place peace has among the spiritual blessings which Christ gives. It must be noted here that it is in righteousness, that the mountains and hills bring peace to the people. There is no peace, except in righteousness. We must be godly—before we can be happy.

"He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor." Here again we have a glimpse of the compassionate heart of Christ. He has a peculiar interest in the poor and afflicted. The Bible is a book for the poor. The old Mosaic code had its special provisions for them. Every seventh year the land was to rest, that the poor might eat the

fruit that grew on the fields and vineyards. The corners were not to be reaped, nor all the grapes picked from the vine; but something was to be left always for the poor. The Psalms gleam with golden words like these: "The Lord hears the poor;" "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinks upon me;" "He shall spare the poor and needy;" "He shall deliver . . . the poor also, and him that has no helper." The world's heart is cold toward the poor. An Arctic explorer was asked whether he and his companions suffered much from the pangs of hunger during the eight months of starvation through which they had passed. He replied that the gnawings of hunger, were lost in the sense of abandonment, in the feeling that their countrymen had forgotten them and were not coming to their rescue. The bitterest thing about poverty—is not the pain of privation, cold, and hunger; but the feeling that no one cares, the lack of sympathy and love in human hearts, the cruelty of injustice, oppression, and wrong which are the portion of the poor, where the love of Christ is not known. But the Bible throbs with love and sympathy for the poor—as a mother's heart throbs for her children. We need but to look even cursorily at the story of Christ's walk among men, to see in Him the most loving interest in, and sympathy with, the poor. His heart was ever most gentle—toward those whom men despised. The afflicted, the sick, the tempted, the crippled, the blind, the outcast, the fallen—were the ones to whom His compassion went out in special tenderness. He is ever the same—the same yesterday and today, yes, and forever. That is the kind of king we have in Jesus Christ. None need ever fear to trust Him. The safest place in the world—is in His bosom. The poorest are sure of His love.

"He will be like rain falling on a mown field; like showers watering the earth." This is a beautiful picture of the effect on the world, of the reign of Christ. The mown field has only roots—all the beauty has been shorn off. The removal of the grass, leaves the roots exposed to the fierce summer heat, which burns and parches them almost to death. This is a picture of this world—under sin's withering curse. We know what bitterness and sorrow, what burning up of life's beauty—sin produces. Think of a country where Christ is not known, where none of the blessings of His grace have ever been received—such a country as the missionaries find when they go to India or China. For example, it used to be said that in India the birds never sing, the flowers have no fragrance, and the women never smile. This is but a poetic representation of the spiritual withering and dearth, which do exist in all places where Christ's gospel is not known. The warm, soft rain falls upon the parched, mown field—and the effect is magical. Almost immediately the seared grass becomes green and millions of tender blades shoot up. This beautifully illustrates the effect of the gospel wherever it goes. A boy lay very sick in a miserable garret in London. He had never known of the love of Christ. A faithful minister entered the place, bent over the cot and said, "My boy, God loves you," and hurried away. The boy looked up in surprise. But the word the minister had spoken was a revealing of the heart of Christ to him, and transformed his life. Every bright spot around a mission station is a commentary on this verse. Every Christian home, every saved and renewed life, exemplifies it.

"He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." We need not trouble ourselves about geography. The verse is a promise of the universal spread of the kingdom of Christ. The world is His empire—and all shall become His. It is ours to win His kingdom for Him. It is not enough to read the promise, and then wait for the kingdom. It is not enough for us to pray for its coming. It is ours to work to win the kingdom for the King. Enemies hold it now, and they must be dispossessed, and room must be made for Christ. Our work is to prepare the way of

the Lord. We are to open doors for Him into hearts and homes. We must help in extending the dominion of Christ until it fills all the world.

"For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help." Over and over again in this description of our King, do we catch a glimpse of the gentleness of His heart toward the poor. Here we are told that He will hear the cry of the needy. There is in the one hundred and second Psalm, a wonderful picture of the interest the Lord takes in those who are oppressed. "He has looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth." This ought to have wonderful comfort to any who are suffering wrongfully, and for all who are in sore need.

Then "the afflicted who have no one to help" has special mention. No one can ever say, "Nobody cares for me," for there is always One who cares. Christ cares. There is an incident in John's Gospel which illustrates this. There was lying by the pool of Bethesda, a man who had been suffering for thirty-eight years. He had been waiting for a long time by the healing waters—but being lame, he was unable to get into the pool at the right time, other stronger people always jostling him aside and thrusting themselves in. Jesus came by and saw this man who "had no one to help," and at once His heart went out to him in sympathy, and He healed him. So it always is. The most needy person in our company—gets the most of Christ's compassion; and the one who has no helper—gets the most of the mighty help of Christ.

Usually kings pay heed to the great, the strong, the people of rank about them; but heaven's King sees first the poor and needy—and listens to their appeals. One day, in the darkest period of the war, President Lincoln was ill and gave orders that no one was to be admitted. Senators and generals and great men came—but none could see him. Then a poor woman in faded garments came, and craved to see the President. She was in great distress about her son, who was in the army and was in trouble. "Yes, admit her," said Mr. Lincoln to the messenger. So it is with our King. The poor and the needy are admitted, even though others are kept waiting. The surest appeal to the heart of Christ—is sore human need.

Delight in God's House

Psalms 84:1-2

"How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God!"

"You must have the bird in your eye—before you can find it in the bush." One who has no love for flowers, will walk through fields and gardens filled with flowers and never see one of them. One who has no music in his own soul may live and move continually amid gentle harmonies, and never be touched or thrilled by even the sweetest melodies. On the other hand, one who loves beauty—will find it everywhere. One who has a singing angel in his own heart—hears every sweet note that breathes in the air about him. Our own heart—makes our world for us.

Here is a man whose heart is full of longing for God. There are thousands in all ages who have the same craving. There are always people who are prevented from attending worship services which they love—those who are sick, those who must care for the sick, or those who by other duties, are compelled to miss the hours of devotion which they greatly love. Love for the worship of God,

should be found in every child of God.

"My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God!" Loss is a wonderful revealer of value. Blessings brighten, as they take their flight. Many good things that we fail to appreciate when we possess them—come to have to us an incalculable worth—when we have lost them. An empty chair is ofttimes the first revealer of the true worth of a friend, whom we but inadequately prized when we had him. No doubt the writer of this Psalm loved God's house when he enjoyed its privileges, when he could go to it freely—but now when he was shut away from it—he realized as he had not done before what it had been to him. There are many people who now attend church services, without finding any especial enjoyment in them, who, if deprived for a time of the privilege, would experience a great sense of loss. We all need God. Many people treat Him very indifferently. But when the hour of need comes, and they cannot find Him—they are in great darkness.

"Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you." Everybody ought to have a church home. There are people who now and then attend church services on special occasions—but who have no fixed church-going habits. They stay at home four or five Sundays; and then go some bright morning to hear the music or the sermon, or to see the people. These are not the people the Psalm describes. To "dwell" in the house of God—is to love the church and be deeply interested in its worship and work, always present at its services. The church has become to them—the home of their soul. These are "blessed." They feed continually at its table. They sit in its shadows with delight. They come to it at the close of days of toil and care and struggle—and renew their strength. They find comfort there in their sorrows; light in their darkness. The blessings of those who dwell in God's house, are very rich.

Then the result as here described is very beautiful. "They are ever praising you." This is the outcome of such a life of devotion—continual praise. The fire burns away upon the golden altar, and the incense rises without ceasing in sweet fragrance. The life that dwells in constant communion with God—is always a rejoicing life. Even in sorrow—its song is not hushed. It is ideal spiritual life which is described in these words, "They will are ever praising you." Always it will be a life of song. They live unbrokenly with God. Life flows from Him into their hearts continually, and the life they now live—is the divine life pulsing in them. They live with God in constant communion with Him and are ever at peace, with no fear, no sense of danger or loneliness, for in all experiences they have God. So it is that their life is a constant song, always joy, always praise.

"Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage." To be truly blessed, one must have a trust, a joy, a resource of strength, which never can be touched by any accident, by any calamity, and which never shall fail. This cannot be said of those whose confidence is in any earthly refuge, for on the brightest day, the ground of this trust may be swept away. But when our strength is in God, we know that though all things else may be torn out of our hands—our happiness shall remain undisturbed and secure.

Someone gives this little parable: Two birds went out one spring morning to build their nests. One found a tree by the river's edge and made her nest among its branches. The river murmured below, the sunshine played among the leaves, and the little birds were very happy. But one night there was a storm and a flood, and the tree was torn out and carried away in the waters—nest and nestlings and all. The other bird found a crag in the mountain and built its nest in a cleft of the rock.

The storm swept over it and the floods rushed through the valley—but the nest with its nestlings was safe in the rock. The little parable needs no interpretation. The man whose strength is in God, is further described very beautifully in the Revised Version: "In whose heart are the highways to Zion." There are highways in every heart—but they are not always highways to heaven. Sometimes they are paths made by sinful thoughts and imaginations; but in the godly man they are highways of prayer and love and obedience—roads that lead to heaven and God. The picture in the mind of the poet, was the pouring of the people along all roads and highways toward Jerusalem to attend the feasts. Those who thronged these highways to Zion had in their hearts love for God's house and God's worship, and these are blessed. Every heart has its highway running through it. Our thoughts beat their own roads in our life. If they are clean thoughts, pure, white, loving—they make paths that lead to Zion, to God. But if our thoughts are unworthy, if they are unclean and unholy—they beat paths that run toward darkness, unworthiness and destruction.

"As they pass through the Valley of Weeping, they make it a place of springs," the Revised Version has it. Probably there was somewhere in the land—a gloomy gorge well known to travelers, called the Valley of Weeping. Some tragedy in the past may have given it its name, or it may have been called so, because of its frightsome depth and darkness. This dreary place is made into a place of springs—a valley of beauty and luxuriance by the rains. The meaning is very clear. The sad things in our lives are turned into joys, through the love of God in our hearts. Many of heaven's richest blessings, come through earth's tears, sorrows changed into joys, transfigured. Tears are dear to God. He gathers them in His bottle. Someone has been photographing a tear and describes the marvelous beauty that the photo reveals in it. Here floods of tears—become showers of blessing. So it is in life, through God's love and grace.

"I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." Says Mr. Spurgeon, "God's doorstep is a happier rest—than downy couches within the pavilions of royal sinners." The humblest employment in the service of God—is better than to be a prince in the service of sin. The most menial work with Christ and for Him—is more honorable than the most conspicuous work in the world, unblessed by Christ's smile and favor. Young men, in choosing their calling or profession, should weigh well this truth. The glamour of fame is pitiful reward—for the degradation of one's life. It all comes to this—that the life of trust in God, is the only blessed life. It is better to have God, to live with God—than to have all this world's honors and riches, and not have God.

"No good thing will he withhold, from those who walk uprightly." This may seem to be a surprising statement at first glance. Does God withhold no good thing from His people? We must focus on the word "good." It is not merely the things which we want—that God always gives. Nor is it not the things which we think are good—that God gives. Perhaps they are not really 'good things'—as God sees them. We must always leave to Him—to decide whether they are good or not. He is wiser than we are—and knows just what effect on us, the things we crave would have. We must submit all our requests to Him—for final revision and approval, when we make them. This is the teaching about prayer, so prominent in the New Testament, which bids us to add to all our most earnest pleadings: "Nevertheless not my will—but may Your will be done." If the thing we ask for does not come—we must therefore conclude that in God's sight, it is not a "good thing" for us. Thus it is—that God's withholdings are as great blessings to us—as His bestowings!

There is another phrase here, which we must study. It is "from those who walk uprightly" that God will withhold no good thing. It is only when we are walking obediently, in God's ways—that we have a right to claim this promise. For, "if I regard iniquity in my heart—the Lord will not hear me!" Psalms 66:18

The Home of the Soul

Psalms 90:1 "Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations!"

We might translate it thus: "Lord, you have been our home in all generations!" Almost the sweetest of all words, is home. Home is the place of love, where love is at its best. It is the place of confidence. We do not have to be always on our guard at home. Out in the world, we are not quite sure of people. We must be careful what we say in the street cars, or as we walk about and talk—for someone may overhear us, and misunderstand us. We soon learn, not to open our lips too freely, when out in public. But when we enter our home doors—we can lay aside all such prudence and speak freely, without fear or distrust.

Home is the place of sympathy and tenderness. We can lean our head on the bosom of love—and feel the touch of kindness. If we have any trouble—we find comfort at home. If we have been foolish or have done wrong—we find pity and compassion and charity at home. If we have sorrow—there is no comfort like that which we get at home. If people outside wrong us and hurt us, if misfortune comes to us—home is a refuge for us. There we always find a shelter. Whenever other doors are shut upon us—the home door is always open. If we are lonely and without friends out in the world, the thought of home cheers us. So long as we have a home anywhere under the stars—we cannot despair. You all know what your home is to you.

Now listen again to these words, "Lord, you are our home." Think of God in this way. There are some human friends in whose presence we feel at home. No storm touches us—when we are with them. We have no fear; we are vexed by no care or anxiety; we are not annoyed by life's hard or unpleasant experiences, when they are near to us.

Think of God as your home. "You will keep him in perfect peace—whose mind rests, nestles, in You." Peace is the very word—it is one of the greatest words in the Bible. To have God for your home—is to have peace. You have no fear of man, of devils, of circumstances. Paul never said anything greater about the blessing of a Christian, than when he declared, "Your life is hidden with Christ in God." No storm can ever reach it! No danger can ever come near it! No power on earth or hell—can send a thrill of anxiety into it! It is hidden with Christ, in God. That is what it is to be at home with God. "Lord, you are our home!"

Charles Wagner calls his church in Paris, 'The Home of the Soul'. He means that the church he has built, is a spiritual home for the people who come into it. That is what every church should be. Every church should be in its community, as nearly as possible—what Christ would be—if He lived again in human form in a house just where the church stands. Imagine Jesus living here, and people coming to Him just as they used to do when He had His home for many months at a certain number on a certain street in Capernaum. Would not our church become a wonderful Mecca for pilgrims? The weary, would come to get rest. The sorrowing, would come to find comfort. People having problems and perplexities, would come to have them solved. Those who have stumbled and fallen, would come to be forgiven and helped to start again. Mothers would come to have their

children blessed. Children would flock here to get Christ's blessing. This corner would be a great resort for all who feel any need of help.

Then all who come—would find a home for their souls here. We know how Christ welcomed all who came to Him. He was everybody's friend. No one was ever turned away from Him, unhelped. The church should be to the people who come to it—what Christ was to those who came to Him. It should be a true home of the soul.

It is in a spiritual way, that the church should chiefly serve us. Some people forget this, and think that it is the business of the church to provide entertainment for those who come to it. We sometimes hear people complain that the church does nothing to furnish 'good times' for the young. But frankly, that is not the purpose of the church. Are schools—public schools, high schools, colleges—established to entertain those who come to them? Places of amusement are established to entertain—but the purpose of a school is to teach, to educate, to train the mind, to develop the intellect.

Just so, the mission of a church is not to amuse, to provide fun and entertainment—but to lead people to Christ, to train them in Christian duties, to build up in them godly character, and to prepare them for usefulness and service to the souls of men.

One says: "When we say that the way to get young people to the church, is to make the church interesting; I am afraid that we too often mean that the way to do this, is to make it entertaining. Did you ever know the theater to be a successful means of governing conduct? Did you ever know the most excellent concert, or series of concerts, to be the means of revolutionizing a life? Did you ever know any amount of entertainment to go farther, than to amuse for the hour it lasted?"

We need not say that the church is never to provide entertainment for its young people. There are ways in which it may do this most effectively, thus preparing the way for its graver and more serious work. But the great purpose of the church is to do people good in spiritual ways. Nevertheless, we are to do all our work in the brightest and most interesting way. It is a sin to make church services dull and dreary; we should make them bright and attractive. We ought to have as interesting sermons as our preachers can preach. We ought to have the best devotional music we can provide. Our worship should be beautiful. But entertainment is never to be the aim—the aim must always be to honor God and make the worshipers more holy.

Keep in mind the theme—the church a true spiritual home, a home of the soul. Read a sentence or two from the account of the first Christian church, just after Pentecost. "All that believed were together, and had all things common; . . . and they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, ate their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people."

Note the various points in the picture—they were together. There is a volume of meaning in the word "together." They had all things common. The rich shared their plenty—with the poor. They were constant in their attendance at the meetings for worship. They were of one accord—there was no friction, no discordant fellowship. They took their food with gladness. They were joyous in their home life and their social life.

"I wonder if there is so much laughter in any other home in England, as in ours," wrote Charles Kingsley in one of his letters to his wife. We should cultivate gladness at home. Religion does not forbid gladness. It makes us joyous. They were praising Christians at Jerusalem. Then worship was full of sweet song. This first church was a home of the soul to those who belonged to it.

How can we make church, a real home of the soul to all who come into it?

First of all, Christ must be the center of the church. No other name must be worshiped but His name. No other face must be seen. You remember the story of the artist who had painted a picture of the last supper. He had tried to make the Master's face so radiant, so attractive, that nothing else on the canvas would be seen. But when the picture was unveiled, he heard the people talk admiringly of the silver cups, and of the embroidery on the tablecloths, with not a word about the face.

He was disappointed and grieved, and taking his brush—he dashed from the canvas, all the secondary features he had heard praised, that the blessed face alone might win men's eyes. Christ should be the great overshadowing Presence in the church. No other face should win attention. The worshipers should see only His face. Just so far as the church is filled with Christ, as He is loved and thought about and worshiped—will it be a home of the soul to those who come into it.

We ministers must keep ourselves out of sight! Let us try to get people to love Christ—and not us. Only Christ can bless and help, and comfort, and strengthen, and heal. Be sure you never elevate yourself—as the one the people see. Seek to be unseen, that those who come with their needs shall meet only Christ. Let us make our church indeed Christ's church, and then it will be a home of the soul to all who enter its doors.

It must also be a church of love. God is love—it cannot be God's church—unless it is filled with love. They tell us that the beloved disciple had only one sermon when he got very old, and that he preached it every Sunday, "Little children, love one another." Perhaps it seemed monotonous to have the old man say the same words every time he spoke to the people—but really there is nothing else to preach. All the commandments are summed up in this one, "Love one another!"

If we can get the people of a church really and truly to love each other—we will make a home of the soul, for all who come in. Christ's prayer for His disciples was that they should be one. We are to live together, as brethren. We are not to be a company of individuals—a thousand, two thousand distinct individualities; we are to be one, one family knit together as one.

"Love is patient; love is kind." That is, it bears injuries and wrongs and insults—and does not get cross. It continues to be kind, giving love always in return for unkindness. They tell us that when the sea worm perforates the shell of the oyster, the oyster immediately by a marvelous secretion closes the wound with a pearl. That is what you do when a brother hurts you, does you some great wrong, and you as a Christian forgive him. You heal the wound in your own heart with a pearl. George Macdonald says, "What am I brothered for—if not to forgive?"

There are a great many things that happen every day in common fellowship, which make it hard to keep love unruffled—but that is the lesson we are to learn if we would make our church, the home of the soul for ourselves and others. Love is always a lesson only partly learned—we must be

learning it continually. It is a very long lesson—it takes all one's lifetime! A church is not a company of saints—but a mass of material for making saints. You are yet only saints in process of being made.

Remember, too, that the more testing of love you have in your experience, the more opportunities you have for learning the lesson. When, tomorrow, somebody treats you rudely, says a sharp or unkind word to you—it is a new practice lesson for you. A tourist who had just been to Pike's Peak said that near the top he saw a great mass of forget-me-nots, growing in the snow. He said he never saw the flowers so blue or so fragrant, as these were. The sweetest love comes out of the hardest lessons. Christians must live together in love—if they would make their church a home of the soul to others. It never can be done, by living together unlovingly.

Then we must also have love—for all who come to us. Christ was the love of God, to all who came to Him. The worst people found Him gracious. His enemies were always trying to pick quarrels with Him—but they never could. He answered all their insults—with kindness. His reply to their false accusations, was silence. When they drove the nails into His hands—His response was a prayer for them! When the suffering and sorrowing came to Him—He met them with sympathy. His disciples were dull, slow learners and tried Him sorely—but He never lost patience with them. Even when His friends proved untrue—He did not chide them. He was always merciful and loving to every kind of people. He welcomed the poor. He knew no caste. The worst sinners He received graciously. If we would make our church the home of the soul to those who come into it—we must make it a church of love to all. An English paper tells of a 'glad hand committee' whose only duty was to speak pleasantly to every stranger who came to the church. One day a man came in who had not been at church for years. After service one member of this glad-hand committee, came and spoke to him and shook hands with him. A little way down the aisle another welcomed him, near the door a third, then a fourth met him, and another spoke to him in the vestibule. The man said he never dreamed the church was so friendly, and said he was coming again—and he did. A godly man recently told of being a stranger in a city for several months, and attending a church all the while, without ever receiving one word of kindness from anyone. The sermon and the worship may be helpful to those who come into the church—but people need love—as well as sermons! Christ met all men with love, with sympathy, with kindness. We must do the same. We do not know what burdens the stranger who comes in is bearing, how heavy his heart may be, how he is longing for the warm grasp of a hand, how much he needs a word of cheer.

Jesus had compassion upon the people. Everyone who came near to Him—felt the power of His sympathy. He said that He would draw men to Himself. If we would win and draw men, if we would be a blessing to them—we must love and care for them. In one of the Psalms the writer says, "No man cares for my soul." The friends of Christ must care for souls. They must love people. They must have pity for the sorrowful; they must sympathize with infirmity and weakness.

Everywhere sympathy works miracles. Those who truly and deeply care for men—have power to help them. Those who are not true lovers of men—can never be winners of men, nor greatly helpers of men.

Numbering Our Days

Psalms 90:12 "Teach us to number our days aright—that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

"They are slipping away—

these sweet, swift years;

Like a leaf on the current cast,

With never a break in the rapid flow;

We watch them as one by one they go

Into the beautiful past."

What have we put upon the little white pages of the days of another year—as one by one they were opened for us to write "our word or two" on them? What has the past year brought to us? What have we given it to keep? If we had it to live over again—would we live it differently? What would we do—that we have not done? What would we not do—that we have done? What has our past year taught us? What lessons are we going to carry over into our next year's life? This ninetieth Psalm is called a prayer of Moses. It is the oldest of the Psalms. Remember the wilderness wanderings. Forty years the Israelites tarried in the wilderness, before they entered the Promised Land. It was because of their unbelief. They were at the gate—and were about to be led into possession. But spies were sent, and their fearful story frightened the people. They dreaded to meet the giants, and refused to go over the border. History was set back forty years. Unbelief is costly.

Moses looked back over these forty lost years. He saw six thousand graves strewn along the path. No wonder a sad tone runs through his Psalm. He was one of the last survivors of the generation that had left Egypt. He thought of the disappointment that had broken so many brave men's hearts. On himself, too, part of the curse had fallen. He must die outside of the land of promise. You remember how he pleaded to be permitted to cross over Jordan. But the saddest thing of all—was that the people themselves were to blame for their disappointment. Those graves in the wilderness, sin had dug. It seemed but a little sin that Moses had committed. He was terribly tried by the people's rebelliousness, lost his patience and self-control, and spoke unadvisedly. And his slip—cost him his entrance into the Promised Land. We cannot tell what a moment's loss of self-control may cost us. In this Psalm, Moses looks back and everywhere he sees sin's ruin and hurt. "We are consumed by your anger." "By your wrath are we troubled." "You have set our iniquities before you." "All our days are passed away in your wrath."

What has been the effect on you—of the experiences of the past year's life? Have they hurt you? Have they left wounds on your soul? The problem of true living—is to get good and blessing out of every experience.

You had sorrow. Did your sorrow leave your heart sweeter and purer? Did it make you gentler, more patient, more compassionate, more mindful of others? Did it bring you nearer to God? Or did the sorrow hurt you, leaving your peace broken, your trust in God impaired, your spirit vexed and troubled? Or you had temptation. Did your temptation make you stronger as you resisted it, and overcame the tempter? That is the way we may make our temptations blessings, to make even Satan help to build up our spiritual life. An evil thought resisted and mastered, leaves us not only unhurt—but stronger in the fiber of our being. But temptations parleyed with, and yielded to—hurt our life. What has been the effect of the year's temptations on your life? Have you come out of

them unhurt, with no smell of fire on your garments? Or take the year's business or occupation. How has it affected your spiritual life? Business is not sinful, unless it be a sinful business. A right occupation ought always to be a means of grace. What has been the effect of your secular business—on your spiritual life? Has it been helpful, strengthening, ennobling? Or take your companionships and friendships; what have they done for you in the year that is gone? Have you been helped Godward and heavenward by them? Have they been full of sweet and good inspirations for you? Have they made a summer atmosphere for your heart, a weather in which all spiritual fruits and all beautiful things have grown and flourished?

What marks has the old year left on your life? Are you carrying hurts and scars from its experiences? Or have they helped to build up a truer, stronger, holier manhood or womanhood in you? We ought to be ever growing in whatever things are lovely. That is what life is meant to do for us.

"Teach us to number our days." What is it to number our days? One way is to keep a careful record of them. That is a mathematical numbering. Some people keep diaries and put down everything they do—where they go, what they see, whom they meet, the books they read. But mere adding of days is not the numbering that was in the thought of the Psalmist.

There are days in some lives—that add nothing to life's treasures, and that leave nothing in the world which will make it better or richer. There are people who live year after year—and might as well never have lived at all! Simply adding days—is not living! If that is all you are going to do with the new year—you will only pile up an added burden of guilt.

Why do people not think of the sin of wasting life?

If you saw a man standing by the sea—and flinging diamonds into the water—you would say he was insane. Yet some of us are standing by the sea—and flinging the diamond days, one by one, into its dark floods! Mere eating and sleeping, and reading the papers, and going about the streets, and putting in the time—is not living!

Another way of numbering our days, is illustrated by the story of a prisoner who when he entered his cell, put a mark on the wall, for each of the days he would be incarcerated. Then each evening he would rub off one of these marks—he had one day less to stay in prison.

Some people seem to live much in this way. Each evening—they have on day less to live. Another day is gone, with its opportunities, its privileges, its responsibilities and its tasks—gone beyond recall.

Now, if the day has been filled with duty and love and service—its page written all over with pure, white thoughts and records of gentle deeds—then it is well; its passing need not be mourned over. But merely to have to rub it off at the setting of the sun, leaving in it nothing but a story of idleness, uselessness, selfishness, and lost opportunities, is a sad numbering!

What is the true way of numbering our days? The prayer tells us, "Teach us to number our days aright—that we may gain a heart of wisdom." That is, we are so to live—that we shall get some new wisdom out of each day to carry on with us.

Life’s lessons cannot all be learned from books. The lessons may be set down in books—but it is only in actual living—that we can really learn them. For example, patience. You may learn all about patience from a sermon, from a teacher, or from a book, even from the Bible. But that will not make you patient. You can get the patience—only by long practice of the lesson, in life’s experiences. Or take gentleness. You can read in a few paragraphs what gentleness is, how it lives. But that will not make you gentle.

Take thoughtfulness. You can learn in a short lesson what it is and how beautiful it is. But you will not be thoughtful, the moment you have learned the definition. It will probably take you several years—to get the beautiful lesson learned.

We talk of learning from the experience of others. It would seem that we ought to learn much in this way. An old man who has passed through many years can tell you, a young man, what he has learned in living—but you cannot really learn from his experience. You may think that you can learn, too, from books. But after all, the great lessons of life—we must learn for ourselves, by our own failings, stumblings, tryings, sufferings; by our own mistakes and the enduring of their consequences. The thought in the prayer is—that out of the experience of our days—we may gain a heart of wisdom. Some people never do. Solomon said, "Though you grind a fool in a mortar, grinding him like grain with a pestle, you will not remove his folly from him." There are plenty of such fools still! They make the same mistake over and over, suffering always from it, in the same way—yet never learning wisdom from the experience. Why should we not learn? We should put our experiences to the test. What has been the effect upon us—of this habit, of this kind of reading, of this amusement, of this friendship, of this method of business?

There is another way of getting a heart of wisdom, from the passing days. Paul taught us the lesson of moving forward and onward—by oblivion of the past. A great truth lies in his words. We are not to stay in our past as one would stay in a prison—but should be ever leaving it and going into new fields. We are not to stay by our past—as if it held all that is precious for us of life, sitting down by its graves and weeping inconsolably there. We are to turn our faces ever to the future, because there new things wait for us—new duties, new joys, new hopes. Our past should be to us a seed-plot in which grow a thousand beautiful things planted in the experience of by-gone days. Our today—is always the harvest of all our yesterdays. We never can cut off our past and leave it behind us; its consequences will always follow us and cling to us and live in us.

We are not to forget the things that are past, in any but a wise and good sense. Progress is the law of true living. Everything beautiful in our past—we are to keep and carry forward with us. We leave childhood behind us when we go forward to manhood or womanhood; but all that is lovely and good in childhood and all its lessons and impressions and visions—we keep in our maturer life.

We cannot forget the sorrow which the year brought, nor leave it behind—it is too sacred and too much a part of our life—ever to be outgrown; but the memory of the sorrow should stay in our heart as a blessing, sweetening our life—no longer bitter—but accepted in love and trust—and enriching us by its holy influence. So nothing beautiful that faded or vanished in our past year—is really lost to us. If we have numbered our days aright, the old year’s experiences will manifest themselves on all our future years—and will make them all richer, sweeter, truer; fuller of life and holiness.

Sowing Seeds of Light

Psalms 97:11 "Light is sown for the righteous; and gladness for the upright in heart."

LIGHT is one of the commonest words in the Bible. It means cheer, joy, life; whatever is bright and beautiful. Christ is light. We are to walk in the light of holiness. We are to shine as lights. Light is promised in all our darkness—if we follow Christ. Gladness, too, is a word we all understand. It is the absence of sorrow, it is satisfaction, it is pleasure, happiness.

There is nothing remarkable in the assurance of light and gladness for the righteous and the upright in heart. That is the teaching of the whole Bible. The ways of holiness—are the ways of peace. The remarkable thing in this promise is the way the light and gladness are said to come to us.

"Light is sown." The figure of sowing is striking—light coming in seeds planted like wheat, or like flower seeds. Our blessings are sown for us—to grow up in fields and gardens, and we gather them as we reap our harvests or pluck lovely flowers. That is, our good things do not come to us full-grown—but as seeds. The figure of seed is common in the Bible as applied in a spiritual way. God's Words are seeds; sown in hearts' soil, they grow up into plants of beauty. Acts are seeds. "Whatever a man sows—that shall he also reap." Here the figure seems natural. But it is remarkable to read of light being sown—that God sows light in the form of seeds in life's furrows, and that we have to cultivate them and harvest them.

There is a deep meaning in the figure. We know what seed is. It contains only in germ the plant, the tree, or the flower which is to be. It is in this way—that all earthly life begins. When God wants to give an oak to the forest, He does not set out a great tree full-grown; He plants an acorn. When He would have a harvest of golden wheat waving on the field, He does not work a miracle and have it spring up over night—He puts into the farmer's hand a bushel of wheat grains to scatter in his furrows. The same law holds in the moral and spiritual life. "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree." So a godly life—begins in a little seed, a mere point of life. It is at first only a thought, a suggestion, a desire, a holy purpose. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed—but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which lives and abides." The picture here in Psalm 97, is of God sowing light and gladness for us. He gives us blessings as seeds which He buries in the furrows of our lives—so that they may grow in due time and develop into beauty and fruitfulness. When you look at a seed—you do not see all the splendor of life which will unfold from it at length. All you see, perhaps, is a little brown and unsightly hull, which gives no prophecy of the beauty that will spring from it when it is planted, and dies, and grows up.

Many of the seeds of life—came first as unwelcome things. They did not shine as beams of radiant light. They were not glad things. They may have been burdens, disappointments, sufferings, losses. But they were seeds, with life in them. God was sowing light and gladness for you—in these experiences which were so hard to endure.

Think of the way Christ sowed light and gladness for men—in His life on the earth. What was He doing in those beautiful years of His, in those days of sharp temptation, in those hours of suffering? "Behold, a sower went forth to sow." He was sowing seeds of light and gladness, the

blessing of whose brightness and joy we are receiving now. The tears that fell at Bethany, and on Olivet's brow; the blood-drops that trickled from the cross on Golgotha—these all were seeds of light sown to give peace, joy, comfort, and life—along these centuries of Christian faith. Or think of the promises of God in the Bible—as seeds of light sown in the fields of the Holy Word. Deserts are made to blossom as the rose, wherever the sower goes forth to sow. One of these seeds of promise falls into an unblessed home—and it is changed from hatred, bitterness, strife, jealousy—to a place of gentleness, love, kindness, song. Every divine promise is a seed of light. Take it into your heart and it shines there, changing everything into beauty. Or take another class of illustration. Every duty given to us is a seed of light, which God has sown for us. Many of us do not like duty. A good woman, speaking of something which someone was urging her to do and which she was trying to evade, said, "I suppose it must be my duty—but I hate it so." Ofttimes our duties at first seem distasteful, even repulsive. They have no attraction for us. But when we accept them and do them—they are transformed. We begin to see the good in them, the blessing to ourselves, the help to others. Seeds are sometimes dark and rough as we look at them—but when they are planted, there springs up a beautiful tree or a flower. Just so, disagreeable tasks when done—appear bright and glad.

One tells of a rustic picture in common life, which heartens humdrum lives. It shows a poor, discouraged-looking horse in a treadmill. Round and round he tramps in the hot, dusty ring—not weary so much of the toil—but more of its endlessness and its seeming fruitlessness. But there is more of the picture. The horse was harnessed to a beam from which a rope reached down the hill to the river's edge, and there it was seen that the horse was hoisting stones, and helping to build a great bridge on which by and by trains would run, carrying freight of lives. This transformed the horse's treadmill tramping into something worthwhile. There are people, men and women, in workshops, in homes, in trades, in the professions, who grow weary of the drudgery, the routine, the self-denial, with never a word of praise, of commendation. But if we could see what these unhonoured toils, struggles, and self-denials accomplish; the blessings they carry to others; the bridges they help to build, on which others cross to better things—the drudgery, the hard work, the self-sacrifice would appear in new light, and the picture would be transformed. It is in these commonplace tasks, these lowly services, that we find our life's true beauty and glory.

Every duty, however unwelcome, is a seed of light. To evade it or neglect it—is to miss a blessing; to faithfully do it—is to have the rough seed burst into beauty, in the heart of the doer. We are continually coming up to stern and severe things, and often we are tempted to decline doing them. If we yield to such temptations, we shall reap no joy from God's sowing of light for us; but if we take up the hard task, whatever it is, and do it—we shall find blessing. Every duty—is a seed of light.

Again, God sows His seeds of light and gladness in the providences of our lives. Sometimes, indeed, we cannot see anything beautiful in them, or anything good. Many of the providences in our lives—come to us first in forbidding form. They come to us as losses, sufferings, disappointments. Yet they are seeds of light, and in due time the light will break out. "No chastening for the present seems to be joyous—but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness." The light is hidden and at first does not shine out; yet in the end it is manifested. This is the key to life's sorrows. They appear destructive at first—but afterwards light shines out in them. We dread adversity—but when its work is finished, we find that we are

enriched in heart and life. We do not receive with confidence the hard things that come to us; afterwards we learn that there were blessings in them. So it is in all of life. God is ever bringing to us good, never evil. He is a sower. He goes before us and scatters the furrows full of seeds of light. It is not visible light that He sows—but dull seeds, carrying hidden in them the secret of light. Then at the right time—the light breaks forth and our way is made bright. There is not a single dark spot in our path, if only we are living righteously. There are places which seem dark as we approach them. We are afraid, and ask, "How can I get through this point of gloom?" But when we come to it, the light shines out and it is radiant as day.

According to the legend, our first parent was in great dread—as the first evening of his life approached. The sun was about to sink away below the horizon. He trembled at the thought of the disaster which would follow. But the sun went down silently, and lo! ten thousand stars flashed out! The darkness revealed far more than it hid. So for every darkness in our l Sowing Seeds of Light

Psalms 97:11 "Light is sown for the righteous; and gladness for the upright in heart."

LIGHT is one of the commonest words in the Bible. It means cheer, joy, life; whatever is bright and beautiful. Christ is light. We are to walk in the light of holiness. We are to shine as lights. Light is promised in all our darkness—if we follow Christ. Gladness, too, is a word we all understand. It is the absence of sorrow, it is satisfaction, it is pleasure, happiness.

There is nothing remarkable in the assurance of light and gladness for the righteous and the upright in heart. That is the teaching of the whole Bible. The ways of holiness—are the ways of peace. The remarkable thing in this promise is the way the light and gladness are said to come to us.

"Light is sown." The figure of sowing is striking—light coming in seeds planted like wheat, or like flower seeds. Our blessings are sown for us—to grow up in fields and gardens, and we gather them as we reap our harvests or pluck lovely flowers. That is, our good things do not come to us full-grown—but as seeds. The figure of seed is common in the Bible as applied in a spiritual way. God’s Words are seeds; sown in hearts’ soil, they grow up into plants of beauty. Acts are seeds. "Whatever a man sows—that shall he also reap." Here the figure seems natural. But it is remarkable to read of light being sown—that God sows light in the form of seeds in life’s furrows, and that we have to cultivate them and harvest them.

There is a deep meaning in the figure. We know what seed is. It contains only in germ the plant, the tree, or the flower which is to be. It is in this way—that all earthly life begins. When God wants to give an oak to the forest, He does not set out a great tree full-grown; He plants an acorn. When He would have a harvest of golden wheat waving on the field, He does not work a miracle and have it spring up over night—He puts into the farmer’s hand a bushel of wheat grains to scatter in his furrows. The same law holds in the moral and spiritual life. "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree." So a godly life—begins in a little seed, a mere point of life. It is at first only a thought, a suggestion, a desire, a holy purpose. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed—but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which lives and abides." The picture here in Psalm 97, is of God sowing light and gladness for us. He gives us blessings as seeds which He buries in the furrows of our lives—so that they may grow

in due time and develop into beauty and fruitfulness. When you look at a seed—you do not see all the splendor of life which will unfold from it at length. All you see, perhaps, is a little brown and unsightly hull, which gives no prophecy of the beauty that will spring from it when it is planted, and dies, and grows up.

Many of the seeds of life—came first as unwelcome things. They did not shine as beams of radiant light. They were not glad things. They may have been burdens, disappointments, sufferings, losses. But they were seeds, with life in them. God was sowing light and gladness for you—in these experiences which were so hard to endure.

Think of the way Christ sowed light and gladness for men—in His life on the earth. What was He doing in those beautiful years of His, in those days of sharp temptation, in those hours of suffering? "Behold, a sower went forth to sow." He was sowing seeds of light and gladness, the blessing of whose brightness and joy we are receiving now. The tears that fell at Bethany, and on Olivet's brow; the blood-drops that trickled from the cross on Golgotha—these all were seeds of light sown to give peace, joy, comfort, and life—along these centuries of Christian faith. Or think of the promises of God in the Bible—as seeds of light sown in the fields of the Holy Word. Deserts are made to blossom as the rose, wherever the sower goes forth to sow. One of these seeds of promise falls into an unblessed home—and it is changed from hatred, bitterness, strife, jealousy—to a place of gentleness, love, kindness, song. Every divine promise is a seed of light. Take it into your heart and it shines there, changing everything into beauty. Or take another class of illustration. Every duty given to us is a seed of light, which God has sown for us. Many of us do not like duty. A good woman, speaking of something which someone was urging her to do and which she was trying to evade, said, "I suppose it must be my duty—but I hate it so." Ofttimes our duties at first seem distasteful, even repulsive. They have no attraction for us. But when we accept them and do them—they are transformed. We begin to see the good in them, the blessing to ourselves, the help to others. Seeds are sometimes dark and rough as we look at them—but when they are planted, there springs up a beautiful tree or a flower. Just so, disagreeable tasks when done—appear bright and glad.

One tells of a rustic picture in common life, which heartens humdrum lives. It shows a poor, discouraged-looking horse in a treadmill. Round and round he tramps in the hot, dusty ring—not weary so much of the toil—but more of its endlessness and its seeming fruitlessness. But there is more of the picture. The horse was harnessed to a beam from which a rope reached down the hill to the river's edge, and there it was seen that the horse was hoisting stones, and helping to build a great bridge on which by and by trains would run, carrying freight of lives. This transformed the horse's treadmill tramping into something worthwhile. There are people, men and women, in workshops, in homes, in trades, in the professions, who grow weary of the drudgery, the routine, the self-denial, with never a word of praise, of commendation. But if we could see what these unhonoured toils, struggles, and self-denials accomplish; the blessings they carry to others; the bridges they help to build, on which others cross to better things—the drudgery, the hard work, the self-sacrifice would appear in new light, and the picture would be transformed. It is in these commonplace tasks, these lowly services, that we find our life's true beauty and glory.

Every duty, however unwelcome, is a seed of light. To evade it or neglect it—is to miss a blessing; to faithfully do it—is to have the rough seed burst into beauty, in the heart of the doer. We are

continually coming up to stern and severe things, and often we are tempted to decline doing them. If we yield to such temptations, we shall reap no joy from God's sowing of light for us; but if we take up the hard task, whatever it is, and do it—we shall find blessing. Every duty—is a seed of light.

Again, God sows His seeds of light and gladness in the providences of our lives. Sometimes, indeed, we cannot see anything beautiful in them, or anything good. Many of the providences in our lives—come to us first in forbidding form. They come to us as losses, sufferings, disappointments. Yet they are seeds of light, and in due time the light will break out. "No chastening for the present seems to be joyous—but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness." The light is hidden and at first does not shine out; yet in the end it is manifested. This is the key to life's sorrows. They appear destructive at first—but afterwards light shines out in them. We dread adversity—but when its work is finished, we find that we are enriched in heart and life. We do not receive with confidence the hard things that come to us; afterwards we learn that there were blessings in them. So it is in all of life. God is ever bringing to us good, never evil. He is a sower. He goes before us and scatters the furrows full of seeds of light. It is not visible light that He sows—but dull seeds, carrying hidden in them the secret of light. Then at the right time—the light breaks forth and our way is made bright. There is not a single dark spot in our path, if only we are living righteously. There are places which seem dark as we approach them. We are afraid, and ask, "How can I get through this point of gloom?" But when we come to it, the light shines out and it is radiant as day.

According to the legend, our first parent was in great dread—as the first evening of his life approached. The sun was about to sink away below the horizon. He trembled at the thought of the disaster which would follow. But the sun went down silently, and lo! ten thousand stars flashed out! The darkness revealed far more than it hid. So for every darkness in our life, God has stars of light ready to shine. Everywhere guidance is ready—when we do not know the way; comfort—when we are in sorrow; strength—when we are weak and faint.

We need never dread hardness, for it is in the things that are hard—that the seeds of light are hidden. The best things never are the easiest things. The best men are not grown in luxury and self-indulgence. We dread crosses—but it is only in cross-bearing that we find life's real treasures. He who saves his life—shall lose it; but he who loses his life for Christ—saves it. In every cross God hides the seeds of light; accept the cross, take it up, and the light will shine out. The darkest spot that earth ever saw—was about the cross of Christ the day that Jesus hung there. There were no stars to be seen. Not a gleam of light was visible. But today the cross is the brightest, most glorious place in all the world!

Take the picture into your heart—this world is a great field on which God has sown light and gladness. There is not anywhere, a path in which these seeds of light are not hidden, and where they will not grow up and pour out their brightness at the moment of need. God does not mean that we shall ever be in darkness.

Then, God wants us also to be sowers, everyone of us, every day, wherever we go. The question is, What kind of seeds do we sow? The Master in one of His little stories, tells us of an enemy, who, after the farmer had scattered good seed on his field—came stealthily and sowed tares among the wheat. What seed did you sow yesterday? Did you plant only pure thoughts, good

thoughts, holy thoughts, gentle, loving thoughts—in the little gardens of people's lives where you sowed? It is a fearful thing for anyone to put an evil thought into the mind of another. It is a fearful thing for anyone to let a debasing thought into his own heart. A sower went forth to sow. He sowed only good seed. We have seen how God sows seeds of light and seeds of gladness everywhere. That is what He wants every one of us also to do. He wants us to make the world brighter, happier. Some people do neither. Many sow gloom, shadow, discouragement, wherever they go. They sow sadness, pain, grief. If we are this sort of sower—we are missing our mission, and disappointing our Lord.

Think of one who, wherever he goes, sows seeds of light and gladness. His life is pure, for only clean hands can sow seeds of light. He is a friend of men—as his Master was. He does not love himself—he never thinks of himself. He never seeks his own ease. He never spares himself when any other one needs his service. He wishes only to do good to others, to make them better, to make them gladder. No matter how others treat him—he keeps on loving them. He will go miles to be kind to one who has been unkind to him, to show a favor to one who has treated him ungraciously. He is ever sowing seeds of light. The home he visits is brighter for months, just because he was there. The words he said that day never are forgotten. The little things he did are remembered and leave a fragrance that will never depart. Shall we not all go out every morning, to repeat our Master's sowing everywhere? Let us be just, paying our debts of love; let us be more than just, giving more than we owe. Let us go two miles—when one would be enough. Let us be sowers of light and gladness. Thus shall we fill the world—with light and love. A Call to Praise

Psalms 103:1 "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name!"

These is not a single sad note in all this Psalm—it is all joy. There is not a sentence of petition in the Psalm—it is all praise. And have you noticed that there are in the Bible very many more calls to praise—than to prayer? There is a great deal also about prayer—it is the very breath of spiritual life. By prayer we come in touch with God. The man who does not pray—cuts himself off from God. Prayer is essential. There are many words about prayer in the Bible. We are to pray without ceasing. A day without prayer—is a day of peril. Yet it is to be noticed—that praise is pressed as a duty even more repeatedly than prayer. The Book of Psalms is full of calls to praise. All creatures are called to praise God. Then the last word in the book sums up in one sentence, the theme of all the one hundred and fifty Psalms. "Let everything that has breath, praise the Lord!" And not only things that have breath—but things as well that do not breathe, "Praise the LORD from the earth, you creatures of the ocean depths, fire and hail, snow and storm, wind and weather that obey him, mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all livestock, reptiles and birds" Psalms 148:7-10. Even animals which are not supposed to have souls, not to have a spiritual nature, seem to have in them a spirit of gratitude which leads them to remember favors and kindnesses and express their gratified feelings in unmistakable ways. The Psalm pictures a godly man, seeking to wake up his heart and life to praise. "All that is within me, bless his holy name." Think of all that is within you, all the powers of mind, the powers of heart, the powers of service. Think of all the bodily powers and functions, all the mental gifts and capacities, all the possibilities of love and of helpfulness. He calls upon his soul to awake and pour out all its song. Every power of his being—he would wake up to praise.

Praise is the highest function of life. The ancients said that the angel of praise, was the greatest of all the angels. We never can reach the best possibilities of our nature, until all that is within us unites in praising God. Think of the reasons why we ought to praise God. Some of the reasons are given in this Psalm: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." How often we do forget God's benefits! What benefits has God bestowed upon us? Here are some of them: "Who forgives all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases; who redeems your life from destruction; who crowns you with loving-kindness and tender mercies."

These are only a few of the benefits which God bestows. The New Testament brings a new revealing. Jesus was the first to tell us that God is our Father. This name shows us the divine heart. He is our Father—and we are His children. Can we but praise a God to whom we owe such blessings?

Yet listen any day—the fairest day of the year, the day when the sun shines brightest and the sky is the bluest—to the complainings, the murmurings, the repinings of the people you meet. Often those who have the most reasons for praise, complain the most. In the morning they complain about the night, its heat or its cold, its noise or its loneliness, its pain or its wakefulness. In the evening they complain of the day's toil and their weariness, the annoyances, the disappointments, the frets, the unreasonable people they have had to meet. It seems that almost nothing goes well with them. The habit of discontent has grown so strong in them—that they are never altogether pleased with anything. In the most perfect circumstances, they can find some flaws. In the loveliest picture, they always see something to object to, to criticize, something to complain of. No matter what the weather is, there is always something disagreeable about it. The person you are commending is of unexceptional character. His life is beautiful. He has done great good in the community. But when his qualities are extolled and his noble service declared, the complainer brings up some "but" —something that seems to derogate from the nobleness, the excellence, the good reputation of your friend. The trouble with such people—is that they look always for flaws and specks. They do not wish to find the beautiful things, and of course they never do find them.

What these complaining people need, is not better circumstances, more good things, all things made different to suit their tastes—what they need, the only thing that will really cure them of their miserable habit of grumbling and unhappiness, is a new heart, being born again, with a contented spirit, ears that will bring the voice from heaven to them, not as thunder—but as the music of an angel. What they need is a thanksgiving spirit, a praising spirit. Then they will look for the good, and not the evil—in the things around them. The fact is, there are a thousand beautiful things in any outlook on life you may have—to one unpleasant thing. Find the loving things—and do not look at all on the bit of marring. Then you would easily forget the one little thorn—in the great mass of roses. The trouble is, however, with too many, that they think only of the thorn, the one small defect or flaw, or discomfort, and forget altogether the roses, the thousand rich and gracious and blessed favors. "Forget not all his benefits," runs the lesson—but this is the very thing they do—they forget all God's wonderful mercies, the countless blessings that flood their days with sunshine and strew their nights with stars. An hour's pain, even a moment's twinge of suffering, blots out the memory of a whole year of health.

There is a legend of two particular angels that come out from heaven every morning and go on their errand all the day. One is the angel of prayer—and the other the angel of thanksgiving. Each

carries a great basket. Everybody pours into it an armful of requests. But when the day is ended the angel of thanksgiving has only two or three little words of gratitude in his basket. This is not a caricature. Most of us do more or less praying—but it is nearly all the unloading of our burdens, our fears, our needs, our clamourous requests for favors—with only here and there a feeble word of thanks for blessings received. Watch the prayers you hear others make—is there much thanksgiving? Watch your own praying—what proportion of it is request, asking, beseeching, and what proportion praise?

Some ingenious gatherer of statistics tells us that in a certain year many thousands of letters reached the Dead Letter Office in Washington before Christmas, from children, addressed to Santa Claus—but that a whole month after Christmas—only one letter came to Santa Claus with a message of thanks. Ten lepers were cleansed, all receiving the same great blessing—but only one of them returned to thank the Healer. Where were the nine?

We need to think seriously of this matter. We are pitifully lacking in gratitude. Thanksgiving languishes on our lips. Some of us do little but complain. Nothing altogether pleases us. We have no eyes for the good things of divine love—which really flood our lives.

Take another line of this thought of praise. We will never grow to be very fine workmen in any department of life, to amount to much among men, or to reach much beauty of character, until we get this quality of praise into our heart and life. It is said of a great artist, that he always held a lyre in his hand while he painted. Music inspired his art. This was one of the secrets, of his superb work as an artist—his heart was glad and praising. No one can do his best work—with a sad heart. If you are in sorrow, another's grief will not comfort you. He who would come to you as an uplifter must have joy to bring you. It would be well if all of us—if we would learn to hold a harp in one hand as we work with the other. Our work, whatever it is, would be better done. "The joy of the Lord is your strength," said Nehemiah to his people when he found them weeping and exhorted them to a better life. They must dry their tears—if they would reach anything noble and beautiful.

It is always so. No sad life ever reached its best possibilities. The men who have done the noblest and worthiest things, who have achieved the most, whose work shines as most beautiful and radiant—sang while they wrought. Pessimism has never done any lovely things; only he who works with a song adds to the brightness and beauty of the world. Gloomy people are perverting their powers, growing thorns instead of roses. The joyless man is a misanthrope. He makes it harder for other people to live, makes them less strong to bear their burdens. He chills the ardor—which he ought to kindle to a redder glow. He is a discourager of every man he meets. The hopeless pessimist is a traitor to his fellows—he is their enemy. He does them harm. On the other hand, he who lives with a song on his lips—is a blessing to everyone he meets. He does better work himself, paints more beautiful pictures, is a better teacher, a better lawyer, a better merchant, an infinitely better physician. No man should ever go into a sick room as a doctor—who has not music in his heart. No man ever can be fit to be a preacher—who is not a joyous man, a praising man. The word of the physician and the preacher is spoken among those who are suffering, those who have fears and anxieties, those who need cheer, courage, hope; and only those who know the joy of Christ can help others to overcome. The emblem of Christian life is light—and light means joy, praise. Some people used to think that gloom was an essential quality of religion. The man who smiled on Sunday, desecrated the holy day. He who was glad-hearted in worship, was

irreverent. Laughter was thought to be a sin. It is said there was an ancient law which banished roses from Jerusalem. But there really is no piety in long-facedness. Christ did not wear a long face—but one that always shone. Jesus said He would have His joy fulfilled in His followers. If you would become a beautiful Christian, you must be a joyous Christian. Joy is always lovely. It shines. It is fragrant. It makes the air brighter and sweeter. It is a wondrous inspirer of life. You can do twice as much work when you are glad and praising—as when you are gloomy, downcast; and you can do it twice as well. The other day one told of starting out sad and heavy-hearted in the morning, with no song, no hope, no praise, not a thought of gladness in the heart. Everything dragged. There seemed nothing worth living for. Circumstances were most distressing. There appeared only blackness before the eyes. Then suddenly, unexpectedly, something happened which changed all the outlook. Light broke in upon the gloom. The friend said that if an angel of God had come into the dreadful tangle—with light and song—the effect could not have been more marvelous. It was joy that came, and the joy changed everything. Does all that is within us, bless the Lord? Is every chord of the heart full of music? Is the harp within us awake? Is the song rising continually from our lips? Let us take with us everywhere, the lesson of praise. A writer tells of a boy who was sunny and brave, as many boys are. This boy had met the ills of life, which too many people regard as almost tragedies, with nobleness and courage. But one day something serious happened. He and a playmate climbed a tree. Just when our little philosopher reached the top, his foot slipped and he fell to the ground. He lay there—but uttered no cry. It was his playmate that screamed. The doctor found his leg and hip badly broken. The boy bore the setting patiently, without a whimper. The mother slipped out of the room to hide her own tears; she couldn’t stand it as well as her boy did. She heard a faint sound from the room where he was lying, and hurried back, almost hoping to find him crying.

"My boy," she said, "do you want something? I thought I heard you call."

"Oh no, mother," he said, "I didn’t call; I just thought I’d try singing a bit." And he went on with the song. When you have pain, or struggle, or a heavy load, or a great anguish—don’t complain, don’t cry out, don’t sink down in despair, don’t be afraid—try singing a bit!

Forgetting His Benefits

Psalms 103:2 "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits!"

Every part of our being should join in praising God. The song of praise we sing—should not be a solo, a duet, or even a quartet—but a full chorus, the feelings, the affections, the mental powers, the tastes, the desires—all mingling in harmony and praise. There are some who praise with their voices—but not with their hearts. Others give intellectual worship, while their affections are not engaged. Others give emotional praise—but their wills and consciences do not join in the song; they have good feelings—but lack in practical obediences and in devotion to duty. Some sing missionary hymns with zest—but give nothing to missionary work Some sing consecration hymns—and then live selfishly and worldly. There is no heavenly music in such singing. The true way—is to arouse every faculty and energy and power and affection—to hearty, enthusiastic, practical praise.

"Forget not all his benefits." Many people have excellent memories for troubles, adversities, losses, and sorrows—but cannot remember the mercies and blessings of their lives. It is very

unfortunate to have such defective memories. Suppose God would forget us for a time, and fail to provide for our daily needs, and fail to send us His ordinary gifts for a whole day, or even for an hour—how sore a misfortune it would be! Yet we forget continually that our blessings come from Him. We take them for granted, and never think of the Giver!

Sometimes we do not think of God for hours together. Yet there is never a moment when God is not thinking of us, and providing for us. Perhaps if there were some break in the flow of blessings—we would learn to be more thankful. The very unbroken continuity of God's gifts makes us oblivious to them. Someone kept a book for a daily record of blessings. It would be a good thing for all of us to do. Surely this matter is important. We think others are very ungrateful, who forget our little kindnesses to them. Must we not judge ourselves by the same judgment, in relation to God's goodness!

"Who forgives all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases." What an enumeration of divine blessings; and what blessings they are, too—in this and the following verses! They are all blessings, too, which the world cannot give. Any one of them is worth more than all earth's treasures combined! If we are not forgiven—we must rest forever under the curse of sin, a weight greater than all the Alps; but God forgives, and forgives all our sins, and forgives fully and forever! If we are not healed—we must be sick forever, sick with the plague and leprosy of sin; but God heals, and heals all our diseases, heals completely. If we are not saved from the destructive dangers of this world—we never can reach heaven; but God keeps, rescues, redeems our life.

Earth's crowns are made of thorns, and at the best, are only what the children call "play-crowns," for they are only made of leaves that wither, or of gold and gems that fire will destroy; but God crowns His people with crowns of loving-kindness and tender mercies, which are real and radiant, which shall never fade—but shall shine forever, becoming crowns of eternal life and glory in heaven. This world cannot satisfy a heart's cravings! Its possessions only make the hunger more intense; but God satisfies the souls of His people, meets all their cravings and hungers. These are some of the things for which we have to praise God.

"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." The prodigal's father waited years in love—how slow to anger! and then ran to meet his returning son—how quick in mercy! Is this not a true picture of God's treatment of us? He is slow to anger—but quick to show mercy.

"He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever." These are wonderful pictures of the way God forgives. The best human forgiveness is very imperfect. Men forgive—but they often "chide" and "harbor resentment." They say that they "forgive, but cannot forget;" they keep the memory of the wrong always in their hearts, never forgetting, even while showing us favors, that once we injured them. The old memories of wrongs block up the channel of love—as old wrecks block up a river, arresting its flow. But God does not chide nor harbor anger. His heart is like the smooth lake which the driving keel cleaves—but which soon becomes calm and placid again, retaining no mark or trace of the crude furrowing. He puts away our sins—as far as the east is from the west, that is, infinitely. This was taught in the ancient ceremony of the scapegoat. One goat was killed and its blood sprinkled before God; this meant the atonement of Christ by which our forgiveness is procured. The other goat then, after the priest had confessed over its head the people's sins, was led away out of sight, into the wilderness, and let loose, never to return again;

thus bearing away sins to an infinite distance, so that they could never come back again to disturb those who had been forgiven. There is a wonderful passage in Jeremiah which reads: "In those days, at that time," declares the LORD, "search will be made for Israel’s guilt, but there will be none, and for the sins of Judah, but none will be found, for I will forgive the remnant I spare."

"Like as a father pities his children—so the Lord pities those who fear him." This is one of the most wonderful verses in the Bible. It brings God very near to us. It shows us His heart. He is not cold and far removed from us in feeling, indifferent to our sufferings, stern and severe in His judgment upon us. Rather, He is full of pity, like a human father in his pity toward his children. The best commentary on these words is Christ’s own life. See Him moved with compassion for the sick, the lepers, the sorrowing, the sinful, the fallen; weeping by a grave at Bethany, deeply touched at Nain as He saw the widowed mother following her only son to the grave; weeping again over Jerusalem because the people would not repent and receive Him. All this is commentary on this precious verse.

"For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." God does not treat us as if we were strong and perfect and unfallen. He does not forget that we are weak, that it is hard for us in our fallen condition to live right, that we are easily tempted and overcome. Therefore, He is very patient and gentle with us when we have sinned—binding up the wounds, restoring the soul. We ought to get a great deal of comfort out of these words.

You say you are so weak—that you cannot resist temptation. Yes, and God knows all about it. You are weary and worn out through trouble or burden-bearing—but God knows all about it. You find your work very hard, and cannot see how you are ever to get through with it; but God knows. He knows your frailty; He remembers that you are only dust. He is pitiful and compassionate, and always gives needed help. There is immeasurable comfort in the knowledge that Christ lived through the whole gamut of human life and experience. He knows all about temptation, for He was tempted in all points like as we are. He knows all about sorrow, for He was acquainted with grief. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, for He was tried in every way in which we are tried.

"As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more." A dear young friend has just brought to my table a cluster of beautiful flowers. They charm my eye, and their fragrance fills my room. But tomorrow they will be withered and dead, and I shall be compelled to put them out of my sight. So it is with human lives. They may be very lovely and sweet—but soon they are gone, and there is only a memory left behind. As we think of this we grow sad, and ask, "What is there that is abiding!"

Above our heads is the blue sky, and when night comes the brilliant stars look down and say, "We do not fade." We have shone upon all the passing generations of men, and still are bright as ever." There is comfort in that—there is something at least which does not pass away in a day. But here is something better still: "But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD’s love is with those who fear him!" The love of God is from everlasting to everlasting. Here is a bosom, then, on which we may lean and know that our repose shall never be disturbed. Would you be safe eternally! Rest your hopes on God’s everlasting love, and not on any frail thing of earth!

"To those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts." All God's promises and blessings have conditions. We have something to do—to get them. Here the condition is obedience. There is a covenant, and it has two sides. There is not the slightest doubt about God's faithfulness. He will do His part. But we have a part to do, too. It is to those who obey His commandments, that the love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. It is important to remember the commandments—but this is not enough. A great many people remember them and can repeat them verbatim—who do not obey them. The stress of emphasis is on the word "obey." So if we want to claim and secure the blessings here promised—we must be sure that we do our part and fulfill the conditions of God's covenant of grace. If this Psalm is a palace of love, here in this verse is the beautiful gate by which all must enter in, who would enjoy its rich gladness and blessedness.

Speak out Your Message

Psalms 107:2 "Let the redeemed of the LORD say so!"

There is a duly of keeping silent. There are times when we would better not say anything. There come thoughts and feelings into our hearts, which we would better not speak out. There are moments when silence is golden. But there is also a duty of speech. God has given us our tongues to be used. The world needs the true words that lie within our lips. There are times when silence would be ingratitude, even disloyalty. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!"

If God has redeemed us, how can we but "say so"? It is disloyal for us to hide in our heart, the wonderful story of what God has done for us. Our Lord was hurt by the action of the nine lepers who had been healed by Him and did not return to give praise to God. One came back—a Samaritan, and then Jesus asked, "Where are the other nine?" We ought to give God our gratitude, when He has blessed us. Rescue from danger, recovery from sickness, the restoration of a friend from death's door, deliverance from trouble, prosperity in business, kindness shown at large cost which has brought great good—our lives are full of the goodness and loving-kindness of God. Surely there ought to be a great deal of praise in our life. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!" But to say it to God in the secrecy of our closet of prayer, is not enough. We ought to tell others that God has redeemed us. We owe it to Him to honor His name among men. Then we owe it to our fellows, also, to let them know what God has done for us. They have needs, trials, hungers—just like those in which God has comforted us; shall we not tell them where we were consoled in our sorrow, where we found companionship in our loneliness, friendship in our heart-hunger, deliverance in our temptation, guidance in our bewilderment and perplexity—that they may find the same in their like need? "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!"

Then, God gives us messages to carry to others. He puts into the heart of every one of His creatures, something which He wants that creature to utter to the world. He puts into the star a message of light—you look up into the heavens at night and the star gives you its message. Who knows what a blessing the star may be to a weary traveler who finds his way by it, or to the sick man lying by his window, and in his sleeplessness looking up at the glimmering point of light in the calm, deep heaven. God gives to a flower a message of beauty and sweetness, and for its brief life it tells out its message to all who can read it. Who can count up the good that even a flower may do, as it blooms in the garden, or as it is carried into the sick room, or into the cheerless chamber of poverty?

Especially does God give to every human life a message to deliver. To one it is some new scientific revelation. To the poet God gives thoughts of beauty which he is to interpret to the world—and the world is richer, sweeter, and better for hearing his messages. Think what we owe to the men and women who along the centuries have given forth their songs of hope, cheer, comfort, and inspiration! To every one of us—God gives something that He wants us to say to others. We cannot all write poems, or books which shall bless men; but if we live near the heart of Christ, there is no one of us into whose ear He will not whisper some fragment of truth, some revealing of grace and love, or to whom He will not give some experience of comfort in sorrow, some new glimpse of glory.

God forms a personal friendship with each one of His faithful children, and each one learns something from Him, which no other one ever has learned. Your message is not the same as mine; it is God's own word to you, and you are His prophet to foretell it to the world. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!"

If only one of the flowers that blooms in the summer days in the fields and gardens refused to bloom, hiding its gift of beauty—the world would be poorer and less lovely than it is. If but one of the myriad stars in the heavens refused to shine, keeping its beam of light locked in its breast, the nights will be a little darker than they are. And every human life that fails to hear its message, or fails to speak it out, keeping it hidden in the silence of the heart—leaves this earth poorer. But every life, even the lowliest, that learns of God and then speaks out its message—adds something to the world's blessing and beauty.

Live near to God—that He may speak to you out of His own heart, the word He would have you tell again to others. Then be sure you speak it out. "What I tell you in the dark—speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear—proclaim from the roofs." "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!"

Again, we ought to let the gladness of our heart utter itself. I say the gladness. There is something very strange in the tendency which seems so common in human lives—to hide the gladness, and tell out the misery. If you will, for one week, keep an account of what the people you meet say to you, even in their shortest greetings, I think you will find that a large proportion of them will not say anything that is cheerful and happy—but much that is dreary and disheartening. They will speak of the discouragements in their business, the hardships in their occupation, the troubles in their various duties, and all the manifold miseries, real and imagined, that have fallen to their lot. But they will have very little to say of their prosperities, their health, their mercies, favors, blessings.

Yet it is of this latter class of experiences, that the world ought to hear the most. In the first place, we do not have half so many woes—as some of us imagine we have. We have a hundred mercies—to one misery. God makes this world just a little rough for most of us—to keep us from settling down in it as a final home of perfect contentment. But He does not want us to complain forever about the roughness. That is neither loyal nor brave—and it is not beautiful. We have no right to add to the world's burdens—by unloading our worries and frets into every ear we find open! There is no text that says, "Let the redeemed of the Lord tell everybody all their troubles, vexations, frets, and anxieties!"

It would be a far sweeter service to the world—if we were to speak only of our gladness, remembering the loving-kindness of the Lord, telling of the pleasant things of our life, and not

uttering our woes. There is always a bright side. There is always something beautiful in the most painful or repulsive condition or circumstances; would it not be better for us to find that—and speak of it, keeping silent as to the painful or repulsive features?

Again, there is a large field of opportunities for saying so—when the words will do great good to others. This is true especially of the expression of kindly feelings, the utterance of encouragements, comforts, inspirations. Many of us are altogether too stingy with such words. We have the good thought in our heart—but we do not say it! Some people boast of their honesty, in saying what they think. That is very well—so long as they think only nobly, charitably, generously, lovingly. But saying what one thinks, means ofttimes speaking rashly, impulsively, cruelly, in the flashes of anger and bad temper—and then the words are not wise nor good. "As well say them—as think them," someone replies. No! thinking harsh or unkind things hurts you—but saying unkind things hurt others! A moment later you will repent, too, of the bitter thoughts, and if they have not been spoken—you will be most thankful that they were not.

One told of being very angry after enduring a bitter wrong, and then of writing a letter to the person who had done the wrong, into which all the anger was poured. The words were like fire. His conscience whispered, however, "Do not send the letter until morning." And it was never sent, and the friend has never ceased to thank God that it was not. It was all a terrible misunderstanding, and the two are the best of friends again. The redeemed of the Lord should not speak harsh, uncharitable, hurtful words, which will only give needless pain, break hearts, sunder friendships, and which can never be unsaid! But we should speak out our good thoughts and feelings on every occasion. Some people fail to do this. Some seem to have the impression that the utterance of kindly words, however well deserved, is a sort of weak and unworthy flattery. But it is not, if the words are sincere and true.

Thackeray says, "Never lose an opportunity of saying a kind word." Then he tells of an English nobleman who always carried his pocket full of acorns, and whenever he saw a bare or vacant place in his estate, he would plant one. Just so, whenever we see a person whose life is sad, or who is discouraged, we should drop a pleasant, loving word into his heart. It will grow into beauty. "An acorn costs nothing—but it may sprout into a prodigious bit of timber." Kind words cost nothing—but they may mean a great deal in the way of blessing and good. Your neighbor is in sorrow. The shutters are closed for days, as a loved one hovers between life and death; and then the death-crape on the door tells that death has conquered, and that the home is darkened. You want to help. Your heart is full of sympathy. But you do nothing; you say no word to give comfort. Is there no way by which your brotherly love might make your neighbor’s burden a little lighter or his heart a little stronger? You want to help him. Why not say so?

Here is one whose life is full of care. His business is not prosperous. There is sickness in his family. Many things appear to go against him. He battles on bravely—but the fight is hard, the load is heavy, the road is rough and steep! He has to meet it all alone, too, without that human sympathy which would mean so much to him. You stand by and see all this. Ofttimes your heart aches as you notice the man’s weariness, the discouragement in his sad face and bent form. You speak to other neighbors, with sincere feeling about his hard struggle and his defeated look. Yes, yes; but you never say anything to him to show him that you sympathize with him. Why not? A few loving, brotherly words—might make him strong to press on yet to victoriousness.

It is in our homes, perhaps, that the lesson is needed most. There is a great deal of love there that never finds expression. We keep sad silences ofttimes with those we love the best, even when their hearts are crying for words. A husband loves his wife and would give his life for her—but there are days and days when he never tells her so, nor reveals the sweet truth by any sign or token. The wife loves her husband with deep affection—but she has fallen into the habit of making no demonstration, saying nothing about her love, and going on through the daily home experiences, almost as if there were no love in her heart. No wonder husbands and wives drift apart in such homes! There are parents who make the same mistake with their children. A young man, referring to his home life, said: "My mother was a brilliant, busy person; but we never were close, and my home was a mere boardinghouse to me."

It is to the expression of the love in our hearts—that we are called today. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!" It is to the good things we leave undone, our sins of omission, that we owe attention, quite as much as to the wrong things we do, our sins of commission.

"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!" We must say it, too, before it is too late. Some people wait until the need is past—and then come up with tardy kindness. When the neighbor is well again—then they call to say how sorry they are he has been sick. The time for showing friendship, is in the friend’s need or adversity—and not when the need is passed. There are many who say their first truly generous things of others—when the others lie in the coffin! Then they bring flowers, although they never gave a flower when their friends were alive!

Tell out your gratitude—God desires it. Speak your message—the world needs it. Pour out your love—hearts are breaking for it. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!" The Dew of Your Youth

Psalms 110:3

"Your people shall be willing—on Your day of battle. Arrayed in the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the dawn, you have the dew of your youth."

"In that day of battle, your people will serve you willingly. Arrayed in holy garments, your vigor will be renewed each day like the morning dew." (NLT) The "Your day of battle" means the time when the king’s hosts are set in order for battle. It seems to be a picture of the Church of Christ, a great company of redeemed ones, with the Master at their head. The second part of the verse represents these soldier-priests as young, in the bloom of early manhood, having the dew of youth. The thought is, not that all Christians are young, for all ages are among the followers of Christ—but that all Christians have the gift of living youth, immortal life. Note some of the characteristics of Christ’s young warriors as they appear in this vision. The first thing is that they are in Christ’s army willingly. "Your people shall be willing—on Your day of battle." They have enlisted voluntarily. In the days of Deborah it is said the people "willingly offered themselves." They were not compelled to enter the army. We belong to Christ, because He is our rightful King, because He redeemed us. Then we must make ourselves His—by personal consecration. We must become His willingly. It must be glad, spontaneous service we give to Him. The second thing to note is the dress of these soldier-priests. They are clad "in the beauties of holiness," that is—in holy attire. Their garments are clean and white. Those who follow Christ should be clothed in the beauties of holiness. The third thing is the symbol of the dew. "You have the dew of your youth." It is a glorious thing to be young. Youth is strong. Its energies are unwasted. Its eye is undimmed. Its

veins are full of rich, healthy life. It is not scarred by battles. It is not weakened and broken by defeats. Its strength is unimpaired.

Youth is pure—not sinless—but relatively unstained. Its innocence is unsullied. Its hands have not been blackened with deeds of evil. Its garments have not been soiled. Heaven yet lies about the pure young life.

Youth is full of hope. It has no past—but before it stretches a vista, bright with radiant visions—things to be attained, achievements to be accomplished, victories to be won. Call youth's hopes daydreams, or air-castles, vision-fabrics, if you will; still they are realities to the heart of the young. They are the stirrings of immortality. Blessed is the heart of youth, that is filled with these hopes.

Youth has great possibilities. Do you ever sit down and think seriously about your life—what it is, what wondrous powers are sleeping in your brain, your heart, your hand; what you may make of your life even here—then what you may become in the endless years of your after-life?

Christian young life, young life given to Christ, touched by His hand and set apart for Him—who can paint its glory, its power, its possibilities! The church is a company of youth. In a sense, all Christians are young. The immortal life in them never ages. The growing old of the body is only temporary—the real life within is always young. In the Psalm the vast company of Christ's youthful followers, are compared to the DEW. The emblem is suggestive.

Dew is beautiful. When you are in the country in the summer, you may behold a glorious sight every morning. In field and meadow and garden—every leaf, every grass blade, every flower is covered with dewdrops. There are millions of them, each one as brilliant as a diamond. They shine like diamonds amid earth's dull things. Every young Christian owes it to his Master—to wear the beauties of holiness.

Dew is pure. It is never stained like the water that lies in gutters and wayside puddles. It is not filled with dirt and other particles, like the water that runs in brooks and streams. Dew is distilled from the air—and is perfectly pure. Christians should be pure and holy in their lives. In this world none are perfectly pure. There never was but one life without stain or trace of sin. Yet the crystal dewdrops glistening on leaf or blade of grass, or hiding in the bosom of a rose—are emblems of what every Christian should strive to be. "Pure and undefiled religion before God" is what the Bible paints as our ideal. To keep ourselves "unspotted from the world" is set down as the ideal of every Christian life. "Blessed are the pure in heart," is the Master's beatitude for purity. The man of pure heart—shall see God.

There is a legend that in heaven at twilight, a great bell of marvelous sweetness softly swings, rung by angel hands, and that a man may listen and hear on earth the wonderful music, if he puts from his heart's inner chamber—all the passion, pain, and strife, and all the heartaches and weary longings of his soul, if he thrusts out all hatred, bitterness, and envy, and all wicked thoughts and unholy feelings, this wondrous music may be heard by him. It is only a legend—but it enshrines a truth. The pure in heart shall see God; if we keep our inner life free from unholy thoughts and desires, we shall indeed hear the music of heaven's evening bells. A writer tells of going with a group down into a coal mine. On the side of the gangway, grew a plant that was perfectly white. There in the midst of black flying coal dust it remained spotless and clean—as white as snow. A

miner, accompanying the party, took a handful of the black dust and threw it upon the plant—but not a particle adhered. On the white folds of the plant there was a wonderful enamel to which nothing defiling would cling.

Such should be the life of every Christian in this evil world—unspotted and holy. Do you ask, "How is this possible?" God can keep you. If God can make a little plant so that no dust can stain its whiteness, can He not by His grace so enwrap your life in the beauties of holiness, that no defilement of sin can soil your purity? If He can keep a flower stainless amid clouds of floating coal-dust, can He not keep your heart in like purity in a sinful world?

Dewdrops are wonderful mirrors. In their crystal clearness, you may see reflected the whole blue sky that arches above you. Every Christian life should show to all who look upon it—a reflection of the glory of Christ. The world cannot see Christ in His spiritual revealings; it is your mission as Christians to show Christ mirrored in your own life. The likeness will be faulty and fragmentary—but the features should be there in unmistakable beauty. The wife of Sir Bartle Frere went to meet her husband at a railway station, on his return home from a long absence. She had with her a new servant who had never seen his master. "Go and look for Sir Bartle," bade the lady. "But how shall I know him?" asked the servant.

"Oh," said Lady Frere, "look for a tall gentleman, helping somebody." The servant found a tall man assisting an old lady out of the railway carriage, and from the description knew him at once. One mark of Christlikeness is love ministering, always helping somebody. Let this mind be in you.

Dew is refreshing. This is especially so in Eastern countries. There it seldom rains—but the dews are heavy, and the crystal drops creep down into the bosom of the flowers and to the roots of the grass blades—and all the beauty of field and forest and garden is revived. Drooping plants are fresh again, and fading flowers are as lovely as ever.

Here, again, the dew is a beautiful emblem of Christian lives, wearing the beauties of holiness. They carry cheer, joy, and brightness, wherever they go. They take into their own homes, when they gather at the close of day, a quiet yet persuasive and resistless life which touches all within with a new gladness. The home which has in it one or more happy Christian people, has in itself a happy secret of joy and blessing. The influence of their lives is full of power for good.

Christians do not know how much they can do to brighten the world, just by being sweet and beautiful—with love, quietness, and peace in their hearts, with gentleness, goodness, and helpfulness in all their lives. It is a great thing to have a refreshing influence, upon lives that one touches. Many people are discouraged, weary, or overwrought in life’s paths, or find it hard to keep up under their burdens; it is a great thing for you to be a comfort and a strength to such lives. Seek to be filled with God, and then go out to be joy-bearers, hope-inspirers, comfort-bearers, wherever you may go. In the way in which the DEW brings its blessings, there is also a suggestion of the manner in which Christians should seek to do good. The DEW comes in the night, while people sleep. It comes without noise. No ear hears it fall. It steals down noiselessly and does its beautiful work of refreshing; then, the moment daylight comes and the sun’s bright glare touches the earth—it vanishes. It loses itself, too, in doing good, for it sinks away into the heart of the rose, down among the roots of the grasses. It writes no record. It trumpets its name nowhere—to make sure of recognition and praise. Nothing shows that it has been at work—except the new life in all

nature.

All this is suggestive of the way we should do our work for Christ. No grace shines more brightly in a Christian life—than humility. Like the dew, seek to do your Christian work noiselessly. Do not try to draw attention to yourself. Blow no trumpet in the streets when you are going out to do some work for your Master. Do not let your right hand know what your left hand does. Let your influence pour out like the fragrance of a flower, like the light of a star. Hide away from the world's glare. Do not try to emblazon your name on every bit of work you do. Do not even think about men's praise—God knows. Work for Christ's eye—not for man's. Pour out your richest love, your costliest service, your most precious gifts—to bless those who need blessing, and let all be lost in the lives you seek to help—not desiring any personal recognition or reward—but only that your ministry may do good. Be like a dewdrop, which finds a drooping rose and sinks down into its folds and loses itself—but revives the fainting flower! Be content to do good, and to bless the life that needs your blessing. Not a single dewdrop which sinks into a flower is lost. Not a word or a holy influence hides away in vain in any heart. Live and speak and work and be for God and bless the world, and care not for reward.

Another way in which the dew is an emblem of the true Christian life, is in its origin. It comes out of the sky. It is not born of earth's springs—but from the "womb of the morning," from the bright, clear heavens. So the Christian life is not of earth. It is not merely natural. It is not something learned in schools. A Christian is one born of God, born of the Spirit, born from above. The spiritual life you have in your heart—came down out of the skies from Christ. God says, "I will be as the dew to Israel." Grace is simply God's own Spirit coming down and touching our lives, entering into them as the dew enters the grasses and flowers.

It is a beautiful thought, that God Himself, and not any mere blessing from God—is the dew that enriches our lives and becomes beauty and brightness in us. We have but to open our heart to receive divine grace. The dew rests upon the flowers, not in the heat of noon-day—but when in the darkness and the silence—they grow quiet and cool. It is not in struggle and restless striving, that we get the blessing of God's renewal—but in the stillness and coolness of humility and peace.

You can be dew to others—only as God is dew to you. You can give—only what you have received. You must live near the heart of Christ—if you would be a blessing in this world. You must keep your heart open to receive into it the life of God that is ever flowing close about you. If only you keep thus filled with the Holy Spirit—you will be fitted for being a blessing to every life you touch. The Rejected Stone Psalms 118:22-23

"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes."

There is a strange Jewish legend of a stone that was originally meant for an important place in the building, but was misunderstood and rejected. It is said that when Solomon's temple was building, all the stones were brought from the quarry, cut and shaped ready for the place they were to fill. Among the stones, was a very curious one which seemed of no desirable shape. There appeared to be no place where it belonged. They tried it in one wall—but it would not fit there. They tried it in another wall—but it was not suitable for that. The builders were vexed and angry, and threw the stone aside among the rubbish. The temple was years in building, and this castaway block

became covered with moss, and the grass grew around it. People passing by laughed at the stone of such peculiar shape that it would fit nowhere in the temple. Every other stone that came from the quarry found its place and fitted into it perfectly—but this one seemed useless—there must have been a blunder in the architect's drawings.

Years passed and the temple arose into beauty—but still the poor stone lay unused, unwanted, despised. The great day came when the temple was to be finished, and throngs were present to witness the crowning event. There was excitement—something was lacking. "Where is the capstone?" the builders said. Nowhere could it be found. The ceremony waited while the workmen sought for the missing block. At last someone said, "Perhaps the stone the builders threw aside among the rubbish, is the one for this place of highest honor. They brought it and hoisted it to the top of the temple, and lo! it fit perfectly. It had been cut and hewn for this very place. Loud shouts rent the air as the stone which the builders had refused as unfit, became the capstone, filled the place of highest honor. The stone had been misunderstood. The master-architect knew the place for which it was hewn and shaped. But the builders did not understand it and thought the architect had blundered. At length, however, the architect was vindicated, and the stone, long despised, found its place of honor.

There seems to be a reference to this tradition in the words of the Psalm: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone." Several times the reference occurs in the Scriptures. In the story of the building, it was the architect's plan or purpose that was misunderstood. The builder thought the master had made a mistake—but he had not. The stone was despised for a time—but at length found its place—the place of honor. Continually the same mistake is made in life. People think that God has blundered in His plans. But when we come to understand, we find that His purposes are right.

"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes." We see examples and illustrations of this continually.

There are people who at first do not seem to fit into any place in the world. They do not appear to have ability for anything worth while, to possess the qualities which will make them of value to the world. They are not brilliant or strong, nor do they seem likely to do anything to distinguish themselves; yet later, they develop ability, wisdom, even greatness, and fill important places in the world. There are many eminent men, of whom their early teachers predicted failure. They were dullards, not showing capacity. Yet afterwards, when they found themselves and found their place, they became distinguished in some particular line. Parents and teachers should never be discouraged when children seem unpromising. There may be hidden in their brain and heart special gifts, possibilities of power which will be brought out in certain circumstances, fitting them for particular duties. No other man has ever been a more remarkable illustration of this, than Lincoln. Reading only the narrative of his early years, no one would dream that he would fill a great place in human history. Even in his manhood, when he was beginning to disclose his powers, men did not think of him as fitted to be President of the nation, the leader of a great moral movement. He was not the stone the builders would have chosen as the capstone. He was clumsy and unattractive. Never was the hand of Providence more clearly visible in the bringing of any man to his place—than in the events which led to Mr. Lincoln's election to the Presidency. The political leaders did not want him. He was the stone which the builders rejected.

Yet we know also the story of his wonderful life and work. His greatness was not fully known, even while he lived. Every year since his martyrdom has revealed new elements of noble character in him, and shown in clearer light the greatness of his work. The world thinks of Lincoln as the emancipator of slaves. He was that—but he was also the savior of his country. South as well as North knows now how he loved the Union. His greatness appears at every point. His oration at Gettysburg contains only a few sentences, less than three hundred words—but it is acknowledged everywhere to be a piece of matchless eloquence. From whatever side we look at this man—he is great. More and more, too, as the years pass, do we see the providential meaning of his life, what it meant to his own country, what it meant to Christianity, what it meant to the world. His tragic death did not end his life, nor put an end to his work. They buried him amid the tears of a nation—but his life was not hidden in the grave.

Thus Lincoln is an example of one who was misunderstood by men, a stone which the builders rejected—but which God made to be the capstone.

God knows what He is doing, when He is making men. He never makes one He has no place for. Even if it is a broken life, God has a place for it, something for it to do. There is a home where the only child is mentally handicapped. Has God a place for it? Yes—perhaps it will be the means of the preparation of the parents for sweeter life and higher glory.

We see examples of the same truth in life's common relations. There are many who are misunderstood and unappreciated, and who do not get their proper quota of praise and commendation. It is so in some homes. A good many of us men do not half understand the worth of our wives—the fineness of their spirits, their devotion to our interests; nor appreciate their self-denials and self-sacrifices for us and our homes. We are not half thoughtful enough toward them, not gentle enough. It is not enough for a man to be true to his wife, to provide well for her, to supply her with physical comforts—her heart craves appreciation, cheer. A great many people everywhere—men as well as women—are not well understood. They may be tactless. They may have faults which mar their beauty. They may have peculiarities which neutralize some of their good qualities. They are uncouth and unattractive in some way. People do not see the good there is in them, do not set the true value upon them, misunderstand them.

Here is a man whom many of his neighbors do not like. Something in his manners offends them, excites in them unkindly feelings toward him. They say he is not sincere, that he does not mean what he says. Yet those who have had an opportunity to know this man's inner life, learn that his neighbors are mistaken in their judgment concerning him. He has in him good qualities, he fills an important niche. He is only misunderstood.

Let us strive to see people—as God sees them. He sees our possibilities, not what we are today—but what we may become through love and patience and discipline. Some fruits are not sweet until late fall. Some people ripen slowly and it is a long time before they become sweet, beautiful, and helpful. Do not reject any life because it is not beautiful at present. Let God train it, and some day it may fill an important place. The stone which you builders would reject as unfit, God may want by and by for the finest ornament in His temple.

Let us be more patient with people we do not like, whose faults offend us, who seem unfit for anything worthy or noble. Perhaps their faults are only unripeness. Or perhaps they are not faults

at all, only individualities which will be elements of strength when the people find their places. God has a plan for every man, and a work for every one to do. Let us leave people with faults and peculiarities, in God’s hands. He will have a place by and by, for the misunderstood life, and the stone which the builders despised—He will use to be the capstone somewhere.

Sometimes it is God Himself that is misunderstood. Yesterday a young woman came to ask counsel. A few years ago, she was married to a noble young man and went to the West. Her husband died and soon all the money he had gathered was embezzled by a professed friend, leaving the young widow with two little children, and penniless. Other losses and sorrows have come. The woman has returned to her childhood home to take up her life work. She is brave and cheerful. She is not doubting God—but she is questioning, "Is God always good? Does God really ever cease to be kind? How can I thus understand these years of my life—in which every flower of joy and hope has faded, and everything I had, has been taken from me?" She is in danger of misunderstanding God. What can one say to her?

Only this, that God’s work with her is not yet finished. You read a story, and at the end of a certain chapter, all seems wrong. If the book ended there, you might feel that God was not kind. But there are other chapters, and as you read on, you learn how good came out of all that seemed hard, even unjust.

Many times we think that our experiences in life, are anything but beautiful and kindly. We cannot see divine love in them. It does not seem to us possible that these rough and hard things, can be built into the temple of our lives, as stones of beauty. This may be the very stone which God has prepared for the holiest place in all the building, and that some day you will say of it, "The stone which I, the builder, would have rejected, has become the capstone! This is the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in my eyes." This illustration of the misunderstood stone runs through the whole New Testament. It is used by our Lord in the Gospels as applying to Himself. He was the stone which the builders rejected—but which God made to be the capstone. Speaking to the rulers, He said: "Did you never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the capstone! This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes!" The meaning is very clear. Jesus Himself was the stone which the builders had rejected. The rulers had a mistaken idea of the Messiah who was promised. They believed the Messiah was coming—but they thought He would be a great earthly king who would free them from their political condition, and would make them a great nation that should conquer the whole world. They had not learned the sacrificial character of the Messiah given in such prophecies as the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. So when Jesus came, lowly, meek, loving, unresisting, they did not believe He was the Messiah promised. They misunderstood Him.

Peter in his defense before the Sanhedrin used the same illustration. The rulers demanded by what power the lame man at the Beautiful Gate had been made whole, and Peter answered, "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—even by Him, does this man stand here before you whole." Then he added, "He is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone." That is, the rulers had rejected Jesus of Nazareth, the stone God had provided—but God had taken the misunderstood and rejected stone, and made it the very keystone of the temple. The great building of Christianity rests on this stone—Christ the one foundation.

Yet there are some people who do not like Jesus Christ. They do not approve of His way of helping and saving. They do not think He is the friend they need. They do not approve of the life to which He invites men. They do not think He can lead them to the best things, the fairest beauty of character, the deepest joy, the largest usefulness. But the temple could not be completed without the misunderstood and rejected stone. This stone at once made it complete. Your life will always be incomplete, unfinished, until Christ is received to His supreme place. Christ came to give you life, fullness, abundance of life. Let His life enter your soul and possess you wholly. Christ came to give you rest of soul amid all strifes and cares. Take the rest He gives. Christ came to give you His own peace. Let His peace rule in you. Christ wants to take charge of all your affairs, to choose your way for you, to direct all your life. Lay all the tangles, all the frets, all the questions in His hands.

Christ came to change you into His own likeness, by teaching you the lesson of love, by giving you self-control, self-mastery. He does not want to destroy the temper, the appetite, the tendency in you which troubles you so much. He wants to teach you to be master of it, master of yourself, of all your being, and lead all your life into sweet devotion to Him. Christ wants to enter into your life so fully—that He will be your constant companion, that He and you shall live together, so that you will do nothing without Him—but that He and you will work together and do impossible things. Christ came to lead us thus into the fullest, richest, most blessed life of fellowship and service, giving us His joy, His peace, His life, His love, at last crowning you with glory! That is what it means for the misunderstood stone to be made the capstone for you. The most glorious thing possible, is to have Christ in His rightful place in our lives.

Looking unto the Mountains

Psalms 121:1-2

"I lift up my eyes to the mountains; where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth."

"I will lift up my eyes." We ought to train ourselves to look up. We grow in the direction, in which our eyes turn. We become like that on which we look much and intently. We were made to look up. Man’s upright form indicates this. The Greek word for man means upward-looking. An old writer says, "God gave man a face directed upward, and bade him look at the heavens, and raise his uplifted countenance toward the stars."

Yet there are those who never look upward at all. They never see anything but things that are on the earth. They never see the stars. They never look toward God. They do not pray. They have no place in their scheme of life for God. Christ taught that all the circumstances of our lives, are in the care of God who is our Father, whose very children we are. The hairs of our head are all numbered. Even the birds are fed and the flowers are clothed by our Father. We should continually look up to God. "I will lift up my eyes unto the mountains." The poet did not mean that the mountains themselves were a shelter for him. Nothing earthly is a sufficient refuge for an immortal being. To him the mountains were a shadow of eternal things. Mountains have always appealed strangely and powerfully, to noble minds. When the writer says he will lift up his eyes unto the mountains, he is thinking of God. "From where does my help come from?" he asks, and the answer is, "My help comes from the Lord."

Think a little what mountains mean to the world. Many blessings come down from them to the plains. Ruskin mentions three great offices which the mountains fulfill. They determine the courses and the channels of the rivers. They are the great ventilators of the earth, generating currents of air that bear health on their bosoms. Then they keep the valleys fertile by the soil they perpetually send down. The mountains make the valleys. Not many years ago, the land in certain western plains was desert. The soil was rich—but there was no water, and nothing would grow. Yet yonder, on the mountain sides, were streams flowing away from the melting snows. All that was needed was to bring the blessing of the mountains down, and the deserts would then be made to blossom as the rose. Men lifted up their eyes to the mountains, and today we have the orange groves and the gardens and all the marvelous luxuriance of Southern California. This is a parable of spiritual life. From the mountains of God—flow down heaven's streams of grace, and the bare and empty lives they touch become rich in beauty and fruitfulness. Think what they miss—who never lift up their eyes to the mountains of prayer, who get nothing from God.

"The Lord is your keeper." This wonderful little Psalm describes the manner of God's helping in a most striking way. Our keeper is the strong One, who made heaven and earth. The power that keeps you, that shelters you, that blesses you—is the power of omnipotence.

"The Lord is your keeper." Note some points. The guardianship is individual, "your keeper." You say, "Surely God does not think of me. He has such vast concerns in His hands—that one life so small as mine cannot have His personal thought and care." The answer is, "The Lord is your keeper." You are as really and as much the object of His interest—as if in all the universe He had only you to think of! When, in distress or need, you lift up your eyes unto the mountains, and ask, "Where shall my help come?" God turns to you as if He had nothing else to do—but attend to your cry.

Think, too, of the minuteness of His care. "He will not let your foot slip." On the mountain paths, great disasters may result from the slipping of a foot. Many a life has been lost, by a misstep among the crags. But the divine keeping extends even to the feet, "The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord."

There is here another assurance of exquisite beauty. "He who keeps you will not slumber." No human love can watch without ceasing. The most devoted mother must fall asleep sometimes, beside her suffering child. But there is an Eye that never closes, that always watches.

"The Lord will preserve you from all evil." How do we account, then, for the troubles, the sufferings, the sorrows that befall good people? The poet does not say the Lord will keep you from pain, loss, sickness, and injury, from people's unkindness, from calamity—but from "all evil." These are not "evils." There is only one evil—sin. You may suffer all manner of trials—but so long as you have not sinned—no harm has come to you; you have been kept from all evil.

Thus this whole Psalm shows the safety of those who lift up their eyes unto the mountains. They are guarded when they go out and when they come in. You never can get away from God's keeping, if you live in the mountains. The mountain takes the storms and shelters the valleys. A tourist tells of coming upon a village which nestled at the foot of a great mountain. He asked the villagers if they had many storms there. "Yes," they replied, "if there is a storm anywhere in the whole region, it seems to find us." "How do you account for this?" asked the tourist. The answer

was: "Those who seem to understand say it is because our mountain towers highest of all the mountains. If he sees a cloud anywhere in the horizon, he beckons to it and it comes and settles on his brow." The tourist asked further if they had many accidents from lightning. "None," was the answer. "We have seen the lightning strike the mountain countless times—but no one in the village is ever touched by it. We have the thunder, which shakes our homes, and then we have the rains, which fill our gardens with the beauty which everyone so much admires—but the lightning never touches us. The mountain takes all the bolts and shelters us."

This, too, is a parable of what Christ is to us and to all who believe on Him. He is the mountain on which the storms break. On Calvary the tempests of ages burst upon His head. But all who nestle in His love—are sheltered in Him. "In me," He said, "you shall have peace." He is our eternal keeper, because He took the storms on His own breast, that we might hide in quiet safety under the shadow of His love. We lift up our eyes unto the mountains, and rest in peace and confidence, because our help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. A mountain is the symbol of reality. The weakness of much Christians, is the unreality of their faith. God is real. Men laugh at you when you talk about your mountains of faith. They say you are a dreamer. But to you they are gloriously real. You go to them in your prayers—and come back with your hands full of heavenly blessings. Is your religious life real to you? Is Christ real? A young Christian friend wrote: "I read my New Testament a great deal—but somehow I find myself asking all the while, 'Are these things actually true? They certainly are very beautiful to read about—but are they true? How do we know they are true?' " Are the things you read in the New Testament real to you? Is God real to you as your Friend? Two girls walking together one evening were engaged in earnest conversation. They stopped a moment before separating, and a gentleman waiting for a car overheard just a fragment of their conversation. One of them said to the other, "Yes—but why has nobody ever seen God?" That was all the gentleman heard—but the one sentence told of pain and question in a heart that longed for certainty. "Why has no one ever seen God?"

There are many good people who have the same longing. A disciple said once to the Master, "Lord, show us the Father." Jesus had been revealing the Father, not only in his miracles—but in all his sweet and gentle life, in his patience, his compassion, his kindness, his helpfulness. There was more of divine glory in any one common day of Christ's beautiful life of love—than there was in a whole year of Sinai's majesty.

There is mystery everywhere. There really are few things you understand. How can you lift your hand! How can you see the far-off mountains from the crags about us here! How can we talk by wireless telegraph with a friend on a ship half way across the ocean? You cannot see Christ, and you ask how you can know that He loves you. But you cannot see the love in the heart of your friend. Do you doubt it, because you cannot see it! You cannot see any form when you are praying, and you ask, "Is there really anyone who hears? Is there really anyone who sees me, knows me, loves me? Is there One who cares?"

If there were no assertions of God's being and no assurances of His love and care in the Bible, daily Providence is so full of God—that we could not doubt His existence, or His thought for His children. Christ is to us, the most real Friend in all the world, though we never see Him with our eyes. We never think of doubting Him or asking if He is real. No human friend comes so close. We see Him in His interest, His care, His kindness, in people's lives, all about us.

Some years ago, two men met on a vessel crossing the sea. They soon discovered that they had both been in the American Civil War, one with the North, the other with the South. They found, too, that they had taken part in the same battle. Then this incident came out as they talked together reminiscently. One night the Northern soldier was on watch-duty on one side of a little river, and the Southern soldier was a sharpshooter just across the stream, picking off soldiers on the other side. The Northern soldier was singing softly, "Jesus, Lover of my soul," as he paced his beat, and the words of the old hymn were heard in the stillness over the river. The sharpshooter was taking aim and was about to fire upon the Northern soldier as the song revealed his place. Just then he heard the words, "Cover my defenseless head with the shadow of Your wings." His rifle dropped—he dared not shoot a man praying that prayer. "I could as soon have shot my mother!" he said. Was not God in this strange incident? Was not the answering of the soldier's prayer a reality! We need not ask why no one ever sees God? Lift up your eyes unto the mountains in every time of need—and you will see Him in the help, the blessing, the deliverance, the comfort, the grace that will come to you.

"I will lift up my eyes unto the mountains." Let us make our lives, lives of upward looking. There are people who look down always, watching for thorns. They never see anything but the unpleasant things. They are always finding troubles. They find them on the brightest days, in the loveliest places, when their circumstances are the happiest. But that is not the way to go through life. Lift up your eyes—and look for roses, not for thorns. Some people think the world is all bad, all wrong, with no love, no friends. They do not love anybody, nor trust anybody. They hear only discord—no music. They say that all men are liars. They tell you all Christians are hypocrites, all merchants dishonest, all homes bedlams, all marriages failures, that nobody is pure, that there is no unselfishness. Can you think of any other way of making one's life wretched, miserable, and unhappy, that equals this? Lift up your eyes unto the mountains where the air is sweet, the light clear, the music like angels' songs. This will change all the world for you. Of course there are discordant notes in the music of almost any neighborhood—but there are also beautiful harmonies, sweet symphonies, noble oratorios, and why should we listen only to the few discords—and shut our ears to the inspiring songs that fill the air? Let us hear the sweet songs—not the discords.

Lift up your eyes unto the mountains—when you think of your own circumstances. They may not seem bright or hopeful. Perhaps you have discouragements, difficulties, hardships. But why should you keep your eyes on these? There is always more white than black, more joy than sorrow, more love than hate, more encouragement than discouragement. Lift up your eyes when things are hard with you—and you will always find something to cheer you. Look for the one joyous, hopeful thing—and let that make you brave. There is always something good in your circumstances. Find that.

There is a story of a little dog lying on a parlor floor one chill and dreary day. Presently there came a small patch of sunshine on the floor, a ray of sunlight coming in through the shutter. The dog saw it, got up and went and lay down in it. That was good philosophy. If there is only one spot of cheer or encouragement in your circumstances, find it and set your chair down in it. So the Psalm calls us with a thousand voices—to look up, and to come up higher. Think of the love, the sweetness, the holiness, the truth, the serenity, the joy of God. If we would reach these excellences, these lofty things—we must lift up our eyes and our hearts—unto the mountains. We never can attain

them by looking down. Goodness is always found above us, not in the depths below us—it keeps ever above us. We must look to the mountains. The heights call us. Let us leave the lowlands of selfishness, covetousness, resentment, envy, and all that is unworthy, and go up and live with Jesus Christ on the mountains of holiness, of victory, of purity! The mountains are places of strength. They are the emblems of perpetuity. We talk about the everlasting mountains. The higher our lives reach as they become filled with God, the stronger they are, the securer and safer. The power of temptation over them grows less and less. Our faults and vices, the base things, the groveling things, cannot live in the pure mountain air—they will choke and die there. The heights are refuges for our souls. Enemies of spiritual life are everywhere—but they cannot reach us—if we climb up into the mountains!

I saw the statement that someone, looking through a great telescope, detected birds flying five or six miles above the earth. How safe they are up there so high! No arrow can find them there. Just so, the soul that looks up into the mountains, that lives in the heights far above the earth—no fowler can trap it, no enemy can touch it. The mountains are places of safety. The mountains are places of peace. There is a point in the heavens, above the clouds, where no storm ever blows, where no tempest ever breaks, where nothing ever disturbs the perfect stillness. The mountains bring peace. With God we are above all fear. Let us rise above the strifes and confusions of earth—into the peace of God!

Joy in God’s House

Psalms 122:1-2

"I rejoiced with those who said to me—Let us go to the house of the LORD! Our feet shall stand within your gates, O Jerusalem." The title of this Psalm is suggestive. It is called a Song of Ascents. Whatever the origin of the title may have been, it is pleasant to think of a true life—as a series of ascents. We are always going upward if we are walking with God—out of sin and debasement, toward holiness and brightness; out of the mists and shadows that lie in the valleys—to the sunlight that streams on the mountaintops. It is uphill all the way.

We think as we climb some rugged steep, and come at last to its crest, that we shall have no more such paths; but tomorrow find that we have only reached the top of one of the foothills, and that there are other hills—a stairway of them—leading up at last to the mountain summit, which we call heaven. If, therefore, we are living truly, our course is a continuous ascent, and our songs should be songs of ascents.

"I rejoiced with those who said to me—Let us go to the house of the LORD!" We can readily understand the gladness of the ancient Hebrews as they were summoned to the house of the Lord. They were dispersed over many countries. Their annual feast days were occasions of great joy for them, because they were then called to the holy city, the place of the temple, the most sacred spot in all the world to Hebrew hearts. No wonder they went up singing. They were going back to their old homeland. They would there meet friends they had not met for a long while. They would sing again the old songs and worship God in the old way.

Just so, it should always make us glad to be called to the house of the Lord. We go to church for two general reasons. One is, to worship God. He has been good to us, and we are called to return to Him love and worship. Another reason is, that in His house God meets us with His

blessings—grace, strength, comfort, wisdom, light. We go to church not so much to give God something—our offerings of homage and praise; as to get something from Him, help for the journey, comfort for our sorrow, strength for our weakness. We should love to go to God's house, because we need the help we cannot find elsewhere.

"Our feet shall stand within your gates, O Jerusalem." When at last, after the long journey, the pilgrim reached the gate of the holy city, his joy was unbounded. Perhaps he had come from afar, his heart all the way full of eager anticipation. Now he is climbing the last hill, now he is at the gate, now entering, now inside. What gladness is his!

Similar joy should be the true Christian's—when he enters the presence of God. We get so used to the exercise of prayer, the privilege of communion, the blessedness of meeting God, that sometimes we fail to experience the rapture that our heart should find. The angels, as they look upon the worship of earth's pilgrims, must wonder at its lack of warmth and fervor, its tameness, its triteness. If we would come into God's presence only now and then, a few times in the year, as the Jews came to their temple—how hungry would we be for God, and what gladness the approach would give! Or if we could have a glimpse of the heavenly realities amid which we stand when we enter the presence of God—no words could express our gladness!

"Jerusalem is a well-built city, knit together as a single unit. All the people of Israel—the LORD's people—make their pilgrimage here. They come to give thanks to the name of the LORD as the law requires." Two reasons are here given why the people went up to God's house regularly. One was, as a testimony. Thus they showed to the world their love for God and testified of their own faithfulness and devotion. When their neighbors saw them wending their way to the temple—they knew that they were devout Israelites. Constant church-going is always a good witness for God. When every Lord's day we drop our business, our worldly tasks, and turn away from ease and self-indulgence, and go to God's house, we are honoring God before our neighbors. The man who is seen going to the church every Sunday, though he never says a word in public about his religion, is preaching a sermon to the indifferent—a sermon more eloquent and impressive than he could preach in words.

Another reason for church attendance, is to give thanks unto the Lord. After a week of gifts and favors received, we should go to the house of God and take there our offerings of praise. Yet is there really much thanksgiving in the worship of the average Christian congregation? We try to make our services very solemn. We should be reverent, for we are in the presence of the mighty God. But joy should be the keynote in all our worship, for we have always a thousand reasons for thanksgiving. Yet, do we always give thanks?

One man said in a meeting that he had been living at Grumble Corner for a long time—but had now moved up to Thanksgiving Street. He said that he found the air sweeter and purer, and everything brighter and better. Too many of us live in Grumble Row most of our life. We do little but complain. Even our prayers are made up of fears, anxieties, and requests, with scarcely a word of praise. If the angels can hear the prayers put up by most Christians, they must wonder how they can be so sad all the time. We should go to God's house—to give thanks.

"Here stand the thrones where judgment is given, the thrones of the dynasty of David." The city of Jerusalem was the capital of the country. It was not only the place for worship—but also the place

where the people came for their laws. It was the place to which they came with their inequities and injustices, their questions requiring settlement. All this Christ is to us, in our Christian life. The church is the divine refuge for us. That is the place, therefore, to bring all our wrongs. If others have injured us, sinned against us, done us harm—we may bring the matters to God’s house, sure that justice will be done, that our wrongs will be righted, and that evil shall be transmuted into good for us. This is a great teaching, and one which we should not fail to learn. Many of us allow ourselves to be sadly hurt in the fiber of our life—by the treatment we receive from others. We allow slights, injuries, unkindnesses, to be like thorns in our flesh, wounding us. Some of us grow bitter and resentful, trying to settle every injury for ourselves. This is not the Christian way. Rather we should take all such wrongs to God’s house, for there are thrones where judgment is given. This is what Christ Himself did. "When he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him who judges righteously."

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May all who love this city prosper. O Jerusalem, may there be peace within your walls and prosperity in your palaces. For the sake of my family and friends, I will say, "Peace be with you." Again and again, in the closing verses of this Psalm, comes the prayer for peace. Peace is the sum of all spiritual blessing. Another part of our errand to God’s house is to pray for peace on the church and for the prosperity of all who love God. We should never go to church for ourselves alone. The Lord’s Prayer teaches us to pray always for others, mingling intercession with our supplication. It is not "My Father," but "Our Father," to whom we should come. We should pray for our brethren and companions. We should seek the good of the whole Church of Christ.

If the spirit of these verses, were the spirit of all our worship, there would be no strife in our churches, no divisions, no quarrels. Peace is the absence of all bitterness. The secret of peace lies in willingness to obliterate self, to suffer uncomplainingly, rather than to demand our "rights." Church quarrels come from the opposite spirit—someone is determined to have things his own way, even if the consequence is the breaking up of the church. If we say the words of this Psalm sincerely, we must be willing to be broken and crashed, to have our rights set aside, if only the Church of Christ prospers and is at peace.

God’s Thinking of us Psalms 139:17-18

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with you!"

We like to know that people are thinking about us. Even a postal card coming in the mail some morning from a friend far away, saying only, "I am thinking of you," brings you a strange uplift. You were sick for a time and could not see your friends, and one day a rose was sent up to your room with a card and a message of love. How it cheered you! Someone was thinking of you. You were in sorrow, and a little note came in with just a verse of Scripture, a word of sympathy, or a "God bless you!" and a name. It was almost as if an angel from heaven had visited you. Somebody was thinking of you. You have not forgotten how it helped you.

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" This means God’s thoughts of us. They are precious. In one of the previous verses of the Psalm, the poet tells us that God knows all our thoughts. Here he tells us of God’s own thoughts—Hethinks of us—thinks of us with love. The root

of the word rendered "precious" is weighty. God's thoughts are weighty, like gold. Then they are without number—that is, God does not think of us merely once in a lifetime, or now and then—but continually. "How great is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more in number than the sand." God thinks about us.

"How precious are your thoughts unto me, O God!" The Bible teaches unmistakably, that God cares for us. A scientific writer not long ago declared that the greatest discovery of the twentieth century would be the discovery of God, and that then will it be known that God does not care. It would be terrible if this should prove to be true. If God never thinks about you, if you have no place in His heart, this would be a dark world for you. But we do not need to wait for a new discovery of God in this twentieth century. The discovery has been already made—and God does care! His name is Father. Can one be a father—and not care for his child! Jesus came to reveal God to us, and He tells us over and over—that God loves us, thinks about us, provides for us, hears our prayers. Not only are we in God's thoughts—but He thinks about us as individuals, not merely as a race. The teaching of the whole Bible is that God knows us individually. There was only one sheep that had strayed from the fold—but the shepherd missed that one, thought about it, and sought it over the hills. The Psalms abound in expressions like these: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." "He leads me." "I sought the Lord and he answered me." "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up."

"When I awake—I am still with you." No matter where you awake, you will find God bending over you. This is the drift of the whole Bible. It is not God and the human family, not God and a nation—but God and the individual. The Good Shepherd calls His own sheep by name. The Father never forgets one of His own children. Though you are cast on a bare rock in the sea, and no friend in the world knows where you are—you are in God's thought. He is watching and caring. Though you are carrying today some secret grief or trouble, of which no one on earth can know—He knows. He sympathizes. He is thinking of you. In one of the earlier verses of our Psalm, the poet says to God, "You understand my thoughts afar off." Your most secret thoughts are known in heaven. Jesus is touched even with the feeling of our infirmities. In all your afflictions, He is afflicted. It is just as if there were only one person in the world—and you were that one. He is thinking of you today—as if He had only you to think of, in all the world.

"How precious are your thoughts unto me, O God!" Could anything be more precious, more comforting, more strengthening, more uplifting; than to know that God really cares, that whatever your need or trouble, He is thinking about you? If you actually believe this, all your trouble will be light, and life's meaning will all be changed for you.

Providence is full of illustrations of God's special thought for His children. In an address made in Glasgow before an Insurance and Actuarial Society, James Byers Black told the story of the escape of the one man who survived the Tay Bridge disaster, some years ago. This man left the train when it stopped for a moment at Fort Street station, just before it started on its journey to death. His hat had blown off—and he followed his impulse to run after it. At that instant the train moved off—and the man was left standing alone at the little wayside station, on a dark and tempestuous night. Within a very few minutes, the train had crashed through the broken bridge and had carried seventy-four people—everyone on board—down to death in the remorseless waters of the Tay River. The man whose hat blew off—was the sole survivor of that night's

tragedy.

It would be interesting to know this man's subsequent history. Why was he spared? What work was there for him to do? If we could understand the mystery of Divine Providence, no doubt we would learn the reason why God thought of this man and kept him off the ill-fated train. We call this a special providence.

Someone once asked George Macdonald if he believed in special providences. He said, "Yes—in the providences—but not in the special." He believed that we were always meeting providences. Not now and then, in some remarkable instances—but in every event and occurrence, there is a Divine Providence. God is always on the field. Our life is full of God. We do not usually see His hand—but He is never absent. There are no accidents, no chances—in life. God thinks of us continually, and watches over all our movements. We call it a providence when there is a disaster on the railway—and we are not hurt. Is it any less a providence when the train runs with no disaster, and we are uninjured?

One man asked thanks to be given in a meeting, because his horse stumbled on the edge of the precipice and he escaped being dashed to death. Another man asked to be included in the thanksgiving, because he passed on the same road and his horse did not even stumble. Not only does God deliver us in danger—but He guards from danger! Every man is immortal—until his work is done. "How precious are your thoughts unto me, O God." I am glad I do not have to plan and direct my own life. God thinks upon me!

God's thoughts for our life, may not always be our thoughts—but they are always the right and the best thoughts. There is a verse in Isaiah which I always read with deep reverence. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth—so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." It is God's thoughts we want for our life, rather than our own thoughts. Of course, God's thought for us is higher than ours; that is, wiser, better, safer—than ours. He is infinite in knowledge, and sees the end from the beginning.

We will all assent to this as a truth, and also as a theory of life. But when we come to the acceptance of God's thought, His way, His plan, instead of our own, sometimes we fail. We think that we could plan better than God has planned. We are not willing to accept His thought for our life. What just now, would you make different—if you were directing your life! You would leave out some disappointments, perhaps. You would not have this year's pinching times, if you were changing things to your own mind. But would it be better that way! Perhaps the best things in your whole life—have come out of the things you would omit—if you were planning! When we say, "How precious are your thoughts unto me, O God!" we should be ready to accept these thoughts, to believe in them, to yield ourselves to them. Have you ever thought what a glorious thing it is to have God's plan for your life, to know that He thought about you before you were made, and then made you according to His thought? It is a wonderful truth. No wonder that George Macdonald said he would rather be the being God made him to be—than the most glorious creature he could think of. No possible human plan for your life could be half so high, so noble, so beautiful—as God's thought for you. This is true, not only for the plan of our life in general—but of each, detail of it. We are coming all the while to certain experiences which so break into our thought for our life, that we are startled and say, "Surely this cannot be God's thought for me." Sometimes we have

pleaded with God to withhold from us something—some sorrow, some loss, some pain—which seemed to be impending, and we did not get our request. That impending affliction came to us—in spite of our prayers. What really happened? God's perfect thought for our life at that point went on, instead of our lower thought. And that was best! Our desire should always be—that God's thought shall be realized, and not ours. This should be our prayer in the most intense moments of our life.

One tells of an unanswered prayer. There had been the most passionate pleading for something without which it seemed that the friend's life would be most incomplete. It appeared that it would be nothing less than disaster to have the request not granted. But if it was God's thought for the life, it would have been no disaster. The disaster, then, would have been the granting of the request! "My ways are higher than your ways; and my thoughts than your thoughts." When will we learn this?

God's thoughts for us are always good, always right. Jeremiah, in comforting the exiles in captivity, said: "Thus says Jehovah, After seventy years are accomplished for Babylon, I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says Jehovah, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you hope in the days to come." God's thought for His people in the captivity was peace, good, blessing. When you are passing through some great sorrow, some overwhelming loss, some sore trial, God's thought for you always is peace, good, blessing.

It seems to me that if we would only believe this, if we would only be sure of it, whatever the experiences may be, nothing ever could disturb us. Of course, we cannot understand things, and we cannot see how good can be in our Father's thought for us—when all seems so destructive, so ruinous. But here is the divine word for it, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says Jehovah, thoughts of peace and not of evil." Then we have the experience of the past. Has it not been always so? God never had a thought toward any child of His—that was not a thought of peace.

He always means good, even in the most painful trials. The cross of Christ was a thought of God, and you know what infinite blessing the cross gave to the world. Every disappointment of yours is a thought of love, if you understood it.

Looking One's Soul in the Face "The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?" Jeremiah 17:9

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way." Psalms 139:23-24

It takes courage to pray this prayer, "Search me, O God, and know my heart!" Not all men can do it. Many people fear to look into their own heart. If by some divine revealing, we were made to see ourselves as we are—all the evil that is in us, our face would blanch into deathly paleness. It takes courage to ask God to search one's inner life—and show one one's sins.

It takes honesty, too, to pray this prayer. The poet meant that every wrong thing found in his heart, under the clear light of God's Spirit, he would cast out. Some people do not want to find their own sins—because they do not want to give them up. They do not wish to discover their secret faults, because they love them and desire to keep them. We cannot pray this prayer—if we are not ready

and willing and eager to have Christ save us from whatever evil way, whatever sinful habit, feeling, disposition, or temper—we may discover in ourselves. It takes honesty, therefore, and sincerity, to pray God to search us. The writer asks God to search him. He does not say he will search himself. An ancient maxim was, "Know yourself." But no man can really know himself, in the depths of his being—unless God holds the lamp to shine in the darkness. God is light. Christ is the world's only light. None but God can truly search us—and show us to ourselves. The poet invites divine searching.

Neither does he ask his neighbors to search his ways and thoughts. Men are willing enough, ofttimes, to judge their fellow men, to find and expose their faults, to proclaim their sins. It is easier to confess other people's sins—than one's own. The Pharisee was quite free in searching the publican and declaring his wrongdoings, though he saw no faults and sins in himself! The poet might have found men who would be willing to search him and try him and point out his blemishes and his wicked ways. But this, he did not ask. Men's judgments are imperfect. Sometimes they are uncharitable, even unjust. There are lives that go down under men's condemnation, whom love would have saved. At the best, men are only ignorant or partial judges. They cannot see our motives—and ofttimes they condemn as evil—that which is noble and beautiful, and approved as right and praiseworthy, that which before God is unworthy and sinful. It is not enough for us to ask men to search us and try us, to say to a friend, "Tell me of my faults and blemishes, that I may put them away."

Dr. Stalker tells the story of a young composer whose work was being performed in a great music hall. A throng was listening and applauding. But the young man seemed to be indifferent to all these tokens of approval. All the while his eye was fixed on one man who sat at the center of the hall. This was his old master, and the musician cared more for his opinion—than for that of the thousands of other listeners; and was thrilled more by his faintest look or gesture of approval, than by all the thunderous cheers of the throng.

It matters very little to us what men may say—either in praise or in blame—of our conduct, or our deeds. But there is One who sits at the center of all things, who is perfect in wisdom, love, and righteousness, and whose judgments are unerring. We should want always to know what He thinks of our acts, words, dispositions, and thoughts. Though all the world applauds what we do, if on His face there is no pleasure, if we see there the shadow of disapprobation, what a mockery is men's applause! On the other hand, if the world sneers, condemns, and blames; if men have for us only scorn, reproach, and persecution; and if, meanwhile, turning our eyes toward the heavenly throne, we see in the divine face—the smile of pleasure and approval, what need we care for either the favors or the frowns of men? It is to God we should turn—for the searching of our lives. No other judgment will avail.

It is better and safer always, to fall into the hands of God, than into the hands of men. God is kindlier and juster than men. Nobody understands you—as God does. Nobody knows your infirmities and has such patience with them—as God has. He knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. He understands our weakness. He knows human life—this blessed Lord of ours—by actual human experience. He knows all the elements that enter into human struggle, and, therefore, is fitted for sympathy. We never need be afraid to open our heart to Him, for He will never be unjust with us. We never need be afraid to ask Him to search us, for if we truly want to

give up our sins when we discover them—we shall find Him most merciful and gracious.

It will be worth our while to think seriously of the things in us—that only God can see. There are sins which are hidden from ourselves, of which our conscience is not aware—our unwitting, unknown errors—the evil in us which lies too deep to be discovered. There is a SELF in us, which even we ourselves do not see. There are depths of our being, into which our own eyes cannot pierce. Even our own knowledge of ourselves, is not final. You may say that you know of no sins, errors, or faults in yourself, and you may be sincere; still this is not evidence that you are sinless. In one of his epistles Paul says, "I know nothing against myself." He was not living in the practice of any sin, so far as he knew. He did no wrong thing willingly and knowingly. He cherished no secret sin. Every fault he discovered, he put away. He knew nothing against himself. But he added, "Yet am I not hereby justified; but he who judges me is the Lord." The bar of conscience in our own breast, is not the final court. It is not enough to have the approval of our own heart. There are errors and evils in the holiest life on earth—which only God's eye can detect. We must ask God to search us, if we would be made absolutely clean. God knows all our past. We do not. There is much that we have forgotten. The memory of many of our deeds has faded out. But God has forgotten nothing. Our forgetting our sins—does not blot them out. The evil things we do not remember, are there yet.

We cannot see our own faults—even as our neighbors can see them. There is wisdom in the wish that we might see ourselves, as others see us—for it would free us from many a blunder and foolish notion. We are prejudiced in our own favor. We are disposed to be charitable toward our own shortcomings. We make all sorts of allowances for our own faults. We are wonderfully patient with our own weaknesses. We are blind to our own blemishes. We look at our own good qualities through magnifying glasses; and at our faults and errors with lenses reversed—making them appear very small. We see only the best of ourselves. If you were to meet yourself on the street some morning—that is, the person God sees you to be—you would probably not recognize yourself!

We remember the little story that the prophet Nathan told King David, about a rich man's injustice toward a poor man, and how David's anger flamed up. "This man must die!" cried the king. He did not recognize himself—in the man he so despised, until Nathan quietly said, "You are the man!"

We are all too much like David.

If the true chronicle of your life were written in a book, in the form of a story, and you were to read the chapters over—you probably would not identify the story as your own! We do not know our real self. We do not imagine there is so much about us that is morally ugly and foul, that is positively wicked. But God searches the innermost things of our life!

God sees into the future and knows where the subtle tendencies of our life are leading us. We do many things which to our own eyes, appear innocent and harmless—but which have in them a hidden evil tendency which some day will come to ripeness. We indulge ourselves in many things which may not appear sinful—but which leave on our soul a touch of blight, a soiling of purity. We permit ourselves to grow into a hundred little habits, in which we see no danger—but which meanwhile are weaving their fine gossamer threads into a net for our souls, or twisting their invisible filaments into a rope which some day will bind us hand and foot! We spare ourselves little

self-denials, thinking there is no reason why we should make them, not aware that we are neglecting God-given duties, and refusing to take up crosses laid at our feet by the Master, thus failing in complete faithfulness. We form friendships which become very dear to us—but which insidiously harm us, weakening our life's purpose or drawing us away from God. The peril in all these things, lies not so much in the mere acts or indulgences of the hour—as in the things to which they will lead. We have no eyes to see the hidden danger in these "no harms" in our life—but God detects the peril, and sees what the end will be. A popular writer tells the story of a dream which a man had. He had left his English home and was in India. He had done many things which would have pained his mother's heart, if she had known of them. One night he dreamed that he saw a drunken man enter his room. As the moonlight fell on the man's face, making every feature visible, a terror more terrible than mortal had ever known before seized upon the dreamer. He saw that the face was his own—but marked and scarred with the furrows of disease and much evil-doing—white, drawn, and grown old. It was a glimpse of what he was coming to, if he did not quickly change his wrong course.

There is another kind of hidden faults. There are things in many of us, no doubt, which we regard among our strong points, certainly fair and commendable traits or qualities—which in God's eye are sore blemishes! Good and evil in certain qualities, lie not far apart. It is easy for devotion to principle—a good thing; to take the form of obstinacy—a very unlovely thing. It is not hard for zeal for orthodoxy, to pass into intolerance and bigotry. Self-respect, consciousness of ability, easily degenerate into prideful self-conceit. Gentleness readily becomes weakness. A man may be giving his life, in the larger sense, to the work of Christ, doing great things for the church—while in his own home, with those nearest to him, he is living like a beast! We see this kind of fault cropping out in our neighbor's character and life, and we say, "What a pity so fine a character is so marred!" Yes, and our neighbour looks at us, and says, "What a pity that with so many excellences, he has these blemishes and faults!" Sin is deceitful. The substance of all this is, that besides the evil which others see in us, and which we see in ourselves; all of us have undiscovered errors and faults—which only God can see!

We ought never to shrink from learning our faults. He is a coward who does. Moreover, he is making a fearful mistake, who blinds himself to the faults in his own heart and life. He is refusing to see a danger which by and by, may work his ruin! Every true man should be glad always to learn of any hidden fault he has.

Ruskin says, "Count yourself richer—that day you discover a new fault in yourself; not richer because it is there—but richer because it is no longer a hidden fault! And if you have not found all your faults, pray to have them revealed to you, even if the revelation must come in a way that hurts your pride!"

Secret, undiscovered faults—are more perilous than discovered faults. Open sins are enemies in the field, undisguised, recognized as enemies. Hidden faults are enemies concealed, traitors in our camp, passing for friends! No godly, true, and brave man will permit a discovered sin or fault—to stay in his life. He will fight it to the death. But his undiscovered sin or fault, lurks and nests in his heart while he knows it not, and breeds its evil in his very soul! Before he is aware of its presence—it may eat out the very heart of his life—and poison the springs of his being! A fire broke out in a large storage building in the morning—but it had been smouldering all night, and,

undiscovered, eating its way among the bales, so that when discovered the whole interior was a mass of fire, and there was only the shell of the building left. Just so, hidden faults destroy lives, and none but God knows the destruction that is going on—until the fatal ruin is wrought. We ought to pray God continually, to search us, and save us from undiscovered sins.

Hidden faults in us—will hinder our spiritual growth. They also make us unfit for God's work. When Canova, the sculptor, was about to begin his statue of Napoleon, his keen eye saw a tiny reddish tinge in the upper part of the splendid block of marble out of which he was to hew the statue. The stone had been brought at great expense from Paris. Common eyes saw no flaw in the stone—but the sculptor saw it, and the stone was rejected. May it not be so ofttimes, with lives which face great opportunities? God's eye detects in them some undiscovered flaw, or fault, some tiny tinge of marring color. God desires truth in the inward parts. The life must be pure and white throughout. He who cherishes a secret sin—is balking God's purpose in himself. God cannot use him for the noble task or service. Because of the secret sin—he is rejected. Are we ready to make the prayer for divine searching? Are we willing to have God search us—and find every secret, hidden sin in us? Are we willing for Him to go down into our heart, among our thoughts and affections and desires, and find and reveal to us every way of wickedness He discovers? Then are we willing to give up, tear out, and cast away forever from us, everything that God finds that is not holy?

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way!" A Morning Prayer

Psalms 143:8-11

"Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. Rescue me from my enemies, O LORD, for I hide myself in you. Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground. For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life; in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble."

Some people never pray. Others say that prayer cannot do anything for them. It is very pathetic when men thus cut themselves off from God—whom they need so deeply. No day starts well or safely—without its morning prayer. We need to get the touch of Christ's hand upon us, to give us strength and courage for our day. Many of us have to rise early and hurry away to work that is hard and sometimes frets and irks us. Perhaps we are thrown among people who are not kindly and congenial, who try us and irritate us by their talk and behavior. The days bring their temptations, their allurements, their false paths, their burdens, their responsibilities, their struggles, possibly sudden sorrows. To push out into any new day without prayer, is perilous. However quiet and sweet the morning air is, we need God to lead us in the quiet and sweetness. If we are going into a day of storm and trouble, we certainly need the divine shelter and guidance. The morning prayer sets the day apart. We should begin each one with God. It is a great secret of beautiful and faithful living, to learn to live by the day. One day at a time, and then begin each day at God's feet. In the morning prayer in this Psalm, there are six petitions:

"Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love." This is a prayer that the first voice to break upon our ears at the opening of the day shall be the voice of God.

Henry Drummond says: "Five minutes spent in the companionship of Christ every morning—yes, two minutes, if it is face to face and heart to heart—will change your whole day, will make every thought and feeling different, will enable you to do things for His sake—that you would not have done for your own sake."

It is very sweet when one is living in constant fellowship with Christ, to look into His face in the first waking moment, to thank Him for His love, to receive His smile of forgiveness and peace, and His blessing for the day. "Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." After being with God—we are ready for anything that the day may bring.

We cannot go out to sing in the morning, unless we have first opened our hearts to hear the song of divine love. Fitting is the prayer, "Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you." When we hear God's voice of love in the morning, we are ready for anything. The second petition of this morning prayer is, "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk." We cannot know the way ourselves. The path across one little day, seems a very short one—but we cannot find it ourselves. Each day is a hidden world to our eyes. We cannot see a single step before us. There is an impenetrable darkness that covers the sunniest day as with night's sable robes. You know not, what the unspent hours of this very day may hold for you. They may have surprises of joy, or they may have surprises of sorrow for you. They may lead you into a garden of pleasure—or a garden of anguish. All you can do is to commit your way to God, praying, "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk."

It brings rest and peace to us, as we look out upon a day's hidden paths, not knowing where we ought to go, to remember that God knows all. Job speaks of the mystery of life, when one seeks the way and cannot find it: "I go east, but he is not there. I go west, but I cannot find him. I do not see him in the north, for he is hidden. I turn to the south, but I cannot find him. But he knows where I am going. When he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

God has many ways of answering this prayer and making us know the way. He puts His Word into our hands and says, "Take, and read."

Another of God's voices speaks within. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord," says the Scripture. We call this candle conscience, and it burns in our breasts as a lamp burns in a room at night.

Then, God guides us through human friends. Someone advises young people always to seek to have an older friend to whom they can go for the wisdom learned from experience.

Sometimes the way amid the tangles is made plain, through some providence. One door is shut and another is opened. A friend was telling how when he was in much uncertainty about his duty on a certain occasion, when a great task was laid into his hands, and when he prayed to have the way made plain, he was led into a sick room. He did not think of that as the answer to his prayer—but in that place of pain he learned the very lesson he needed to learn, and found the very guidance he sought. When the oriental shepherd led his flock through some dark valley—it was because that was the way to a bit of green pasture on the other side. Or the answer to your prayer may be a keen disappointment. "O God, this cannot be the way!" you cry. If Joseph, the morning he left home to go to his brothers, had prayed, "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk," he might have wondered as he was led to Egypt as a slave—if that were the answer to his prayer.

It certainly did not seem as if God were directing him those days. But as the years went on, he learned that there had been no mistake in the guidance. If he had escaped from his brothers or from the caravan, he would have only spoiled one of God's plans of love for his life. We need never be afraid to pray this prayer—and then to accept the answer, whatever it is. God will show us the way—if we will accept His guidance. The third petition in our morning prayer is, "Save me from my enemies, LORD; I run to you to hide me." The day is full of dangers. We do not know it; we see no danger. We go out, not dreaming of any possible peril. Yet everywhere there are enemies. Disease lurks in the air we breathe, hides in the water we drink, and is concealed in the food we eat. Along the street where we walk, on the railway on which we ride, there are perils. No African jungle is so full of wild beasts, savage and blood-thirsty, as are the common days with malignant spiritual enemies. We are aware of no danger and, therefore, cannot protect ourselves.

What can we do? As we go out in the morning we can offer this prayer, "Save me from my enemies, LORD; I run to you to hide me." Thus we can put our frail, imperilled lives each morning into the keeping of the Mighty God.

We have no promise that prayer will take the dangers out of our day. It is not in this way that God usually helps. Prayer brings God down about us, a heavenly protection, making us safe in the midst of most hurtful things. Not to pray as we go into the day—is to venture among life's thousand perils—with our heads uncovered, with no armor about us. The problem of life is not to get an easy, safe way—but to go through the way, though beset with perils—unhurt; to be kept from harm—amid sorest dangers.

Every day's experiences have their perils for us, which with prayer become helps and blessings—but without prayer can only harm and devastate our lives. We cannot help ourselves. We cannot compel the dangers to become our shelter. We cannot cover our own souls with any shield that will make us safe. The only safety for us any day—is in prayer. If we understood what perils there are for us, if our eyes were opened to give us a glimpse of the enemies that wait for us in cloud or sunshine—we would never dare to go forth from our door any morning—until we had first called upon God to deliver us from our enemies.

We cannot keep ourselves; God alone can keep us. We are safe nowhere but under the shadow of His wings. We should flee to Him to hide us. It is never safe to go forth any morning, without a prayer of committal of ourselves to God's watchful care. The fourth petition of this morning prayer is: "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. May your gracious Spirit lead me forward on a firm footing."

"Teach me to do your will." A little before the writer prayed, "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk." But knowing the way is not enough: we must also walk in it. Mary Lyon said she feared nothing so much as that she would not know all her duty—and that she would not do it. Paul said, "The good which I would do—I do not do." When we ask God in the morning to show us the way, we must ask Him also to teach us to go in the right path. "Lead me on level ground." A great many people know their duty—better than they do it. It should be our aim in all things—to conform to God's will. But we need God's help to do this. Our hearts are inclined to disobedience. We do not naturally love to walk "on level ground." We need both to be taught and led. "Teach me ... Lead me" are the two prayers. We all need to pray these prayers together.

Sometimes the answer does not come in sweet, easy ways, with breath of fragrance and in summer sunshine. Sometimes the teaching comes in sore pain and loss, and the leading is over sharp stones, along a rough, steep path. Still our prayers should be, even amid tears and pain: "Lord, Teach me . . . Lead me." If in no other way we can be saved, it is better that we lose out of our life all the flowers and sunshine, and walk amid thorns and in darkness, reaching home at last, than that we walk in flowery paths and in the brightness, and never get home at all. So each morning let us continue to pray, "Teach me . . . Lead me." "Teach me to do your will. Lead me in your ways." The fifth petition in this morning prayer is, "Quicken me, O Lord." To quicken is to give life. We have no strength for the day's duties and struggles. We feel ourselves weak and faint. Perhaps we are physically unable for the work before us. We certainly are spiritually weak. Our life's fountains need refilling. This is a prayer for life, new life. Christ came that we might have life—and might have it in abundance. He is ready to give it to all who will take it. We need but to ask for it. In the morning as we go forth to the day's toils, tasks, cares, and struggles, our prayer should be: "Quicken me, O Lord. Give me life and strength. Put Your Spirit into my heart. Breathe Your own breath into my soul. Shed abroad Your love in me. Quicken me with strength inwardly. Fill me with Yourself." If we pray such a prayer—we shall not fail through weakness. The power of Christ will then rest upon us, and when we are weak in ourselves—then shall we be strong in Christ. The last petition of this morning prayer is, "For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life. In your righteousness, bring my soul out of trouble." The day may bring sorrow, or it may bring other trouble. We cannot guide our feet through the dark valley. Sorrow is meant to do us good and will do so—if we have God to lead us through it.

One writes: "Gardeners sometimes, when they would bring a rose to richer flowering, deprive it for a season of light and moisture. Silent and dark it stands, dropping one fading leaf after another, and seeming to go practically down to death. But when every leaf is dropped and the plant stands stripped to the uttermost, a new life is even then working in the buds, from which shall spring a tenderer foliage and a brighter wealth of flowers. So, after in celestial gardening, every leaf of earthly joy must drop, before a new and divine bloom visits the soul."

Thus it is that sorrow works blessing and good in the child of God—when the Holy Spirit guides the life through the experience. But our prayer must always be that God would bring our soul out of sorrow, for otherwise only harm and not good can come from it. Sorrow will wound and scar our life—unless the gentle hand of Christ be upon us to heal and comfort.

Then, there are other troubles besides sorrows—business troubles, home troubles, cares, disappointments, difficulties of a thousand kinds. We know not what any day may bring to us. We need God's wisdom, God's power, God's guidance—or we shall never get through unharmed. Let us learn to lay all the tangled threads of our life in the hands of the Master. He can take them, disentangle them, and with them weave beauty and blessing. At the opening of each day, may our prayer be, "In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble."

If we but learn to begin each busy day at God's feet with such a morning prayer as this—we shall go forth with bright face, happy heart, strong hand, and firm step—to live loyally, faithfully, sweetly, and usefully all the day. The God of Those Who Fail

Psalms 145:14 "The LORD upholds all those who fall—and lifts up all who are bowed down." The God of the Bible—is the God of the weak and the unfortunate. The Bible is a book of love and

sympathy. It is like a mother’s bosom to lay one’s head upon, in the time of distress or pain. Its pages teem with cheer for those who are discouraged. It sets its lamps of hope to shine in darkened chambers. It reaches out its hands of help to the fainting and to those who have fallen. It is full of comfort for those who are in sorrow. It has its many special promises for the needy, the poor, the bereft. It is a book for those who have failed, for the disappointed, the defeated, the discouraged, the crushed, for the broken lives.

It is this quality in the Bible, that makes it so dear a book, to the universal heart of humanity. If it were a book only for the strong, the successful, the victorious, the unfallen, those who walk erect, those who have no sorrow, those who never fail, the whole, the happy—it would not find such a welcome as it does in this world, wherever it goes. So long as there are in this world, tears and sorrows, and broken hearts and crushed hopes, human failures and human sin, lives burdened and bowed down, and spirits sad and despairing—so long will the Bible be a welcome book; an inspired book and full of inspiration, light, help, and strength for earth’s weary ones!

"The LORD upholds all those who fall—and lifts up all who are bowed down." Wherever there is a weak, fainting, stumbling one, unable to walk alone, to him the heart of the God of heaven goes out in tender thought and sympathy, and the divine hand is extended to support him and keep him from falling altogether. Wherever one has fallen, and lies in defeat or failure, over him bends the Heavenly Father in gentle pity, to raise him up and to help him to begin again. In the East there was much cruel oppression of the poor. They were wronged by the rich and the strong. They could not get justice in the courts. But all through the Scriptures, we find stern condemnation of those who oppress the poor, who rob them of their rights. The bitterest thing about poverty is not the pain of privation and cold and hunger—but the feeling that no one cares, the sense of being forgotten, the absence of sympathy and love in human hearts, the cruelty of injustice, oppression, and wrong which are the portion of the poor—where the love of Christ is not known. But the Bible is full of divine commands against the oppression of the poor. God is ever the friend of the weak, the defender of the defenseless, the helper of those who have no human helper.

"The Lord hears the poor." "Whoever mocks the poor reproaches his Maker." "Whoever stops his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself—but shall not be heard." Thus the God of the Bible puts Himself on the side of the wronged and oppressed. The widow and the orphan are, especially in Eastern lands, very desolate and defenseless. But God declares Himself their special helper and defender. Amid other laws found in the old Mosaic Code, we come upon this bit of divine gentleness: "You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to me—I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath shall wax hot." Sheaves were to be left in the field, olives on the tree, grapes on the vine—for the fatherless and the widow.

There should be infinite comfort in these provisions of the ancient law for the widow and the fatherless in all times. The heart of God, which beat with such tenderness thousands of years ago—is unchanged today. The God of the Bible has a partiality of kindness for those who have lost the human guardians of their feebleness. Whereon there is weakness in anyone—the strength of God is specially revealed.

"The Lord preserves the simple." The "simple" are those who are innocent and childlike, without skill or cunning to care for themselves, those who are unsuspecting and trustful, who are not armed by their own wisdom against the evils of men. "The Lord preserves the simple;" He takes

care of them; He keeps and guards them. Indeed, the safest people in this world—are those who have no power to take care of themselves. Their very defenselessness is their protection. Have you ever seen a blind child in a home? How weak and helpless it is! It is at the mercy of any cruelty which an evil heart may inspire. It is an open prey for all dangers. It cannot take care of itself. Yet how lovingly and safely it is sheltered! The mother-love seems tenderer for the blind child, than for any of the others. The father's thought is not so gentle for any of the strong ones, as for this helpless one. "Those sealed eyes, those tottering feet, those outstretched hands, have a power to move those parents to labor and care and sacrifice, such as the strongest and most beautiful of the household does not possess."

Now this picture gives us a hint of the special, watchful care of God for His weak children. Their very helplessness is their strongest plea to the divine heart. The God of the Bible is the God of the weak, the unsheltered. Woe unto him, therefore, who touches the least of these! The God of the Bible is the God also of the broken-hearted. There is a verse in one of the Psalms which says, "The Lord is near unto those who are of a broken heart." Then another Psalm says, "He heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds." The world pays no regard to broken hearts. Indeed, men ofttimes break hearts by their cruelty, their falseness, their injustice, their coldness—and then move on as heedlessly as if they had trodden only on a worm! The world treads remorselessly upon bruised reeds. Like the Juggernaut, it rolls on, crushing and breaking, without pity, without feeling, never stopping to lift up, to heal, to restore those who are fallen in the way. But there is One who cares. "He heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds." Their broken-heartedness attracts God. The wail of human grief—draws Him down from heaven. Physicians in their rounds do not stop at the homes of the well—but of the sick. Surgeons on the battlefield pay no attention to the unhurt, the unwounded; they bend over those who have been torn by shot or shell, or pierced by sword or saber. So it is with God, in His movements through this world; it is not to the whole and well—but to the wounded and stricken that He comes. Jesus said of His own mission, "He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted." Men look for the glad, the happy, when they seek friends; but God chooses the sorrowing for the sweetest revealings of His love.

We look upon trouble as misfortune and failure. We say the life is being destroyed that is passing through adversity. But the truth which we are finding in our search, does not so represent suffering. "The Lord raises up all those that be bowed down." "The Lord heals the broken in heart and binds up their wounds." He is a repairer and restorer of the hurt and ruined life. He takes the bruised reed, and by His gentle skill—makes it whole again, until it grows in fairer beauty than ever before. When a branch of a tree is injured in some way, hurt or bruised, all the tree begins at once to pour of its life into the wounded part, to restore it. When a violet is crushed by a passing foot—air, sun, cloud, and dew all at once begin their ministry of healing, giving of their life to bind up the wound in the little flower. So it is with God; when a human heart is wounded, all the love and pity and grace of God begin to pour forth their sweet blessing of comfort to restore that which is broken.

Then, we know that much of the most beautiful life in this world comes out of sorrow. As "fair flowers bloom upon rough stalks," so many of the fairest flowers of human life spring from the rough stalk of suffering. We stand with the beloved disciple on the other side, and we see that those who in heaven wear the whitest robes and sing the loudest songs of victory—are they who

have come out of great tribulation. Heaven's highest places are filling, not from earth's homes of festivity and tearless joy—but from its chambers of pain, its valleys of struggle, where the battle is hard, and from its scenes of sorrow, where pale cheeks are wet with tears, and where hearts are broken. The God of the Bible is the God of the bowed down, whom He lifts up into strength. Earth's failures are not failures—if God is in them.

Paul's experience is very instructive. Christ said to him, in his discouragement: "My strength is made perfect in weakness." That is, we are not weakest when we think ourselves weakest; nor strongest when we think ourselves strong. God's power is made perfect in our weakness. Human consciousness of weakness, gives God room to work. He cannot work with our strength, because in our self-conceit we make no room for Him. Before He can put His strength into us—we must confess that we have no strength of our own. Then, when conscious of our own insufficiency, we are ready to receive of the divine sufficiency.

Paul said, when he learned this blessed secret, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Then he added: "For when I am weak—then am I strong." The ones whom God upholds—are the ones who without His help would fall. Those whom He raises up—are those who but for His uplifting, would sink away into utter failure. The power of Christ rests upon those who are weak—and know themselves weak. You cannot struggle victoriously alone—but your very weakness draws to you the sympathy and the help of the Lord Jesus Christ. So it comes, that the feeblest are the strongest, if they but lean with all their feebleness on the arm of Christ! Your weakness is itself an element of strength, if you are truly following Christ. As it were, weakness is a nerveless arm that God nerves, an empty heart that God fills with His own life. You think your weakness unfits you for noble, beautiful living, or for sweet, gentle, helpful serving. You wish you could get clear of it. It seems an ugly deformity. But really, it is something which if you give it to Christ—He can transform into a source of power! The friend by your side, whom you almost envy because he seems so much stronger than you, does not get so much of Christ's strength, as you do. You alone are weaker than he—but you and Christ are stronger than he.

Look at the life of Christ. He was God manifest in the flesh. What He did, therefore, was a revealing of God's manner of dealing with men. To what class of people did His sympathy and help go out most richly? Did He ally Himself with the strong? Was He drawn to the successful, the prosperous, the victorious? No! It was just the reverse. So marked was His sympathy with the people who had failed, that the prosperous classes said, with a sneer, that He was "the friend of publicans and sinners." All the poor wrecks of humanity in Palestine seemed to be drawn to Him—the sick, the blind, the lame, the lepers, the outcast—and He never turned one of them away unhelped. His whole life was given up—to those who had failed. He lived amid human wreckage all His days. His heart turned to the sad, the troubled, the needy, the lost. His own parable told it all—He left the ninety-nine safe sheep in the fold, and went after the one that was lost. He explained it by saying, "Those who are whole have no need of the physician—but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous—but sinners to repentance." He showed Himself the friend of those who had failed—not because they had failed—but because they were weak, and in danger, and needed Him—and because He would save them. As sickness draws the physician with all his skill and power to heal; so human failure draws the Christ with all His love and life and all His power—to lift up and save. So much for the truth—the God of the Bible is the God of the weak, of

the stumbling, of the fainting, of the fallen, of the unsuccessful, of those who have failed. Who is there among us, to whom this precious truth brings no comfort? Some, perhaps, have not been successful in their earthly business. You have toiled hard—but have not got along well. Well, this world's affairs are but the scaffolding of our real life. If they have, meanwhile, been true to God, and faithful in duty, there has been going up inside the rough scaffolding of earthly failure—the noble building of a godly character.

It is ofttimes only at the cost of worldly success, that we can reach spiritual beauty. Michaelangelo used to say, as the fragments of marble flew thick on the floor beneath the blows of his mallet, "While the marble wastes—the image grows." So, ofttimes we may say, as God cuts away the externals of our life, "While the outward wastes—the spiritual shines out in greater and greater beauty." You are sure at least always, that your failures and losses do not drive God from you—but draw Him nearer and nearer. "He raises up those who are bowed down."

4. Volume 4.

Volume 4.

Volume 4. From Solomon—to Malachi

PREFACE In the limited number of volumes planned for in this Devotional Series, it is not possible to give more than a very few Scripture passages, with the readings upon them. The present volume covers a great scope of history, from the time of Solomon—to the close of the Old Testament era. From some of the books not any selections have been made, from others only one or two have been chosen.

Solomon Anointed King

Solomon’s Wise Choice

Building the Temple

The Temple Dedicated

God’s Blessing upon Solomon

The Fame of Solomon

Solomon’s Sin

The Kingdom Divided

Jeroboam’s Idolatry

Omri and Ahab

God’s Care Of Elijah

Obadiah and Elijah

Elijah on Mount Carmel

Elijah Discouraged and Restored

Naboth’s Vineyard

Elijah Taken to Heaven

Elisha Succeeds Elijah

The Widow’s Oil Increased

The Shunammite’s Son

Naaman the Leper

Elisha at Dothan

Saved from Famine

The Boy Joash Made King

Joash Repairs the Temple

The Death of Elisha

Captivity Of the Ten Tribes

The Assyrian Invasion

Returning from Captivity

Rebuilding The Temple

Dedicating The Temple

Ezra’s Journey to Jerusalem

Nehemiah’s Prayer

Reading the Law

Haman’s Plot Against the Jews

Esther Pleading for Her People

Isaiah’s Call to Service

The Suffering Savior

The Gracious Invitation

Daniel’s Principles

Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream

The Fiery Furnace

Daniel in the Den of Lions

Sin the Cause of Sorrow

Israel Often Reproved

Jonah Sent to Nineveh

Joshua the High Priest

Power Through the Spirit

Lessons in Giving Solomon Anointed King

1 Kings 1:28-39 The life of David was troubled to its close. The tragic death of Absalom ended his rebellion against the king—but David found little of that love and restful quiet which make old age ideal in its peace. There were continuous strifes and dissensions in his kingdom. In his own home also there were jealousies and quarrels.

David incurred the divine displeasure by numbering the people, and had his choice of judgments. Three days of pestilence was followed by the king's setting up an altar and offering sacrifices in the threshing floor of Araunah when pestilence ceased. When the king was very old another rebellion was plotted by Adonijah. Bathsheba, aided by Nathan the prophet, aroused David to have Solomon declared king at once, before Adonijah could be crowned. It was a strong appeal which was made to the king. "Is this thing done by my lord the king," demanded Nathan, "and you have not showed unto your servants who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?" David replied: "Call Bathsheba." And she came into the king's presence. The mother was very deeply interested in the future of her son. She was ambitious for him. What true mother is not interested in her boy's career, and ambitious for his success? No mother wants to see her boy make a failure of his life. It is a part of mother-love to wish great things for her children. They need not always be things that are great in this world's estimation. Indeed, the mother who has the truest aspirations for her children, cares far more that they may live worthily and grow into noble character; into "whatever things are true, . . . whatever things are lovely"— and fulfill God's purpose for their life—than that they may win high places in this world.

Yet every mother has lofty yearnings for her children. The mother of James and John craved for her sons places at the right and left hand of Jesus in His kingdom. Bathsheba wished to see her son crowned a king. As we think of these longings in the universal mother-heart, we need not be surprised at Bathsheba's eagerness and earnestness in this matter. She was quick to have Solomon's right to the throne protected. Boys do not know what great things their mothers dream for them, and how they strive and toil to have them win honor and attain lofty and worthy things. It ought to be every boy's aim not to disappoint his mother—but to become what she wishes him to be.

David had sworn to Bathsheba in the past—that Solomon, her son, should reign as king. He now declares to her that his oath will be sacredly kept. He would not disappoint her. We should learn a lesson here on the sacredness of keeping engagements and promises. Whatever we have solemnly pledged ourselves to do—we should do at any cost to ourselves. One of the marks of the man who shall abide in God's presence, we are told, is, "That he swears to his own hurt, and changes not." Many people's conscience needs toning up in this regard. There is altogether too much carelessness in keeping promises. Too many people find it very easy to "forget" to do what they have solemnly said they would do. Pledges sit very lightly upon their conscience. Vows are thoughtlessly made—and just as thoughtlessly broken. We ought to learn a lesson from David's assurance to Bathsheba. He had made an oath to her, and now he declares to her that he will certainly do what he has sworn to do. The solemnity of an oath should not be needed, however, to make an engagement sacred and inviolable. One's simple word should be held irrevocably binding—just as binding as one's most sacred oath. We should be absolutely true. To speak anything but the truth is a degradation of our whole nature. Forgetfulness is no excuse for failing to keep a promise. We have no right to forget things that we promise. If our memory is defective—we should put down our promises in writing, and keep them so before our mind that it will be

impossible for us to forget them. We ought to be so careful in keeping our word even in the very smallest matters—that people shall learn to trust absolutely every lightest promise we make. One who can be implicitly relied upon, who never fails those who trust in him, is like a fragment of the Rock of Ages.

David's assurance to Bathsheba must have given strong comfort to her. It was a great thing to succeed such a man as David. Indeed, it is a great thing, a high honor, for any boy or young man to be the successor of a good and worthy father. Many young people who study this lesson, have fathers and mothers who have lived nobly, who have brought to them a rich inheritance of blessing—a good name, honor, influence, if not money. It is a high honor to a son to be a successful father's successor in business. When a father dies, and the son is called to take up his work, it is as if a crown had been put upon his head. Every son should seek to be a worthy successor to his father.

We may profitably compare Adonijah and Solomon, two sons of the same royal father. Adonijah sought to be his father's successor in place and in power—but sought it in such a way as to make himself a criminal in the eyes of the world. On the other hand, Solomon was thoughtful, studious, faithful to all duties as a young man, discarding the vices that his brother Adonijah loved, and striving after the true, manly virtues. So far as we know, Solomon himself made no claim to the throne and made no effort to get it. He was God's choice for David's successor. Whatever we may say about his later life, he certainly began well. He was worthy to take his father's place.

We find these two types of sons in a great many homes. We find those who desire to profit in a father's inheritance—but have no desire to wear the garments of a father's worthy name and character. There are too many prodigal sons who demand their portion of the father's substance—but have no intention of succeeding their father in character, in moral principle, in his place in the Church, and in the doing of good. A young man who would be a worthy successor to a good father, must remember that he has his father's name to bear and to keep unsullied before the world, as well as to share his father's patrimony. The responsibility of being a godly man's successor is very great. We have a sacred trust committed to us which we must guard with sedulous care.

David showed his old-time spirit and energy in the way he carried out his determination regarding Solomon. He called Zadok, Nathan, and Benaiah, and commanded them to make Solomon king. "Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon my son to ride upon mine own mule, and bring him down to Gihon: and let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel." The old fire in David's heart flamed up into brightness again. Although he had been so feeble, when he now saw his throne about to be seized unlawfully by his prodigal son, all the man in him awoke—the old warrior, the brave master of circumstances.

We must admire his promptness, his firmness, his courage, and his unfaltering purpose. He knew it was God's will that Solomon should reign in his place, and he was eager to carry out God's thought for Solomon. No nobler ambition could be in any parent's heart than so to lead his child that the child shall fulfill the plan of God for his life. A great many parents are ambitious for their children, without asking what God would have them to do. David's example is better. He was swift in duty, although so feeble, because he knew what God's will was, and he was determined to carry it out. He was ready to make a sacrifice of himself, giving up the throne in order that Solomon

might be crowned at once. The swiftness of David's course probably saved him and the country from a repetition of the experiences which marked the time of Absalom's rebellion. If he had lingered a little longer, Adonijah would have been declared king, and probably would have had a great following among the people. David might have been driven away from his palace, Solomon might have been killed, and the future of the empire imperiled. But the promptness of David saved the country from this danger and himself from humiliation and sorrow.

Many men lose all the best opportunities of their life for lack of promptness. They dally until it is too late to do anything. Then they wake up and try to do their duty—but the time is gone! They might as well sleep on now and take their rest. The men whom David had charged with the duty of anointing Solomon lost no time—but carried out the king's commandment instantly. "And Zadok the priest took the horn of oil out of the Tent, and anointed Solomon." The oil was the symbol of the Holy Spirit. The anointing was a type of the anointing of the Spirit. The meaning of the ceremony was that, as men anointed the young king with oil, so God would anoint him with divine grace, setting him apart as king and gifting him for His service. Something like this is the sacrament of baptism, when water is used. The water has no power to cleanse or change a heart—but it is a symbol of the Divine Spirit. As we baptize with water, we pray that God may baptize with His own grace. When Jesus was being baptized He prayed, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. Thus He was anointed for His ministry as Redeemer of the world. God anoints every one of us, as we wait at His feet in consecration, giving us His Spirit to fit us for His work.

Solomon must have felt a new responsibility in his soul as the holy oil touched his brow. New duties were his now. He was separated from his fellows—and set apart for a new life. It is related of a Russian prince that he was in Paris, having for his companions certain rich young men who passed their time in reveling. One night they were feasting, and in the midst of their revels a sealed message was handed to the prince. He opened and read it, then, rising, said to his companions, "I am emperor now." He then turned away and left them, separating himself forever from his past life. When we are called to any new duty we should break with whatever in our past life has been unworthy.

Solomon's Wise Choice

1 Kings 3

Solomon began well. He evidently desired to be a godly king, to perform faithfully the duties of his position, and to lift up his kingdom to nobleness and strength. He was deeply impressed with the sense of his responsibility as David's successor, sent to carry on the work which his father had begun. He was also conscious of the inadequacy of his own wisdom for ruling, and his need of divine help. There is no doubt that this vision at Gibeon came in answer to the longings of Solomon's heart. He had gone to Gibeon to hold a great convocation of the heads of the people. The occasion was an urgent one. He offered on the brazen altar a thousand burnt offerings. The night following he had this dream, that the Lord appeared to him and asked him what He should give to him. "Ask what I shall give you."

God comes to every one in youth, if not in such a dream as Solomon's, at least in some other way quite as real. The question the Lord asked Solomon, is one that every young person hears.

Someone may say, "If God came to me and gave me my choice out of all the things people desire, I would try to make a wise choice, too." But God really does give to every one in youth the same privilege—the choosing of things to live for. Christ says, "Ask, and you shall receive." But we do not avail ourselves of the munificence of His offers of good things to us. The days are like messengers sent to us from God, and we do not know what treasures they carry in their hands.

"But why must I make a choice?" Someone asks. "God is far wiser than I am. He knows what are the best things in all the world for me. Why does He not choose for me, giving me that which is best? Why must I, in my ignorance and inexperience, choose for myself?" One of the conditions of living—is that we must make our own choices. Even a mother cannot choose for her child. She may advise, persuade, and urge—but she cannot decide. Even God does not choose for the feeblest of His children. To every one He comes, saying, "Ask what I shall give you." And what we choose to take, He will let us have.

Solomon's heart was full of gratitude. He thought of God as the Giver of all his blessings. He was thinking of what he owed to his father. Those of us who have or have had godly parents, never can repay our debt to them. That is one reason why we ought to choose good things. Think of all a godly parent hopes, dreams, plans, longs for, asks for in prayer—for a child. Then think of the bitter pain and disappointment when the child grows up and makes a bad choice. Solomon felt under obligation to live and rule worthily because of the favor which God had shown to his father.

We talk about the responsibility of parents for their children—we should think sometimes also of the responsibility of children for their parents. A child may make a father's life a failure. Before David died, he gave Solomon this counsel: "I am going the way of all the earth: be strong therefore, and show yourself a man; . . . that Jehovah may establish His Word which He spoke concerning me." That is, the fulfillment of God's promises to David for the success of his kingdom, would depend upon Solomon's faithfulness. What David had done was but the beginning; it was Solomon's mission to take up and continue David's work until it was complete. Many a son wrecks all his father's hopes, and tears down all that through years of toil and sacrifice and sore cost his father has built up. An honored parentage is a good heritage—but it puts one under a tremendous burden of responsibility, for its blessings are a sacred trust, and must be kept unsullied and then accounted for at last.

It is a grave and serious moment in a young man's life—when his father dies and the care of the family and of the business passes into his hands. It tests his character. If he is true-hearted, it makes a man of him. If he is weak and without strong principle, he breaks under the burden. Solomon realized that now the responsibility was his, and he resolved to meet it like a man. Suddenly there had been set upon his brow, the crown of a great kingdom. From a careless, lighthearted youth—he had suddenly become a man, with a man's burden on his shoulders. There comes to many young men such a moment some time in their life. A new duty is suddenly put into their hands. They are called to face a new responsibility. What should we do when we find ourselves before new responsibilities?

There is a great deal of beauty in the humility of Solomon as we see him that night before God. "I am but a little child; I know not how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people." We need not take these words literally. The tradition that Solomon was only twelve years old when he began to reign, probably came from a

misunderstanding of Solomon’s meaning here. He was almost certainly older—eighteen or twenty. Still he was but a little child. That was a holy moment in Solomon’s life. He saw his duty in all its largeness, and he saw himself in all his littleness. He was only a child in knowledge, experience, and wisdom. He knew nothing about the duties of a king, and he was aware that he knew nothing. We call Solomon the wisest man; he never showed greater wisdom than that night at Gibeon, when he felt the pressure of the crown upon his brow and realized his own inability. Not always do young people experience such self-distrust as they take up new responsibilities. Sometimes they have too much self-confidence, and realize no need of help. Such a beginning is always fraught with danger.

Then Solomon made his prayer to God. "Give Your servant therefore an understanding heart to judge Your people." There is a fine ring in these words. Solomon wanted to be a good king, and to rule wisely and justly. He did not want to dishonor God, to do God’s work negligently or mistakenly, to be a failure as a king. So he looked up into God’s face and said: "You have made me king. The work is great, and I am but a little child in preparation for it. Give me wisdom to be a good king." That was Solomon’s choice. That should be the choice of every young person starting out in life. We should want always to do our work well, whatever it is.

Some people fail to understand that all of life is sacred. They think there is great responsibility in being a preacher or a Sunday-school teacher. Men must answer to God for these things. But they do not think of the responsibility of being a carpenter, a shoemaker, or a plumber. The old shoemaker and told the preacher that his shoemaking was just as religious a business as his pastor’s preaching. If he should mend the shoes poorly, and a boy should catch cold and get pneumonia, and die—he would be responsible. "I cannot afford, as a child of God, with the hope of heaven in my heart," he said, "to put poor work into that job, for much depends upon it. I would not like to meet that boy’s parents, and have them tell me he had died, because I was not a faithful shoemaker." The old man was right. All work is sacred, and we need God’s help in the commonest experiences. The answer showed divine approval: "Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked for yourself long life, neither have asked for riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies—but have asked for yourself understanding." God was pleased with the choice Solomon had made.

He had not chosen long life. Long life is not the most desirable gift from God. There are people who have lived seventy years—and would better not have lived at all. The truest, completest, most perfect life ever lived on this earth was only thirty-three years in length. Let no one choose to live long—but rather to live godly.

Riches was another thing Solomon had not chosen. Some people seem to think that money is the best of all possessions. No doubt, if the choice were offered, many men would choose riches before anything else. But it would be a sad, impoverishing, fatal choice!

There is a Russian story of one who entered a diamond mine in search of gems. He filled his pockets with the precious stones and then, as he went on, he would throw away those he had already chosen, to make room for the larger ones he had now found. At length he became very thirsty—but there was no water. He heard what seemed the flow of waters—but when he came to them they were only rivers of diamonds. At what seemed the sound of a waterfall, he hastened forward—but only to find a cascade of precious stones. With all this marvelous wealth round him,

he was dying of thirst. All the riches within his reach—would not buy him a drop of water! This is a true parable of the seeking of wealth. It is not life's best choice. It will not give men true blessing.

Another thing Solomon had not asked for was the life of his enemies. This would have been a most selfish choice, indeed. The law of Christ is love, and hate never can be the best thing. The Lord was pleased with Solomon's choice, and gave him his request—a wise and an understanding heart, that he might be a good king and rule well. Then He gave him also more—riches and honor. Riches are a blessing—only when one has the wisdom to use them rightly. Honor is a blessing—only when one knows how to use it for Christ. When one's heart is right, God loves to give him this world's good things—to add to his power for doing good. As we read the words of God to Solomon, we think of the words of one still wiser, "Seek first His kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Money and honor are not the first things—the first things must always be God and godliness. But when we make God and His kingdom our first choice—God often gives us besides, other good gifts to add to our power of usefulness and service.

Building the Temple

1 Kings 5 The temple was David's thought. He was not permitted to build it, however, because his work was conquest, the establishing of the kingdom. But his thought was not rejected; it was approved and commended. He was allowed to make vast preparation for the work. He purchased the site for the building and gathered gold and other materials for it. In the fourth year of his reign, when Solomon was secure in his kingdom, he began to build the temple. He entered upon the work with great enthusiasm. He was a lover of magnificence, and spared nothing in making the sacred building the most splendid in the world.

Solomon received help from the king of Tyre. It was more than a commercial league that existed between these two kings—there was also a close personal friendship between them. So when work on the building was about to begin, Hiram sought an opportunity to assist. This is another of the blessings which came down to Solomon from his father. Hiram had been a lover of David, and he wished to continue with David's son, the friendship which he had maintained so long with the father. A father's friends become the inheritance of the children. This is a rich legacy when a man has lived a true and worthy life and has made good friends. Of course, everyone really has to win his own friends. No son can go very long on his father's friendships. He must make them his own by a true life, by worthy conduct, by an unselfish spirit. But those who have been the father's friends—are disposed to be friendly to the son. He can make them his friends—if he desires. They are ready to become his friends for his father's sake. The "good will" of a long-established business, is the result of a man's wise, liberal, and honest dealing through his lifetime. He has built his own character into it. This the son may make his own—if he will maintain his father's character and principles and continue his father's honesty and truthfulness. So in all life—it is a great thing to have a good and worthy father, and the son may enjoy the benefit from the friendships his father has formed, unless by his own lack of worth and worthiness, he flings away his blessings.

Solomon reminded Hiram, that David had desired to build a temple to the Lord, and told him that now, since peace had come to his kingdom, he was going to build it. This rest from war and strife made the present, the time for the work. The temple could not be built in time of war.

Just so, times of quiet and restfulness in one's life should not be idle times. There is other work to do then, besides rushing activity. These are days for temple building. True living is not all struggle, conflict, conquest, gathering money, toiling with one's hands. Building of character is the great work of life. This goes on best in the quiet. A man who had been himself occupied in business for a great while, with scarcely a day's rest or pause, was stricken down with a partial paralysis. He was compelled to lie still for months. His mind was clear and active, while his body was inactive. One day he said to his pastor, "I have grown more in these quiet months—than I did in all my long years of rushing activity!" He was now really building up the temple of God in his own soul. Ofttimes days of suffering, or pain, or sickness—are one's very best days. We ought not to wait for necessary inactivity to compel us to be still; we should get the quiet into our life—even in our busiest times. We should train ourselves to it. We should teach our hearts to be still—amid all possible confusion. Only thus, can we be ready for our best work. We must have a restful spirit, if we would build up the inner temple of our lives. There should be "silent times" in every day's life. The secret of Daniel's noble character, while carrying a great part of the burden of the kingdom of Babylon, was that he never forsook the quiet place of prayer. Not even the threat of the lions' den could make him neglect the season of devotion. There is no other secret of a true and noble life, amid the world's strifes and trials. We must keep quiet within—that we may build up in our hearts the temple of God.

Solomon told Hiram of the work he had in hand for God. He purposed to build a house for Him. He knew what God's plan for his life was, and he purposed now to realize it. He knew that God wanted him to build a temple—and he set about building it. We should all seek to know our duty—and then do it. God has a plan for every life. For every child that is born in the worldj there is some purpose in God's thought, something which He wishes that child to do, some place He wishes it to fill. But how can we ever find out what God's plan for our life is? Solomon knew what God's plan was in this case, for God had told David, and David had told his son. But most of us do not have such direct revealings of our duty. How then can we know what God wants us to do? The answer is, that if we will quietly follow Christ day by day—He will make known to us what His plan for us is. He may not tell us at the beginning what He would have us do years and years hence. But as we go on, doing each day the things that He gives—we shall in the end accomplish all His plan.

God's purpose begins with the little child. He found David when he was only a boy, keeping sheep. It was a long while before David would be a king—but every day of his shepherd life, was a part of God's plan in his preparation for being king. So we need not worry about what God wants us to do; we may simply do each day—the things He gives us to do, and then at the close of our life, if we have been faithful all the while, we shall be able to say, "I have finished the work which You gave me to do." We may not know in advance what we shall have to do any day—but as we go on, we shall know. Doing God's will as far as we know it—we come to know more and more of it, and thus finish it at last!

Solomon sent to Lebanon for cedar trees for the temple. Why did he not use the trees that grew in his own country? The reason was that the cedars which grew on Mt. Lebanon were the finest woods that could be found anywhere in the world. Solomon was determined to put into the temple, nothing but the best. He must have the finest stones, the best timbers, the purest gold, the richest precious stones, the most beautiful works of art in all departments. The temple must contain in its

materials the best things the world could furnish. Nothing imperfect, nothing poor, nothing unworthy must go into that noble building!

We get a lesson here for ourselves. In the building of our character, nothing that is not beautiful, that is not the best, should be used. We should read the best books, so as to build into our life-temple the greatest and noblest thoughts in the world. Nothing stained or unholy should ever be used. Our friendships have very much to do with the making of our character, and we should have only good, true, and worthy friends. Unworthy companionships build blotched stones into our life temple. Above all we should read the Bible, for it contains God's thoughts and God's words, which make the best building material. They are all white and of the purest marble, and there is no blemish or flaw anywhere in them!

Then above all companionships, we should have that of Christ, for He is the truest, the most inspiring Friend that any mortal can have. Let us be sure that we build only the best things into our temple fabric.

We should put into God's work what we do in other lives—only the best. We should never give a touch to any character, through word, or disposition, or act, or influence of ours—that is not clean enough to appear before Christ's holy eyes. The laborers of Hiram brought the trees from the mountains of Lebanon to the sea. Thus the men of Tyre and Sidon became helpers in building the temple. It is interesting to notice that not only were many of the materials brought from heathen lands—but much of the work was done by heathen builders and artists. This suggests to us, that in the great temple of God that is rising in heaven, men of all nations do their part. Today the missionaries are carrying the gospel to all parts of the earth, to every nation under heaven, and many converts from heathen lands, are at work on the walls of the great temple. It will be seen at last, that there has been no nation under heaven which has not furnished some souls for heaven's great family.

Solomon devoted himself with enthusiasm to the work of building the temple. He did what God gave him to do—and then God gave him wisdom for each new duty and responsibility. God always keeps His promises—but His promises depend upon our obedience. If we will not do our part, neither can we have God's promised blessing. The lepers were cleansed "as they went." That is, they obeyed Christ's command to go and show themselves to the priests, and as they departed, healing came.

God promises us guidance in all our life's paths—but to get His guidance—we must go on, taking each step as He shows it to us. The guidance comes—only as we obey. God promises us strength according to our day—but to get the strength we must do the duty which the day brings. The strength is not given in advance—but it comes only as it is needed. If we will not go forward in the way of God's commands—we must not expect to get God's help.

There is a promise which says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God." But if we would get this wisdom, we must do our part. Wisdom is given—only as it is used. The lesson is one we should never forget, that all God's blessings depend upon our obedience and faithfulness. The Temple Dedicated

1 Kings 8:54-63 The temple was seven and a half years in being built. It rose silently. The stones were dressed in the quarries and all the timbers were made ready in the shops, so that no ax or

hammer was heard in its erection.

Thousands of workmen were engaged in the construction of the temple. The building was magnificent, with its terraced courts, its marble cloisters; then within all this mass of splendor, the temple itself, rising above all, a pile of marble and gold.

Then came the dedication. It was a great day. All that vast and costly building had been erected for a definite purpose. It was not to be a great place of meeting for the people, like a Christian cathedral, or a modern church. While the people came to the courts of the temple, none ever entered the temple itself, except the priests. The temple was built expressly to be the home of the ark of God. It would have had no meaning, but for that little wooden chest, with the golden lid, surmounted by the cherubim. So the first thing when the building was finished, was to carry the ark from its old dwelling place in the tabernacle, which Moses had made for it, to this new abiding place now prepared for it.

We are to be temples of the Holy Spirit. Our lives, however beautiful, cultured, and worthy they may be, do not reach to their real glory or the divine purpose in their existence, until God is enshrined in them. This is the object of our creation and redemption. If we miss having God in us—we have failed in our highest purpose. A great sacrifice was offered. That was the way they worshiped God in those days. The offerings told of praise and rejoicing in the people’s hearts. It was a great day, not only for the king who had built the temple—but for the people who had watched its rising. The offerings also spoke of the divine holiness, and of the atonement that must be made for sin. We know that there was no real spiritual efficacy in the sacrifices themselves, which were offered at that service. They had no power to put away sin. They did not cleanse the temple and make it fit to be God’s dwelling place. The Lord did not draw near to the people because of the many animals offered up by them in sacrifice to Him. Yet these offerings had their meaning. They declared that "apart from shedding of blood—there is no remission of sin."

We know, too, that they had another meaning—that they prefigured the great all-availing sacrifice, "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." There came another day, a thousand years afterwards, when upon another hilltop close by, the Son of God offered Himself without spot to God as the Redeemer of the world. In His sacrifice, He actually opened the way to God for all who will come to Him. The sacrifices which Solomon and the people offered that day, had their fulfillment and their real meaning in Christ’s sacrifice, when on Calvary He gave His life a ransom for many.

After the offering, the ark of God was brought in and taken into its place in the inner sanctuary. This holy apartment was not open to the people. Indeed, no one of them was ever admitted, excepting the high priest. This was not meant to teach that men were really shut away from God; for God is merciful and has always welcomed sinners to Him. The exclusion of men from the Holy of holies, taught that God was holy and that sin could not dwell in His presence. It taught also that access to God can be had only through the Great High Priest. Heaven’s gates are wide open—they are never shut; but we can enter only through Christ. "He is able to save to the uttermost all who draw near unto God through Him."

"The cloud filled the house." This was the Lord actually taking possession of the house which had been built for His dwelling place. It was not an ordinary cloud at all, as we understand the use of

the word, that filled the house that day—it was the sacred symbol of the divine presence. It was an expression of the wonderful condescension of God, that He should actually accept an earthly temple as a dwelling place. It showed His love for the people of our race. We understand, too, its remoter meaning. This coming of God into the temple—was the prefiguration of the Incarnation, when the Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us. Christ was the true temple. Thus God came down and dwelt with us in very truth.

There is still another fulfillment which is to be realized only in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is pictured for us in the book of Revelation, where we read, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." In another place in Revelation, we have a glimpse also of the same glory: "Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their Shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes."

It was a wonderful prayer that the king offered that day at the dedication of the temple. He asked God to accept the house he had built, and make it His dwelling place. We have a temple to dedicate to the Lord. It is a great deal more wonderful building than the house Solomon erected. It is in our own heart! The king asked, "Will God indeed dwell on the earth?" We know that God wants to dwell on the earth, not in houses of marble and cedar and gold—but in human hearts. God has two homes, "I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." So we may have a home for God in our heart, which we can dedicate to Him, to be used by Him as a temple. If we have not yet dedicated it to Him, why should we not do so now? Then God will come into our heart.

It is said of the king: "He arose from before the altar of the Lord, from kneeling . . . with his hands spread forth toward heaven." There are three things in Solomon’s attitude in prayer which are suggestive.

He prayed before the altar. The altar was the place of sacrifice, and sacrifice meant atonement. All our prayers should be made before the altar; that is, in dependence on the atonement of Christ. That is what we mean when we ask for blessings and favors for Christ’s sake. To pray anywhere but "before the altar" is to pray at unopened doors. We must come in Christ’s name, if we would gain access to the mercy-seat. "No one comes unto the Father—but by Me." The second thing to notice in Solomon’s attitude, is his posture of kneeling. This indicated reverence, humility, submission. Kneeling is always a fit posture before God. He is infinitely greater than we are, and infinitely holy and good. Kneeling also implies submission. A conquered prince kneels to his conqueror, thus indicating surrender, the laying down of arms, and a full allegiance. Whatever may be the posture of our body in prayer, our hearts should always kneel before God. The third thing to mark in the king’s praying, is the spreading of his hands forth toward heaven. Holding out the hands open and empty toward heaven, implies that we expect blessing from God and are ready to receive it. This, too, should be part of every true prayer—sense of need, confidence that God will give us what we desire, expectancy, emptiness to be filled. In the building of the temple, Solomon saw the fulfillment of a promise which God had made to Moses hundreds of years before. He

praised God for this and testified that not one word of all His good promise had failed. We can say now just as confidently as the king did that day, that in all these centuries since, not one word of all God's good promise has failed any one of His people. No believer has ever leaned upon a divine promise—and had it give way under him. No one has ever trusted the Word of God—and had it fail of fulfillment. The most real and sure things in this world—are the Words of God. In every one of them, God's own almighty hand is gloved; we clutch them and find ourselves clutched by Divinity—out of whose clasp we never can fall, nor can anyone ever snatch us.

We lean upon these Words, and find ourselves encircled and upborne by the everlasting arms! We pillow our heads in weariness or sorrow upon God's Words of love and comfort—and find ourselves drawn close to our Father's heart and held in His warm bosom and soothed by His tenderness, which is greater and gentler than a mother's. So all through life in every experience, we may trust the promises of God and commit all our interests to them, and not one of them ever will fail us. We may trust them, too, in death, and we shall find everything just as God has said—the divine presence in the dark valley, dying but going home, and absent from the body—being at home with the Lord.

It is a fit prayer to be always on our lips—that God may incline our hearts unto Him, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments. Our hearts are prone to wander—and need divine keeping. Fenelon's prayer was: "Lord, take my heart—for I cannot give it to You; and when You have it, O, keep it—for I cannot keep it for You; and save me in spite of myself." God will never compel us to be good and obedient—but He will incline us, persuade us, draw us, help us. We need continually, therefore, to pray Him to throw over us—the mystic influence of His Holy Spirit, that we may desire holiness and may seek to walk in God's ways.

Solomon asked that God might not forget his prayers, that they might be kept before Him day and night. Many prayers are for more than one answering. When a mother pleads for her child—she would have her petition kept before God day and night. She would have God keep His eye ever on her boy, wherever he may be, whatever his danger may be. It is a precious thought that we do not need to be always reminding God of our desires for our friends—but that our prayers stay before Him, are not filed away and forgotten, as are so many requests we make in places of power—but are always remembered. Even if sometimes we forget to pray, God does not forget, for He knows our love and our heart's wishes, and will do more for us—than we ask or think. Our prayers are kept in heaven. We are told that God keeps our tears in His bottle—that is, He remembers our sorrows, and our cries are sacred to Him!

God's Blessing upon Solomon

1 Kings 9

There is a measure of moral safety in work. While Solomon was busy with all his great plans, he was in less danger of being led away from God. At length, however, his magnificent projects were all completed and he was ready to enjoy the ease and the fame which he had earned in his twenty-four years of wonderful activity. Instead, however, of being a time of security—this was Solomon's time of danger. There is peril in popularity. It brings adulation, which ofttimes becomes almost adoration. This is apt to turn one's head. One who is honored so by the world—does not always remain humble and lowly.

Then Solomon’s greater leisure since his buildings were finished, also brought danger. We are more open to temptations when we are idle—than when we are busy. Work is always a means of grace—and idleness brings peril. Luxury also has its dangers, and often saps the spiritual life of its vitality. In all these ways, Solomon found himself now in danger. He was unconscious, however, of his peril, and this made it all the worse!

We think that seasons of trouble, sorrow, and hardship—are the times when people need sympathy and help; but really they need the grace of God most—when they are in the midst of worldly favor and prosperity! A saintly man said to his friend, "If you ever see me beginning to get rich—pray for my soul." The Lord appeared to Solomon when he was beginning his reign, when he was making his choice of objects in life. Then all was bright. He appeared to him the second time because he was in danger. He saw that the world was throwing about the king, its glittering charm, and He came with earnest warning. Warnings are always blessings, or are meant to be blessings; if we heed them—God will save us. Not many people are afraid of prosperity. They do not think of it as dangerous. They do not pray to be kept from harm in it. Yet our Lord gave no warnings more solemn and earnest, than those which He gave against the perils of riches and prosperity. It is sad to remember that even after this divine warning, Solomon did turn away from God. Even God’s appearing to him in person, and speaking to him—did not save him from going after the gods of the heathen! Warnings, too, make the sin of our failing, all the greater. Forewarning ought always to be followed by forearming.

God had accepted Solomon’s work and had blessed it, accepting at his hand, the house he had built. No privilege that could be granted to anyone in this world is so great as that of being used of God—of having God accept something of ours. For example, one writes a hymn, like the Twenty-third Psalm, or "Rock of Ages," and God accepts it and uses it. Thousands sing it, putting their hearts into it, and are lifted by it nearer to God. Or one writes a book and dedicates it to Christ; Christ accepts it and allows it to carry blessing to many of His people, giving comfort in their sorrow, strength in their weakness, light in their darkness, guidance in their perplexity. To be thus honored by God—puts upon one new responsibility for living worthily.

Instead of making one proud to be thus honored and used—it should make one humble. Especially should he walk softly and carefully now, for God’s seal is on him. He is Christ’s, and dares not turn back to the world. That is what God meant, when He said to Solomon that He had heard his prayer and had accepted the temple which he had built, putting His name there, and taking it into His heart. He meant that the acceptance of this, Solomon’s work, put the king under new obligations to be faithful, made his life sacred thenceforth forever. The Lord promised Solomon, that if he would be faithful, his kingdom would stand.

God will build true prosperity only upon one foundation: righteousness and truth. This is true of the individual, and is true also of nations. The Bible is full of promises of goodness and mercy—but every one of them, rests upon a condition of faithfulness on the part of those who claim them.

We have an example of this in Joshua, where the Lord gave His servant a clear explanation of the foundation of all true success. "Only be strong and very courageous, to observe to do according to all the law, which Moses My servant commanded you: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go." Success can be reached—only in the doing of God’s will. Anything else that men may call success, will only be a failure. It is built upon

the sand, and the floods will sweep it away by and by.

"But if you shall turn away from following Me—then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them." Here is another "if". The first told of blessing—if they would obey God's commandments. This second showed a dark picture of those who will not go in God's way. The end of this path is destruction.

Think of the human hopes which have been lost, the innocence, the purity, the holy aspirations and desires, all the possibilities of noble spiritual life; think of the wrecks of all these precious things which lie at the bottom of the great sea of life. When we think of the temptations, the sorrows, the trials through which we must pass in living—it is enough to alarm us. People talk much about the terrors of death—but life has far more and far greater terrors, than dying! In the poem a child asks, "What is life, father?" and gets the answer that life is a sore battle, where many fail and yield; and then asks, "What is death, father?" We are not surprised that when she hears that death is the rest which comes at the end of the strife, she says, "Let me die, father; I fear to live!" But the wise answer is, "You must live first—and win your crown on the battlefields of life."

Life is indeed full of perils—but they need not affright us. If we pass through them safely, we are sure of the crown; and those who fight the hardest battles and get the noblest victories, are those who shall receive the highest reward. Paul gives to us the assurance that even life, with all its dangers, cannot separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. We know that if we trust in Christ and rest in His hands—nothing can snatch us out of His clasp! We see here very plainly, how we may go safely over life's wild and tempestuous sea. If we keep the commandments of God—we shall get the blessings of victory and honor. But if we disobey God and break away from His commandments, we shall wreck all our hopes upon life's ocean! The Fame of Solomon

1 Kings 10

Solomon's fame spread widely. Everywhere flew the stories of the splendors of his kingdom, and his great wisdom. It was not the fame of his piety and godliness that men heard, his generosity and kindness, his courage and heroism. His fame was rather that of the material splendor of his reign, than of fine personal and moral qualities. He sought to do brilliant things.

We are not to understand that Solomon did not contribute in any way to the good of his kingdom, that all his work was sensational. He did a great deal that was substantial. He gave his people a place among the nations which they had never dreamed of attaining. He made Jerusalem a great city in its beauty, its wealth, its brilliance. His wisdom, too, became famous. Wonderful stories of it were told near and far. From other countries, people came to see Solomon and his great buildings, and to hear his words, and to pay homage to him. Of all his visitors, the queen of Sheba seems to have made the greatest impression. She was a much more important personage than the kings and princes of the near-by tribes or nations who came to see Solomon. She came from afar, from "the ends of the earth." She came in great state with a majestic splendor that excited much attention. She had heard the strange stories about the Israelitish king, and came to see for herself what foundation there was for them. "I wonder if these reports are true?" she began to ask. She would go and see for herself. The distance was great—but her curiosity and eagerness overcame all thought of the hardship of the journey.

Jesus taught us one use to make of this story, "Behold, one greater than Solomon is here!" He said, referring to Himself. In every way He was greater than Solomon. He was the eternal Son of God, Solomon's Lord. His wisdom infinitely surpassed Solomon's. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are attributed to Solomon. There is a great deal that is practical in these books. Proverbs contain much that is helpful in common life. But the wisdom of Christ's teachings far surpasses the best that Solomon ever spoke! Christ's ability to enlighten and help excelled Solomon's, as divinity excels humanity. If, then, one woman came so far, at such cost, to see Solomon and hear his wisdom—the whole world should come to see and hear Jesus!

We have ever fresh illustrations of the same lesson. In every age, in every country, there are men and subjects who attract attention and draw people from far and near—to see and study them. Yet all the while, there stands One among us whom many men know not, nor desire to know—who surpasses in interest and wisdom—all the objects of attraction in the world. People throng to see and hear the scientist, the novelist, the explorer, the discoverer, the orator, or the singer—but only a sparse few gather about the blessed Divine Teacher! Men are interested in the questions of the day, in politics, in railroads, in inventions; but how few sit down to study the profound and eternal truths of Christ's redemption! They think these things suited only to children and women, and to the old and the dying, forgetting that they are the things which the "angels desire to look into." The queen of Sheba came with "spices, and very much gold, and precious stones." Solomon need not in every sense be regarded as a type of Christ—yet this visit of the queen furnishes an illustration of the way we should come to Christ our King. We should bring presents to Him. A tourist in Southern California tells of looking with much admiration at the wonderful flowers which grew about a fine residence. The lady of the house, seeing the visitors, came out and spoke to them very cordially, asking them questions about their home and their tour. Then taking a pair of scissors, she snipped off a fine handful of flowers, which she gave them. They noticed, however, that the flowers she cut were all past ripe, and when they turned away they gently shook the bouquet, and the petals nearly all fell to the ground. That is the kind of gifts too many give to Christ. But we dishonor Him when we bring Him our fading flowers. This queen did not give trifles of little value—but the richest things she could find in all her kingdom. We should bring to Christ not the poorest and least things we can find—but the best—the most precious hours of our time, the finest gold of our youth, the sweetest fragrance of our heart's love. Nothing less than the best—is worthy of Him. Thus the wise men when they came from the Far East, brought their treasures and laid them at the feet of the new-born King. Thus Mary brought her alabaster box of precious nard, broke the box, and poured the ointment on the head and feet of her Lord. So should we all do. The queen of Sheba brought spices, gold, and precious stones as a present to Solomon, and "behold, one greater than Solomon is here!" Solomon was rich and did not need the queen's gifts—yet he accepted them. Christ is infinitely rich; He owns all things, the gold of the mines, all the gems of the world. Yet He gladly accepts our smallest gifts. Even the poorest things, if they are our best, and if given with love—He will receive with joyful acceptance. The widow's two mites—He takes from the offerer's thin, wasted hand, with blessed words of recognition. A gentleman worth millions accepted a bunch of withered flowers from a ragged child in a mission Sunday-school, and could not have manifested more real pleasure, if he had received from a jeweled hand the choicest flowers from the florist. Thus our blessed Divine Lord accepts our poorest gifts—if they are prompted by true love for Him and are indeed the best we can bring. He wants our best, however, and is worthy of our best. The queen brought spices and much gold and

precious stones to King Solomon. We should bring to Christ—the sweetest fragrance of our heart's love and the richest jewels of our life! The queen of Sheba brought to Solomon all her questions, her problems—and he answered them all. "She came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind. Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her." She seems to have had many questions to ask the wise king. Some of them may have been mere silly puzzles with which she sought to test his wisdom; others of them may have been real questions, concerning which she wanted answers. To every question she asked, Solomon gave her patient and satisfying answer.

We should learn to take all our questions—to our Heavenly King. No matter what it is that troubles or perplexes us, whatever we cannot understand, we should carry it to Him. Nothing can be too small, and nothing too great—to lay before Him, for He condescends to our least affairs and has wisdom for the greatest. Perhaps we are too formal and restrained in our secret prayers. It is better that we should break away from all forms—and just talk to God as a child talks to its father or mother, telling Him everything that is on our mind or heart, all our worries, our needs, our temptations, the things that vex and try us, the matters that are mysterious to us and hard to be understood, the questions that arise in our reading and conversation and thinking. In a word, we should commune with Him of all that is in our heart—and take His counsel about everything.

Then He will always answer all our questions. Ho will do this in different ways. Some of our questions He answers in His Word, and we have to search there for what we seek to learn. Some of them He answers through wise, loving, human friends, whom He sends to us to counsel and advise us. Sometimes our difficulties are met by words that we hear, or by books that come into our hands. Some of our questions, He solves in His Providence by opening or shutting doors for us, if we quietly go on in duty. He will always find some way to answer our questions, if we will do His will as it is made known to us—and wait His time.

"When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the LORD, she was overwhelmed. She said to the king—The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes! Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard!" 1 Kings 10:4-7

Here again we have an illustration of the experience of those who come to Christ. People often doubt when they read or hear about Him and His love, whether the reality can be so wonderful as they are promised it shall be. They think that at least, His friends must exaggerate the greatness of the blessings which He bestows upon them. But when they come and see for themselves, when they have experienced the riches of Christ's grace and love, they learn that instead of the reports being too highly colored—that the half has not been told! No one is ever disappointed in coming to Christ. We need never be afraid to say to those who doubt or question, "Come and see for yourselves!" If they will only come and try Christ, accept His friendship, experience His love, let His grace into their hearts, trust His promises—they will find that the truth far surpasses the report! It will be the same also of heaven's glories—when we come to enjoy them. We read wonderful things about the blessed home which Christ has gone to prepare for us; but when we reach it—we shall find that the half was never told us! The queen's witness to Solomon, as she concluded her

visit and turned homeward, was very complimentary: "How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the LORD's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king, to maintain justice and righteousness!" It is a privilege to be among the friends of any good and wise man. There are people whose close companions we may almost justly envy. They live near to the godly, the wise. They hear their words, they see their life, they have their friendship.

We may think of the disciples of Jesus, who had the privilege of being with Him continually, hearing the wonderful words which fell from His lips, seeing the sweetness, gentleness, purity, and holiness of His life and witnessing the wonderful works which He did. What a privilege was John's—leaning on Jesus' bosom, and Mary's—sitting on a stool at His feet, listening to His teachings! It is a privilege to be a member of a godly man's family, living in the midst of refinement and culture. It is a far greater privilege to be a Christian, a member of the Heavenly Father's family. "A greater than Solomon is here!"

Solomon's Sin

1 Kings 11 The religion of Solomon has been much discussed. It has been generally supposed that he was not as good a man as David. Yet David was not ideal in his religious character. He had grave defects. The often quoted saying, that he was a man after God's own heart, probably had chief reference to his conduct as a king—rather than to his personal moral life. The name of Solomon was not stained by such crimes and cruelties as was David's. He began his life worthily, showing a sincere desire to please God. He delighted in the worship of God. In building the temple he showed devoutness. His prayer at the dedication of the temple ranks among the most remarkable "devotional utterances to be found in pre-Christian devotional literature."

Just when Solomon's apostasy began, we do not know. "When he was old" is the only indication of the time in the Scripture. The nature and extent of his departure from the Lord are not definitely defined. It is said that his wives turned away his heart after other gods. He loved many foreign wives—and these drew him from his loyalty to Jehovah. A good wife is a great blessing to a man. Many a man owes everything to his wife. Many great men who have risen to honor and power and to noble character, have said that they owed it all to their wives. But Solomon made two mistakes:

First, he had too many wives. Any plural number is too many. One wife is "a good thing," if she is a faithful and true woman; but more than one brings a curse, and not a blessing. Solomon had many wives, and it is no wonder that they turned both his head and his heart. The other mistake was that his wives were not godly women. He did not follow God's counsel in choosing his wives—but married heathen women. They did not convert to the faith of Solomon's house—but remained heathen in the holy city. They must have chapels and priests for their different gods, and in the very shadow of the temple, the smoke arose from many a heathen altar. At first Solomon only permitted these ceremonies, tolerating all religions; but later, as he grew older, he attended upon the rites, and his heart was turned away after heathen deities. These foreign wives were from the very tribes which the Israelites had been commanded to destroy utterly. "King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, 'You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.'

Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been." 1 Kings 11:1-4

Thus his religious life was wrecked! The lesson has its solemn warning for all young people, not to form intimate relations with those who are wicked. To do so almost surely leads to apostasy from God and to ruin in the end. It is pathetic to note that it was in his old age that Solomon was thus led away. Many men stand through their middle life and past it, and then in their advanced years depart from God and fall into sin. His heart was turned away after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with Jehovah his God. The trouble was in his heart. It was his heart that was turned away—not his head. It was not a change of theological views or opinions that led to his defection. His heart was not perfect in its loyalty. The life follows the heart wherever it leads. The heart determines the character; the heart is the character, as God sees it. It is the heart, therefore, that needs keeping with all diligence.

Solomon's heart wholly devoted in its aim and motive to God and His service. None but Christ was ever perfect in character. David's heart is here referred to as perfect. Yet he was not free from sin. He was perfect in his loyalty to God. He never turned away after any other gods. He fell once into sad sin—but his deep penitence afterwards shows how true was the cleaving of his life to God. David had an undivided heart for God; Solomon had a corner in his heart for the Lord, and then other corners for the gods of all the other nations. The Master said: "You cannot serve God—and mammon." No one can serve the Lord—and any other god. We need to be on our guard against this Solomonian religion. There is plenty of it all about us. It is very broad Church, and liberal. It abhors the preaching of the severe truths of God's Word about sin and damnation, and about holiness. It sends well-nigh everybody to heaven, and regards hell as a mere fable. It calls strict Christians puritanic or strait-laced, and finds no use for such psalms as the Fifty-first. It is not hard to see in this verse, however, which of the two kinds of religion pleases God the better and which leads to the better end. If what his religion did for Solomon is a fair sample of the outcome of that sort of religion—it does not appear to be quite satisfactory. The turning of Solomon from the Lord was very serious. It was not negative merely. It did not end with a change of opinion. "He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done. On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods." 1 Kings 11:5-8. His apostasy was complete. He seems to have abandoned the temple which he had built for the Lord. At least he built chapels and shrines for all the gods of his wives and worshiped in them, degrading Jehovah to the level of the idols of the heathen nations! No wonder that Solomon lost the favor of the true God. All God's promises to him were conditioned upon his obedience and faithfulness. "The Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned away from the Lord." We must not forget God's uncompromising hatred of sin, and His inflexible justice—while we extol His mercy and love. It is utterly impossible for us to turn away from Him, and yet have Him remain near to us in His gracious, favoring presence. We cannot leave His ways—and hope to have Him walk with us. Holiness of heart and life is the unvarying condition of divine blessing. God does not

withdraw His love from His children when they sin—but He does withdraw His approving smile, without which life withers; and the blessedness of His favor can be restored only when we come back to Him from our wanderings with penitence and renewed consecration to obedience and holy living. The fact that the Lord had graciously appeared twice to Solomon is noted as an element of aggravation in his sin. Matthew Henry says: "God keeps account of the gracious visits He makes us, whether we do or no; knows how often He has appeared to us and for us, and will remember it against us if we turn from Him." Every such gracious visit to us, adds to our responsibility for obedience and holy service. The more we know of God and the greater the favor He shows us—the sorer is our sin if we forsake Him and go back to sin. A sculptor had a vision of Christ, which he reproduced in stone. He believed that he had seen the Christ in his vision, and that the form he had chiseled in the marble, was the very image of the glorious Person who had appeared to him. He grew famous afterwards and was asked to make statues of certain heathen deities. But he refused, saying: "A man who has seen the Christ would commit sacrilege, if he were to employ his art in the carving of a pagan goddess. My art is henceforth a consecrated thing." When Solomon had seen the Lord in vision—not once only—but twice —he should have been forever a consecrated man. The eyes that looked upon the Lord, should never have lusted after earth's pleasures. The hands that had fashioned a glorious temple for God, should never have built chapels and altars for heathen deities. Solomon's sins were far greater because of the special favors God had granted to him. Have we seen Christ? Has He appeared to us in His Word, or in prayer, or at the holy table? Let us not forget that having seen Christ, should set us apart forever for His service and for holy living. The Lord appeared again to Solomon in some way; at least He spoke to him in solemn warning: "Since you have not kept my covenant and have disobeyed my laws, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your servants." God will not leave His work in the hands of those who will not obey Him. The vessels that He employs must be clean. He tries men with trusts. If they prove faithful He continues the trusts in their hands, and adds others. If they prove unfaithful and unworthy, He takes from them the things He has committed to them.

It is personal obedience that is here made the test. Solomon may still have been a wise king, a good administrator—but he was no longer a godly man. His heart was not right, his life was not holy, he was disobedient to God's commands; and it was on account of this personal unholiness, that the kingdom was to be torn from him. In these days there is a great deal of talk about public and private character in men who aspire to office. Some contend that the people have no right to inquire into a man's personal moral character; that they have to do only with the questions of his statesmanship and general ability for government. Very clearly, it was Solomon's private and personal character, that brought upon him the divine wrath. God wants men with pure hearts and clean lives to represent Him in places of power and authority. The Lord was still gracious to Solomon. He would rend the kingdom from him—but not until his life was completed. " But for the sake of your father, David, I will not do this while you are still alive. I will take the kingdom away from your son." Lives are woven together, and the influence of one falls upon another. A godly man transmits blessings to his children, and one who turns away from God robs his children of blessings that ought to be theirs. David's godly life kept from Solomon the visitation of the full consequence of his sin.

There are many of us enjoying blessings on our thoughtless, reckless lives, because we had pious parents who walked in the ways of God and pleased Him. Their prayers form a shelter over our heads that shields us from the consequences of our own sins. But there are many people who, just like Solomon, live so as to rob their own children of the honors and privileges that they might and ought to transmit to them. Solomon's son did not receive the kingdom of all Israel, getting but a fragment of it—and it was Solomon's fault! The man who, by drunkenness or gambling, or indolence or extravagance, wastes the fortune God has given him and transmits beggary to his children—is guilty of like sin. Many children suffer sorely for the sins of their fathers! The Kingdom Divided

1 Kings 12 The golden age of Israel closed with the death of Solomon. His empire was great, extending over wide limits. His revenues were very large. Everything in his kingdom was on a grand scale. He "made silver and gold to be as stones in Jerusalem." The palaces and public buildings were magnificent in their splendor. Yet the seed of decay was in the heart of it all. The rabbis say that while Solomon walked about in splendor—a worm was eating at the heart of his empire. This is another way of saying that the elements of corruption were in Solomon's kingdom. There were reasons. His heart had been drawn away from God by his heathen wives. At the same time the magnificence of his kingdom and the extravagance of his reign made it necessary to extort oppressive taxes from the people. Many of them also were drafted for forced labor. No wonder that they grew restive under these hard conditions. When Solomon died they were ready for the outbreak which followed. If Rehoboam had been wise, there might not have been an immediate rending of the kingdom from him—but in his folly—he drove the people to the extreme of rebellion.

Solomon largely outlived his fame. His reign became excessively burdensome to the people by reason of the heavy taxes they had to pay. His character also lost much of its charm through his departure from God. His aims were not lofty—as they were at the beginning. He was called in his earlier years, the wisest of men—but his later life was characterized by folly. His kingdom was no longer as secure and strong as it was, when he received it. Indeed, it was ready for disruption, and Solomon himself was responsible for its corrupt condition. It was a pathetic ending of his record that, notwithstanding the glory of his reign and the great things he had done—no word of commendation of him is given. All that is said of the close of his life is that he "slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father; and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead."

Solomon did not leave behind him when he died—a sweet, fragrant memory in the hearts of his people. "When he was gone, the people came to Rehoboam, asking him to lighten their oppressive loads. Rehoboam promised them an answer in three days, and then sought advice.

First he sent for the older men, and they advised him to grant the request. Experience had made them gentle. "Show yourself their friend," they said. "Listen to their grievances. Take a kindly interest in them. Think of their good. Speak to them affectionately. Give them the relief they seek, and serve them in any way you can. If you do these things—you will win their love, and they will prove your faithful subjects." This was good advice—but Rehoboam was not satisfied with it. The aged men were too slow for him. He turned to the young men of his own age, hot-headed fellows like himself, and sought advice of them. When the people came to the king for his answer, Rehoboam, following the advice of the younger men, and replied to them roughly. His answer,

indeed, was insolent and brutal. Such words as he spoke would have kindled the flame of rebellion, even if there had been no tinder dry and ready for the spark.

Rehoboam has many followers. We should learn the folly and wickedness of sharp, rude, and bitter words. Anyone sees how unworthy of a king, Rehoboam's speech was—but such words are unworthy of anyone's lips. They were insolent, contemptuous, haughty, unmanly, and cruel. We are all too apt, under provocation, to give rein to intemperate speech.

Destinies have been wrecked by following foolish counsel. Every young person needs a wise older friend to whom he may go with his life's serious questions. Happy is the young man or young woman who has such a counselor, and who will then accept the wisdom which comes of experience. But Rehoboam rejected the wise counsel of the aged men. He answered the people roughly: "My father was harsh on you, but I'll be even harsher! My father used whips on you, but I'll use scorpions!" The consequence of Rehoboam's harsh words was the wrecking of his kingdom. The people turned away, saying, "What portion have we in David?" It took but a minute to give the reply which Rehoboam gave—but the harm done by it never could be undone! Burke said, "Rage and frenzy will pull down more in half an hour—than prudent deliberation and foresight can build up in a hundred years." We need not go far, nor seek long—to find other illustrations. Many people lose noble, helpful friends, lose them beyond regaining, by the petulant, ill-tempered words of a minute. Many lives with splendid possibilities become utter failures through uncontrolled tongues. When will men and women learn to put bridles in their mouths? The matter of seeking advice is always a serious one. Some people too readily turn to others to ask them what they should do. We ought to learn to think for ourselves. Each man must bear his own burden. We never can get clear of the responsibility of choosing for ourselves. However, there are times when we may turn to others for advice. The young and inexperienced especially may receive valuable help from those who are older and more experienced. But in seeking advice we should make sure of the people to whom we turn. Bad advice has wrecked many a life.

Rehoboam had good advice from the older men—but rejected it. There are many who follow him in this regard—they receive good counsel from friends, from parents, from teachers, from godly men, from those who are wiser than themselves, and then ignore it. There are many who, like Rehoboam, reject the good advice—and take the bad. There was One Rehoboam seems to have missed altogether in seeking advice—he did not go to God for counsel. We should always ask God what He would have us do; He never advises unwisely. No life was ever wrecked by taking His counsel.

One lesson we get from Rehoboam's undisciplined course—is that those who would rule over others, must have achieved both self-control and patience in themselves. Rehoboam had achieved neither. He thought only of his own personal gain—the last element that should influence one in dealing with others. He lacked altogether that spirit of meekness, which Jesus said shall inherit the earth. We should keep SELF out of our work for God, out of all our work of love. Whenever SELF comes in—it mars everything. We should think only of our duty, not of the way our act may affect us. If Rehoboam had asked, "What course will be the best for the country and for the good of the kingdom?" he would not have acted so foolishly. He would have shown patience and kindliness, and would have lightened the heavy burdens under which the people were bending.

Those who rule over others, should love them and be ready to serve them. Rehoboam is an example of those who try to govern others by tyranny. If he had really loved the people and had been disposed to serve them, sympathizing with them in their burden-bearing and showing them kindness, they would have continued loyal to him. "Through love, be servants one to another" is the New Testament law.

We all need to guard ourselves at these points. We are apt to be unloving and harsh in our dealings with others, especially when our dignity seems to be hurt. Even parents need to keep a careful guard upon themselves in this matter, lest their consciousness of having authority should make them unjust to their children. Paul exhorts fathers not to provoke their children to anger, lest they be discouraged. Teachers have like temptation in enforcing authority. So have all who are placed over others.

It often happens that a man who has been very kind and brotherly as a fellow-workman, or as an equal among men, becomes tyrannical and intolerant when in a position of authority. We should remember that all power is of God, and we represent Him in whatever place of authority we occupy. We should rule, therefore, in God's name—as He would rule if He were in our place. In all our dealings with those over whom we are placed in the Providence of God—we should be gentle, sincere, loving—that we may look into God's face without shame.

Life has its turning points for all of us. This was the turning point in Rehoboam's career. He had before him the possibilities of a prosperous and successful reign. All hinged, however, on one word. Should he say yes—or no? If he had said yes, he would have won the people to himself and his kingdom would have been established. He said no, however, and he drove the people to anger and rebellion. Men are continually coming to turning points when all their future depends upon a single decision. Two paths lie before them. One leads to beauty, honor, blessing; the other leads to dishonor and sorrow. The decision of the moment, settles for us in which of these two paths we will walk. Many a man or woman by a careless word—throws away the hope of infinite blessing and good.

It is interesting to notice that while the kingdom of David had failed of its best through man's fault and sin, it was not altogether cast off. The vessel had not come out what the potter first intended it to be—it had been marred on the wheel—but he made it again, another vessel, not so fine as the first would have been—but still a good vessel. The kingdom had a second chance. From the seed of David came at length the Messiah. There is encouragement in this for all those who miss their first and best chance. They may try again, and their life may yet realize much honor and beauty. When we think of it, most of the worthy lives of godly men in the Bible—were second chances. They failed, and then God let them try again. David himself, and Jonah, and Peter, and Paul are illustrations.

Jeroboam's Idolatry

1 Kings 12

Jeroboam had a fine opportunity. He had come up from the ranks of the people through his own industry and efficiency. He was among the workmen engaged on the great public works of the nation when Solomon found him, his attention having been drawn to him by his industry and ability. He had risen, not through political influence—but by sheer worth—to a high place. Then he

had been divinely pointed out—as the man to be the king of the ten northern revolting tribes. The prophet had told him that the Lord would give him this responsible place. The people had also freely turned to him and chosen him as their leader. He had the gifts and qualifications for kingship. If only he had used his opportunity aright—he might have become a great king and have built up a mighty empire. But there was a condition, as there always is when God puts a trust into any man's hands. "I will place you on the throne of Israel, and you will rule over all that your heart desires. If you listen to what I tell you and follow my ways and do whatever I consider to be right, and if you obey my laws and commands, as my servant David did, then I will always be with you. I will establish an enduring dynasty for you as I did for David, and I will give Israel to you." But Jeroboam threw away this magnificent opportunity, and wrecked the possibilities of his own life. He might have made a brilliant story of honor and blessing for himself and the new kingdom if he had been faithful to God.

Jeroboam was a good builder. Building had been his business. When he became king, he set to work at once to build and fortify cities. "Jeroboam built Shechem . . . and built Penuel." What a pity it is that he did not stay at his building work all his life! We cannot help thinking how different the history of God's people might have been—if Jeroboam had not become king; or if, being king by divine appointment, he had walked in God's ways. A trail of sin, however, blotted every page of the nation's story behind him. He is known as "the man who made Israel to sin." Every time his name is mentioned, this mark of dishonor is attached to it. He was put upon his throne with a holy mission. He was called to be a godly king, and then was promised honor, divine blessing, and the perpetuity of his throne. But he proved a traitor to God, and failed to carry out the divine plan for his life. He not only wrecked his own destiny—but he dragged a nation with him, down to sin and infamy. It seems a pity that he was ever discovered by Solomon and promoted to a place of honor. Better if he had remained all his life in his lowly place. He understood building cities and strengthening fortifications; had he only built morally and spiritually as well as he had built in material things, he would have been a successful king. There are many people who do this world's part of their life-work well enough—but fail utterly of their higher mission.

We must do our common work conscientiously. We are sure that Jesus was a good carpenter and did the work of His trade most honestly and carefully. But He had a higher mission than carpentering. There are fine carpenters, who are neglectful of their spiritual duties. No life is a success—which does not build for heaven. Bricks and stones and timbers—will not make eternal habitations. It is right to do one's work well—but if one's work on the heavenly side is neglected meanwhile, the result will be disastrous in the end. The record of Jeroboam's enterprise, is all eclipsed by the black spots of his great moral failure.

Jeroboam wanted to keep his people loyal and faithful to him, and set about devising ways of encouraging such loyalty and devotion. He thought he saw danger in the people's returning to the feasts in Jerusalem. He feared that if this were still permitted, that they would be drawn back to their former allegiance to the southern kingdom of Judah. He knew that they would not be satisfied without some system of worship. They had been accustomed to go to Jerusalem to the great feasts, and these observances had a tremendous hold upon them. If they had no place of worship of their own, they would continue to go to the temple and would gradually drift back to Judah. "Jeroboam said in his heart. Now . . . if this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of Jehovah at Jerusalem, then will the heart of this people turn again unto the Lord."

It is true that old religious faiths die hard. Religious ties are very strong. When bred in the blood and fiber, it is almost impossible to break them. Those who have been brought up with strong religious habits from their infancy—can scarcely by any power be turned entirely away from these habits in later life. This is one reason why children should be trained from the cradle to obey God, and engage in His service. They may then for a time be drawn away from good paths by the world's temptations—but they will almost surely come back in the end. Jeroboam was right in his impression that the people would be apt to drift back to the old altars, unless he provided something in place of what they had left. Yet this was no justification for the sin into which he led them. If he had been loyal to God—he would have sought the counsel of some wise and godly men, and have devised some plan to provide for his people religious worship, which would have the divine approval. The king's device to meet the danger was not God's way. "The king made two gold calves. He said to the people, 'It is too much trouble for you to worship in Jerusalem. O Israel, these are the gods who brought you out of Egypt!' He placed these calf idols at the southern and northern ends of Israel—in Bethel and in Dan. This became a great sin—for the people worshiped them!"

Nature abhors a vacuum. A human heart cannot be left empty. "When one object of devotion is taken from it, something else must be put in its place. The king knew that the only way he could keep the people from returning to the old worship—was by furnishing some other worship for them. So he was not content to forbid them going up to the old national feasts; he set up new shrines and appointed new festivals. The old missionaries understood this law of life. When cutting down the sacred groves where the people had worshiped idols, they used the wood to erect Christian chapels on the same spot. If we seek to drive out evil—we must do it by getting something good into the heart instead. There is little use in merely urging people to stop doing wrong—they must be taught to do something in place of the wrong, and unless they are given something good to do—they will continue to do the wrong things. But while Jeroboam took advantage of this law of life, he erred grievously in the way he sought to fill the vacuum. Turning the people away from the worship of the true God—he set up idols and taught them to worship these! Only evil came out of it. "This became a great sin, for the people worshiped them, traveling even as far as Dan!" The king's plan worked well, according to his purpose. The people took readily to his new shrines. They went even to the farthest off, to Dan, to worship. They do not seem to have had any desire to return to Jerusalem. So Jeroboam had a religion of his own for his new kingdom, and thus one of the strongest ties of the old national life, was broken and the separation was made complete.

Yet this is one of the saddest records in the Bible. It tells of the beginning of a departure from God, which in the end brought bitter sorrow and terrible ruin upon the people, blotting from the very face of the earth—the tribes who were thus set going on a wrong path! The man who starts an error—never knows to what it will grow. He who sets another's feet in a wrong path—never knows where it will lead at last. To teach one child falsely—may be to hurt thousands of lives in the end. Those who start new enterprises open fountains of influence, good or bad, which will flow on forever. Jeroboam gave shape and character to the new departure, and the nineteen kings who followed him—all, with not on exception, walked in his evil steps!

There is an old story of an abbot who coveted a certain piece of ground. The owner refused to sell—but consented to lease it for one crop only. The shrewd abbot sowed acorns, a crop of which

would take three hundred years to grow and ripen. Jeroboam’s one evil sowing, mortgaged the new kingdom for evil through all its two hundred and fifty years of history!

Jeroboam’s evil work did not stop with the setting up of the calves of gold. He established a full religious cult and elaborated a complete system of worship. He made priests, and ordained feasts and systems of sacrifice.

We may trace the course of this man’s sin as it works itself out in the after history. What were the consequences in Jeroboam himself? Trouble followed trouble. His hand withered at the altar. His child died. He was defeated in war. His kingdom was partially torn from him. He was smitten in his person and went to his grave in dishonor.

Then in all the ages since his name has been gibbeted before the world, branded with infamy, as "the man who made Israel to sin." But his sin did not stop with himself. He poisoned the springs of national life and led a nation into idolatry. The whole history of the ten tribes is one of disaster and calamity, ending in captivity and extinction. Commentators note the fact that in the seventh chapter of Revelation, where the names of the tribes that are sealed in heaven are given, two are missing, Ephraim and Dan, the tribes in whose territories the idol-calves were set up. Is there no significance in this omission? The story of sin is always terrible! "Sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death!"

Jeroboam’s record is preserved as a warning for those who come after him. The red light of the story shines out as a danger signal. Which way are you starting? Are you facing light or darkness? As you start in youth—you will likely continue to go forever!

Omri and Ahab 1 Kings 16:23-33 The story of Jeroboam’s northern kingdom is terribly monotonous in its sin—and tragical in treasons, stratagems, and insurrections. There is no relief in the dark picture. In the southern kingdom of Judah, too, some kings are evil—but now and then we come upon one like Asa or Jehoshaphat, who followed the Lord faithfully. In Israel, however, there is no break in the record of sin, each succeeding ruler being worse than his predecessor.

"Omri began to rule over Israel in the thirty-first year of King Asa’s reign in Judah. He reigned twelve years in all, six of them in Tirzah. Then Omri bought the hill now known as Samaria from its owner, Shemer, for 150 pounds of silver. He built a city on it and called the city Samaria in honor of Shemer. But Omri did what was evil in the LORD’s sight, even more than any of the kings before him." 1 Kings 16:23-25

OMRI had a taste for building. He showed his sagacity in the selection of Samaria as the site for his new capital. The location was central. It was easily defended. Springs of water abounded. The city he built became prominent and influential, and continued as the capital of the kingdom unto the end of its history. Men may do some fine things, may be public-spirited, and do much to improve and adorn their city or country—and yet in God’s sight be very wicked. Heaven does not write biographies, as earth does. Men look at what the eye can see; God looks within, at the heart—and records the motives and desires. So it often happens that while this world extols a man for his achievements, God condemns him for his sins. It is better surely to have God’s approval, though we remain obscure in this world, than to be lauded by men, and then hear God’s condemnation. The Scriptures paint life stories faithfully. They hide nothing, because it is evil. Over against Omri’s fine achievement in building, we read, "But Omri did what was evil in the

LORD’s sight, even more than any of the kings before him!"

Omri’s great buildings were of no account in God’s sight—while in his heart he wrought evil. The real worth of our work—is what it is worth in the eyes of the Lord. Human estimates are nothing, human adulations are mockeries, while God sees sin in the acts which men approve. One honest and lowly deed wrought in love—is worth more than a lifetime’s achievement wrought in pride and self-seeking.

It is said that Omri "walked in all the way of Jeroboam." Every man tracks a path on which other feet follow his. There is no one so obscure but that if he looks behind him—he will see someone coming after him, walking in his steps. This is true, both in good and evil people. Some men, by reason of their prominence and influence, lead many others in whatever way they go. We may think of the continuous throng following after John, Paul, Peter, Bunyan, and such men. But evil men have followers, too. Jeroboam stamped his impression on all the dynasties and kings of Israel that came after him.

What sort of influence are you starting in this world? What sort of path are you making? Where would it lead those who follow after you? A man who had been going with bad companions, drinking and carousing with them, came home late one night, and bending over his two little children sleeping in their clean, white bed, kissed their sweet lips. That night he could not sleep. One picture haunted him all night long—himself hurrying toward ruin, and his two beautiful children clinging to his garments and drawn after him. He rose in the darkness, fell upon his knees by his children’s bed, and gave himself to God for their sake.

"The rest of the events in Omri’s reign, the extent of his power, and all his deeds are recorded in The Book of the History of the Kings of Israel." 1 Kings 16:27. It is startling to read after the story of Omri’s wickedness, that all his acts which he did were recorded. Everything was recorded, even the smallest matter. Yes, and the acts of every one of us—are also written in a book of chronicles! The record is made moment by moment with unfailing accuracy. Nothing is omitted. Nothing is set down incorrectly. For "every idle word," the Master Himself said, men must give account; so for every thought and intent of the heart—they must answer. What sort of a record are we making? The children at school are eager to have good reports to show their parents; what report is made of us in God’s books day by day!

"When Omri died, he was buried in Samaria. Then his son Ahab became the next king." After Omri came AHAB. "But Ahab did what was evil in the LORD’s sight, even more than any of the kings before him!" That certainly was a bad pre-eminence. It is an honor to do good above others. Excelsior is a good word when it leads upward, to higher nobleness and sublimer achievements. But when it leads downward, it is a dark and evil word. Yet that is the way of wrongdoing. In sin, the disciple is apt to outdo his master. A bad father has frequently worse children. A man is only a moderate drinker, and defends his practice as sensible and safe. His sons follow in his ways, and too often outstrip their father and become drunkards. God’s children grow in grace; the devil’s children grow in wickedness. The wife a man chooses, has a great deal to do with his career. One of Ahab’s worst mistakes, was in his marriage. "Then, as if following the sin of Jeroboam son of Nebat were a trivial matter—he married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and then proceeded to serve Baal and worship him!" The woman he married was of the worst heathen stock, one of the worst women known in ancient times. Her character has not a single

beautiful, womanly trait, and her name stands unrivaled in history for cruelty, vindictiveness, and all manner of wickedness. Ahab married her, and then of course went over to the heathen with her.

There is no step in life which has more to do with one's future weal or woe in both worlds—than one's marriage. If one marries "in the Lord," the event brings great blessing; if one is attracted by glitter or show and is married to a heathen, the result can be only misery! There is no other rock on which more lives and more human happiness are wrecked. Some people try to excuse Ahab for his wickedness by saying that he was weak, and that all the blame rested on his wicked wife. Possibly; but is any man to be excused on such grounds as these? Did he not sin, first of all, in marrying such a woman? Did he not sin also in allowing her to lead him into so much evil?

Still the record grows darker and darker as we read on. "Ahab did yet more to provoke Jehovah . . . to anger than all the kings . . . before him." It is strange how men dare the Lord and defy Him, doing the most heaven-defying evil before His eyes. The worst men will not commit their crimes in the presence of the officers of the law. No burglar would break into a house or commit a robbery with a policeman standing by. But men break God's laws right before God's face, and provoke Him to anger with impunity! They think nothing of defying the mighty God and daring Him. Why is this? Surely it must be because they cannot see God—and therefore do not think that He sees them. They do not believe that He cares, or that He will punish. "You are the God who sees me" realized, would make the worst men fear to provoke God to anger by doing the things which He forbids and condemns.

God's Care of Elijah

1 Kings 17:1-16

"Now Elijah, who was from Tishbe in Gilead, told King Ahab,—As surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives—before whom I stand—there will be no dew or rain during the next few years—unless I give the word!"

ELIJAH was a remarkable man. His heroic and single-handed contest with Ahab and the Baal religion, gave him prominence and power. He was the greatest man of his nation at the time. The fact that he was 'taken up to heaven in a whirlwind' also sets him apart among men. Then the still further fact that he appeared nine hundred years after this, still living and active in the service of God, on the Mount of Transfiguration, gives to his name an interest which attaches to almost no other one of the Old Testament prophets. His first appearance was sudden—he broke in upon Ahab, unheard of before, so far as we know, with a startling message. His origin is not clearly known. Probably he was a native of the mountain region of Gilead. If so, he grew up in solitude, amid wild mountain crags and rushing torrents. He was a sort of Bedouin in his dress, habits, and manner. He was startling in his movements. He knew no Master but God. He waited for the divine bidding, and then went, as swift as the wind, to obey it. He was a man of strong faith. He took God's Word literally, believing that God meant just what He said. He never doubted, never questioned, never feared. To him God was intensely real. To many of us, God seems little more than a dim, pale, far-away vision; but to Elijah no other being was so actual. We need more of the sense of God's reality to give us sturdier faith and more heroic consecration.

Elijah defines his relation to God in the phrase, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand." He meant that he was God's messenger, always standing before God's face, ready to go instantly on His errands. He never sat down in God's presence—but always stood, girded and sandaled, ready for immediate running. Too many of us are slow in obeying. It takes us a long while to get ready to start on an errand on which God bids us go, and then we loiter or move languidly, as if scarcely half awake. In His commission to the seventy our Lord commanded that they should greet no man along the way. He meant that there was not a moment to be lost, that His business required instant haste. Too many of us not only delay in starting—but dally on the road. Then when we come to the place of need—we find the time has passed by, for the duty which we were sent to do. The announcement which Elijah made to Ahab, was a startling and dismaying one. There should be neither dew nor rain in the land—but according to the prophet's word. This one man seemed to have power to shut up the heavens, until he chose to call again for rain. This was because he lived with God and always did His will. We are told by James, that it was in answer to Elijah's prayer—that no rain fell during those three and a half years.

Elijah was sent into retirement, while the penalty for the king's sin should be visited upon the land. He was hidden from human sight and divinely cared for. God is never at a loss to find a way of providing for His children. All things are His servants. The brooks, the water, the birds, the beasts of the field, the wings of ravens, the waves of the sea—all creatures, all things, animate and inanimate, belong to Him—and are ready to serve Him at His call.

Some people trouble themselves much about miracles, asking how God can interrupt the regular order of nature to do any special favor for a child of His. If we understand how completely all things are in God's hands, it will not be hard for us to believe that God can do what He will—in His own world. He cannot be the slave of His own laws. Perhaps none of us ever have been fed by ravens, as Elijah was fed beside the brook Cherith; but in other ways, no less marvelous, God brings our daily bread to us continually. Railroad trains carry it across continents, or ships bear it round the globe, to bring it to our tables. We are too wise in these days, know too much science, to get the most perfect comfort from the promises of God. Who ordained nature's laws? What is nature's fixed order, but God's regular way of doing things? If our faith were but more simple, and if we let the Bible words enter our hearts without worrying about how God can keep His promises, we would have less anxiety and deeper peace.

Elijah, at least, had no trouble with his question of miracles. When he heard the divine command, "he went and did according unto the Word of Jehovah." He did not say he could see no way of getting food down in that deep, dark gorge. That was not his business at all—that was God's matter. All the prophet had to do was to obey the divine command; God would look after the rest. We say we have faith—but when we read a promise, we cannot quite trust it unless we can see how it is going to be fulfilled. That is not faith—that is walking by sight. Faith is resting our head where we can see no arm; walking where we can see no path—but confident the path will be opened; trusting for bread when there is no visible supply—yet never doubting that the bread will be ready for us when we need it.

Elijah was cared for, for some time in his first hiding place. But by and by, in the drought, the brook dried up. That is the way this world's brooks always do. At first they flow full and fresh; then they begin to waste, and soon they are dry altogether. This is a picture, too, of all earthly joys. But when

the brook dried up, God had another place ready. "Arise, and go to Zarephath." God did not send Elijah to Zarephath while the brook had water in it. There was no need that He should do so then. It was a test of Elijah's faith—to watch the stream growing smaller and smaller every day. "What shall I do when this brook runs dry?" he might have asked; at least, many of us would have asked this question quite anxiously, as we saw the water run lower and lower. But probably Elijah did not ask the question at all, for he knew that God would have something else ready—when this supply was exhausted.

One morning, however, there was no water at all in the brook, and the prophet had to eat a dry breakfast—only bread and meat. Still he did not worry. After his breakfast the Lord told him to move on. We should never doubt God's care. No matter how low the supply gets, though we have to come down to the last mouthful of bread and the last cupful of water, and still see no new provision ready—we are to take the last loaf and cup with gratitude, believing that God will have something else in time for our next meal.

Elijah did not find the prospect very bright either, when he came to Zarephath. He met there a very kindly woman—but one whose resources were almost entirely exhausted. Although a Gentile, she seems to have known Elijah's God. Then she had a generous thought for the stranger who came to her gate. She had faith also, for when Elijah told her that if she would provide for him, that her small supplies should not grow less until the famine had ceased, "she went and did according to the saying of Elijah." That is, she took the little handful of flour she had, and the little oil, and made a cake for her hungry guest, and then another for herself and her son. It is only when we do God's bidding, that He blesses us with His help. Until we fulfill our part—God's part will not be supplied. Had this woman not believed and obeyed, the wonderful two or three years' miracle in her house, would not have been wrought.

We must notice also the woman's generosity. She showed hospitality to a stranger. Blessings do not come to selfishness. If she had prepared a meal for herself and her son, and had left the hungry stranger outside unfed, there would have been no miracle of increase. We must be ready to share our little with others who need—if we would receive blessings on ourselves. The woman was well rewarded for her faith and kindness. She and her son were fed until the end of the drought. If the prophet had not come to her door that morning, she and her household might have perished in the famine. Or, if she had refused the prophet's request, saying she could not possibly spare anything for a stranger, when she had so little for herself—she and her household would have starved before the rain came. The meal and the oil wasted not, because she shared it with another.

There is withholding that brings poverty; there is scattering that brings increase; there is giving that makes rich. The way to get blessing—is to be a blessing. If your love is growing cold, go and help somebody that is in need—and your heart will be warm again. In human needs that appeal to us—are folded up blessings which we can get, only by ministering to those needs.

"The jar of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail." God did not prepare enough oil the day the famine began, to last through the famine. Indeed, there never was more than a little handful of meal and a little oil, always on hand. But the supply never grew less. After each day's food had been taken out—there was always another day's food left. Thus the lesson went on all the while—each day faith had to be exercised, for the next day's supply. God wants us to learn to

live by the day. Our Lord teaches us to pray, "Give us this day—our daily bread." Enough for the day—is all we are to ask for. If we have only one day's provision, and are doing our duty faithfully; we may trust God for tomorrow's food—and it will come when tomorrow comes.

Obadiah and Elijah

1 Kings 18:5-16

There must have been a tender parting when the prophet ELIJAH went away from the widow's house. He had been there so long and his stay had been such a blessing to the little household, that his departure must have caused great sorrow. It is good for us to make ourselves so helpful and such a blessing, wherever we visit or tarry for a time, whether only for an hour, or a night, or for many days—that when we go away—we shall be missed and pleasantly remembered. Not every one leaves fragrant memories, however, after such a stay; some fail to endear themselves to the household in which they are guests, and then their departure is a relief. It must have been a trial to the prophet, too, to go away from the quiet home where he had been so long, where he had been so kindly treated, especially since he was now to go into the presence of Ahab. However, he neither faltered nor hesitated in his obedience. Ease and comfort had no attraction to hold him back from duty. It required courage, too, to go and face the wicked king.

AHAB was a man of unscrupulous wickedness, and Jezebel, his wife, was one of the most dangerous women that ever lived. She had killed all the prophets of God she could lay her hands on. Elijah was especially obnoxious to the king and queen. They had been searching for him everywhere during the three and a half years of the famine, that they might destroy him. Yet there was no fear in the prophet. The divine commandments are always to be obeyed, and obeyed none the less promptly and cheerfully, when they take us out of the warmth—into the storm—than when they call us out of the storm—into the warmth.

OBADIAH, who appears in this part of the story, is an interesting character in his way. We are told that he "feared Jehovah greatly," and yet he was kept in a prominent position in the palace of Ahab. This certainly seems a strange place to find a godly man, a faithful servant of Jehovah. All were for Baal there. Baal's prophets swarmed about the royal residence. Jezebel was there—the wicked, vindictive, Jehovah-hating queen. Prophets of the Lord had been killed, every one who was opposed to Baal. Yet Obadiah was kept there. We are surprised that he was tolerated. Then we are surprised that he, being a godly man, stayed in such an ungodly place.

Probably it is a testimony to Obadiah's value and usefulness, that he was retained in the household of Ahab and Jezebel. We know that even wicked men, when they want trustworthy servants, prefer godly men. Obadiah may have been too valuable a person to be dispensed with, even though Ahab and Jezebel may have hated him. Yet ought Obadiah to have remained in that wicked court? The answer seems to be affirmative. That was the place where God wanted him to witness and shine as a light. Godly men are ofttimes needed in evil places. The godly are to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world. God needs them, too, as witnesses for Him. The brief sketch of Obadiah given us here, suggests several lessons. One is that it is possible to live a true, godly life—even amid most ungodly influences and associations. We need only to make sure we are where God wants us to be. If so, and if only we are faithful, our religion will not be obscured or extinguished by any adverse influence. The stories of Joseph, Moses, and Daniel also illustrate

this. Some men are even better in a hard environment, than in an easy one—just as some plants grow in the Arctic winter—that would die in an equatorial summer.

Obadiah seems to have been true to God—in a place where all was false. He maintained his faith and his worship. He was probably the only one there, who was not an idolator. We are told that he feared the Lord "greatly," which indicates a religion of a particularly positive and active kind. Yet we cannot help thinking that it must have been a secret faithfulness to God which he practiced. It is not likely that if he had been outspoken for Jehovah, he could have remained there.

Another suggestion from the story of Obadiah, is that God has different kinds of work—for different men. Elijah had his work—to flash like the lightning, to deliver his startling messages, and then vanish for years. The work of Obadiah was to witness for God, not in speech—but by a godly life in a corrupt court—and by his fidelity and courageous generosity to save alive a remnant of God's faithful ones. The only active service rendered by Obadiah to the cause of Jehovah, so far as we are told, was his saving a hundred prophets from the terrible persecution which Jezebel started. We may be sure that this was done secretly, for if Jezebel had known that a member of her own household was thus working against her, saving out of her hand a hundred of the men whom she wished to have destroyed, she would very soon have put an end to his life!

Still the service was a good one, however defective it may have been in its courage. It may have been that the divine providential reason why Obadiah was kept in the palace of Ahab, was that he might save these men. We may not know why God sometimes leaves us in an unpleasant place, where there is danger and where all is uncongenial and hard for us—but we may always be sure that He has some purpose in it—that we have an errand there for Him, that there is something, or there will be something, for us to do in that place.

We have a glimpse here of the great suffering which the famine brought upon the country. Famine is always terrible. In the three and a half years of this drought, there must have been very great suffering. Beasts as well as human beings were in distress. Ahab and Obadiah were both engaged in a search for grass to save the animals. They had gone all over the country, seeking out every little spot in which there might be a bit of pasture. There is no evidence of penitence in Ahab, at the close of the three years of famine. His heart had not been softened by it. There is not a word which indicates that he was bemoaning his sins, and crying to God for the removal of the judgment which these sins had brought upon the country. We find him still cursing Elijah as the cause of the trouble! Nor is there any indication that the sufferings of the people had revealed anything humane and fatherly in the heart of their king. As he appears before us in this incident, he thinks only of his beasts—he does not want to lose his fine horses and mules! One writer says: "Strangely enough, Ahab at last begins to feel distressed and uneasy; but do you think it is for the myriads of his suffering people? No; but for the horses and mules, many of which have died; and the rest may soon perish, leaving him an impoverished king." There are men and women, even in these modern Christian days, who pet and stroke their dogs and cats—and revel in their luxuries—but who have no heart nor ear for the sufferings of their fellow-men!

It was as Obadiah was searching for pasture or for water for the animals, at the king's commandment, that Elijah, met him. Elijah needed the encouragement and comfort which Obadiah gave him in telling him of the saving of a hundred of God's prophets. He had thought that he was the only one in all the land who believed in Jehovah, and it must have given him great

encouragement to find Obadiah still faithful to God—and to learn that there were at least a hundred others still living who were God's true followers. The meeting was, no doubt, a blessing to Obadiah also. It strengthened his faith and encouraged him in this time of distress—to stand face to face with the great prophet.

Obadiah, however, was not ready for the errand on which Elijah wished to send him. He knew the bitter resentment of Ahab, and was aware that for three and a half years he had been searching for Elijah that he might kill him. Therefore he feared the king's fury, when he should learn that Elijah was near. He feared, too, that the prophet would again disappear, and that when Ahab should fail to find him—he would kill Obadiah. Dr. Parker points out the inconsistency in Obadiah as shown in this incident. "Obadiah risked his life to save a hundred of the prophets of the Lord—yet dared not risk it without first receiving an oath for the greatest prophet of all." At last, however, Elijah stood before Ahab. The king seemed glad, thinking that now, at last, he had the prophet in his power and could do with him what he chose. At once he charged him with being the troubler of Israel, the cause of all the distress which the people had suffered. That is the way always with such men as Ahab. They lay the blame of their sin, on somebody else. But Elijah was not awed by the king's charge. He answered, "I have not made trouble for Israel. But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the LORD's commands and have followed the Baals!" It is the sinner who is the troubler, not the faithful messenger who comes with the warning. If Ahab had listened to God's warnings, his troubles never would have come. We can blame only ourselves, when our sins bring upon us woe and suffering.

Elijah on Mount Carmel

1 Kings 18

Elijah challenged Ahab to a test of Baal's power. He demanded that the question should be settled, whether the Lord or Baal was the true God. Baal's prophets were summoned, therefore, to meet with Elijah on Mount Carmel. On one side stood Elijah, alone, as the prophet of Jehovah; and on the other side the four hundred and fifty priests of Baal. All day, from morning until evening, Baal's priests had been about their altar, crying, dancing, and gashing their flesh, after the custom of their heathen worship. But Baal had not answered, and, with mortification in their hearts and curses on their lips—they turned away in defeat. It is now Elijah's turn. Will Jehovah answer by fire and thus prove Himself the true God?

Elijah called the people to come near to him, that they might see all that he did, for there were no secrets in the worship of the true God. Then he repaired the altar of Jehovah, which had been broken down. Once the fires had burned on this altar—but it had been neglected, the people having turned away to worship calves of gold, instead of the true and living God.

While this picture of the ruined altar is before us—we may think of other altars that are broken down. There are homes where once the voice of prayer was daily heard, where the family bowed in worship. But now no longer does the morning and evening prayer ascend. There are those who at their mother's knees were taught to kneel, and who through infancy and youth continued to pray—but who no longer bow before God. All about us, everywhere, are these broken-down altars. The first thing the prophet did at Carmel that day—was to rebuild God's altar which was in ruins. The first step toward blessing in prayerless homes and lives—is to build again the old altar of God.

Elijah then made preparation for the great test. He prepared the altar, put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood. That was all he could do; the fire must come down from God. Common fire would not do—it must be fire from heaven. It is the same in our sacrifices. "Present your bodies a living sacrifice" to God, is our part. God will never lift us up on His altar—we must lay ourselves there willingly. We present our bodies a living sacrifice when we yield our will and surrender ourselves to God with love and praise, ready for obedience and service.

We cannot change our own heart—Elijah did not bring fire from some furnace or smoking hearth to kindle the wood on his altar; he prepared the sacrifice—and then waited for God to give the fire. When all the preparations were made, Elijah prayed for God to send the fire. We get nothing spiritual from heaven, without prayer. Prayerlessness receives no blessings. A day without prayer—is a day unblessed, unsheltered, and open to all disaster. If we are seeking blessing and are ready to yield our wills and affections to Christ—we have but to cry to God, and He will send down the divine fire to consume the sacrifice which we have laid upon His altar. But we must always pray. "Ask—and you shall receive." Mere waiting is not enough—there must be supplication as well as consecration. The form of Elijah's prayer must be noticed. "Let it be known this day that You are God in Israel." The prophet was not seeking his own glory—but God's. He was not trying to work a miracle to show his power—but to show the people that Jehovah was the true and the only God. We should never think of honoring ourselves in doing God's work—our aim always should be to honor God. After anything we have done for God, we should not exult in our own exaltation—but should thank God and honor Him. A king, when his army had won a great victory, bared his head in the presence of his soldiers and reverently repeated, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us—but to Your name be the glory!" We should never concern ourselves about our share of the honor, about the reputation or the glory we are to get from any work we have done, any duty, any sacrifice we have made; we should seek that God's name alone shall be honored, that it may be known that He is indeed God.

All day, the prophets of Baal had prayed in vain beside the altar—but the moment Elijah began to pray "the fire of Jehovah fell, and consumed the burnt-offering." A god that cannot answer prayer is not the God for needy, tempted, perishing, dying men. Baal had been proved no god. He was unable in that great crisis to give any answer. But the moment Elijah prayed, the fire fell. The test of Mount Carmel is being repeated every day in thousands of places on the earth. Our God is the Hearer of prayer. Burdened hearts are crying to Him—and He is answering their requests. Blessings are falling upon needy, suffering lives—in response to earnest, faith-filled supplications. The fire of the Lord is always falling. It fell on the day of Pentecost on the praying disciples. It has fallen since on millions of heart-altars, consuming earthliness and sin, and leaving the glowing flames of love, devotion, and holy service. The effect on the people was tremendous. When they saw it they "fell on their faces, and they said, Jehovah, He is God!" Jehovah had been forsaken and His worship abandoned. Jeroboam's sin had thus ripened into its full, terrible fruitage. Baal was now accepted as the god of the nation. Jehovah's prophets had been hunted to death. So utterly had idolatry driven out the true worship, destroying or sending to hiding places, the followers of the true God—that Elijah thought he was the only one left in the whole land who was loyal to Jehovah. Then came this test. It was a magnificent occasion—one man against king, prophets, priests, people; but one man with God is more than a match for all the world against God. This test is going on still. Baal's worshipers are yet prominent in the world, though known

now by other names. What are the evidences of Christianity? What demonstration of power have we ever had which shows that Christianity is divine? We may point to the whole history of the Church, in answer to this question. Wherever the gospel has gone through the centuries, divine power has been with it. A little study of history and a little examination of the map of the world—will show thousand of Carmels. Idolatry and false religions have done their best—but nothing has come of their experiments—no moral improvements, no lifting up of the people, no sweetening and purifying of homes, no building of hospitals and asylums, no restoring of lives, no saving of souls.

Then Christianity entered with its simple story of divine love, its fire from heaven, the power of the Holy Spirit; and wherever it has gone all has been changed. Men have turned from their sins—unto God. Evil hearts—have been made holy. Cruelty—has given place to gentleness. Happy homes have been built up. Society has been transformed. As we see these wonderful results of Christian life—the Carmel days over again—we can say with joy and triumph, "Jehovah, He is God!" The victory was complete. The fire consumed the burnt offering, even the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that filled the trench. Baal's prophets had been defeated and must die. They had been proved guilty of high treason, as representing idolatry. Events moved rapidly. Elijah announced to Ahab the coming of rain. The prophet then went to the top of Mount Carmel, and we see him next in the attitude of prayer—praying for rain. Although God had promised the rain—yet it was necessary that Elijah should pray for it. "Ask—and you shall receive."

Elijah's prayer suggests to us also the importance of expectation. When we ask for things which God has promised, we should look for an answer. The prophet sent his servant to watch for the clouds. The picture is very beautiful. The answer did not come immediately—but the prophet continued pleading with God. Again and again and again the servant went up and looked—but there was nothing to be seen, no cloud in the sky. At last, a little cloud as small as a man's hand appeared. The answer was coming. The prophet ceased to pray—and set out on his journey to Jezreel.

Elijah Discouraged and Restored

1 Kings 19:1-16

It is little wonder that Jezebel was furious, when she learned from Ahab—of the slaughter of her priests. She vowed vengeance upon Elijah. "May the gods also kill me if by this time tomorrow I have failed to take your life like those whom you killed!" It was a trying hour for Elijah, and for once he flinched.

"So you intend to be a reformer, young man?" asked an old peer of young Wilberforce. "That is the end of reformers," he continued, pointing to a picture of Jesus on His cross. Those who would contend with error—must always expect opposition, possibly persecution, possibly death! To be a bold confessor anywhere is to face enmity, sneers, reproach. Even Christian boys at school or at work—will ofttimes have to endure petty persecutions if they remain true to their Master.

We have been accustomed to think of Elijah as a man who would flinch before nothing. But we are disappointed this time in our man. "Elijah was afraid and fled for his life!" Possibly he did right, We are not required always to face danger. There are times when it would be foolhardy to do so, when

we would only be throwing away our life. Jesus said to His disciples, "When they persecute you in this city—flee into the next." On several occasions, in the earlier days of His ministry, Jesus Himself withdrew from danger, because His hour had not yet come. There are times, of course, when we must stand—and not flee. At the last, when His hour had come, Jesus made no effort to escape from His enemies—but quietly yielded Himself into their hands. There are times in every life—when to flee from danger would be cowardice and treason to the Master. But we have no right to sacrifice our life—unless it be clearly in obedience to the divine call. We cannot blame Elijah, therefore, for fleeing from the wrath of Jezebel. In what followed, however, we cannot defend the prophet. Not only did he flee—but he became panic-stricken. "Then he went on alone into the desert, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors!" He was in a state of sad despondency. It was not fright that produced this condition of mind—it was discouragement. It seemed to him that all he had done, all the struggle at Mount Carmel, had come to nothing. There are few things we need to guard against more carefully, than discouragement. When once we allow ourselves to come under its influence, we are made weak. Our hope and courage fail. In every line of life we find discouraged people, and the discouragement takes away much of their power for work. It surely is a sad picture—this greatest and bravest of all the old prophets, lying there under a little bush in the wilderness, begging to die!

There are many other illustrations of similar experience in godly men. John the Baptist, lying in prison in the castle of Machaerus, began to question whether, after all, Jesus, whom he had baptized and upon whom he had seen the Spirit descending, was indeed the promised Messiah. Luther, another Elijah in his bravery before rulers, once became so depressed that all joy left him. It is said that one morning, when he was in this mood, his wife came down to breakfast dressed in deep mourning. Luther looked up in amazement, and said, "Who is dead?" His wife answered: "Why, do you not know? God is dead." He reproved her for her words. "How can God die? He is eternal." "Yet," she replied, "from the way you are cast down—one would think God must be dead." Then Luther saw what a wise woman his wife was, and mastered his mood.

Elijah was a man of prayer. He is mentioned in the Epistle of James as an example of a righteous man, whose supplication availed much in its working. Here, however, his prayer for death was not answered. It was well for Elijah, too, that the prayer was not answered. If he had died there—what an inglorious ending of life it would have been! As it was, however, he lived to do further glorious work, to see great results, and instead of dying in the wilderness, missed death altogether.

It is never right to wish ourselves dead. People are sometimes heard expressing such a wish—but it is always wrong. Life is God’s gift to us, a sacred trust for which we shall have to give account. As long as God keeps us living—He has something for us to do. Our prayers should be for grace to bear our burden and do our duty bravely unto the end.

Any discouraging experience, and the things we think have failed us—may cast down into despondency. But the things we think have failed us—are often only slowly ripening into rich success. Thus the night of discouragement passes away—and the day of blessing follows. We have but to be faithful and to wait—and in the end we shall always rejoice.

It was only a little bush under which Elijah crept, and its shadow furnished but scant protection from the heat. Yet a blessing came to him there. He slept. "He gives His beloved sleep," writes the

psalmist. Sleep is a wonderful blessing. God hides us away in the darkness, and while we sleep, he brings gifts of life to us. He fills up again the wasted fountains of life, and we rise in the morning renewed and strong, ready for new service.

It was only a little juniper bush under which the prophet slept that day. There is another tree under which God's discouraged ones may find real and true comfort—the tree of Calvary. Angels come there, too, with their sweet refreshment and gentle ministry. There food is furnished to satisfy the soul's deepest craving. There all blessings of mercy and grace are dispensed. A story is told of one who fled from a gathering storm, taking refuge under a great tree. He was both hungry and thirsty. On the tree he found fruit for his hunger, at the tree's roots a spring of water gushed out, and there he quenched his thirst. Just so, under the cross we find not only shelter—but also food and drink. When we are in any trouble we should go and sit down in the shadow of the cross of Christ, and we will find there all we need of divine comfort and help. When he had slept for a time, an angel came and touched him, and bade him arise and eat. Here, again, we see God's loving gentleness. First, sleep, with its refreshment; then food. God did not cast off His servant because he was so discouraged and depressed. He followed him in his flight and kept watch over him all the way. There is great comfort in this fact for us. God is very patient with us in our weakness and failure. He gave Elijah sleep, and then food, until his exhausted nature was refreshed. Very much spiritual depression is caused by the condition of the body. Ofttimes the best cure for despondency, is sleep and food until the nerves are quiet and the body is restored to healthy conditions. The prophet was strengthened, and "went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights." When we have long journeys to take, God prepares us for them. When hard experiences lie before us, we are divinely fitted for meeting them. Whenever God sends us on any journey, into whatever desert it may be—He will make provision that we faint not by the way. Many people whose lot in life is hard—go through the days with cheerful, songful spirit because every morning, in prayer, God gives them food which makes them strong for the journey. Those who feed upon the Word of God are strengthened for the journey of life.

While Elijah was in the cave in the mountain, God came to him. This was still part of his work of restoration. Elijah was discouraged, and God would bring him back to his usual gladness and hope. He came to him in the stillness and asked him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" When we find our friends in great sorrow, the best thing we can do for them ofttimes is to give them an opportunity to open their hearts. That was what God did here—He asked this question that Elijah might unburden himself. Of course, God knew all about Elijah's discouragement; but it did the prophet good to tell it. We need never be afraid to open our heart to God, telling Him every anxiety, every care. He understands, and will never chide us. It will do us good to speak freely to Him, even if our fears are only imaginary.

Elijah had thought that he was alone in his loyalty and courage in standing for the Lord. He had thought himself the only loyal follower of Jehovah. No other one had had courage to come out and make himself known that day on Mount Carmel. This made it all the harder for Elijah. It is easy to fight in company with other men—but to face the enemy alone, is the sublimest test of a soldier's courage. The real test of a Christian life—is not in church services, nor in a Christian home—but where the believer must stand by himself. The young man who finds himself the only Christian clerk in the bank or the office, may find his duty hard. But this should only inspire him with fresh courage and strength. He is the only one Christ has in that place, and he dare not fail. Suppose

Elijah had not stood for God that day, had flinched and fled, what would have been the consequence? We never know what may depend on our standing loyally and faithfully at our post, even in lowliest places. The Lord continued to comfort His servant. He did it now in a wonderful parable in nature. A great wind tore the mountains—but the Lord was not in the wind. An earthquake followed—but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake there was a fire—but the Lord was not in the fire. "And after the fire—a still small voice," a sound of gentle stillness—and that was God. Elijah had been discouraged by the failure of the startling work at Carmel, that it had not altogether crushed Baalism. The Lord shows him that noise is not the most stupendous quality of power, that it is not noise which makes the deepest impression. God works silently, without noise. It is the silent things, the unconscious influences of our lives, that make the deepest and most lasting impressions, and not the things which get advertised in the papers. Jesus was "a still small voice" in this world. He made no noise—He did not strive nor cry out, neither was His voice heard in the streets. He did not break a bruised reed, so gentle was He in His movements. Yet that one sweet, quiet life, pouring forth its spirit of love, wrought more than has been wrought by all the armies of conquerors since the world began. The Lord then sent Elijah on to other duties. "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat to succeed you as prophet." Elijah was thus assured that other men in their turn would come upon the field, each one doing his part for the destruction of this terrible system of idolatry. No man’s work is complete in itself. Elijah did a part, and then Hazael and Jehu and Elisha, each coming in turn, did a part, until the destruction of Baalism was completed. All we have to do—is the little fragment of duty which God gives to us. Others have gone before us—and have done a part. Others will come after us—and do another part. If we simply do our little portion in our own day—we shall please God and bless the world.

Naboth’s Vineyard

1 Kings 21 The work of Elijah went on after the Lord had dealt so gently with him, restoring his courage. Elisha is found at the plow, and is called to go with Elijah as his disciple and friend. Elijah seems to have been deeply affected by the lessons learned at Horeb. He worked after that more quietly and patiently. He did not try any more to suppress Baalism by force—but sought to kindle zeal for the Lord, and then to wait for the slow working in men’s hearts and lives. In the incident of Naboth’s vineyard we find again the old Elijah spirit in all its rugged energy. Naboth had a vineyard near Ahab’s palace, and the king coveted it for himself. He was willing, however, to buy it and to pay Naboth a fair price for it, or exchange for it, another vineyard. But Naboth could not legally sell his ground. Now a very unkingly quality in Ahab showed itself. "So Ahab went home angry and sullen because of Naboth’s answer. The king went to bed with his face to the wall and refused to eat!"

We see what a fool an undisciplined man, though a king, may make of himself. Instead of accepting Naboth’s refusal in a manly way, Ahab acted like a baby. We would better look at the picture carefully, for sometime we may be tempted to act in the same way. Even in our modern Christian days, full-grown men sometimes sulk and get sullen over a little disappointment. One would think, to look at Ahab pouting on his bed, that some great calamity had befallen him. But really the trouble was only this—that he could not have his own way in everything. There are people who have luxury, wealth, and honor—but are made unhappy in the midst of all their

splendor—because they cannot get some little thing which they want. A discontented heart is the trouble.

We may weave into this story Paul's words about contentment—that he had learned, in whatever state he was, therein to be content. He had learned to do without things which he would have been glad to have. Ahab had not learned this splendid lesson, and there are a good many other people who have not learned it.

Now Jezebel comes upon the scene with her sinister meddling. She wanted to know what was wrong with the king. She seems in a mood of wifely sympathy: "Why are you so sullen? Why won't you eat?" Ahab answered, "I asked Naboth to sell me his vineyard or to trade it, and he refused!" Naboth had a right to say no to the king—indeed he could not have done otherwise without doing wrong. The property was his—but not to sell. Naboth was conscientious in refusing Ahab's request, and this ought to have ended the matter for the king. But he had no respect for the poor man's scruples.

We learn here, that we have no right to interfere with the conscience of any other person. Even a king dare not command a subject to go against his conscience. No parent should ever compel a child to violate its conscience. We may urge reasons upon other people—but we can have no right to make a person go against his own conscience.

Jezebel lacked conscience. She was angry at Ahab's yielding to Naboth's refusal. "Are you the king of Israel or not? Get up and eat and don't worry about it. I'll get you Naboth's vineyard!" A wife's influence over her husband should always be toward right things. Usually this is the case—men owe more to their wives, than they ever can tell. But when a woman is bad, her influence over her husband is immeasurable in its evil. Jezebel was one of the worst women of history. What Ahab might have been if he had had a good wife—we cannot tell. But we know that the influence of Jezebel over him was malignant and bad to the very farthest degree.

Jezebel began here with a taunt, "You the king, and allow a poor subject to thwart you in any wish of your heart! You the king of Israel, and permit the scruples of a man to stand in the way of your own desire!" Scorn is a terrible weapon when used as Jezebel here used it. That is the way many boys and young men are sneered out of the right path. "You tied to your mother's apron-strings! You keep on reading that old Bible! You go to church among hypocrites! You are afraid to take a drink of wine!"

Ahab had not the courage to answer: "Yes, I am a king—but might does not make right. I must respect the conscience of my humblest subject. I must not sin against the Lord." Many boys and young men also lack courage, when sneered at and twitted with their weakness, to reply: "Yes, I am afraid to dishonor my mother or disregard her command. I am afraid to despise my Bible and throw away my religion, and go against my conscience. I am afraid to drink and enjoy forbidden pleasures." This is the only true and manly way to meet such taunts and scorn. It requires heroism; but when one's soul is at stake—it is an occasion for sublime heroism. To be laughed out of conscience—is to be laughed out of heaven in the end!

Jezebel took the matter into her own hands: I'll get you Naboth's vineyard!" "So she wrote letters in Ahab's name." "Find two scoundrels who will accuse Naboth of cursing God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death!" And Ahab said nothing. He let the wicked woman do as she

wished. He let her take his seal and affix his name to letters, ordering a conspiracy against a good man’s life. For one thing, we see the terrible danger of allowing ourselves to fall under the influence of wicked people. Ahab was not the last man—whom a bad woman has destroyed. Bad women are many times the devil’s angels, to put chains about the necks of men and lead them away from all that is sacred and holy, straight down to hell! We learn also how unkingly, how unmanly it is to be led by another person into sin. If only Ahab had had the courage to rise up and assert his power and refuse to do the wrong thing that Jezebel suggested, how differently the story would have read today! The lesson is for us. We should allow no one ever to induce us to turn aside from the right way. There is one thing we must not give away—our conscience.

Most foul was the conspiracy against Naboth. He had not done anything that was dishonorable. He had only obeyed the law of the kingdom which forbade the alienation of any portion of an ancestral estate. He had not defied the king; he had only claimed that which was his by divine right. Yet this evil woman, assuming the authority of the king, plotted to have Naboth arraigned by his own people—and by false witnessing, condemned him to death. "Then two scoundrels accused Naboth before all the people of cursing God and the king. So he was dragged outside the city and stoned to death!" When Jezebel learned that her conspiracy had succeeded and that Naboth was stoned and was dead, she went to Ahab and said, "Get up and take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite that he refused to sell you. He is no longer alive, but dead." So Jezebel had saved the king’s money and got him the vineyard for nothing. Having died, as was supposed, for blasphemy, his estate was confiscated to the crown. Jezebel seemed to be a good agent. It seemed an excellent bargain. It is good to have a prudent wife, provided she is honest and true at the same time. But stop and count the actual cost to Ahab. Elijah said to the king, "You have sold yourself to do that which is evil. " So Ahab paid more for the vineyard than it seemed he was paying. He thought he had got it without cost—but really he had given his soul for that patch of ground. Many people get even less for their soul than that. A young man sells his conscience, his scruples, his convictions, his hope of heaven, to get a place, to make money, or to have "a good time." A politician gets a high office—but he has sold himself—it has cost him his soul. Is not the price too great? A man gets rich by fraud. He lives in splendor, enjoying his wealth—but the price he has given is his soul. Does it pay?

Ahab eagerly hastened to claim his garden. "Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of the Jezreelite, to take possession of it." Ahab had not killed Naboth—possibly he did not know all that Jezebel had done. But now he is quite willing to accept the prize, without asking any questions as to the way it had been acquired.

There are many people too weak to do base or wrong things themselves, who would yet allow others to do these things, while they reap the benefits. Does anyone expect to get clear of the guilt of wrong-doing, by allowing an unscrupulous wife or partner to do the wrong things for him? Does anyone suppose that a merchant escapes the sin and penalty of dishonesty when he silently allows his clerks to do the cheating and lying, while he pockets the results? Does anybody suppose that because the money is put under the legislator’s pillow, and he does not know who put it there, he is not guilty of taking a bribe if he retains it and votes as the big corporation wants him to vote?

There is no use shamming in God’s presence. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked." Letting others do the wicked thing for us—does not free us from the responsibility. Ahab stood in that vineyard a conspirator, a murderer, a robber, a false swearer, a blasphemer, though he had not lifted a finger nor said a word in the whole transaction. It was fitting that when Ahab came down to take possession of the murdered man’s vineyard, that the shaggy old prophet should meet him, waiting to confront him and tear off the shroud which hid the ghastly skeleton of crime, and tell him what God thought about it and about him. Sin may be successful—but when we come to get the gains—the Judge confronts us. Scathing indeed is the prophet’s condemnation of the king and the pronunciation of his doom. His house shall fall. Dogs shall eat the carcass of Jezebel. The king’s whole posterity shall perish, and their bodies shall be given to the dogs of the city and the fowls of the air!

Elijah Taken to Heaven

2 Kings 2:1-11

Elijah’s work was finished. The words of the record are very striking: "It came to pass, when Jehovah would take up Elijah by a whirlwind into heaven." The words show how completely Elijah’s life was at the disposal of God. The prophet himself had nothing to say as to when he would go—or how he would go. It would be when and how the Lord would take him. The unusual manner of Elijah’s departure would seem to have been a mark of divine commendation, a reward for his faithfulness. Yet we cannot state with any positiveness, why the prophet was thus lifted over death as he was. All we can say is that it was the divine will concerning his departure. In this way he would best glorify God. The brief account opens another window, a window into the Father’s house: "Jehovah would take up Elijah . . . into heaven." His departure was a promotion, an exaltation, a translation. We know he did not cease to live. We have but to turn the pages over, until we come into the New Testament to see him again, nearly nine hundred years later, living and active still in God’s work. This is just as true of the Christians who die in our time—as it was of the old prophet. The Lord takes them up into heaven, and they live on in blessedness and service forever.

One cold autumn day I saw an empty bird’s nest on a tree. It looked desolate and forsaken—but I knew that the birds which once sang there were living yet, away in the warm southland, beyond the reach of winter’s storms, singing there the same sweet songs they used to sing here. Just so, there is an empty love nest in many a home, in many a heart—but we know that the dear one who has gone is living with God in blessedness.

Elijah’s last day on earth was a busy one. He was sent from place to place, first to Bethel, then to Jericho, then to the Jordan. God reveals His plan to His children step by step as they go on. Elijah was faithful also to the very last moment, and went swiftly from task to task. It was to visit the schools of the prophets that he went to Bethel and Jericho. He wished to give his last counsels to these young students whom he had been training and on whom the religious work for the people would depend when he was gone.

We should continue in our work until we come to the end. In fact, when we know that the time is short—we should be all the more diligent and earnest, that nothing may be left undone. Some godly men think they may retire from active service when they get well on in years, living leisurely

in the closing days. But the knowledge that we have only a little while to live—should make us eager to do all we can in the world where so much needs to be done. The shortening days—should call us to intenser activity.

Elisha's friendship must have been a great comfort to Elijah. He came into his life that day in the field when the old prophet came upon the young man plowing, and called him. Elijah needed greatly such glad and cheerful companionship. Probably he had not known much of friendship. His life had been that of a recluse. His mission was stern and his work had been severe. Elisha had in him just the qualities that were needed to give comfort to Elijah in his advancing years. Elisha went with him everywhere, a constant help and cheer. He clung to him to the very last. "As Jehovah lives, and as your soul lives—I will not leave you!" he said.

Again and again Elijah begged him to tarry behind. Just why Elijah sought to slip away from him, we are not told. Perhaps he was trying to save him from the pain of parting. But Elisha would not allow Elijah to get out of his sight a moment. He owed everything to Elijah, and it was fitting that he should cling to him to the last and refuse to be separated from him. There are many young people who owe more than they know to older friends—parents, teachers, pastors, or others—and it is fitting and beautiful that they should show their grateful love and interest to the end.

Notice, too, what Elisha would have missed—if he had not clung to his master. He would not have seen the miracle at the Jordan or the glorious translation, nor would he have received the mantle of the ascending prophet. There are always rich rewards at the end of every path of faithfulness; and the harder and steeper the path—the greater are the rewards. God always pays His servants well, and we do not know what we miss, when we shrink from our duty in any way.

Elisha seems to have been much annoyed by the insistence of the young prophets. They kept asking him if he knew he was to lose his master that day. He said to them, "Do not speak of it!" The words seem harsh and ungentle, especially when spoken at such a time, in the midst of the sacred scenes which this chapter describes—yet the rebuke was merited. These sons of the prophets were impertinent chatterers, breaking in upon the solemn moments of most loving ministry with their thoughtless questionings. They had no conception of the sacredness of what was passing before their eyes. They had no appreciation of the grief of Elisha, before which their hearts should have been awed. They needed to learn just the lesson which Elisha's sharp rebuke gave them.

Many of us need to be taught the same lesson. We like to air our little bits of knowledge and information, letting everybody know what we have heard. Especially is this true when the knowledge we have gained is something we have no right to know, or at least no right to repeat. When we meet one in sorrow—we feel that we must say something about the trouble, and so we begin to chatter or to ask questions, when really we ought not to refer to the matter at all. There is a time to speak even in the presence of sorrow—but there is also a time to be silent. We would better be quiet always in time of grief—than to speak the wrong words or to speak them in a wrong spirit. Impertinence is always a miserable offense—but it is most miserable of all when it flings its crude words upon a breaking heart.

Elijah warmly returned the love of Elisha. The deepest wish in true friendship is not to receive—but to give; not to be ministered unto—but to minister. Elijah desired to bestow upon Elisha all he

could bestow upon him. He wished to leave behind for him not merely the memory of his love—but a blessing which should make his successor more ready for his work. So he said, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." He knew he was about to depart, and his heart yearned for the young man who had been so true a friend to him, whom he loved so tenderly. He wanted to give him some parting blessing.

We see illustrations of the same love ofttimes, when parents are about to leave this world. Their affection for their children grows more and more tender as the moment of parting draws near. This incident suggests also that our friends may often do more for us in dying—than they could do even in the midst of life. They are nearer heaven then than they ever were before, and have special power in prayer. Many of us are richer forever, for the last benediction and prayer of some beloved one.

Elisha's choice in answer to the request of Elijah showed the nobleness of his heart. He did not ask for position or health or ease or honor—but for more spiritual power. He had watched his master in his work, in his zeal for God, in his intense earnestness, and he wanted to have a double measure of the same spirit. He desired most of all—to be a better man, a holier man, more active and efficient in the Lord's work. Believers should seek, above all things, the graces and virtues which make a noble Christlike character. The highest desire of a true-hearted man should be that he may be divinely qualified for the work he is called to do. That was the longing of Elisha, as he knew that his master was about to leave him and that the burden of his great ministry was then to fall upon him.

Elijah promised conditionally that Elisha should have the blessing he sought. He told him that if he saw him depart, the favor should be granted to him. Godly men do not die out of the earth when they die. Their influence remains. They leave part of their spirit in other men's lives. Elisha received a double portion of the spirit of Elijah, because the work which the older man had been doing—would pass into the hands of the younger. The true mother leaves much of the power and the beauty of her character, in the hearts of her children. The teacher leaves his words in the minds of those he has taught. All people, good or bad, leave their life behind them in influence, when they go away. How important it is that we shall live well, that our characters be true, holy, pure, so that those upon whom any portion of our influence may fall—shall be blessed by what they get from us. The last scene of all was very glorious. "As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind!" So the most devoted friends must sometimes be separated. This parting came very suddenly at the last. We walk on together talking for many days, not dreaming of separation, then suddenly, as the chariot is waiting, the one is taken and the other left! We should not overlook the certainty of ultimate separation in every friendship we form. Some day, one of the two who are now walking together in love—will be taken and the other left to weep by a grave and to walk on thereafter lonely and sorrowing. The departure of Elisha suggests also—that heaven is not far away. One of the chariots from the King's country came down that day and carried the old prophet home. Another came down to the door of the house when your believing father, mother, brother, or sister passed away. We shall not leave the world as Elijah did, missing death—but we shall have the heavenly chariot for our freed spirits just as truly as he had. Jesus said that Lazarus, when he died, was borne by angels home to glory. We shall have angels to carry us up to heaven!

Elisha Succeeds Elijah

2 Kings 2:12-22 No good man’s work is ended—when the man himself is taken from the earth. Every influence of his life stays among men. No one does more than a little fragment of the world’s work, in his short time on the earth. Elijah came into the world, did what God gave him to do, and then passed away, leaving an unfinished work behind him. Then Elisha came and took up Elijah’s mantle, and went on doing his part of the work. The cry of Elisha when he saw Elijah departing was first a cry of sorrow, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" Thus he extolled the value of Elijah to the nation, his greatness, the defense he had been. It is always a loss to a community when a godly man departs. The country was protected by its horses and chariots. Elijah had been the defense of Israel. What the country owed to him, no one can tell. In his own measure every godly man is chariots and horsemen to his own country and community. We should make our lives so good, so faithful, so strong, so full of helpfulness, that we shall indeed be chariots and horsemen to our community. The falling of Elijah’s mantle at Elisha’s feet was the divine call to the young prophet to take up the work which his master had left. There was to be no break in the continuity of the service. The chariots and the horsemen were gone—but already the place was filled with new chariots and new horsemen. "God buries the workman—but carries on the work." We weep when one is taken away, and lament the irreparable loss, as it seems to us. Irreparable it is, in one sense. No one ever can take the place of the friend who is gone out of our life. But then his work was done. There really was no longer any need for him to stay. Elijah had done his part in God’s great plan, and had done it magnificently. There was need for more work—but this was not Elijah’s work. Elisha was standing there to take up the mantle that dropped from his departing master.

We are continually seeing useful lives removed from earth. The loss seems to us irreparable. Their departure seems to us a calamity. But there are no accidents in God’s providence. Every one’s life is a plan of God, and no faithful servant of His is taken away—until his particular part in the great plan is finished. Then his mantle falls at someone’s feet—yours, perhaps. The godly father dies, and there is grief in the home. He will be greatly missed. Yes—but an older son stands by the coffin, strong and gifted, blessed with the blessing of the father’s life and teaching. At this son’s feet, the mantle falls from the father’s shoulders. He must take it up—and with it the burdens and responsibilities of manhood. He must become now his mother’s protector and the shelter and defender of his younger brothers and sisters. A godly mother dies; and when a holy mother is gone out of the sweet and gentle home which her own hands have built up—the loss indeed seems irreparable. But if there is an older daughter in the sorrowing group at the grave, the mother’s mantle falls at her feet. So it is in all the breaks which death makes in Christian homes and communities. In every case, the mantle falls at someone’s feet. With the coming of the new responsibilities upon Elisha, there came also adequate power and wisdom. He claimed the fulfillment of the promise which Elijah had made. "He took the mantle . . . and smote the waters, and said. Where is Jehovah, the God of Elijah?" His faith was simple and strong. The same God who had wrought so wondrously through Elijah—would work now through Elisha. This is the law of grace with God. There is much comfort in this, if we will accept it. Parents are sometimes most anxious about their children when they think of the world’s dangers and of the burdens they must carry when they go out to face life’s struggles and tasks. Yet, if they would but remember their own life story, how the Lord had led them, protected, blessed, and helped them—and then remember

that the same God is the God of their children, they need not be afraid. We read the story of God's providence in other people's lives, how wondrously He kept and guided them, and then we wish we might have like guidance in our lives. But have we not? "Where is Jehovah, the God of Elijah?" The young prophets saw what Elisha did at the Jordan, and they knew at once that he really had been appointed to be the successor of Elijah. They said: "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him." They saw Elisha smite the river with the mantle and the waters open to allow him to pass through. They bowed themselves then before him as their new master. Elijah's mantle, carried now by Elisha, would not itself have convinced them of his appointment—but the miracle wrought, was sufficient proof. We can prove ourselves Christ's anointed ones—only by doing the works of Christ. It is not enough for a young man to be ordained as a minister—he must show in his life and work—the power of Christ. It is not enough to wear the emblems of official place in the Church—we must have in our lives the true marks of Christlikeness. In these days the world cares little for the mere emblems of ecclesiastical authority. The only credential that will be accepted is spiritual power, shown first in beautiful living, then in victoriousness in the world's struggles, and then in a ministry of power and helpfulness. At once Elisha became the messenger of God to the people. He began to do them good in many ways. We have an illustration of this in the healing of the springs which supplied the city of Jericho with water. The authorities came to the prophet and told him that, while the situation of their city was pleasant, there was one serious drawback—the waters were not wholesome. Good water is essential to the health and prosperity of a city or town or community. Bad water produces disease and death. But there are other kinds of evil fountains, besides corrupt springs of water. There are springs of moral pollution which gush up in the heart of many a city and spread evil and deadly curse. Many a village or town, lovely for situation, with fair streets and bright homes, wealth and many advantages of religion, education, and culture—is blackened, its beauty ruined—by its liquor saloons, which pour their streams of moral death all abroad. Gambling places are also like fountains of curse in a town or city. There are places of sinful amusement, too, which send out deadly streams. In every town in our country there are springs whose "water is bad," causing sin and sorrow!

Elisha promptly responded to the request of the authorities of the city, and the water was healed. "He went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast salt therein, and said. Thus says Jehovah, I have healed these waters." This is a parable of the work of the gospel in this world. Our hearts are the had fountains, and Christ comes with the new cruse of the gospel and pours divine grace into the foul spring—and it is healed. All true reformation of life must begin within—at the spring of the waters. It will not do merely to change one's manners—to get a man to stop swearing and lying. He must get a changed heart. Then the only salt that will make the heart's bad waters sweet and good—is the salt of God's grace. If we would cure the fountains of evil in a town—we must use the same new cruse and the same salt. Legislation has its place—but the gospel alone can change sin's curse into the blessing of holiness.

Jesus said that Christians are the salt of the earth—but He said also that the salt must have its savor, else it will do no good. That is, the Christian people in a town must themselves be full of the Spirit of God, of the love of Christ, earnest, consistent, faithful, true. There are Christians enough in every town and city to save it and purify its fountains of sin—if they all were active and full of the grace of God.

Stories from missionary lands give illustrations, continually new, of this little acted parable. The missionaries find towns and cities beautiful for situation—but the "water is bad." They begin to pour the salt of the gospel into the springs, and at once the change begins.

Every Christian should see in Elisha here, pouring salt into the waters, a picture of himself, pouring the grace of God into some foul fountain to sweeten it. Every one of us should make at least one spot in this world a little more healthy and pure. Of course, the healing is God’s work, not ours; but it is ours to put the salt into the foul springs—and we must be sure that it is really salt which we put in. The Widow’s Oil Increased

2 Kings 4:1-7

Elisha was greatly different from Elijah. We see him first plowing in the field. He was the son of a prosperous farmer. He must have been greatly surprised when he saw the old prophet coming to him in the field and without a word, casting his mantle over his shoulders. Thus Elijah adopted him as a son and invested him with the prophetic office. The act was performed in silence—yet Elisha understood its significance.

Probably taking his mantle again, Elijah strode on, leaving the young man bewildered and amazed. In a moment, however, he recovered his self-possession, followed Elijah, and declared his acceptance of the call, desiring permission to say farewell to his father and mother. He was ready to leave all for the Lord’s sake. From that time he was with the old prophet as a son, tenderly caring for him. Elijah’s career was short; Elisha’s was long and honored. Elisha was a man full of good works—a sort of New Testament man born before his time. He was a kindly man. If he was not as great as Elijah—his life was no less useful. Elijah is remembered by his striking and highly sensational acts—Elisha wrote his name in countless hearts in letters of love. "Elijah began his career by predicting a famine in the land; Elisha began his by healing a spring, that there might not be from thence any more death or barren land." The story of the widow and her oil is a fair illustration of the long ministry of Elisha. The widow of a prophet was in trouble. Tradition says it was the wife of Obadiah who was thus in distress, and that the debt was for money which her husband had borrowed to provide for the hundred prophets whom he hid and supported in a cave during the famine, shielding them from the persecution. If this tradition is true, the appeal came to Elisha with special force.

Elisha had a compassionate heart. People turned to him instinctively in their trouble, knowing that they would find sympathy and help in him. There is no better indication of character, than the way the tried and sorrowing in a community feel toward a man. When he is habitually good and kind—it soon becomes known. His name is known everywhere as a strong tower into which they may run and be safe. The widow was sure that Elisha would receive her and listen patiently to her story. He was a prophet—her husband had been a prophet, too. That was a bond which would count. Elislia had known her husband and had known him to be a godly man, and that would strengthen her appeal. Her husband had feared God. That would count, too, with the prophet. In those days there were not many who were disposed to help the poor—but this woman was sure that Elisha would hear her story and not turn her away.

We cannot better serve God—than by being kind to His other children, by being compassionate toward human sorrow and need. Our lives will be judged at last, Jesus tells us, by the way we

have treated the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the stranger, the unfortunate. If we do not love God's people—we do not love God. The widow was not disappointed in her confidence. Elisha did not refuse to hear her, did not turn a deaf ear to her. He showed an interest in her case and listened sympathetically to her story. At once he set about providing for her needs. She was in debt. The man of God did not tell her to repudiate the obligation. Debts should be paid. There are too many who are careless in this matter. It is a bad thing to go into debt, if one can possibly avoid it—but when we owe another we should spare ourselves no effort to pay what we owe. Elisha wrought a miracle to enable this widow to pay the old debt of her dead husband. We are not likely to have our debts paid in this way. "Owe no man anything, except to love one another," is a New Testament exhortation.

It is interesting to note how the prophet helped the woman to meet her obligation. He did not pay the money himself. He did not ask some rich man to pay it. He did not get up a fair or a bazaar to raise the money. He helped the woman to pay it herself out of her own resources. Thus he helped her to preserve her self-respect. We should think of this, in assisting others in their troubles. If we can put them in the way of helping themselves with or without our co-operation, we have helped them in the truest and best way. It is thus that God does in blessing us. He uses what we have, and helps us through our own resources. Elisha learned what the woman had, and used this.

What she had in her house was so little, that there certainly did not seem to be much hope of paying a large debt with it. She had nothing "but a pot of oil." Yet with this, Elisha enabled her to pay all that she owed and to have a competence for herself and her family for time to come. We are reminded at once of the miracle of the loaves and fishes which our Master wrought long afterwards, using the little His disciples had with which to work. The method of the prophet's helping, is also worthy of study. He sent the woman and her sons out among the neighbors to borrow vessels—empty vessels. They were bidden to borrow not a few—all they could get. It seemed a strange transaction, this coming of the boys with empty vessels in their hands, until the whole place was cluttered with them. It must have started much talk among the neighbors. But the purpose soon became manifest.

Elisha told the woman that when the vessels had been procured, she and her sons should go into the house and shut the door. This thing that was to take place was not to be done in the sight of the neighbors, to be talked about, to become the sensation of the village; it must be done quietly, behind closed doors, with only God for witness. That is the way Christ Himself did His work. He did not seek publicity. His voice was not heard on the streets. He bids His disciples not to do their righteousness before men, to be seen of them, and exhorts us not to let our left hand know what our right hand does. We are to shut the door—when God and we have a work to do. When everything was ready, the woman was to begin to pour oil from the little pot into the empty vessels, setting them aside as they were filled. Miraculously, there was no exhausting of the oil. The pot with the oil became a fountain which flowed without intermission, until all the vessels were filled! Then the oil stopped—not a drop of it was wasted. No more was given, than there was room to receive.

It is easy for us to take the lesson from this beautiful incident. The number of vessels sought and found, measured the woman's faith. She did not dream that more vessels might have been filled—if she had provided them. Probably she borrowed all the vessels she could. At least the oil

did not cease until every vessel had been filled.

It is always so with God’s blessings—they come to us as long as there is room to receive. God will give us as much grace, as we can take into our hearts and lives and work out in helpful ministries. The forgiveness which He bestows upon us, is as full and deep and large as the room we make for it in our own hearts. If we are unmerciful and unforgiving, we cannot get much of God’s forgiveness. If we are full of mercy ourselves, then God gives us lavishly of His mercy. "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." Whatever the vessels may be that we bring to God for the receiving of His gifts—He will always fill every one of them to the brim. If we get but little—it is because we have but little room for receiving. If only we would enlarge our capacity, if we had more faith, more desire, greater yearning—we should get more of God into our lives.

Another point, is the use of the oil which has been thus provided. Elisha was not present when this miracle was wrought. He did not work it himself—but left it for the woman and God. But when every vessel was filled, she hastened to him and told him what had been done. He then bade her go and sell the oil and pay the debt with the proceeds. After the debt was paid there still was money left, and this she and her sons were to use for their own support. Mark well, that the first use to be made of the results of this miracle was to be in paying what she owed. This should always be our way. If God gives us money in any way while we are in debt—we should not use it on ourselves, until we have paid what we owe. Then we may spend what remains, in caring for ourselves. The Shunammite’s Son

2 Kings 4:8-37 The story of the great woman of Shunem is a delightful one. She was good to the prophet, showing him most kindly hospitality as he went back and forth on his prophetic errands. The little chamber on the roof was a fit resting-place for the man of God. It was a place of prayer, too, and blessing came upon the home through the prophet’s intercession. The coming of a little child to the lonely couple, brought great gladness. But sorrow came too. The child stayed a while, and then suddenly died. There are a few homes in which at some time a little child has not died. Many a mother reads this tender story as if it were a chapter out of her own life. Many children who read it remember the day when a little brother or sister lay dead in their own home. Longfellow says:

There is no flock, however watched and tended,

But one dead lamb is there. There is no fireside,

however defended—but has one vacant chair. In her first grief, the mother thought of the prophet who had been such a friend to her. In all she did, she showed strong character and good faith. She did not break down in her sorrow. It had come suddenly upon her, and it is always harder to endure grief that is sudden, than that which comes with forewarning and expectation. It was a specially great sorrow, too, for this was her only child. Yet with all these elements of special bitterness, the mother’s faith did not fail. She seems to have had a hope that her child would be given back to her again. At least she trusted God in the whole matter, and turned to Him at once for comfort.

Why did she go to the man of God? When we are in trouble, in sorrow—it is well to go to some godly friend—pastor, teacher, or someone who is able to give us sympathy and counsel and to pray for us. We need no priest to come between us and God—but in time of great distress, it is

good to have wise and gentle human guidance. Not every one can help us in such a case. There are those who have been divinely prepared for being comforters of others. Happy is it for the man or woman in sorrow—who has a friend who can be such a helper.

Elisha had a gentle heart. When he saw the woman coming far off he knew something was wrong. He did not wait until she came to him and had told him her trouble—but he sent his servant to meet her on the way. Just so, we should train ourselves to sympathize with others who are in trouble. We should cultivate gentleness and thoughtfulness. Some people never seem to think of the trouble others have, and thus they miss countless opportunities of doing good. The true heart, however, instinctively recognizes grief or heart-hunger in others, and at once shows affection and kindness.

Elisha told his servant what to say to the sorrowing woman. "Is it well?" he asked. "It is well," she answered. But she hastened on until she came to Elisha himself. For some reason she could not open her heart to Gehazi. Perhaps he was cold and unsympathetic. His manner may have been harsh and forbidding. But with Elisha, it was different. The woman trusted him, and in his presence there was no reserve. So she told him all her sorrow.

We all know people like Gehazi—people to whom we cannot open our heart when we are in trouble. In an old Church, a rule was adopted forbidding ministers to keep dogs—lest the poor who came to their doors should be hurt, instead of fed or helped. Christian people should never keep the dogs of sullenness, churlishness, and moroseness loose about their doors—lest those with sorrow or with burdened hearts who come to them, needing and craving sympathy, may be hurt or turned away. All who represent Christ should be like Him, in gentleness and sweetness of spirit. Their very face and manner should have such a welcome in them as shall draw sad ones to confide implicitly in them. The woman seems to have chided the prophet for the blessing which had come to her through his prayers. "Did I ask you for a son?" Her words seem to mean that it would have been better if she had remained as she was, with no voice of love in her home, with her heart unblessed by love, for then she would not have had the sorrow which was now so hard to bear. She felt that it would have been better not to have had the child at all—than to have had him given and so soon taken away in death! Many times good people have felt the same way when they have learned to love—and then have been bereft. In their first grief it seems to them that it would have been better if they had never had the friend—than to learn to love him so—and then lose him. Yet, "Tis better to have loved and lost—than never to have loved at all."

We are blessed in two ways: The loving blesses us. It opens and enlarges our heart and enriches our life. Even if the one we love does not stay long with us—the loving does us good.

Then, the sorrow blesses us. The taking away of our dear ones, does not rob us of the blessing which the love wrought in us. Even if this child had not been restored, the mother would still have kept the impressions and the influences which the child in its brief, beautiful years had left upon her life.

If the owner lent you "The Angelus," and it hung in your parlor but for a day or two, pouring into your soul its marvelous beauty, you would never forget those wonderful days when you had "The Angelus" in your house. No painting is so exquisitely beautiful as the life of a little child, and though the child stays but a day or two and then is taken away, no true-hearted parent ever forgets the

time it was there or loses the impressions made by its brief stay.

"Because the rose must fade,

Shall I not love the rose?"

Gehazi's effort to restore the child was of no avail. He laid the prophet's staff on its face—but no life came. Perhaps the fault was in Gehazi. If he had had faith—the miracle might have been wrought. However, the staff may illustrate the mere forms of religion. They are nothing, unless there is true faith in those who use them. One writes: "Elisha's staff was a first-class instrument, if it was in the hands of Elisha. In Gehazi's hand—it was only a walking stick, worth a few pennies. So it is everywhere. A few pebbles of the brook are invincible weapons of war—if David slings them. The simple statement of Christ's death is the means of the conversion of three thousand people—when Peter makes it. Everywhere, if the means are consecrated to God and used by consecrated men, they will be effectual. But the forms of religion in themselves, have no more value than Elisha's staff." When Saladin looked at the sword of Richard Coeur de Lion he wondered that a blade so ordinary, should have wrought such mighty deeds. The English king bared his arm and said, "It was not the sword that did these things; it was the arm of Richard." We should be instruments that the Lord can use, and when He has used us—the glory shall all be His. Even the words of Holy Scripture laid by an unbelieving or cold-hearted teacher or minister on dead souls, will have no more effect upon them than the prophet's staff on this dead boy. When Elisha himself came to the house where the dead child was—he moved promptly and solemnly. Mark two things he did. First, he prayed. He entered the room and shut the door. No one but God could help him, and all others must keep out. The picture is suggestive—the shut door, the agonizing prophet, the waiting, the importunity. Then the other act was important—the prophet stretched himself upon the child. He brought his warm body in contact with the child's dead, cold flesh. God blesses souls through other souls, that are warm with throbbing spiritual life. If we would have influence in helping others into better Christian experience, we must stay near God until our own heart is warm and aglow. A gentleman in a jeweler's store was looking at some gems. He saw an opal which seemed lusterless and dead—no brightness, no flashing color. The jeweler took the stone in his hand for a few moments and then laid it down, and—behold! all the colors of the rainbow shone in it. It needed the warmth of the human hand to bring out the beauty. Just so, there are lives which need the touch and warmth of human love and sympathy—to quicken them into life. The woman was most grateful for the restoration of her child to life. There is a story of a Scotch mother whose child was carried away one morning by an eagle, which soared high up among the crags with the little one. Nothing could be done—no one could scale the cliffs. The mother went into her lowly home and shut the door, and fell upon the floor in an agony of prayer. There she lay all the day. Meanwhile a sailor, used to climbing the masts, crept up the crag, found the eagle's nest, brought the baby down and carried it to the mother's home. Clasping the child in her arms—she hurried with it to the minister to give it to God, saying God had given the child back to her from the dead—and she must dedicate it anew to Him before she embraced it. Thus it was, that this Shunammite mother did.

Naaman Healed of Leprosy

2 Kings 5:1-14 The story of Naaman is interesting in several ways. It gives us a glimpse of the times. The country of Israel was subject to incursions from hostile tribes. In these raids not only

was property carried away—but women and children were ofttimes taken as captives. Naaman himself was a great man in his country; he was commander-in-chief of the army of Syria. He was held in distinction by the king, who honored Naaman throughout the land. He had won great battles. He was a brave and valiant soldier. But all this list of honors was offset by one sad woe—he was a leper! This story of Naaman is like many a rich man's life today. He has all that wealth can give him—BUT there is some dark shadow, an incurable disease, a secret sorrow, a domestic infelicity, a shame which nothing can blot out—and that spoils all the glory. No human life is altogether perfect. No human happiness is altogether complete. Leprosy meant sin—every one of us, however great, is a sinner. Leprosy was a terrible disease. It was incurable. Its progress was slow but certain. It ate away the body joint by joint. In the land of Israel it drove a man from his home and friends, to live in isolation. Yet the leprous body—is only a type of the leprous soul. We all have this drawback which Naaman had. The incident of the little girl is instructive, and yet moving. It was a cruel fate that had torn her away from her home in the country of Israel. Young girls will be interested in this little maid—and will sympathize with her in her sad misfortune. She may have been ten or twelve years of age. She was carried off by a company of Syrian soldiers from her home, and was held captive. She must have been greatly frightened as the rough men of war seized her and took her away with them. Her mother must have wept bitterly. Her father and brothers must have vowed some time to get the child back. But God had her in His keeping, and He used her while a captive to do good. This is not the only Bible story of a captive child. We all remember about Joseph, who when but a lad was treacherously sold by his own brothers and carried off to Egypt as a slave. Yet he in his captivity proved a great blessing, not only to Egypt but to his own people and to the very brothers who had sold him! Daniel also was carried away when only a child into a heathen country, and he also did a great deal of good.

Sometimes children are put into places and circumstances of hardship, where they must suffer much; but wherever their lot is cast, and whatever the circumstances are in which they find themselves, they may do good. Wherever God allows us to be placed we shall find not only divine protection—but an opportunity for usefulness. God has something for us to do right there—or He would not have put us there. Some children find themselves living in hard conditions, without many pleasures, receiving unjust or cruel treatment, it may be; but they may trust God in the hardest circumstances. He will not forget them, and if they commit their lives to Him—He will use them for doing good. This little girl was thoughtful and sympathetic. Evidently she had been well trained, for she knew much about God and God's prophet. When she learned of Naaman's condition as a leper—she expressed to her mistress the wish that he might visit the prophet who was in her country. It seems a little strange, that this child who had been carried away captive by Naaman's soldiers, perhaps by Naaman himself, should have this kindly interest in her master. She had been cruelly wronged, torn away from her homeland, and carried as a captive to a foreign country. She was now captive, working as a slave in Naaman's house. We would not have been surprised, if the child had cherished bitter feelings toward the great captain. But instead of this—she looked upon him with pity. She even interested herself so much in his recovery, as to tell her mistress about the prophet who could heal him. We have a lesson here on the treatment of those who have wronged us or injured us. We should always try to do them good.

Another suggestion from this part of the story, is that even a child can do great good. But for this little maid, Naaman probably would have remained a leper, growing worse and worse, until he

died. Her words to her mistress made her and Naaman also aware of the healing that was within reach. There is a Prophet greater than Elisha, of whom every Christian child knows—Jesus Christ Himself. We should tell those about us who are in sin or in sorrow—of this great Healer, that they may come to Him as Naaman went to Elisha and find blessing. If this child had said nothing of the prophet, Naaman would not have learned of the healer!

We learn here also that there is no place in life without its opportunities for usefulness. We would say that this little child, a captive in a strange land, could not be of any use in the world—yet her simple-hearted kindness was the means of the curing of the great soldier. A boy may be in a very humble place—just an office boy, an errand boy, a messenger boy; or a girl may be only a little serving maid in some great house. Yet both of them may bear such witness for their Master in their lowly places—as to become great blessings to others!

Naaman quickly availed himself of the information which had come through the little slave girl, and with a letter of introduction from his king—soon appeared in the country of Samaria. But he went to the wrong place with his leprosy. His king had sent him to the king of Israel—instead of to the prophet. And when the letter was read by the king, it caused alarm. He knew that he could not cure the man of his leprosy, and at once he suspected that the letter from the king of Syria was part of a plot to bring about war. As he opened the letter he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy?"

Just so, many people go to the wrong place with their troubles, their sorrows, their sins. The king could not cure Naaman's leprosy. There are some things which earthly power cannot do. It is said that money will do anything—but there are many things which money cannot do. It cannot buy love. It cannot give peace to a troubled heart. It cannot prolong life. The queen's cry, "Millions for a moment of time," received no answer. Rich men in authority may have great power—but there are poor men who, by their prayers, by their teachings, or by their lives—can bring blessings which no rich man could bring. It is better to have Elisha's power to do good—than to be king!

Elisha helped the king out of his perplexing dilemma. "When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me—and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel." It was a splendid cavalcade that waited before the prophet's humble dwelling that day. Although Naaman was a leper and had come to implore help of a lowly servant of God—he kept up all his grand style. There was no sign of humility. Indeed, he expected to be cured in a grand way, and then to pay for the healing with a princely sum. He was not there as a poor suppliant, and no doubt he thought he was conferring great honor upon this humble and obscure prophet in coming thus to him.

There are many people in these modem days, who treat Christ's Church very much as Naaman wished to treat Elisha. They put on all their magnificence when they attend the services. They consider that they honor the Church when they accept its ministrations. They like to be called patrons of the Church. They show favor to it. Such people, like Naaman here, will find it necessary to get out of their chariots, to lay aside their fine trappings, to step down into the valley of humiliation, and to bathe in the fountain of Christ's blood—before they can find any real blessing at God's hand. There is no way to the favor and mercy of God—but by the way of penitence and humility.

Elisha was not awed by the grandeur of the general before his gate. He did not even come out to speak to the great man sitting in the chariot before his door. He showed not a shadow of servility. He simply sent a message to him, telling him to go and wash in Jordan seven times. Naaman was very angry and turned away in rage. He was angry because Elisha had not shown deference to his grandeur. He was not there as one of the common herd—but as the great general of Syria. He had formed his own idea of the way he ought to be healed—in some grand way. There are people who in their pride and haughtiness, imagine that God should treat them differently from common folks. The way of the cross is altogether too humble for them. They turn away with scorn and rage from it! But we must not fail to notice how nearly Naaman missed being healed. Had it not been for the entreaties of his attendants he would have gone away a leper still, rather than submit to the prophet's lowly requirements. There are many people who fail altogether of salvation, for the same reason. They come to the cross—but when they hear what they must do to be saved—they turn away, keeping their sins and their leprous hearts, rejecting the salvation which can come to them only in Christ's way!

It is well that Naaman's servants were wiser than himself. They persuaded him to do as the prophet had bidden him to do. So he thought better of his course; he let the counsel of his friends influence him; he considered how foolish it would be for him—to miss the curing of his leprosy. He let his rage cool down and returned humble.

He had a second chance. This shows the divine patience. Thousands of people reject Christ, and then, when they come, by and by—they find the way still open. They have a second chance. God waits long to be gracious even to the sinner who has often refused the invitation of mercy. Naaman did as he was bidden. "So Naaman went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, as the man of God had instructed him. And his flesh became as healthy as a young child's, and he was healed!"

Elisha at Dothan

2 Kings 6:8-23

Two gentlemen—one a clergyman, the other a prominent business man—were conversing together about foreign missions. They were speaking especially of India.

"Sir," said the business man, "you cannot convert India to Christ in ten thousand years."

"Isn't that rather hard on God!" asked the minister.

"O, I hadn't thought of Him!" said the business man. No doubt the king of Syria was a wise commander and made good plans for his campaign. But there was one element which he did not take into account. He left God out! He had not thought of Him. He did not dream that God could do anything, that He would take any part in the struggle this people were making. Other men are doing the same thing continually. They go on forming their plans, laying out their schemes—but taking no account of God. They forget that He has anything to do with the management of this world, that He knows what they are planning, or that He can interfere if He will with their schemes and their movements. They forget that there is an EYE looking down upon them, an eye which sees all they do; that there is an EAR, bending low, which hears every word they speak, and that there is a HAND which can easily thwart and circumvent their shrewd designs. Most people live

just as if there were no God, as if they could do just as they please, and then they wonder why their plans miscarry. The prophet was the best friend and the best adviser the king had. By knowing the enemy's movements, he was able to inform him about them. He sent to the king again and again, warning him not to pass a certain place. There really are no secrets in this world. In war, commanders endeavor to keep their movements from being known by the enemy, and ofttimes they succeed. But there is a place where everything is known.

Nothing is hidden from the eye of God. We are told in the New Testament that the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation. Right here we have an illustration of this word. The Lord knew the plans of the king of Syria to entrap the king of Israel. He made known these plans to the prophet Elisha, and he in turn told the king of Israel of the ambuscade, in order that he might save himself from the danger. The Bible gives us many such warnings. In such and such paths it tells us it is not safe for us to go, for Satan walks there. Our own consciences also give us many a warning. There is a fable of a wonderful ring that a prince wore, which clasped his finger softly, when he went in right ways—but stung his flesh sharply, whenever he was in danger of going in some wrong path. That is what every tender conscience does. If only we heeded always the warnings of our conscience, we would never get into danger save when duty calls us, and then we would have divine protection, for where God sends us—He will take care of us. The king of Israel was wise enough to heed the counsel of Elisha—and thus avail himself of the information which was given to him concerning the movements of his enemy. He did not scout the warning nor sneer at the prophet's words as timid fears—and then go quietly into the trap. He saved himself by heeding the warning.

Too many people, however, disregard divine warnings of danger in this or that place. They do not believe what the Bible tells them. There are no enemies in the place pointed out—so they proudly say—or if there are, they are not afraid of them. So, disregarding the friendly warnings, they rush straight into danger. But the king of Israel was wiser. When the prophet told him that in this or that place the enemy was hidden, waiting to ensnare him—he avoided those places. He saved himself by keeping away from the peril. That is what we are to do when warned of spiritual danger. Has not God promised protection—that He Himself will be our keeper, and that no evil shall befall us? But it is only when we are walking in God's ways and obeying God's commands, that the promise avails. The divine way of delivering us from any danger—is by warning us of that danger—that we may avoid it. As soon as the king of Syria heard how his actions were being reported by the prophet, he determined to put an end to his opposition. He did not propose to be baffled and have his plans defeated by one man. He would have this man seized and brought as a prisoner to his camp. But men are very foolish—to try to fight against God. We are told in the Second Psalm, that when enemies plot against Him, the Lord, sitting in heaven, laughs at their efforts and has them in derision! The Bible is full of illustrations of this. His enemies killed Jesus and put Him into the tomb. Then they rolled a great stone to the door, sealed it, and had a guard of Roman soldiers sent to keep watch. They supposed they had put an end to Christ's work—but we know how God in heaven laughed at these vain attempts. It is insane folly—to try to outmatch God and defeat His purposes. Horses and chariots and great armies amount to nothing—when the Lord is on the field!

It was a serious condition of things which Elisha's servant found one morning when he arose. An armed host was encamping round the town! We may criticize this young man and blame him for being timid; but would not you have been frightened, too? We are all very much alike in our temper

and spirit. We have God’s promises assuring us of divine keeping—but these seem to make life very little safer for us. Let us try ourselves by the test to which we bring the prophet’s servant, and see if our faith is much better than his.

There are two kinds of courage: There is one kind that puts on a bold face and is brave even in the presence of danger, without any clear ground for the courage. But the prophet was brave in a different way. His courage was based upon the real protection of God. The true secret of confidence and calmness in danger—must always be the same—not in imagining that there is no danger—but in knowing that there is sufficient divine protection.

Jesus taught the lesson thus, "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world!" The great truth to be learned by all who would have true moral courage, is the reality of God’s keeping. We are told in one of the Psalms that the Lord is our keeper; then in another, that we may hide away in the secret place of the Most High and there abide safely under the wings of the Almighty. Men sleep in their camps in war-time, with armed enemies surrounding them, and are not afraid, for they know that watching sentinels form a complete circle and keep a sleepless guard about the camp in the hours of darkness. So in any dangers, we may know that we are safe—because God waits and watches and is keeping us. In answer to the prophet’s prayer, the young man’s eyes were opened so that he could see spiritual things. "Behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha!" The prophet’s prayer was not that God would send an army to guard him—but that the young man’s eyes might be opened to see the army that was already there. We cannot see angels encamping round our homes these nights, or hovering above our heads—but nevertheless they are watching and protecting us all the time. This glimpse is meant not for this one young man that one night—but for every young man on every night in every time of danger. If we could see spiritual things—we would behold such hosts about us every morning when we wake. Every child of God has a promise of angel protection—better still, divine protection. We cannot see Christ beside us—but He is always near—closer than breathing, nearer than hands and feet.

Saved from Famine

2 Kings 7:1-16 The city of Samaria was besieged. The famine was great. The people were suffering. The king blamed it all on Elisha and sought to kill him. Men often charge their troubles on God. They may be divine judgments; but if so, the reason for the judgments is to be sought for, in the sins of those on whom the judgments are falling.

Elisha told the king that the famine was about over. "Elisha said, Hear the word of Jehovah." It is always well to listen to the word of the Lord. He always has something to say to us, especially in time of trouble or perplexity. When we are in sorrow—He has something to say which will comfort our hearts, if only we will listen to it. When we are tempted and are about to sin—He has something to say which will save us if we heed His words. When we read what goes before Elisha’s answer, we get a specially important lesson here. The king had been blaming all the trouble of the famine on the Lord, and complaining that He was too slow in sending promised help or relief. "Stop," says the prophet, "and hear the word of the Lord." We should never be quick to blame God when any trouble is upon us, or when He seems to be slow in keeping His promises. We should learn to wait for the Lord. He knows best when to give the blessing we seek. We must not judge any unfinished work of the Lord. Today He may give pain or disappointment—but wait

until we see what He will give tomorrow.

Then Elisha foretold what change in the hard conditions in Samaria there would be, almost immediately. "Thus says Jehovah, Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel." The king was complaining bitterly because of the famine, and this is the answer of God to his angry complaint. Even while the words of unbelief were on his lips—the blessing of bread was at the very door. Tomorrow provisions would be abundant and cheap. We see how useless was the king's anxiety. The king of Samaria is now dead—but the lesson is for us. Do we ever get discouraged and fume and fret and grieve God by our complainings, when He leaves us without material help for a little time? We lose both faith and patience, because the help we need is not given instantly, or because the promise we find is not at once fulfilled. Faith is trusting—when we cannot see, believing God's promise—when it is not yet fulfilled. We ought therefore to be confident of blessing before it comes—if we have God's Word for it; and, no matter how long the delay—we should not be afraid.

We must notice here also that the king's unbelief and anger did not cause God to withhold His blessing. The king had tried to kill the prophet, as if he were the cause of the famine. He had spoken most bitterly, too, of God. But the answer to all this, was the announcement, "Tomorrow there shall be abundance of bread." There is great comfort in this. If our unbelief and sin shut the doors of God's kindness and cut off the flow of His mercies and favors—we would never get much of good from the divine fullness. But it is not thus that God treats us. He is patient with our impatience, ingratitude, and unbelief—and blesses us in spite of ourselves. But the prophet's words were not received with confidence. "The officer on whose arm the king was leaning said to the man of God—Look, even if the LORD should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?" There was a sneer as well as unbelief in the answer. The captain meant to say that such a thing was impossible. He made no account of the divine word spoken by God's prophet. He could see no way in which the thing could be done, and therefore refused to believe that it could be done.

We have many modern skeptics who are just as unreasonable. Indeed, they are more inexcusable, since now the evidences of God's power and grace are so much greater. They refuse to believe anything they cannot see or cannot understand. They will accept nothing as true—which cannot be accounted for on natural grounds. They ridicule prayer and say it is impossible that anyone hears requests made on the earth—or that they can be granted. They do not believe that God ever helps anybody bear a trouble, or sends relief to anyone in distress, or opens a way out of a difficulty. They sneer at all the old beliefs which Christians cherish, and tell you such things are impossible.

We should take a close look at this old-time skeptic, for he is a fair sample of his modern followers. These latter refuse to believe, though evidences are abundant. They will not believe in Christ, though the evidences of His life and death and resurrection are abundant and incontrovertible. They will not believe anything they cannot see or understand, though common life and their own experience are full of things they can neither see nor understand. The answer of Elisha to the king's attendant was startling. "Behold, you shall see it with your eyes—but shall not eat thereof." We have but to read on through a few verses, to find that this word of the prophet was actually fulfilled. The things God says He will do—He always does. The courtier saw the abundance of

food, saw the prophet's foretelling fulfilled—but while the starving people were eagerly taking possession of the provision God had given them, "the people trampled him in the gateway, and he died, just as the man of God had foretold!"

It is strikingly true that the same answer may be made to the modern skeptic. He also shall see the fulfillment of the divine promises and the Christian's hopes at which he sneers—but he shall have no share in the blessings. A man may make light of the cross of Christ and the salvation it brings—but when the day of judgment comes and all who have believed find shelter under it—he will find no place there for him. He shall see others saved—but he shall be left unsaved. A man may mock at the promises of God's Word, and laugh at the simplicity of those who trust in them; but the day will come when he shall see others realizing all the blessings of these promises, while there will be nothing in them for him! Unbelief may be fashionable, and skepticism may appear 'smart'—but there will come a time when the unbeliever and skeptic would give worlds for the Christian's hopes—when worlds could not buy them for him! We must not forget that there is an "afterward" for all who despise God's Word. In a strange way did the prophet's words come true. They were outcast men to whom it first became known. "There were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate—and they said one to another, Why sit here until we die?" The story is a striking one. Leprosy was a type of sin. These four men were shut out of the city and from association with other men. They were most wretched. The famine affected them, too. They were starving. If they stayed where they were—they would die. If they went into the city the famine was there—and they could only perish there. There was one place, however, where there was plenty of bread. The Syrians surrounded the city, and they had plenty of provision in abundance. True, they were enemies—but these lepers said they could do no more than kill them—and they would be no worse off than if they died of starvation, as they must do if they stayed where they were. Then there was a chance at least that the Syrians might spare them alive. So nothing could be lost—and much might be gained, they said, by going over to the Syrian camp. The lepers determined therefore to do this. They went, shrinking, fearing, and trembling—but when they got to the camp they found nobody there—and no danger. However, they did find provision in abundance. So their lives were saved. This story-parable needs no explanation. Unsaved sinners are in just such a state, as were these four lepers. They are not lepers only—but they are in the camp of death. If they stay where they are—they will surely perish. Their souls will starve. All round them, however, are those whom they look upon as enemies. The Church of Christ has its camps on every side. Here there is bread. At last, in their great need, they determine to go over to Christ's people. It cannot be any worse, they say, than staying where they are. "I can but perish—if I go." So, trembling, shrinking, they move toward Christ's camp, to find no danger, no enemy—but only blessing, food in abundance, garments and riches, all they need. So the story has its rich spiritual lessons. The Lord knows how to carry out His purposes of good. He always finds some way to defeat men's schemes. Here there was a siege surrounding the town, and there was no human hope that it could be broken. The Syrians were strong. The people within the city were hopeless. In some way the besieging army was made to hear what seemed to them the sound of an approaching army. "TheLord had caused the Arameans to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a great army." It was a panic, we say—but it was brought about not incidentally—but in some providential way, and had its place in God's plan for the lifting of the siege and the relief of the city. It is a wonderful comfort, to know that there are no chances even in the most perplexed days, with the worst confusion of events and circumstances. God knows what is coming; into His plan of love

and goodness every event fits, having its part in the working out of some great divine purpose.

We see, too, that God has many ways of defeating His enemies—and delivering His own people. He is not dependent on the largest guns or the best military strategy. In spiritual conflicts, our enemies often seem too strong for us. We can never overcome them by any strength of our own. In the open field they must defeat us. But let us remember always that God is on our side; the same God who made the panic here at Samaria and raised the siege—is watching over us, and by a breath can scatter the hosts of foes that encircle us—and give us deliverance. We need but to stand and wait—when enclosed by such circumstances. God is on our side; He is our Leader, and through Him victory will always in the end come to those who are faithful.

"Then they said one to another: We're not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us. Let's go at once and report this to the royal palace." They were right about it, too. They would have acted very selfishly—if they had eaten all they wanted and packed up for themselves all the valuables they could carry away. The people in the city were famishing and did not know that the enemy was gone and that abundant provision was lying close to the walls. Only these four lepers knew it, and they were bound by all the laws of humanity to make it known.

There is a great lesson here which should be remembered. Good things which fall to our lot—we should not grasp and enjoy selfishly. Nothing is more beautiful in a child, than the desire that others shall share whatever little luxury or pleasure it may have. The Boy Joash Made King

2 Kings 11:1-12

It is interesting to study and think of the influences that combine in the making of any man. When we begin to go over the story of our ancestors, we soon lose ourselves in the vast number of them—parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and so on, running back for generations. Yet every one of these passed down to us something which mingles in our blood and in our brains. We cannot choose our ancestors as we may choose our companions, and therefore in a certain sense cannot be held responsible for the make-up of our lives from this source.

Yet, after all, we are responsible, for the Bible tells us how we may bring heaven down into our lives, to change the old nature into new divine beauty. Men sometimes blame heredity when their life has gone wrong. "I could not help doing this or that. It came down in the tides of my blood, from my great-grandfather." Yes; but here is Christ, ready and able to come into your heart and change all this bad heredity—into good grace. That is what the doctrine of new birth, the birth from above, means.

We are to study Joash, the boy king. What kind of ancestors had he? They could scarcely have been worse than they were. His grandmother was Athaliah, and there was nothing good in her that we are told of. Ahab and Jezebel were his great-grandparents, and history tells us of few worse people than they were. There certainly was bad blood enough in the veins of the boy king—to have foredoomed him to a life of evil. His own father, too, was a wicked king. The story of his life is told in a sentence; "He walked in the way of the house of Ahab . . . for he was the son-in-law of the house of Ahab. " With such an ancestry—what sort of character would one naturally have expected in Joash, the boy king? Yet he disappoints our fears. He seems to have had, at least in his early years, no inclination toward the wickedness of those who had gone before him. He led in

noble reforms, and brought the people back to God.

Athaliah wished to reign, and, that there might be no rival claimant to the throne, she determined to slay all the royal children. We are reminded of the cruelty of Herod in slaying the infants in Bethlehem in order to make sure of destroying the newborn King of the Jews. But, like Herod's, Athaliah's terrible massacre failed of its intention. It was necessary that the infant prince should live, in order that there might be no break in the line of David, for of that line the Messiah must come. No purpose of God can fail. He knows how to deliver His children from peril. We think of the way Moses was preserved for his great mission, and Jesus for His work as the Redeemer. In the case of Joash, the hands to help carry out the divine purpose, were those of the good priest and his wife. The boy was snatched up in the moment of peril, rescued from death, and hidden away in some obscure apartment of the temple. It was easy to hide him in this way, for there were many rooms in the holy house. Besides, the temple had long been neglected and had also been broken up. For seven years the child was concealed there, and most tenderly sheltered and nourished. No doubt he was well trained, too, and carefully taught the laws of his nation. The protection of this child was exceptional. He was specially dear to God, because of the place he held in the line of the divine promise. Yet every Christian is a child of providence. The children's angels have instant access into the divine presence whenever they fly to heaven on any errand in behalf of those for whom they are caring. When God has a plan in the future of any life—He takes care that the man is preserved and trained, and at the right time led forth ready for its mission.

It was a great day in Jerusalem when the boy Joash was brought out and crowned as king. The secret of the temple had been well kept. Athaliah had no suspicion that a member of the royal family was still alive and in preparation for reigning. She was taken utterly by surprise, when she heard the people crying, "God save the king!" The Lord laughs at men's plots and schemes to defy or overthrow His purposes. Athaliah thought that her place on the throne was safe, that God had been driven from His kingdom, and that her heathen religion now had no opposition. But when she rushed to the temple and saw the boy standing there, wearing the crown, and surrounded by the guards, she was dismayed and could only cry out, "Treason, treason!" But it was not treason—it was the triumph of right against wrong, the defeat of conspiracy and plotting. She had tried to thwart God—and God had thwarted her. The chronicles of those days, seem to be only a record of sin, of departure from God, of plot and intrigue, of blood and shame. Why should we linger on these painful stories? What help can come to us from such Bible study as this? The answer is, that even in the chapters which tell us these tragic things, if we read them closely, intelligently, and through to the end—we can see the hand of God moving, restraining, checking, overruling.

Two things we may note specially: For one thing—we see that sin cannot prosper. For a time sin may seem to succeed, winning its victories, overthrowing the good, setting up its throne. But we need only to wait a little while—to see failure and ruin as the final outcome of whatever is evil. We need never fret when wrong seems to prosper for a time, when wicked men seem to succeed. We have only to wait for God, and at the end we shall find that sin is always terrible failure and always brings irreparable ruin. "Though the mills of God grind slowly—yet they grind exceedingly small."

Another thing we learn from these Bible narratives is that through all the records of men's crime and sin—God's purposes of good and blessing for His people go on unchecked and undefeated. It may not be easy to continue optimistic when we read the chronicles of these ancient kingdoms.

But there is a white line running through all the disheartening history. God is preparing the world for the coming of Christ. The divine promise is never overlooked. God’s hand is never off the current of events for a moment, even at most tragic moments. We must read the story, too, remembering that it is only part of one great cycle which stretches to Calvary. God is redeeming His people.

We should interpret the history of our own times in the same way. God is still and always on the field. Evil is not on the throne. It is not chaos we see as we look out on the events of the world as they are chronicled in our morning newspaper. The divine purpose runs through all the story. Out of all that seems evil—good will surely come. God is leading the world to something better—to righteousness, to truth, to holiness!

Joash Repairs the Temple

2 Kings 12:1-15

Joash was only seven years old when he was brought out from his place of concealment in the temple and crowned as king. It is evident that the influence of the good priest Jehoiada and his wife, was an important factor in the reign of Joash—so long as they lived. The record is: "Joash did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him." After that, he lost much of his earnestness and energy in doing good. A great many people are dependent for their better moods and for whatever is really beautiful and noble in them—on the influence of human friends. There are children who do well while their parents are living—but who, when these are gone, drift out into the world. Many a young man’s departure from God, dates from the day when he stood by the coffin of his father or mother. It is important that we seek always to keep ourselves under the most wholesome human influence possible, for our character takes its color largely from that which touches it. But we should make sure always, that we are also under higher influence than the human, so that when the human force is gone—the divine may abide. The great work of Joash—was his repairing and restoring of the temple. This sacred building had been not only neglected during the days of the kings before Joash—but it had been robbed of its treasures and left in ruins! For seven years Athaliah had reigned—the only woman who ever sat on the throne of David. During that time religious worship was entirely abandoned. The very building itself was desecrated and broken up. Through the influence of Jehoiada, Joash early in his reign entered upon the work of the repairing of this sacred building. The work of restoration was committed to the priests. They were to use all the holy gifts, consecrated to religious service, in the good work. They were also bidden to hasten the matter. With this money they were to repair the breaches of the house, mend the broken walls, replace the beams, and put the sacred buildings in proper condition. Some time had now passed since this order was given, and the work had not yet been done. No reason is given for the failure. We are merely told that the priests and Levites did not hasten the work. They were indifferent to it. There is no intimation that there was any dishonesty on the part of the men. Perhaps the only reason was lack of interest. The king called the priests, saying, "Why haven’t you repaired the breaches of the house?" He chided them with their delay and lack of interest, and demanded of them why it was. God would keep us active and diligent in all our work. It is a sin to neglect any duty. We grieve Christ when we loiter at our tasks. Promptness is half of obedience. Children should be taught early the duty of swiftness and alacrity in all their work. Loitering is sin. It takes out of life much of its power for

good. A new plan for raising money was now adopted. Instead of the priests going about the country asking men for gifts, a chest was made and set beside the altar. A hole was made in the top of the chest, into which money should be dropped. The chest was kept locked, and the people were asked to put their offerings into it. In this way, an entire separation was made between the gifts meant for the priests' own use—and the offerings made for the restoration of the temple. This gave definiteness to the giving—each offerer was sure that the money would be used for the purpose for which he gave it. The contribution box should always be near the altar, so that when we come to pray we may also give. The angel told Cornelius that his alms as well as his prayers had gone up before God. We need to have both praying and giving in our devotions. There should be no religious service without an opportunity for an offering to God. Giving opens the hand, while praying opens the heart. "It is more blessed to give—than to receive;" so he who receives only and does not give—misses the better part of the divine blessing. We need the contribution box in our Christian life as well as the Bible, the hymn-book, and the altar of prayer.

Evidently the giving became very enthusiastic. In Chronicles we are told that "All the officials and all the people brought their contributions gladly, dropping them into the chest until it was full." All the people gave. This is one lesson we should get here. The princes and people alike came to the contribution box with their offerings. Everybody ought to give to the Lord. The poorest cannot afford to miss the blessing of giving. The humblest have their share of the responsibility of the work. The richest and greatest are not exempt from the obligation, and need the blessing which comes to those who are ready to work with God.

There is a suggestion, too, in the way the people gave. No one knew what another put into the box. Thus even the poorest, who could give the least, would not feel ashamed of the smallness of what they could give. The money was given to the Lord, and He knew what each person gave, and He understood the circumstances of each one. It is very important in all of our Christian life and service—that we give or do, not to be seen of men—but only for God's eye. Jenny Lind used to say, "I sing to God." She forgot the throngs who were listening to her, and thought only of God.

Another point to be noticed here is that the people gave gladly. There was no reluctant giving, no giving merely through a sense of duty, without heartiness. Everybody gave cheerfully, enthusiastically, joyfully. Paul tells us that the Lord loves a cheerful giver, and it has been noted that the word rendered cheerful in Paul's phrase, means hilarious—God loves a hilarious giver. Joy ought to be the incense rising from the altar—when our gifts are laid there for God. He may use what men give reluctantly or grudgingly, and it may be made to do good to others, to advance the Lord's cause; but the giver gets no blessing from it. It is only what we give or do with joy—which leaves blessings in our own hearts. The people responded so generously—that the chest was soon full, and then the king's officers opened it, counted the money, and put it up in bags. We get a suggestion here on the importance of honest business methods in the Lord's work—as well as in the common affairs of life. Those who are called to take charge of money in connection with God's Church, should be exceedingly careful that every penny is accounted for. Treasurers in Mission Boards and Christian Endeavor Societies should realize their responsibility and should keep most sacred charge of all money entrusted to them.

Only the other day a treasurer of a young people's society, scarcely more than a boy, was called upon to pay out the money which had been collected and placed in his hands, and it was

discovered that it had been used by him in some affairs of his own and could not be replaced. The amount was not large in this case, and friends quickly made it good; but the young treasurer was guilty of embezzlement of funds which belonged to God. His error was a most unhappy experience in his life. Whether it will prove a beneficial lesson to him—or the beginning of a career of careless money dealing, cannot now be known. At last the work of repair and restoration began and went on vigorously and enthusiastically. In Chronicles the language is, "So the workmen wrought, and the work of repairing went forward in their hands, and they set up the house of God in its state, and strengthened it." The Death of Elisha 2 Kings 13:14-25 The story of Elisha has a fine charm about it. It contrasts with the story of Elijah. The men widely differed in their personal character, and the manner of their work differed quite as widely. We come now to the close of Elisha's ministry. The most useful life must come to an end. It is interesting while we stand beside this old prophet's deathbed, to think of all that he had been to the country in which he lived. We saw him first as a young farmer, plowing in the fields one day, when suddenly behind him came the prophet Elijah in shaggy garments and threw over his shoulders a sheepskin cloak. Thus the young farmer was called to the ministry, as we would say. From that time on, his life was given up to God and God's service—for a while as the attendant and helper of Elijah—and then as the great prophet of Israel. He was a man of gentle mood and kindly spirit. His ministry was full of blessings. We have but a few incidents of it recorded—but these show us the spirit of the man. The friend of the poor and the oppressed, he was also the counselor and helper of kings.

There is no time when a man's life and work can be seen quite so truly—as from amid the shadows of his last hours. Then prejudices give way to honest appreciation, enmity dissolves in kindly sentiment, and criticism is changed to ungrudged commendation. We should live so that when the end of our life comes—the world may speak approvingly of us. In order to do this—we must live faithfully along the years—unselfishly, purely, thoughtfully. The incident in one of Elisha's last days, recorded in our passage, is peculiarly interesting. The king came down to see the old minister. Joash knew well the value of the counsel of the old prophet. He was now in much trouble with enemies who were pressing upon him. He needed Elisha's wisdom. Perhaps this was why he came, rather than merely to pay tribute at the deathbed of the godly man. The prophet could not come to him any more—and the king came to him with his questions, his perplexities, his anxieties, to get advice. It is a great thing to be set apart as a counselor and friend, one to whom others may come with their needs, their sorrows, their sins, and their troubles. The king's tribute to the prophet was very beautiful. He spoke of him as his father, and indeed Elisha had been a father to him. He was an affectionate man and, no doubt, had shown all of a father's interest in the king. He spoke of him also as "the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof." This was a tribute to the value of Elisha as a defender of the nation. It did not mean that the prophet had been a leader of victorious armies, for he never was so employed—he had not been a soldier—but that his wisdom, counsel, and love had been to the king of even greater value—than his armies had been. Besides, the prophet's power with God—had brought divine help to the nation in time of war. Godly men are always a blessing to a community and to a country. Indeed, the world does not know the value of the saints who live in it, ofttimes neglected, overlooked, unrecognized, and yet the real deliverers and defenders of the people.

Elisha improved the occasion of the king's coming to see him, to say some earnest words to him. He wished to teach him a lesson which might influence his course as a king. It was an ancient

custom to throw a spear or shoot an arrow into a country which an army was about to invade. Thus it is said that Alexander the Great, arriving on the coasts of Iona, threw a spear into the country of the Persians which lay before him. This was a formal declaration of war against Persia. Marcus Aurelius, when leaving Rome to go on one of his campaigns, performed a final sacrifice, and then, dipping a spear point into the blood of the sacrifice, he hurled it in the direction of the enemy. This was in token of the war he was about to begin. That this custom prevailed at the time of Elisha and the kings of Israel, this incident of the arrows would seem to indicate. The king was bidden to draw the bow with his own hand. This showed that he was to wage the war. The battle was to be fought by him. The prophet then put his hand upon the king's. This signified that the Lord, whose representative Elisha was—would fight with the king in the battle against his enemies.

We are beset with enemies. Whatever we may say about the barbarity of war, there is no question but that every Christian is called to be a soldier and must fight even until death. Every blessing has to be won in contest. This incident has its lesson for us in our spiritual warfare. We should cast the arrow of God toward every enemy that stands before us—there should be no peace made with sin, no truce even with wickedness. Our own hand must be upon the bow, for we must fight our own battles. Even God will not fight for us while we lie supinely at our ease. He does not fight for us—but He will fight with us. We are bidden to be strong in the Lord. We are assured that God will bruise Satan under our feet. While the Lord does the bruising, it must be under our tread. The Lord wants strenuousness and thoroughness in our warfare against spiritual enemies. The prophet taught his lesson in dramatic way.

He bade the king to open the window eastward, toward Syria, and to shoot. "The Lord's arrow of victory," said the prophet. Then he bade the king gather up his arrows and smite upon the ground. The king obeyed—but smote only three times. Elisha was angry and chided the king with his lack of earnestness and enthusiasm. The war against the Syrians was not to be a partial one—but should be waged until the victory was complete and the enemies were entirely subdued. This was God's plan for the war, which Joash was commanded to begin. This was what God meant him to do. The lesson is also for us. We should not fight any spiritual battle languidly. We should never make a compromise with sin in any form. We should smite our enemies until they are consumed. The trouble in the wars of God's people in Canaan, was that they did not utterly exterminate their enemies. They left little handfuls of them here and there, parts of tribes and families, sometimes making alliances with them. The result was that these enemies became the plague of God's people in after days. We must do thorough work in our battle with temptation and sin!

"You should have smitten five or six times," said the prophet. The incident of the arrows, was not a mere bit of play. Without knowing it, the king was being tested. The prophet's anger was not unreasonable. The test had not been an arbitrary one. By the way the king smote with the arrows—he showed the kind of man he was. He smote indolently, carelessly, only three times. He showed no enthusiasm, no energy. His act was the tell-tale of his character. He did everything in the same way: half-heartedly, and not thoroughly. If he had smitten with all his might and persistently, he would have shown himself to be a man of unconquerable spirit, doing his work with energy. As it was, he had proved himself to be unequal to the responsibility laid upon htm. Instead of smiting the Syrians until he had consumed them—he would gain only three slight victories over them and then let them go.

We are interested in this because it teaches us important lessons. Without being conscious of it—we are always revealing our character by little things in our conduct and behavior. Even in his play, a child shows the quality of his spirit and tells whether he is going to be a man of persistence and courage—or indolent, easily satisfied, half-hearted. Wellington said the battle of Waterloo was won at Eton. He meant that in the games and plays of his school days—he had learned the secret of the power which made him a general. Children cannot be too careful in forming their early habits. These habits will almost certainly control the whole life.

Captivity of the Ten Northern Tribes

2 Kings 17:6-18 The story of the ten tribes from the beginning, was a story of mistake and disloyalty. There was a divine promise to Jeroboam that if he would be true to the Lord, that blessing would follow him. "It shall be, if you will hearken unto all that I command you, and will walk in My ways, and do that which is right in My eyes, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as David My servant did; that I will be with you, and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto you." But Jeroboam paid no heed to the divine Word. Almost immediately after the founding of his kingdom, he set up places of worship at two points in his kingdom, with calves of gold and priests, and established a national feast, that his people might be drawn away from the worship at Jerusalem. Thus at the very beginning the new kingdom, was characterized by a departure from God.

Starting thus in an open apostasy from God, the history of the nation was from beginning to end—a continuity of idolatry and all evil. There were no bright spots in it. The Southern kingdom of Judah had its wicked kings and its periods of evil—but the Northern Kingdom had nothing but sin in its story! In all its career—its course was downward. It had nineteen kings—but not one of them was a godly man. At last the end came. The king of Assyria captured Samaria, and carried Israel away. This was the end of the Ten Tribes, which are sometimes called the "lost tribes." Doubtless many of them lost their nationality by marriage with the heathen. Some of the better ones, no doubt, joined the Jews who returned to Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehemiah. The ten tribes had warnings enough—but they disregarded them. Opportunities for salvation came, even down to the very last—but the condition always was repentance and a return to God—and the people would not accept the condition. So they went on from bad to worse—and at last were destroyed. They fell into the hands of their enemies, and were carried away as captives.

While this story is before us, we may think of its parallel in the history of every one who persists in unbelief and rejection of Christ. Sin puts yokes upon men’s necks, and chains upon their limbs—binding them hand and foot and carrying them away into hopeless bondage. The fatal end of such sinning, is illustrated in this carrying away of Israel. "There is no danger in my case," says one; "I mean to be a Christian by and by—after I have had a good time for a while." But meanwhile the little threads of careless habit, of sinful neglect, of pleasant wrong-doing, are weaving themselves into cords, and the cords are growing into cables! A sailor reported to the captain during a storm, that the water was gaining upon the vessel. The captain drove him away with angry words—he was too busy to give attention to the sailor’s report. Again and again the warning was given, and each time it was unheeded. At last the barge was sinking and the men were ordered to the life-boat. There was not a moment to spare. A cable bound the boat to the barge, and the captain took his knife to cut it; but as he turned to do this his face turned pale with

horror—the cable was an iron chain! This is the story of thousands of lives. Men do not know until the last moment, when it is too late, that they are hopeless captives, passing to their doom in chains which they cannot break. The time to throw off such chains—the only time when it is possible to do so—is before they grow into strength. The historian goes back and tells us the reason for the pitiful doom that befell these tribes. "The children of Israel did secretly things that were not right against the Lord." Secret sins bring ruin—just as surely as sins that are open! Of course, one may keep a fair reputation among men, when committing only secret sins, wearing the white garments of a fair reputation ,while his inner life is spotted. But the sins themselves which are thus kept hidden—work their ruin just as completely and inevitably as if they were open, public sins!

We must mark that it was sin which brought about this doom on the ten tribes. The historian may explain in natural ways, the cause of the downfall of the kingdom. But whatever the political or other reasons may have been—the real reason was sin. Sin always brings calamity! Here is a man who grew up in a gentle, beautiful home. He had brightest prospects, finest opportunities. He was well taught, nurtured in an atmosphere of holiness, of purity, of prayer. Today he is a criminal, wearing chains, sentenced to twenty years for homicide. It is not an accident, a piece of 'bad luck," that he is now where he is. All this penalty came for his sinning against the Lord. The homicide was not the first sin—it was the end of a long series which probably began in a boy's little disobedience to his mother one day. A definite form is given to the charge against these tribes. "They served idols." Not only did they turn away from their own God—but they turned also after the gods of the heathen. It is always so. Idolatry is not an extinct form of evil. We may not worship idols made of stone or wood—but if we leave the true God—we are worshiping some idol. We cannot keep our hearts empty. If God is not in them, some other god is in His place. These people, instead of following God and His ways, followed the ways of the heathen round about them.

We need to learn well, the lesson against conforming to the world. Many Christian people seem to be on astonishingly familiar terms with this world. They are not extreme or puritanical Christians. They have been emancipated from the bondage of the old-time, strict Church life, so they boast. Yes, yes—emancipation, is it? So, no doubt, the Israelites talked—as they indulged their heathen liberties. They were liberal Hebrews—but what came of their liberty in the end?

They were not left without warning. The narrator tells us that the Lord had testified unto them by the hand of every prophet, saying, "Turn from your evil ways!" They could not say they had not been warned of the danger toward which they were drifting. Prophet after prophet had come and with solemn words and severe threatenings, declared to them God's will, outlining to them the outcome of their course, unless they would turn away from it. Some of the noblest and most faithful prophets who ever spoke to men for God, delivered their fearless messages to the kings and people of this nation. One of these was Elijah, who thundered his stern warnings in the days of Ahab. Another was Elisha, whose ministry was long-continued and was faithful and almost Christlike in its tenderness.

God never fails to warn them and tell them of the way of safety. But men may perish in spite of the divine faithfulness. Many have been lost in the midst of holiest privileges. There is only one way of escaping sin's penalties—the sinner must turn from his evil course—and walk in the paths of God's commandments. No mere sentimental or emotional turning to God avails. The charge is

clearly made, that the people persistently refused to obey God’s commandments. "They would not hear—but hardened their necks!" That is always the story. Men are not lost, because of any lack of goodness and mercy in God Himself. People sometimes say, "God is too good to punish sinners." Very true, in a sense. God does not desire to punish. But men persist in their sins.

We need not think of God as being angry as men are; that is, of raving in fury. Yet God is angry with sin and cannot endure it. "Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of His sight!" After all the pleadings and warnings, all that the divine love could do—this was the end. The same sad story happens in many a home. Father love or mother love never can save a child from sin—if the child persists in his evil way. God cannot lift an impenitent sinner into the holiness of the heavenly kingdom, unless the sinner repents. The Assyrian Invasion of Judah 2 Kings 19:20-22, 2 Kings 19:28-37 In the opening portion of this chapter there is an interesting incident of a letter received by Hezekiah from his enemy, the king of Assyria. The letter was full of threatenings and insults, designed to terrify Hezekiah and lead him to yield up the city.

"Ha!" said the insulting letter, "do you know what I have done to the other countries and cities which have been in my way? Do you suppose you can withstand my army which has swept victoriously and resistlessly over all lands? The gods of those nations have not been able to deliver their people from me, and do you imagine that your God can deliver you?"

We are told that when Hezekiah had received this letter and read it, he took it into the temple and spread it out before the Lord. That was a beautiful thing to do. That is what faith should always do with any difficulty or perplexity—take it to the Lord in prayer. We may one day receive a letter which will trouble us and which we do not know how to answer. It may tell us of some danger or some sorrow. It may be from an enemy and be full of unkind words. Or it may cause us perplexities in some other way. Now, the best thing to do with this letter—is to spread it out before the Lord. We cannot answer it ourselves. We cannot defend ourselves against the danger, nor can we solve the perplexity; but God can take care of the matter, whatever it is.

Too often we may try to handle our own difficulties and to unravel with our own hands, the tangles which we find. We would better put them all into the hands of the wise Master, and keep our own hands off! Hezekiah prayed over this letter, asking God to bend His ear to listen and open His eyes to see. Then he besought God to interpose for His own honor and glory, that the Assyrian’s challenge might be taken up and that all the nations might learn that Jehovah was the only true God. The conduct of Hezekiah in this case illustrates well a counsel of Paul’s in one of his Epistles. "In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus."

Prayer is heard by God—that is one great lesson. We may safely lay all the interests of our life, all our dangers, difficulties, sorrows, and losses before God in prayer. The surest weapon we can use against anyone who is trying to hurt us, is to pray against him—not bitterly nor with resentment—but by laying all the hurt and danger before God, that He may take care of our interests for His own name’s sake.

There is proof here that Hezekiah’s committing of the grievous trouble to the Lord was not in vain. Isaiah sent to the king this message. "Thus says Jehovah, the God of Israel, Whereas you have

prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Syria, I have heard you." It is a great comfort to us to know that God has an interest in our affairs, that we may consult Him about them.

It is good to know, what God thinks of the things that fret us. Sometimes people imagine that they are being wronged and persecuted, when in reality it is their own fault. By their own irascible temper or by their own selfishness or willfulness they bring upon themselves the ill-will or the unkindness of others. In the Beatitudes the Master was careful to say that it is when we are persecuted for righteousness sake—that is, for being godly and doing good—that blessing is promised. It is when men speak evil falsely against us, that the divine favor is pledged to us. Some people deserve injury and hurt from others; sometimes persecution is not because we are good—but is righteous punishment for evil doing. The Lord does not take our part against those who are seeking our hurt—unless we are blameless. We cannot appeal to Him for help to cover up our sins or deliver ns from them. The little kingdom of Judah had no power of its own to make it secure or self-confident. In truth, it could not in its own strength stand against great and proud Assyria. But God was its refuge and strength. Omnipotence was encircling it, like horses and chariots of fire encamping on every side. Thus surrounded, thus sheltered in God, the kingdom could easily rejoice in confidence, for God would care for it.

Every Christian has the eternal God for a refuge. He can hide away in the secret place of the Most High, and laugh at every danger. One of the most wonderful words of the Bible, is that in which Paul says of Christians, "Your life is hid with Christ in God." Truly, we can laugh at danger and at all enmity—if we are hid in such a strong castle. We can look out at our windows and shake our head at the puny powers of evil which taunt us and threaten us. "The virgin daughter of Zion has despised you and laughed you to scorn," said the Lord to Sennacherib; "the daughter of Jerusalem has shaken her head at you." The words tell of the confidence which even the weakest child of God may have in the face of the haughtiest enemy, when sheltered by divine love and power. The Assyrian king had defied Hezekiah and spoken contemptuously of his small resources of strength. "Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands." The Lord answers, "Whom have you defied and blasphemed? It is a wonderful quality of divine love—that it puts itself in the place of those it loves. He who harms a child of God—smites God in the face! He who taunts a Christian for righteousness, taunts God. He who does any unkindness to one who belongs to Christ, treats God Himself unkindly. We have this taught very beautifully in the New Testament in the Lord’s parable of the judgment, where we are told that he who gives food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, and who shows mercy and pity to the sick, the stranger, the prisoner—is showing the same kindness to Christ Himself! While he who passes by the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, and the stranger without helping them—is passing by the Lord Christ Himself!

"That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies!" But we need not worry ourselves over the question whether this angel was. God uses all things as His messengers, for the earth is His and the fullness thereof.

Returning from Captivity

Ezra 1:1-11 But little is known concerning the history of the people during the seventy years except what we gather from the allusions of the prophets of that period. We know, however, that under God’s providence the captivity wrought great good to the Jews. By severe discipline, they

were cured forever of idolatry. It has been noted as a remarkable fact, almost, if not altogether, without parallel, that the Jewish nation survived such a dislocation and dissolution of all local and social bonds as the captivity produced. One reason for this was the religious faith that bound them together. Besides, through all their humiliating experiences the hope of a return to their own land, according to their prophets, lived unquenchable in their hearts. A still further reason is found in the fact that the holy seed was in this nation, and it was therefore the object of special divine care. It is remarkable how even the genealogies of families were sacredly kept during the captivity. When it is remembered that the line of the Messiah ran through the tribe of Judah, the importance of this is obvious. The returning of the Jews, was not an accident in history. The Lord's hand was in it: "That the word of Jehovah . . . might be accomplished, Jehovah stirred up the spirit of Cyrus." God never forgets a promise. When the end of the seventy years drew near He set in motion providential movements which prepared the way for the return of the people. Not a jot or tittle of anything that God has ever spoken, can fail of fulfillment. Any word of His that we find anywhere in the Scriptures we may grasp and trust, knowing that He will make it good.

Notice the way the Lord brought about this return of His people. "Jehovah stirred up the spirit of Cyrus." God can always find some way to reach men's hearts. It may be remembered that Daniel was still living and stood high in the government. Possibly it was through his intercession that the attention of Cyrus was drawn to the Jews in their captivity. Cyrus was a Gentile—but God's dominion is not confined to His own people. His authority extends everywhere. Heathen nations are under His sway. He uses all the powers of the world for the carrying out of His own plans. Men come on the stage of action and carry out their own little ambitions, with no thought of doing anything for the Lord, unconscious that what they do is in any sense a fulfillment of a divine purpose. Yet without knowing it, they are really helping to execute plans of God made long before they were born. It is a comfort to us to know that the divine purposes are being carried out in all the world's life. Even wicked men's devices which appear to be destructive to the Church, are overruled to the fulfillment of God's purposes of love.

Cyrus did much to open the way for the people of Israel to return to their own land. He sent forth the proclamation, "All of you who are his people may return to Jerusalem in Judah to rebuild this Temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, who lives in Jerusalem. And may your God be with you!" The proclamation was addressed to all the Jews who were in the realm. All who would, were invited to go to Jerusalem to help in the work—but there was no compulsion. There is another temple to be built for the Lord, and again builders are wanted. The proclamation comes now not from a heathen king—but from Jesus Christ Himself. Every one is invited to come and take part in this great work. The poorest and the smallest can do something. The temple at Jerusalem on which these builders wrought has long since perished. But the temple on which God wants us to build shall stand forever, and everything anyone may do on this building shall be eternal. But how can we build on the walls of the heavenly temple? By doing all we can in this world for Christ. Our own lives are parts of the temple, and we may seek to have our characters made good and holy. Then we can strive to make other lives better, to bring other people to Christ, and to help build up in them a likeness to the Lord Jesus. The smallest things that we can do for Christ shall be like stones laid on the walls of Christ's house, which is rising within the veil, like ornaments—little touches of beauty on some part of the glorious building.

Cyrus became enthusiastic in his interest in the return of the Jews. He even sought to get his own people to help the captives in this. "Those who live in any place where Jewish survivors are found should contribute toward their expenses by supplying them with silver and gold, supplies for the journey, and livestock, as well as a freewill offering for the Temple of God in Jerusalem." There was opportunity for everybody to do something. Some of the people would work on the walls and some of them would help by giving money. There always are these two ways of doing our part in the building of God's temple. Everybody had a share in this work.

Only a certain number of the people volunteered to return to Jerusalem—but many others encouraged and aided them. "And all their neighbors assisted by giving them vessels of silver and gold, supplies for the journey, and livestock. They gave them many choice gifts in addition to all the freewill offerings." The people became enthusiastic. When it was known that certain people were to return to rebuild the temple, there sprang up in many hearts the enthusiastic desire to assist. God influences even worldly men, to help His own people in their work for Him. All the money in the world is the Lord's, and He can get it when He needs it. There is a pleasant suggestion also in the words, "strengthened their hands." They were encouraged by the kindness of their neighbors. If we cannot ourselves do much for the cause of Christ, even our little gifts encourage those who are carrying the heavy burdens. If we cannot give money, we can at least give cheer, prayer, sympathy; and ofttimes such help strengthens men's hands even more than money would do.

One other notable thing Cyrus did. Nebuchadnezzar had taken away from Jerusalem the holy vessels of the temple. "King Cyrus himself brought out the valuable items which King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the LORD's Temple in Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his own gods." It was not the fault of Cyrus that these vessels had been brought to Babylon and profaned by being used in idol temples. But he found the vessels there, and now it would have been his fault if they had been left there. So he quickly provided for their return to their own place. As we go on our way through life, we continually come upon evils that other people have started. We are not responsible for the beginning of these evils—but if we let them go on and do nothing to check them—we will be responsible for their continuance. It is our duty to undo every wrong wherever we find it. If there are wrong methods in vogue in the business in which we become a sharer, we must instantly correct them.

Rebuilding the Temple Ezra 3:10-32; Ezra 4:1-5 The story of the rebuilding of the temple is very interesting. There was much enthusiasm in the hearts of the people as they began it. The temple was sacred in the eyes and thoughts of all devout Jews. Its ruin and desolation touched every heart with feelings of sadness, and the opportunity of doing even the smallest thing toward its rebuilding gave great joy. Every one had some share in the work. Some were cutting down trees away in the forests of Lebanon. Some were bringing the timber in rafts down the seacoast. Some were dragging great beams up from Joppa to Jerusalem. Some were working in the quarries, getting out new stones for the walls. Others were gathering out of the ruins the old stones which had belonged to Solomon's temple. Others were clearing up the rubbish, so that the building might begin. At last the foundations were laid, and the holy house began to rise. The work which these builders did was the rebuilding of a temple, once beautiful and glorious, which had been destroyed. The fire had swept over it, and all its splendor lay in ruins. Now it was to be rebuilt, that again God might be worshiped in its holy place. There is a great deal of rebuilding to be done in

this world. Human lives marred by sin—are temples of God in ruins. We all have the privilege, if we will accept it, of helping to restore ruined spiritual temples. The work of rebuilding the temple, was one of great joy to the people. They had come back from captivity with gladness, full of patriotic enthusiasm, and rejoiced at the privilege of restoring God's house to something of its former beauty. "All the people shouted . . . because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid." That was a great day. "While the builders wrought on the walls the priests and the Levites sang." In doing so they not only praised God—but also cheered and encouraged the workmen. There is always a place in God's house for those who can sing. We should sing as we work; that is, we should work cheerfully and with praising heart.

It was said of a great artist that he carried a lyre in his hand as he wrought on his canvas. The music inspired him for his art. Those who can sing have a special mission in cheering and encouraging others as well as themselves. Music inspires us, quickens our pulses, makes us rejoice. Armies march better and fight better—when bands of music are playing. Christian song has a wondrous power in inspiring to courage and heroism. David's harp drove away Saul's insanity, and music has been driving away many ugly moods and bitter passions ever since. Songs breaking upon despairing hearts—have saved men and women from suicide.

People who can sing have a gift by which they can do great service for Christ. They can go in little companies and sing in prisons or in hospitals or asylums, and their songs will give cheer and courage, and perhaps carry a thought of God's love to sad, penitent, and weary hearts. They can sing in sick-rooms, and the sweet notes will be like angel voices. They can sing in their own homes as they work, cheering weary ones beside them. The ministry of consecrated song is a wonderful one, and leaves untold joy and blessing in the world.

There is a charm about first things—which is lacking in things that come after. There is never quite such a home to us as the home of our childhood. There is never any other Church with which we may be connected that is quite so dear to our hearts—as the Church where we first were saved. These older men did not find in the new building, the beauty of the former one. "Many of the . . . men, who had seen the first house , . . wept." They wept because they thought the new temple could not be so beautiful as the old one had been. It was natural for them to feel so, and yet we cannot praise their conduct.

There are some people who always find the discouraging side of life, not the happy, cheerful side. Their eyes seem to have a peculiar faculty for seeing defects, blemishes, flaws, and faults. This is a very unhappy peculiarity. These people miss the lovely features in every landscape, in every garden spot, in every bright scene. Where others see roses—they see only thorns. While others are filled with rapture—they go about in gloom. While others sing—they murmur and complain. The world is all wrong for them. Then not only do they spoil life for themselves by this pessimistic way of seeing things—but they spoil it for others. Instead of adding to the happiness of those about them—they mar their pleasure. Anyone who has fallen into this miserable habit—should instantly and determinedly begin to get away from it! It is worth a fortune to be able to see all life—through happy cheerful eyes—and to see habitually the bright, lovely things—instead of the gloom, shadows, and thorns.

There is a tendency also among some older people to think that nothing is quite so good now—as it used to be in their early days. Distance lends enchantment, and sometimes old people are

saddened by their loneliness, possibly, too, by their infirmities, and have not the bright spirit of their earlier days. Besides, the old people's eyes are a little dim and misty, and see far-away things in a glow which does not belong to things that are near. Then what we find anywhere, in any person or place—really depends upon our own mood or attitude. Our hearts—make our world for us. It is not wise to say that the former days were better than our own. Of course, many things are different—but in the truest sense—the present is the best time the world has ever seen. The people of the country, the Samaritans, who had been there since the Israelites were carried into captivity, were excited by what was going on—the return of the former inhabitants and their efforts to rebuild their old temple. The Samaritans were a mixed people, made up of colonists who had been brought by the Assyrians from Babylon and other places, and placed in the cities of Samaria which had been emptied by the carrying away of the people as captives. They had brought their national gods with them. One of the captive priests was sent to teach them how they should worship the Lord. They adopted the Jewish ritual—but their worship was not pure.

Perhaps the Samaritans were sincere in wishing to unite with the Jews in the work of rebuilding the temple. "Let us build with you," they said. More likely, however, they wanted to be allowed to help that they might hinder. They professed to be loyal to God—but almost surely they were not. They did not want the temple to go up again, for they knew the holy worship would be resumed with the holy teaching. This would interfere with their sinful lives. They wished, therefore, to get their hands upon the work that they might keep it back, or at least make it harmonize with their own evil desires. That is what the world is always trying to do. It dreads and hates holiness, and tries to leaven it with worldliness, so as to make it less objectionable to itself; that is—less true and holy. Religion always has this temptation—the world wants to be taken in. The answer of the builders was: "You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the LORD." Some people would call this narrow-mindedness, bigotry. "Why did they not accept the help of these well-to-do neighbors? It would have put the work forward rapidly. But it looks as if the refusal of this help and cooperation was really a noble and patriotic thing to do. These were the world's people, not true lovers of God. To accept their fellowship and aid—would have been to compromise with the world.

We need to take the lesson. We are to be in the world—but not of the world. In our religion, we must not accept the world's companionship and the world's spirit. The world may be very willing to come with us in part of our work for God—but it would corrupt, degrade, and vitiate our service!

Dedicating the Temple

Ezra 6:14-22

There was much delay in the building of the temple. There was bitter opposition from the inhabitants of Samaria. "The people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them." They wrote to Artaxerxes, king of Persia, to protest against the building, maligning the Jews and alleging that Jerusalem had been a rebellious and wicked city. The work of rebuilding was thus interrupted for a time. Under Darius, however, the decree of Cyrus was again found and the work on the temple was resumed and finished. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the people. They probably would not have finished the work at all—if it had not been for the cheer given by these prophets. We are all apt at some time in life to get disheartened. Things go wrong with us. The burdens are heavy, the way is hard, opposition is fierce. Many

people faint and give up in times of trouble, because no one has a word of cheer for them. But if someone comes with glad heartening, they take fresh courage to go on to finish their work or fight their battle through to the end.

Haggai and Zechariah did not themselves work on the walls, and yet without their part, the building would not have gone on to completion. You may by your good cheer, be the means of accomplishing noble and wonderful results, which would never have been accomplished but for the stimulating influence of your words. This is an important part of the preacher's work every Sunday. The people come to the services weary after their hard work. Sometimes the week has not been a prosperous one. Business had not been successful. Money has been lost. Labor has not yielded good returns. It has been hard to make ends meet. Or there has been sickness, and the loved one is not out of danger. Or someone in the family has not been doing well. Or the discouragement may be personal. Temptation may have been too strong—and the battle may have been lost. Duty has been too hard or too large. There is not a Sunday when the pastor does not face disheartened people sitting in the pews, needing his good cheer. If he speaks brave, hopeful words—he will help many a weary one to a victorious week. This is part of his work, quite as really as preaching the gospel of salvation and life. All of us, wherever we go, are continually meeting those whose hands hang down, and whose knees are trembling—and it is our privilege and duty to lift up the one, and strengthen the other. Helping by encouragement is one of the very best of all ways of helping.

Thus cheered, the people wrought with energy and enthusiasm upon the building. They had both divine and human help. They had the commandment of God to impel them, and they had also the decrees of Cyrus and Artaxerxes to protect them and aid them. Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes did their part. Then there was Zerubbabel and Joshua, besides Haggai and Zechariah, with hundreds more whose names are not recorded. The obscurest helper helped in some way, and record was made of what he did. The man who felled trees in the forests of Lebanon, the man who worked in the quarry, the man who mixed the mortar—all did their part. Without the humblest helpers—the most skilled workman and the greatest could not do their conspicuous portion. So it is in all the Lord's work in this world—there is something for every one. Each one has something to contribute toward the Lord's work, and the lowliest thing done on God's temple—is full of highest honor.

There is a tradition that a certain artist sought permission to do the ornamenting and adorning of the great doors of the English Parliament House. If this work could not be given to him, he asked that he might be allowed to decorate one panel. If he could not have this privilege, he begged that at least he might be permitted to hold the brushes for the artist who should do the work on the great doors. Even that humble office, he felt, would be an honor worthy to be sought. Just so, the lowliest task in the building of God's great spiritual temple—is honor enough for the noblest of mortals. To put one line or touch of beauty in a life—is to work with God. To give a little comfort, cheer, or encouragement to a sad or weary spirit, thus helping a life heavenward, is better than to build a huge pyramid that never blesses anybody. The smallest ministry to a human life or even to one of God's lowliest creatures. redeems a life from commonness and makes it divine. At last every part of the work was done, and the time came for the dedication. It was a glad occasion when that completed building stood there on the sacred mount. It had risen out of ruins. It had cost great sacrifice and toil. It had been built up amid many discouragements and hindrances. Tears had fallen on many a stone as it was lifted to its place. Things we do through cost, self-denial,

hardship, and hindrance—are far dearer to us and more sacred—than things we do with ease, without feeling the burden or the cost. Churches built by poor, struggling congregations, whose people have to sacrifice, pinch, and deny themselves to gather the money—yield far more joy to their builders when finished—than beautiful and costly churches reared by the rich. The former represent human love, life, blood, and tears. They are built out of people's hearts. The latter may be grander in men's eyes—but in heaven's sight the former shine in the radiant splendor of love. Our joy in doing God's work and in making gifts to God—is measured by the real cost of the things we do and give. The more heart's blood there is in them—the more precious they will be to us and also to God, and the greater will be their value to others. The truest joys of earth are transformed sorrows. The richest treasures of our lives are those which have cost us the most. The dedication day was a day of great gladness. The offering consisted of a hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, and four hundred lambs. The people were poor—but they spared nothing that day. They gave God the best they had. The animals in the great sacrifice were of no special worth in the services, except as they represented love and devotion to God. They stood for the people's own lives.

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship." Romans 12:1. The ancient sacrifices were killed—but it is a living sacrifice which we are to present. That means that we are to dedicate our bodies to be God's temples—places for God to dwell in. We are to live for God in the very best sense, giving Him all our powers, keeping our lives unspotted and holy for Him, and devoting them to His service in all sweet ways. Too many of us give to God only the broken remnants of tired days—the fragments that are left over—after we have served our own selfishness with the best. We need to learn to give Christ the best of everything we have.

"Every one in his place and to every one his work", is the law of God's Church. The priests had their duties and the Levites had theirs, and when all were set where they belonged, the worship could go on. In every Christian Church the same adjustment is necessary. It is the duty of one to preach, of others to be elders and deacons; of others to be teachers, others secretaries and librarians. Thus to every member, there is some allotment of duty and service. There is not a little child who cannot be of use in some way in Christ's work. A Church is complete only when every one is doing something, filling some place. The services of the temple were resumed at once after the building was dedicated. The Passover feast was held again at the proper time. The Passover was to the Jews, very much like what the Lord's Supper is to Christians. It was in remembrance of the days when they were in bondage and when God brought them out. Now a second time they had been brought out of bondage, and it was especially and doubly proper that they should now keep the Passover feast. It was a memorial of their own release from captivity.

There is a story of a stranger who appeared one day on the streets of an Eastern city. Passing where many birds in cages were exposed for sale, he stopped and looked with tender pity at the little captives. At length asking the price of one of the birds, he paid it and, opening the cage, let it go free. Thus he went on until all the birds had been liberated. Flying up a little way, they caught a glimpse of the mountains far off, which were their native home, and flew quickly toward them. When the stranger was asked why he had done this, he answered, "I too have been a captive—and now I know the sweet joy of liberty." We who have known the bitterness of sin's captivity and are now free, made free by Christ's deliverance, should gladly seek to open the prisons of other captives and let them go free!

Ezra’s Journey to Jerusalem

Ezra 8:21-32

EZRA is an interesting character. He was a priest and scribe who was commissioned to return from Persia to Jerusalem, and so took an active part in the civil and religious affairs of the Jews at Jerusalem. He led a fresh company of exiles back with him. A royal edict had been issued by Artaxerxes, clothing Ezra with authority. He was the bearer of offerings for the temple made by the king and by the Jews. He led a caravan. He was influential in enforcing the Mosaic law among the people, who had become indifferent to many features of it. Before setting out, he gathered his company together and spent three days in making preparation for the journey. The first thing he did was to seek God’s guidance. He says, "I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions." We should begin every new journey, every new undertaking, every new piece of work—by asking God to show us the way. The Bible very significantly begins with the words, "In the beginning God." At the beginning of everything, God should be recognized and honored. No friendship ever reaches its best—unless God is in it and God’s blessing is on it. No business ever can have the fullest success—unless the hand of God is in it and God’s guidance be sought. The things we cannot ask God’s blessing upon—we would better not do. The place into which we cannot ask God to guide us—we never should enter. Ezra asked the Lord to show him a safe journey to Jerusalem. We need always to seek guidance of God, for only He can show us the right way.

Ezra is very frank in giving the reason why he cast himself so completely upon God. He was seeking the honor of God, and wished therefore, as far as possible, to be independent of human help. "For I was ashamed to ask of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way." He had told the king that the hand of God would be upon all them that sought Him for good, and he wished to give the king proof of this in his own experience. It was a dangerous journey upon which he and his company were about to set out. No doubt the king, with his kindly interest in the expedition, would have furnished an escort if Ezra had asked for it. But Ezra felt that this would be dishonoring God. A life of faith—is a life of dependence upon God. Part of our witnessing for God before the world—is showing that our trust is not in human strength—but in God Himself. We say, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not be in want." Do we prove our faith in this confession? When need is upon us, do we show ourselves trustful because the Lord is our Shepherd! We say, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." We sing the words with a measure of triumph in our voices. But do we live as if God were indeed our refuge, as if He were indeed a very present help in all trouble? Many of us are too easily frightened in time of danger or trouble. With such a God as ours—we ought to be ashamed to be afraid of anything. We ought not to turn to the world’s help after we have declared so strongly that God is our defense and our refuge. We should show by the way we meet difficulties, dangers, losses, sorrows, that there is a divine reality on which we are leaning.

Ezra was taking up with him a great quantity of silver and gold and the sacred vessels for the house of God. He took special care for the safety of these treasures. He set apart twelve of the chiefs of the priests . . . and weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels." First, these were godly men, honest and trustworthy, whom Ezra selected. This was important. Sometimes sufficient care is not taken in choosing those who are to be the custodians of money

belonging to others. In this case, the money and the treasures were all carefully weighed and the amount set down. Again, at the end of the journey, the men were required to account for everything they had received. Some people are very careless about money matters. Young people should learn that it is part of their religion—to be strictly honest. If others put money into their hands for any purpose—it should be accounted for to the last cent. In societies of different kinds, there is money to be handled, and certain people have to act as treasurers. Those who accept this position should realize their responsibility. No matter if only a few cents a month are to be handled, there should be the same careful putting down of the amount and the same accuracy in accounting for it at the end as if the sum were thousands of dollars. The charge of Ezra to these men who were entrusted with the treasures, is worthy of careful study. He said unto them, "You as well as these articles are holy to the LORD. The silver and gold are a freewill offering to the LORD, the God of your fathers. Guard them carefully until you weigh them out in the chambers of the house of the LORD in Jerusalem before the leading priests and the Levites and the family heads of Israel." The men themselves were holy; that is, they had been set apart to a holy service. The treasures entrusted to them were holy. The money and the vessels did not belong to any man—but to God. The men were now to carry them safely through all the dangers of the thousand-mile journey. They would be held responsible for their safe-keeping, until they deposited them in the house of God in Jerusalem. Then the treasures would be weighed again, to see that they had been carefully guarded and that nothing, not even a fraction of an ounce, had been lost. This was a very solemn trust. But every one is continually receiving trusts which he is to guard amid the world's dangers, and deliver at last at God's feet. A Christian convert in a missionary country said of something he was guarding with special care, "It is God's—but I am in charge of it." This is a true statement of our position regarding many of our responsibilities. It is true not only of the religious funds entrusted to our custody—but just as really of money of any society or institution or corporation or business that may be entrusted to us. It is true of anything for which we may be responsible. Our own life is a sacred trust committed to us, for which we must give account.

There are many applications of this principle. Other people are continually putting into our hands the gold and silver of their love, their confidence, their friendship, trusting us with things which we are to guard and keep for them. Do you ever think, for example, of the responsibility of being a friend? One confides in you and comes under your influence. How careful must you be lest you harm the life that thus entrusts itself to you. We accept friendships and confidences eagerly, and sometimes perhaps thoughtlessly, not asking ourselves if we can care for them, guard them, keep them. We forget that we must answer to God for every touch and teaching and for every impression we put upon any other life. Our own good name also is a trust committed to us to be kept unspotted. We must guard it and live so every day that no stain may ever fasten upon it through any act or conduct of ours, or any association with evil. So the good names of others are in our keeping. We must be careful never to tarnish another's name by any careless word we may speak concerning the person.

Ezra testifies to the faithfulness of God in caring for him and his company on the way. "Then we departed . . . and the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy." At the beginning of his journey Ezra committed the care of himself and other pilgrims, to the good hand of God. He was glad to say that without any help from the king, without escort of

soldiers to guard them, they had come to the end of the long journey, through manifold dangers—yet without harm.

We never know how much good we owe every day and every night to the good hand of God that guards us amid life's dangers. We think we are keeping ourselves by our own tact or shrewdness, or that we owe our safety in our journeys to the perfection of the railways and vessels on which we travel, or to some sort of chance that favors us. We leave God out too often when we are thinking of our safety, our protection, our comfort, the countless favors of our lives. Always the eye of God is upon us and the good hand of God is over us. This is our Father's world, and we have children's care in it.

Nehemiah's Prayer

Nehemiah 1:1-11

Nehemiah was a captive. There is a tradition that he belonged to the royal family. Probably he had been educated in the land of captivity. At least he occupied a position of great importance in the king's court. He speaks of himself as the king's cup-bearer—but this title does not mean that he was merely a servant. The position was one of importance and of much influence.

Evidently Nehemiah was a man of strong character, who could not be swayed by the enervating influences about him. Robert Ogden tells of once discovering a wonderful little flower on the Rocky Mountains. In a deep fissure, one day in midsummer, he found the snow lying yet unmelted, and on the surface of it he saw this flower. Looking to learn where its roots grew, he perceived that a long, delicate stem came up through the snow. The root was in the crevice of the rock underneath. Like that flower in the cold snow—are the lives that are found growing up in the midst of the world's temptations, and yet are beautiful and true in spite of all that would naturally tend to destroy them. The secret is that they are rooted in the cleft of the Rock of Ages.

Nehemiah was in Shushan the palace; that is to say, at the very center of a great heathen capital. Yet it was while occupying a position there, that there came into his heart the desire to honor God and help in restoring His land. Let no young man say, after reading the story of Nehemiah, that it is not possible to be a true and earnest Christian wherever God may place him. If he is compelled to live among the ungodly, exposed to all manner of evil influences, he can still be true to God. All he needs is to be sure that his heart is fixed upon Christ, and that the roots of his faith are kept alive through prayer, communion with God, and the study of God's Word. It is possible for a young man to rise in the world as Nehemiah did, to prosper in business, to win honor and influence among his fellow-men, and yet keep his heart pure, his life clean, himself unspotted from the world.

One day, while Nehemiah was engaged in his accustomed occupations, he was visited by his brother Hanani. Hanani had been visiting the Jews who had returned to their own land, and Nehemiah asked him concerning the condition of things at Jerusalem. Many people who are happily fixed themselves, do not give much thought to their friends who are less fortunate. Nehemiah, however, though himself living in luxury, did not forget his brethren, who were enduring hardship and suffering, nor did he cease to remember his country in its time of distress. This quality in Nehemiah should not be overlooked in our study of his character. In our days of prosperity, we should not forget those who are in circumstances of suffering and need. That man cannot call himself a Christian—who never thinks beyond the circle of his own little life. When one

Christian suffers, all his fellow-Christians should feel the pain. The strong should help the weak. The fortunate should not forget the unfortunate. The well should sympathize with the sick. In the homes of gladness, with the circle unbroken, there should be deep sympathy with the household next door where there is grief. Nehemiah showed a brotherly spirit.

Nehemiah was greatly affected by what he had heard concerning the condition of things at Jerusalem—but his feelings led him to action. "It came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept . . . and prayed before the God of heaven." Some men weep easily—their tears lie near the surface; but these are not usually men of deep and strong nature. They are emotional, and often their emotions never become acts. Nehemiah was not a man of that kind—he was stalwart and strong. His tears, therefore, did not show weakness. It is not unmanly to weep when there is such cause for weeping as there was that day. Nehemiah wept over the sorrows of his people, over the calamities which had befallen them. Jesus Himself wept when He stood on the brow of the Mount of Olives and looked down upon that same Jerusalem, over the report of whose desolation Nehemiah now wept. Country, home, and religion are dearer to a true man—than place, power, honor, and riches. We should be moved with compassion, when we think of the lost souls about us. But tears are not enough. Nehemiah at once carried the burden to God in prayer. That is what we should do with all our anxiety for others. The greatest achievements in this world—have been made through prayer. The first way to help others—is to pray for them. Until we have begun to pray—we shall not do much for them. Yet praying is not always the whole of our duty. Nehemiah wept; then prayed; then set to work in behalf of his people. He left his luxurious place in the king’s court, journeyed to Jerusalem, and took earnest hold with his own hands, giving of his influence and energies to the cause. More than tears or prayers—are needed in our serving of others. Too many people weep over distress and pray earnestly for the relief that is needed—yet do nothing themselves. Nehemiah’s way is better—first sympathy, then prayer, then work.

There is something very noble in Nehemiah’s prayer. "Let Your ear now be attentive, and Your eyes open, that You may hearken unto the prayer of Your servant." Not only is God represented as listening to the prayers of His children—but also as looking in sympathy upon them in their need. His eyes are ever turned toward the earth, as if to see who is bending the knee or looking up with penitence and desire. There is no fear that God will ever fail to see anyone who prays. No matter how dark the night may be—His eye beholds. No matter how lonely the place—He will not fail to catch sight of the suppliant bowing in penitence.

One who was wrecked at sea and floated for many hours on a piece of spar before being picked up, said afterwards that the most terrible feeling he had ever experienced, was the thought that in all that vast waste of waters about him—there was no ear to hear his cry and no eye to see his condition. But he was wrong. There really was an eye that could see and did see, and an ear that could hear and did hear, even there on the wide sea, his cries for help.

Nehemiah prayed that God would direct him in his plea before the king. "Prosper, I pray You, Your servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." Nehemiah did wisely. Before going to the king with his request he went to God, asking Him to open His way with the king. Since so much depended upon the king’s answer, he asked God to prepare his heart to listen sympathetically. In everything we undertake, we should ask God to prosper us. We cannot do this

if we are engaged in any wrong or dishonest business or plan. But when our heart is right and the thing we would do is part of God's will, we may freely ask Him to direct us. When our errand is for other people and its success depends upon their willingness to help us, we should ask God, before we go to them—to give us favor with them and to prepare them to be interested in our plea. The prayer of Nehemiah was answered. One day as he was engaged in his duty, the king noticed sadness in his face and, touched with sympathy, asked him what was troubling him. Nehemiah told him of the condition of his people, of the desolation of their holy city, and asked permission to go to Jerusalem to rebuild it. The king granted his request. Nehemiah's arrival encouraged the people. The new governor showed great energy and capacity. There were enemies outside who plotted against the rebuilding. Some of the people themselves were faint-hearted and became discouragers, finding fault. Hinderers also came in from the Jewish settlements outside.

Amid all this discouragement Nehemiah remained brave and confident. He also sought to encourage the people. "Fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses." The motive which Nehemiah suggested: fighting for one's home and loved ones —is among the strongest motives that can appeal to the human heart. Every man with a spark of manhood in him—will fight to the death for his own. We are all so tied up together, that this motive is always present when we are defending the right. We must seek the purity and the safety of the town in which we live, because our own family is in it—and peril to the population is peril to ours. We must seek a wholesome water supply and good drainage and clean streets for the city, because our children and friends live in it. So with the moral and religious influences in a community—the welfare of our sons and daughters, our brothers and sisters is involved. In all movements for education and reform, there is the same motive. A distinguished man was speaking at the opening of a reformatory for boys, and remarked that if only one boy was saved from ruin by the institution it would pay for all the cost and labor. After the exercises were over, a gentleman asked the speaker if he had not put it a little too strongly when he said that all the cost of founding such an institution would be repaid if only one boy should be saved. "Not if it were my boy," was the quiet answer.

Reading the Law

Nehemiah 8:1-18 The work of Nehemiah had been well done. In spite of opposition and all hindrance the walls had been rebuilt and the city had come into a measure of prosperity. Then under the divine direction Nehemiah gathered together the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that their genealogical records might be made up. After this there was called a great assembly to listen to the reading of the Holy Scriptures. The people came eagerly. They wanted to hear what God would say to them. We should be eager to respond to the call which summons us to God's house to a Church service. It is the divine command that we should do this. Yet there are reasons for the requirement.

We need to hear continually the words of God, that we may not forget them. We need to look frequently into God's face to have a glimpse of His holiness as the ideal for our own living. We need to be reminded continually of our sins, then of our duties. Besides, we have sorrows, and we need the comfort which comes to us only through God's Word. We have a Scripture injunction which exhorts us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. When the people had come together, Ezra the priest brought out the roll of parchment of the law and read the words to the

people. Everybody was there that day. They came as one man. The men did not leave all the church-going to the women, as some men are disposed to do in our modern days. Nor were the children left at home while their parents went—they were there, too. The service that day seems to have been like a great Sunday-school. The law of Moses was the book used, and Ezra and the other teachers read it to the people and explained its meaning to them. The Bible is the one book for all who want to know the essential things of life. There is no other book for the penitent sinner desiring to be saved, or for the sorrowing one seeking comfort. Other books have their message and may do very well when the joy is full—but in life's great crises—there is only one book that meets all needs. There is no other book for the death. "Bring me the book!" said Sir Walter Scott, when he was approaching the closing hour. "What book?" one asked. "There is but one book!" replied Sir Walter. There were thousands of books in his great library—but there was only one book for that hour. The Bible tells us how to live—and then shows us how to die. The people were eager to hear the Word of God. Perhaps they had not heard it read for a long time, and now it was a joy to have it read to them again. There was silence in the great throng as the reading began and as it proceeded. "The ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law." The trouble with many people, old as well as young, is that they are not attentive when the Scriptures are read. Some ministers complain that the people do not listen to the sermons they preach to them. Some teachers find difficulty in getting the ears of their scholars when they seek to explain the lessons. If only we would remember, that it is God who is speaking to us when His Word is read—we would listen eagerly and attentively.

Ezra's sermon that day was very long—from dawn to noon; yet no one seems to have got tired. We read that in Wycliff's days, when portions of the Bible which he had translated into English and had written out with a pen were carried among the people, so eager were they to hear the Word of God in their own language that they would gather in groups round the fires and would listen ofttimes all night, drinking in the precious sentences. The Book is so common now, and we hear its words so frequently, that it has not the interest to our hearts it should have. When Ezra unrolled the parchment—all the people stood up. Thus they showed their respect and reverence for the Holy Book from which the good priest was about to read. The words to which they were to listen, were God's Words, and they rose up to do God honor. Standing was a posture of respect. Men stood before a king. Angels stood before God's throne. It is not a superstitious regard for the Bible, that we should cherish. The mere honoring of the Book itself amounts to nothing. Some people wear a crucifix around their neck—and yet show none of the humility and worshipful spirit of Christ in their lives. Some people handle the Bible with seeming reverence—who have little of the Bible in their hearts, not following its teachings, nor heeding its counsels and warnings. True reverence for God's Word is not superstitious—but is sincere and earnest.

What Ezra and his assistants did that day is what all teachers of the Word of God should do for those who listen to them. "They read in the book of God distinctly; and they gave the sense, so that they understood the reading." The business of the preacher and the teacher, is to make the sense of God's Word so plain that those who hear, whether old or young, shall understand. People come together on Sunday to worship God, and part of this worship should always be to hear what God will say to them. The teaching should be simple, clear, definite, and plain. The effect of the teaching that day was uplifting and inspiring. Nehemiah said to the people, "Go and celebrate with a feast of choice foods and sweet drinks, and share gifts of food with people who have nothing

prepared." God loves to have us enjoy His blessings. We are to eat our food with thankfulness and with rejoicing. He wants us to get the very best we can from life—to eat the fat and drink the sweet. He would have us to be happy.

Then, He wants us also to share our blessings with others. When we have plenty, we should send a portion to those who have nothing. Our joy must not be selfish. Having a good time all alone—is not the ideal of Christian gladness. When we are prosperous, we should not forget those who are poor. When we are happy in our home of love, with unbroken circle, we should not forget the families about us that are in sorrow and bereavement. The good things which God gives us are not meant for ourselves alone—they are given to us to be shared. Only in the sharing do we get the best of them ourselves. People who eat the fat and drink the sweet in their own homes, at their own well-covered tables, and never think of the hungry and needy outside, are not the kind of children God wants His people to be. The people were not to think about their sorrows that day, nor let their troubles cast a shadow over the brightness. "Neither be grieved; for the joy of Jehovah is your strength!" If we would be strong, we must have the joy of the Lord in our hearts. The sad heart tires in a little while. If we would be strong for service, for endurance, if we would always do our best, we must cultivate the joyful spirit. Some Christians are always worrying about something. If they do not have a real trouble they hunt up an imaginary one. They hang up on the walls of their hearts, pictures of all the unpleasant things that happen—but not the pictures of cheerful and happy things. No duty is urged in the Bible more earnestly and more repeatedly, than the duty of Christian joy. Of course, we must make sure that it is the joy of the Lord that we have. This world's joy is not enough to make anyone permanently happy. The joy of Christ is from Christ Himself. It is joy that comes from heavenly sources. It does not depend on the happenings of the hour, for then it would come and go with the changes in our circumstances. The joy of the Lord is from a deep well that is not affected by any sort of weather. Nehemiah wanted the people that day to rejoice, because of what the Lord had done for them, and to put away all care and all anxiety. The people caught the spirit of the great teacher and obeyed his exhortation. "So the people went away to eat and drink at a festive meal, to share gifts of food, and to celebrate with great joy because they had heard God's words and understood them." That is a fine illustration of what always should be the effect of teaching or preaching God's Word. The people understood the words and let them into their hearts. Then straightway they went forth to do as they had been exhorted to do.

We will always find new things in the Bible if we will read it over and over. No matter how many times we have gone through it—when we go through it again, we shall come upon passages we have not seen before, or at least which have not fixed themselves in our minds at any former reading. On the second day of this great Bible reading service, the Levites came upon the commandment appointing the Feast of Tabernacles. Evidently this command had been overlooked and this festival neglected. But it is delightful to find them entering at once upon the observance of the great Harvest Home. This was a feast of remembrance. They were to live in booths, recalling the years of their wandering in the wilderness. It is said that the Jews in these wonderful days made the branches of their booths thin so that they could see the blue sky and the stars through them. So should we build our houses, with roofs through which heaven's light will shine. Whatever hides God from us—cuts us off from blessing.

Haman's Plot Against the Jews

Esther 3 and 4 The Book of Esther opens a window into Oriental life. It shows us also something of the sadness and debasement of woman's condition in those days. At first thought, Esther seems to have had an enviable experience in being chosen because of her beauty, to be the queen of Xerxes. But when we understand better what her position really was, we see that she was not to be envied—but pitied rather. Esther's story in the light of Christianity, is a sad one. Nor can we hold her up as an ideal woman. Yet there is value in the study of her story, as it shows by contrast—what Christianity has done for woman. The book in its introduction tells the story of the deposing of Vashti, the former queen. Our sympathies are with the wronged queen. We can have only condemnation and contempt for the heathen king. We learn also how it was undertaken to find another beautiful woman to take Vashti's place. In all the provinces of the kingdom the fairest virgin was sought for the king. Esther appeared to win a great prize—but no lowly Christian girl today, would want to exchange places with her.

Mordecai is the real hero of the Book of Esther and the deliverer of the Jews. Not much is told of him. He was of the tribe of Benjamin. He was a captive and lived in Shushan, or Susa, the Persian capital. Esther had been brought up by Mordecai as his own child. Yet Esther was forbidden to reveal in the palace either her relation to Mordecai or her nationality. Mordecai was in close communication with the palace. He discovered a plot against the king and defeated it, his name being recorded in the chronicles.

We do not know what Haman had done to win the king's favor. He was rich, and possibly had been liberal with his gifts to the king. For some reason, at least, the king wished Haman honored, and wherever he went every one bowed down to him—everybody but one man. Mordecai did no reverence to the proud official. Mordecai was a Jew—and Haman was an Amakelite; hence probably the bitter enmity between these two men. All the attendants and courtiers did honor to the grand official as he passed backward and forward—all except this Jew, who refused to bend the knee to him. Haman, writhing under the insult continually repeated, determined upon revenge and conspired to kill not Mordecai only—but all the Jews in the realm. He obtained the king's signature to the decree, and it was promulgated and the time fixed for the extermination of the hated race. Mordecai sent to Esther a copy of the edict, informing her of the plot, and charged her to go in unto the king and plead for her people.

Esther reminded Mordecai at once of the difficulties in the way. She referred to the custom observed in such matters. "All the king's servants ... do know, that whoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law for him, that he be put to death." The only people admitted to the king were those for whom he himself sent, and Esther had not been invited. "I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days." The fact that she had not been invited to come for so long a time, was disheartening. "There must be some reason for it," she thought. Esther would better not have stopped at all to think about these difficulties in the way. Considering the perils in our way—is apt to make us grow faint-hearted. Ofttimes, as it proved in Esther's case, the perils will vanish if we go forward.

Mordecai was not disposed to release Esther from her obligation. So he sent a messenger reminding her that her own life was in bond in this matter. "Think not with yourself that you shall escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews." She might meet death if she ventured into the king's presence; certainly she would meet death if she sat still where she was and did nothing.

She was one of those upon whom the sentence had been pronounced in the king's decree, and even the palace and the royal robes she wore, would not protect her. Many people hesitate to come to Christ. They fear He will not receive them. They think it will be hard to live a Christian life. They count the crosses, the self-denials, the duties, and the long way of struggle and battle. But suppose they do not come to Christ at all—what then? Is there no danger in staying away? If you sit still where you are, will you be saved?

Sometimes silence is very costly. Often, no doubt, silence is better than speech. The old proverb says that while speech is silvern, silence is golden. Many times we will sin—if we speak. But here is one time when it was a sin not to speak. So in every life there are times when to be silent—is to fail in duty. We are to speak out on all occasions when the glory of Christ requires it. We should never be afraid to speak a word of warning to one who is in danger. We should never hesitate to speak boldly in confession of Christ, when all about us are Christ's enemies. We have many cautions about watching our speech and withholding words that are not good—but we must beware of silence about the eternal things. We scarcely ever lack words when the themes are light and trivial; let us not fail amid the light and trivial talk to speak earnest words which shall not be forgotten.

Mordecai reminded Esther further that she was not God's last resort. "If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" If one messenger proves unworthy of the trust reposed in him, another is found, and the purpose moves on to its fulfillment—but he who has faltered is trodden down by the marching hosts behind him. The only safe way in life's thronging field—is straight on in the path of duty. No danger of the battle is so great as the danger of halting and turning back. No duty, however hard, should be feared half so much—as failure in the duty. We should never shrink half so much from responsibility which seems too great for us as from the shirking of the responsibility. In the end it is always easier and infinitely safer to do our duty, whatever the cost—than not to do it. God can get along without us—but we cannot get along without Him, and to fall out of the line in life's crowded pathway, is to lose everything. To neglect opportunities, is to throw away honors and crowns.

Mordecai went a step farther and reminded Esther that probably she had been born and raised up for this very task. "Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" Every one is born for something, some particular duty or task. Someone speaks of Stephen as having been born and trained that he might make one speech of thirty minutes in length. God has His people ready in their place when He wants to use them. If we are true to God, doing His will day by day—we are always in the place where He wants us, and wherever we are—He has some work for us to do. When we find ourselves in the presence of any human need or sorrow, we may say, "God sent me here just now to bring relief or to give help or comfort to this person."

We sometimes wonder at the strange ways of Providence, by which we are carried into this place or that. Is there not a key here to this mystery? It certainly was a strange Providence that led Esther, the lowly, simple-hearted maiden, into the palace of the great Xerxes to be his queen—but there was a divine purpose in it. She was placed there—because she would be needed there by and by. When God by some strange providence brings us into peculiar circumstances or associations, it is because there will be some time a need for us just there. At last Esther rose to

the call of duty. She determined to go into the king's presence. "So will I go in unto the king—and if I perish, I perish!" She took the risk. There are times when the best thing we can do with our life—is to give it up. There are times when to save one's life—is to lose it, when the only way to save it—is to sacrifice it. Life that is saved by shrinking from duty—is not worth saving!

Esther Pleading for Her People

Esther 8

There was great sorrow everywhere among the Jews. Mordecai rent his clothes and sat in the king's gate, clothed with sackcloth. He sent word to Esther, imploring her to go to the king and plead for her people. The story of her venturing is familiar to all. Her plea with the king was successful. Haman was made very happy by being present by invitation at Esther's first banquet, and went home exultant. That night the carpenters were busy erecting a gallows for Mordecai. But the same night something else happened. The king could not sleep, and the chronicles of his reign were read to him. There the fact that the king owed his life to Mordecai was recorded, and the further fact that Mordecai's deed had not been publicly recognized. The picture of Haman conducting his enemy through the streets next day as the man the king would honor, is most striking. The tide had turned.

Haman was dead on the gallows he had set up for Mordecai—but the decree for the destruction of all the Jews still stood, and the terrible day was drawing near, when all the Jews should be slain. Unless the decree could be reversed or recalled—they could not be saved. It was at the cost of life, that Esther brought before the king the request that the decree should be revoked.

We get here, a lesson on courage in duty. We learn also that we have a responsibility for others as well as for ourselves. Sometimes the best use one can make of his life—is to sacrifice it, to give it up, that others may be delivered or helped. This is so when the engineer by losing his own life can stop his train and save the lives of the passengers. We learn also that God puts us into places and relationships for the very purpose of meeting some need, performing some service. Esther had been brought into her place at this particular time—that she might do just this particular service for her people. Think what might have happened, if she had failed. Think what may happen—if we fail in any time of duty.

Esther, unaware of the provision of the Persian law that no decree can be recalled, implored the king to reverse the letters devised by Haman, and learned that the reversal was impossible. Far more broadly than we may think this is true in life. We cannot recall any word we have spoken. It may be a false word or an unkind word—a word which will blast and burn! Instantly after it has been spoken—we may wish it back and may rush after it and try to stop it—but there is no power in the world that can unsay the hurtful word—or blot it out of the world's life! It is so with our acts. A moment after we have done a wicked thing, we may bitterly repent it. We may be willing to give all we have in the world—to undo it, to make it as though it never had been. But in vain. A deed done takes its place in the universe as a fact—and never can be recalled.

"Don't write there, sir!" said a boy to a young man in the waiting-room of a railway station, as he saw him take off his ring and begin with the diamond in it to scratch some words on the mirror. "Don't write there, sir!" "Why not?" asked the young man. "Because you can't rub it out." The same is true of other things besides those words written upon glass with a diamond point. We should be

sure before we speak a word or do an act, that it is right, that we shall never desire to have it recalled, for when once we have opened our lips or lifted our hand—there will be no unsaying or undoing possible.

Haman had built the gallows for Mordecai—but in the strange and swift movements of justice—Haman was hanged upon it himself! Injustice and wrong recoil upon the head of him whose heart plotted the evil. "Curses, like young chickens, come home to roost." "Ashes fly back in the face of him who throws them." "If one will sow thorns—he would better not walk barefoot." "Whoever digs a pit shall fall therein; and he that rolls a stone, it shall return upon him." The decree of the king could not be recalled or reversed. But another decree was sent out which in a measure counteracted the former. We have seen that life's words and deeds are irrevocable. We cannot recall anything we have done, neither can we change it. But by other words and deeds, we may in some measure modify the effect of that which we cannot blot out. Paul could not undo his persecutions of Christians—but by a life to devotion to Christ's cause he could in a sense make reparation for the terrible harm he had done. We cannot undo the wrong things we have done—but we should strive to set in motion other influences which may at least compensate in some sense for the harm they have wrought. We cannot unsay the sharp word which wounds our friend's heart—but we can by kindness and loyal devotion—yet bring good and blessing to his life!

Isaiah's Call to Service

Isaiah 6:1-13

Isaiah knew the very day and hour when he saw this wonderful vision. It was in the year that king Uzziah died. The vision had made such an impression on his mind—that he never could forget it. It had meant so much to him as an experience, that he could never cease to look back to the day as his spiritual birthday. That was a memorable year. Uzziah was one of the greatest of Judah's kings. He had reigned fifty years with high honor, and then suddenly he was smitten with leprosy. He had gone into the temple and attempted with his own hands to burn incense. On his forehead appeared at once the white spot which was the mark of divine judgment, and the king was thrust out and dwelt in a leper house until his death. The year in which king Uzziah died, was therefore more than a date. That was the year of Isaiah's vision.

There are one or two dates in nearly every earnest life, which are always remembered. Sometimes it is a loss or a sorrow which has made its indelible record. Sometimes it is the coming of a great joy into the heart—the first meeting with a new friend, for example. Sometimes it is the day when Christ was revealed too the heart. We may be very sure that Andrew and John never forgot the day when they first saw Jesus and when He took them to His own lodgings for a long talk. It is good for us to keep records of the great days in our life. The prophet in his vision, saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. It is a great thing when such a vision as this fills one's life. Too often it is this world—which most largely blocks the soul's view. Men see visions of wealth, power, fame, or pleasure—but see not a gleam of heaven nor a hint of the shining of God's face. But earthly visions do not exalt our life. They make us no better. When we have visions like Isaiah's, in which God fills all our field of view—we are lifted up in spirit, in character, in hope and joy. One who sees God—is never the same man afterwards. He is set apart now for holy life and service. He is dominated ever after by a new influence. He has seen God—he must therefore be holy; he must walk softly and reverently; he must be true to God.

There is something unusual and very impressive in the description of the seraphim in this vision. "Each one had six wings!" Wings are for flight—it is the mission of angelic beings to fly on God's errands. The six wings would seem to signify special readiness to do God's will. But they suggest here, more than their normal use—to fly. The modern Christian would probably use them all for flying—and would be intensely active. We live in an age when everything inspires to activity. We are apt to run, perhaps too greatly, with our 'wings'. But we should notice that two of the seraphim's wings were used in covering his face when before God—teaching reverence. Two of them also were used in covering his feet—humility. The other two were used in flying—activity. Reverence and humility—are quite as important qualities in God's service as activity! The song of the seraphim, as they veiled their faces and covered their feet, indicated praise, worship. One choir sang, "Holy, holy, holy, is Almighty Jehovah!" and the other responded, "The whole earth is full of His glory!" What we owe to God always is holiness, for everywhere is His glory. Yet many people never see any of God's glory in the earth. They think of glory as something bright and dazzling, like the burning bush, the pillar of fire, or the transfiguration. But there is as much glory in a tree laden with sweet blossoms—as there was in the flaming bush at Horeb; and as much glory in a face shining brightly with love—as there was in Stephen's. We read of Christ's first miracle that He thus "manifested His glory." It was the glory of kindness and helpfulness which this miracle showed. Everywhere God's glory shines in all nature—and in all true Christian living, in lowly homes where prayer is offered. The prophet stood now face to face with God, and the effect on him was a sense of his own sinfulness. "Then said I: Woe is me I for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips! For my eyes have seen the King, Almighty Jehovah!" We do not know our own unworthiness until we have had a glimpse of God. In the light of the divine holiness—we see our own unholiness!

One of the most remarkable incidents in the Gospels, is that in which Peter begged Jesus to depart from him. It was after a great miracle. Peter was awed by the manifestations of power in Jesus. Only a divine being could do such work. The effect on him was that he shrank away from the presence of such a holy being! He was not worthy to stand before Christ. "Depart from me—for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" When the light of God's face shines into our heart—we see how unworthy we are. All pride and self-conceit vanish—when we stand in the presence of the divine glory. The mercy of God is ever instant in its response to human penitence and confession. "Then one of the seraphim flew unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he touched my mouth with it, and said: Lo, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin forgiven!" The act of bringing the coal and touching the prophet's lips, was very suggestive. The altar was the place of sacrifice. It was holy fire that burned there. All this must be kept in mind as we think of the meaning of this act. Not any common coal of fire would have done. It represented fire from heaven, the fire of the Holy Spirit. As the coal touched the lips of the prophet—they were made pure and clean. No sooner had the prophet's lips been cleansed—than the call for service came. "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" God is always wanting errand-runners. Angels fly swiftly and eagerly. There is not an angel in glory, who would not gladly come to earth on any mission, however lowly. A legend tells of one of the highest angels sent to earth one day with two commissions—to deliver a king from the power of some temptation; and to help a little struggling ant home with its burden of food. The latter errand was done just as dutifully and joyously by the great angel—as the former. But God wants men as well as angels for messengers in this world. He is always asking this question, "Whom shall I send,

and who will go for us?" The Suffering Savior

Isaiah 53

One picked up an old book—and found it fragrant. The secret was that a sweet flower had been put in among the leaves by someone, and its fragrance had permeated the whole volume. So the fragrance of Jesus has perfumed the Bible from beginning to end. We do not find the name Jesus until we reach the beginning of the New Testament—but the sweetness of the name is everywhere. We find it even in the earliest pages of the Old Testament. No sooner were the gates of Eden closed on our first parents—than the gospel was given. True, the language was dim, not like the clear sentences of the Gospels; yet the promise is there in Eden—as the bud of a very lovely flower which, by and by, opens out under the increasing warmth of progressing revelation; until in the later prophets, especially in Isaiah, it appears in rare beauty. No other chapter in the Old Testament has been a greater revealer of Christ, than has the fifty-third of Isaiah. Its words are almost as familiar as those of the Twenty-third Psalm. They are repeated at Communion services in thousands of churches, and are read in secret by countless devout believers, who love to sit in the shadow of the cross. The best that can be done in brief space with the fifty-third chapter, is merely to indicate a few of its truths. The first verse has a tone of discouragement. "Who has believed our message?" That has always been the discouragement of the bearers of spiritual good tidings. If news comes that gold has been discovered in some far-away place, people believe it and flock by thousands to the spot. But when God’s messengers deliver their messages, although they tell of the most glorious things, people are slow to believe. The second verse reminds us that Christ’s earthly beginnings were unpromising. "He grew up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground." These figures are striking—a tender plant shooting up from a dry stem which seems dead, a root growing in a desert place. The field was not promising. But the root was not dry or dead—but living, and it grew into rich beauty. It became a great tree whose branches reach now over all the earth, with cool shade in which the weary rest, and rich fruits for men’s hunger. The description goes on. "He was despised, and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." The saddest thing about the life of Christ—was that men despised and rejected Him. He came with a great love in His heart. He came to do men good, and save them, to draw them away from their sins, to make them love God, to lead them to heaven. He came in love—and yet men despised and rejected Him. It is the same still.

Men do not like to look upon suffering. They can see no beauty in it. Pain is ugly to the human sense. Anciently it was thought that sickness was a mark of divine disfavor. The weak were looked at with scorn. Even yet we have not learned to see blessing hidden in suffering. The Servant of the Lord came in weakness, and He was rejected. He came to the needy and the sinful, with treasures of life and glory, which He offered to all. But men paid no heed to His knocking and His calls, and He had to pass on with His blessings.

We learn the object of the sufferings of Christ. The ancients thought that when a man suffered he was being punished for sin. We have this thought here in the words, "We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." That is the way Job’s friends judged him. But here it is taught, that not for His own sin—but for ours, was the Messiah suffering. "Surely He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows." A Japanese Christian illustrated what Jesus did for sinners, by this story: A mother was crossing a great prairie with her baby in her arms. She saw flames coming in the dry

grass. She could not escape by flight, so swiftly were the fiery billows rolling on towards her. So with her hands she speedily dug a hole in the soft ground, laid her baby in it, and then covered it with her own body. She was burned to death in the wave of fire that rolled over her—but the child was safe, unhurt. The Christian explained, "Just so did give Christ Himself—to save us."

We have a picture, also, of those whom Jesus seeks to save. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Jehovah has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." This verse tells us that all are sinners. Of course, we all believe this, or admit it in a general way. But do we really admit it as a close, personal matter? "Like sheep!" Sheep are miserably foolish. They are always straying away, going wherever they can find a tuft of grass to nibble at, until at last they are far from the fold and do not know how to find the way back again. Like sheep, we have all gone astray. Every one has turned to his own way instead of going in God’s way, the way of truth and holiness. The Servant of the Lord was a silent sufferer. It is not common for men to remain silent in pain. But here it is said: "He was oppressed—yet when He was afflicted, He opened not His mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is silent—so He opened not His mouth." One of the highest qualities in him who is called to suffer—is silence in endurance.

Another quality in the suffering of the Servant of the Lord, is its injustice. "By oppression and judgment He was taken away, and as for His generation, who among them considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of My people to whom the stroke was due?" The forms of law were not observed. "By a forced and tyrannous judgment He was taken." Then they gave Him a convict’s grave. They made His grave with the wicked, although He had done no violence, neither was deceit in His mouth.

Such perversion of justice seems so terrible, that men might ask, "Where is God, that this cruel wrong is permitted?" But the answer is, "It pleased Jehovah to bruise Him!" In the Hebrew, the word has not the harshness it seems to have in the English. God did not delight in the bruising—but His purpose was in it. "Yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief: when You shall make His soul an offering for sin—He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in His hand."

Then we have a vision of the glorious outcome of the sufferings of the Messiah. "He shall see of the travail of His soul—and shall be satisfied." He is not sorry now that He endured the cross and all its shame. He does not regret His sufferings and sacrifices on the earth. The blessings which have come from His humiliation, have more than satisfied Him. He sees countless millions of souls saved, which must have perished forever, if He had not gone to the cross to redeem them. The life of the Son of God seemed a tremendous price to pay for the ransom of the lost—but it will appear in the end that the price was not too great. We do not know the worth of human souls, nor can we begin to estimate it until we try to understand how much Christ paid to redeem us.

You say that a certain professed Christian is a very unworthy one, with scarcely a line of spiritual beauty in him. "Christ will never have any comfort from him," you say. "He will never make a saint." "But wait!" says the patient Master. "My work on this man—is not yet finished. He is very imperfect now, and I am not satisfied with him. But wait until My work on his life has been completed. By and by he shall wear the full image of My face, and I shall be satisfied as I see in him—the blessed prints of all My sorrows and My love." The Gracious Invitation

Isaiah 55:1-13 The Bible seeks in every possible way—to make men know the divine love and mercy. A great novelist in one of his stories tells of a child who ran away from her home. Every night when it grew dark a candle was set in the window of the old home and left to burn there all night, that the lost one, if ever she crept back, repentant, desiring to return—might see the light and know that it meant a welcome for her, that love's place was kept for her within. The Bible is like a great palace standing on some mountain top in the center of a dark world. It has a thousand windows in it opening on all sides, and in every one of them a bright light shines, to tell earth's lost and weary ones, wandering in the gloom—of a home where they may find a welcome—if they but come to its door. The fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah is one of these Bible windows. The chapter opens with a call which falls on the ear of the lost like sweet music. "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come!"

There is a story of a thirsty traveler wandering in the desert. He had a compass in his hand—but knew not whether its needle pointed toward a place of refreshment, or to a spot in which he must lie down and perish. He was utterly in despair. Turn which way he would, he seemed to be only wandering farther and farther away from hope. He had sunk down in the sands of despair, when a little leaf came, wafted by a passing breeze, and fell beside him. He picked it up, and new hope took possession of his heart. The leaf told him of life. It could not have come far, for it was still fresh and green. At the place from which it came—there must be water, shade, and food. He knew the direction, too, for the breeze had borne it. So with the little leaf firmly clutched in his feverish hand—he rose and hastened in the direction whence the leaf had come, and soon was resting in the shelter of a green tree and quenching his thirst from the springs that gushed at the tree's roots! Like that little green leaf, dropping out of heaven, comes the call from God, of the opening words of this chapter to those who are weary and thirsty in spirit. Where it comes from—there must be water, food, and rest! It is divine love that sends it! The call for attention, "Ho!" is a call to life. It commands attention. It would arrest the most careless, those who are heedless and indifferent. It has a message, too; it is not an empty call. "Come to the waters! And he who has no money—come!" The invitation is universal. "Every one." It is to the poor as well as to the rich. "He who has no money." It meets the universal human need. It fits the actual craving of men. "Every one that thirsts!" Who does not thirst? Who has not deep needs burning in his soul? The blessing offered is precisely adapted to the need. "Come to the waters!" What water is to physical thirst—Christ is to men's spiritual needs. This world's vanities do not satisfy—but what Christ gives, quenches all their thirst!

Then there is more than water, more than refreshing. "Wine and milk!" These are symbols of nourishment and exhilaration. All is free, too! "Without money!" Nothing has to be paid for these blessings. Indeed, no money could purchase them. Only earth's baubles can be bought with gold or silver. Yet, although free, there is a very real sense in which these blessings of salvation must be bought. "Buy, and eat." Money will not buy them—but like the man who sold all he had, to purchase the field with the hidden treasure in it—we must give up everything to get Christ. We must pay ourselves, our life—to win Him.

One of the saddest things in human life, is the wild search for things which will not satisfy men's real needs. "Why do you spend money for that which is not bread?" It does seem strange indeed, that men never learn the folly of trying to find bread for their spiritual nature—in what this world has to give. They have deep cravings and they try to satisfy them with money, power, pleasure, or fame. But these things are not bread for the soul—and immortal lives cannot feed upon them. A

hungry man is not satisfied by finding gold or pearls—it is bread he wants. What can money do—for one who is in deep spiritual distress, or when remorse embitters his life, or when he sits in deep sorrow by the coffin of his dead; or when, facing death himself, he looks into eternity? Nothing but Christ will do in such moments! An angel cannot be fed upon earth's viands. Just so, a human soul finds no satisfaction in the possession of this world's trinkets!

What the gospel offers is real bread, because it satisfies the heart's cravings. God's blessing comes to us through God's Word. "Hear—and your soul shall live!" We are to listen to the invitations of divine grace. But there is a time when we must give heed to these divine calls—or it will be too late. "Seek Jehovah while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near!" The candle burns now in the window—but it will not always burn there. "Whoever will—may come," runs the Bible invitation—but there will come a time when it will be too late to answer the call—a time when God may not be found, when He will not be near—when the door will be shut!

There is only one way of accepting the invitation. We cannot take it—and keep our sins. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto Jehovah." We cannot be saved—and still keep our evil thoughts in our hearts and go on in our evil ways. God is very willing to take our sins, putting them away forever—but He will not take our sins, without ourselves. We must give up our evil ways, even our wrong thoughts, and must serve God.

Men's hearts by nature are hard, like trodden fields. But even the hardest heart, God's grace can soften. "As the rain comes down and the snow from heaven ... so shall My word be." We all know how the rain softens the dry and hardened ground. Its drops go to the roots of the withering grass and the fading flowers—and soon new life appears everywhere. So it is when God's Word falls upon a human life. It makes the barren life, fruitful. Sometimes it lies like snow on the earth, not melting for a time. The results of holy teaching do not always appear at once. But as at last the snows melt and fill streams and rivers; so God's Word in a life—will some day find its way down into the heart and bless it. Heavenly lessons have lain for scores of years, producing no effect; yet, at last, when the warm love of God touched the life—it brought forth beautiful fruits.

Daniel's Principles

Daniel 1

There is something very noble in the picture of Daniel which we have in the first chapter of the Book of Daniel. He was only a lad. He had been torn away from the godly restraints and influences of his own home. He was now at liberty to do as he pleased, so far as parental control was concerned. He was among heathen people, and no one would blame him if he would disregard the rules of his home religion. Indeed, nobody there would know it! Besides he was a mere boy, with a partially formed character, at an age at which convictions usually rest lightly—and when removal from the restraints of home frequently is the sign for the cutting of the moorings which thus far, have held the life from drifting.

All of these considerations heighten the beauty and nobleness of Daniel's conduct. He knew what his duty was, for he had been instructed at home. This duty was the same in Babylon, as in Jerusalem. Change of location and of surroundings, makes no change in the principles of right and wrong. What was wrong in the holy city, under the shadow of the temple, in the sacredness of a saintly home—could by no sophistical moral metamorphosis, be made right in heathen Babylon!

There was nothing uncertain about Daniel’s attitude toward duty.

"Daniel purposed in his heart." The heart is the place to settle all questions of principle. There was no long puzzling in Daniel’s case, about his duty. He did not go around asking advice from his friends. He did not try to find a back door out of the perplexity in which he was placed. He did not ask: "How will this affect my future condition here in this royal court? May it not interfere with my personal advancement? Will it not make it harder for me to get along as a captive?" He met the question on the grounds of moral right, and settled it instantly, and never reopened it. One who thus lives—never needs to ask what others say or think—or how such and such a course will affect one’s prosperity. It is a very heroic thing to be able to stand alone, to dare to be peculiar—and not to do as others do. To be true to God, ofttimes requires us to stand entirely alone—and even to be laughed at and sneered at by others! Decisions should always be made in just this way—and when made—they should be adhered to in spite of all opposition and danger.

One of the tests of character which came to Daniel in his captivity, was in connection with the food and drink allotted to him as a student. A daily portion of the king’s dainties and of the king’s wines was appointed for the young princes. But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with these things. So the temperance question, is quite an old question. Of course, it is easy to say that Daniel did not settle his course upon what we call modern temperance principles. It is easy to say that he was controlled by old ceremonial laws now obsolete, or by superstitious notions concerning what had been offered to idols. Nevertheless the principle remains the same. Daniel believed it to be wrong to partake of the king’s dainties and drink of his wine—that he would be defiled by them if he touched them, and, so believing, he was firm in his determination not to use them.

"God made Daniel find kindness and compassion in the sight of the prince." This was very important to Daniel’s success. Had this officer been harsh or indifferent, the story would have been ended right here—perhaps in the martyrdom of the heroic boy. It is very important that we should act—so as to win friends for ourselves. Sometimes people profess not to care what other people think about them—but such indifference is surely very foolish! None of us know how much we owe to our friends, to the favor which we gain in their minds—to the kind words they speak to us, and to the influence they exert on our behalf. No one can ever rise in the world to any important place—except through the confidence and esteem of others.

We see here also, how God can make friends for one whom He wishes to promote. The Bible elsewhere tells us that the king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord. Again, we read, "When a man’s ways please the Lord—He makes even His enemies to be at peace with Him." So it is right for us to ask God to give us friends; but when we offer this prayer we must be very careful—that we do our own part to be worthy of the friends whom we wish to win.

One who is cross, selfish, and rude—will have but few friends and, when the time of need comes, will find himself left alone, without human sympathy and help. Evidently it was not hard to love Daniel: his character was so beautiful, his disposition so gentle, his manner so winning. Christians who wish to win favor and rise in the world, should cultivate the same qualities, and, thus making themselves attractive, they will win friends wherever they go. The prince who was in charge of the young captives, feared to go contrary to his instructions. He felt quite sure that the boys would suffer in their appearance from their abstinence from the rich food and stimulating drinks provided

for them—and shrank from taking the responsibility of permitting it. Daniel showed his tact by suggesting a ten day trial. "Prove your servants, I beseech you, ten days; and let them give us only vegetables to eat, and water to drink." A good many people have about the same impression with regard to luxurious diet and drinks that this Babylonian prince seems to have had. They imagine that if they were to live plainly and temperately, that they would suffer in health or in brightness and sparkle. Probably in all such cases, a plain diet would be very much better for them. There is a vast amount of gluttony in the world—even among Christians. Not many people would suffer from coming down to plain fare for a time. Certainly as regards alcoholic drinks, the experiment cannot fail to prove—that abstinence is better every way for body, mind and soul—than indulgence.

It is interesting to have the result of this experiment given in God's Word. We are not to suppose that there was anything supernatural about this. No miracle was wrought—to favor the use of the plain food and simple drink. The steward's fears were groundless. The countenances of the Hebrew boys were fairer and they were healthier than those who had partaken of the king's dainties.

These Hebrew youths showed their superiority in other ways. "God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom." God is able to help young people even at school. Of course, they were not helped—except through their own industry and application. No doubt they worked hard as students, applying themselves diligently to every lesson. It will not do when the lessons are hard—just to pray to God to teach them to us—and then go out on the playground and waste our time, expecting to be divinely helped. God's help is never meant to bolster up our laziness. We are not to pray that God will do for us—anything we can do for ourselves. But God gives help—only to those who earnestly help themselves. If a student applies himself with all diligence to the study of his lessons—he has a right also to pray to God to help him, to make difficult things plain, to throw light upon obscure things, to make his mind alert and clear—and God will do it!

"Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus." For more than seventy years he held high positions in that heathen court. All that while—his life was godly and beautiful. He was faithful to God, noble in character, and loyal to truth. He began well, and never swerved from his purpose to follow God fully, and do his duty. In Daniel's life—we have a wonderful illustration of the value and of the power of home training and teaching. So well was Daniel taught, so deeply was the influence of that home impressed upon his heart—that when he was borne away as a captive to a heathen land—no power of heathendom, no temptation, no threat of danger could make him swerve!

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Daniel 2

Dreams have an important place in the Bible. There is no doubt that dreams were really means of divine communication, as in Jacob's ladder, in the dreams of Pharaoh, and in that of Nebuchadnezzar. The account of this dream and its interpretation is very interesting. The king's strange forgetting of it—gave additional opportunity for the glorifying of the true God. Babylon's 'wise men' could not tell the king, what he had forgotten. Then Daniel came.

There is a suggestion in the king's forgetting. Does God never come to us with some revealing, some glimpse of His holiness, some lesson, some vision of truth—which we immediately forget?

Some of us forget sermons—before we get home from church! Sometimes we can hardly even remember the minister's text! Sometimes impressions that are vivid and distinct at the time they are made—pass almost entirely from the mind in a little while! The king could not recall any part of the dream which had troubled him so. He demanded of his wise men, that they tell him first what the dream was—and then what it meant. When all his wise men failed to be able to do this, Daniel sent the king word that his God was a revealer of secrets, and that he would make known Nebuchadnezzar's dream. He then told him what the dream was, and afterward made known its message.

Daniel said, "You, O king, are king of kings—unto whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom." The point to be specially noted here—is that all earthly power is from God. He gives it to whoever He will. Kings are appointed to rule for Him and receive their authority from Him. The same is true of all who bear authority, of whatever kind. This gives a sacredness to power, whether it be the parent's, the teacher's, the magistrate's, the overseer's. All human power and authority—is only God's power entrusted. We must use it reverently, in faithfulness, in love.

Napoleon, when he became emperor, took the crown in his own hands and put it on his head, implying that he made himself ruler. Later he learned that power belongs to God; that He puts one down and sets another up.

Daniel proceeded to indicate in detail—the meaning of the vision. "You are the head of gold. And after you shall arise a kingdom inferior to you, and another third kingdom. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, forasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and subdues all things." Thus history ever reads. One kingdom gives place to another. The greatest kingdoms are pushed aside—and thrust down by the less. Not only among nations is this true; we see the same in families and among individuals. The rich of one generation, are the poor of the next. The high in rank today, are forgotten tomorrow. Thrones built by human hands crumble. God can humble the proudest whenever He desires. He can destroy the head of gold; and crush the arms of silver; and break the legs of brass; and demolish the feet of iron and clay! "The snowflakes of Russia humbled Napoleon's pride, and the raindrops at Waterloo sent him into exile!"

Then Daniel went on to describe the element of glory in the vision—the setting up of the kingdom that never should be destroyed. "The God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty thereof be left to another people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever!" Right in the midst of the glory of Rome—came Jesus Christ, to set up the kingdom of His Father in this world. This kingdom differed in many ways from those world kingdoms which were pictured in the vision. It was not established by war, by military conquest—but by moral force alone. Christ had no armies of soldiers marching forth with Him to crush opposition. He came not to destroy men's lives—but to save them!

There is a story of an emperor in whose realm, there was a rebellion. Certain of his subjects were in revolt. The emperor was setting out to the scene of the uprising, and said to his nobles, "Come with me and see me destroy those rebels!" But when he reached the province he showed only kindness to those in revolt. He treated them with gentleness and affection. The result was that they laid down their arms—and became his most loyal subjects. His nobles reminded him of his words to them, "Come and see me destroy my enemies!" He replied, "I have destroyed my enemies; I

have made them my friends!" This illustrates Christ's conquest—and the way He extends His kingdom. It is set up not by force of arms—but by love; it rules our hearts!

"The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end—but it will itself endure forever!" Daniel 2:44 There are four things said here about the kingdom of Christ:

First, it never shall be destroyed! The kingdoms of this world have their day—and then cease to be. One destroys another. The strongest earthly kingdom has in it, the elements of decay—clay mingled with its iron—and is thus doomed to destruction! Nothing earthly is indestructible. But the kingdom of Christ shall never be destroyed.

Second, it shall never pass to another king! No one king long occupies any earthly throne. Human life is short, and no hand can long hold the scepter. Even dynasties are short-lived. But Christ is a King out of whose hands the scepter shall never drop; on whose brow the diadem shall never lose its luster!

Third, this kingdom of Christ shall go on conquering—until all earth's kingdom's have submitted to its sway! Unto Christ every knee shall bow—and every tongue shall confess that He is the Lord of all!

Fourth, the kingdom of Christ shall be eternal! When all earth's thrones have crumbled into dust, Christ's throne shall appear in the clouds, shining in glory! The interpretation of the dream closed in a wonderful picturing of the glorious coming of the kingdom of Christ. "This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy!" The rock was Christ. It came from heaven, from God. Its origin was supernatural, "Not by human hands." It smote the image, and broke in pieces the iron, the clay, the silver, the gold. So shall the kingdom of Christ continue to grow and extend—until it shall fill all the world and absorb all power! Whatever is wrong—shall be broken to pieces; and holiness shall fill all things.

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever!" Revelation 11:15 The Fiery Furnace

Daniel 3:13-25

"As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music—you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up! Whoever does not fall down and worship—will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace." Daniel 3:5-6

Every child knows this story. It is one of the classics of Christian households. It were well if all our modern Christians had the sublime moral courage of these "three Hebrew children." We will never have to meet precisely the same trial of faith, that these young men had to meet; but we need just as heroic a spirit—in order to be faithful.

Imposing images are set up even now in many a place—and all are expected to bow down to them—and woe to him who does not kneel!

We all have chances enough to be heroic. The popular religion is inclined to limpness of the knees. We have grown wonderfully tolerant in these days! We bow to almost anything—if it happens to be fashionable. It would not do us any harm if we were to take a good lesson from the example of these "three Hebrew children." As Nebuchadnezzar grew great—he grew proud. He knew no God. There was no one to whom he thought of bowing down. He exalted himself as God. He demanded that all men should pay homage to him. That is the meaning of this strange story of folly. His people obeyed his command. "Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music—all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up." But there were some whose knees did not bend! Quickly the king was informed by anxious spies, that certain Jews did not worship the golden image he had set up. Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury, commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Here we see a great king—in a very bad temper! That was certainly an unkingly mood. No man is fit to rule others—who has not learned to rule his own spirit. Peter the Great made a law that if any nobleman beat his slaves—he should be looked upon as insane, and a guardian should be appointed to take care of his person and his estate. This great monarch once struck his gardener, who then died in a few days. Peter, hearing of the man’s death, exclaimed, with tears in his eyes, "Alas! I have civilized my own subjects; I have conquered other nations; yet have I not been able to conquer or civilize myself!"

There are Christian people who would do well to think a little of this matter. Self-control is the mark of completeness in Christian culture. It is the lesson of peace perfectly learned. Bad temper is always a sad blemish in disposition and conduct. To get into a rage—is a mark of lingering barbarism in the character. Self-mastery is Christlike.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were all young men who were in peculiar circumstances. They were away from home, out from under parental influence and restraints, and exposed to very strong temptation. They had now their choice between duty—and the fiery furnace! We should study this lesson for its example of heroic devotion to duty, regardless of consequences. Even yet, the world’s promotion is obtainable ofttimes—only at the price of a trampled conscience!

There are several things to note in these young men.

Note their calmness; they displayed no excitement, no heat of passion. The peace of God ruled in their hearts.

Note also, their sublime courage. They had a contempt of death. They feared only one thing—sin.

Note also, their trust in God. They committed the matter utterly into His hands. They did not know what He would—but they were sure it would be the right thing. The king did not want to destroy these young men, and repeated his command. "Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made—very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace! Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" The king wanted to give them another chance, as he preferred not to burn such useful servants; but they told him there was no need for a second opportunity. They would have no other answer to give. They could make no possible change in their decision. The thing that was demanded of them was contrary to the plain law of their God—and that settled it forever. There was no room for discussion or for deliberation

or for persuasion—when it was the law of God that was concerned. They could burn—but they could not turn!

It would save many people a great deal of weighing, balancing, and discussion of fine points—if they would act always on this principle—that the Word of God is final in all matters of duty. When a thing is forbidden in the Word—that should be the end of it. But too many people keep questions of duty open, waiting for new light, secretly hoping that by some logical process it may become possible for them to avoid making the sacrifice, and to do the thing that now appears to be wrong. So they parley with the matter, and weigh the pros and cons, and wonder if they are mistaken in their sense of duty—and usually end in yielding to sin. It is never safe to parley with temptation! There is no need for it. Duty is final, and no process of reasoning can change it. There is no new light possible on a divine command. It would save many of us much trouble if we fixed it in our mind—that God's Word settles some things, settles them finally and forever, and that we have no need to consider them—but should obey them without parley or question! The answer of the young men was given promptly. "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace." There is a wonderful majesty in these words. About the whole of thecreedof these men was in the words, "Our God." God was theirs—and they were God's. He was taking care of them, and therefore they had no need to concern themselves about their own safety.

It is a great thing to be able to call God OURS, and to say, "God is our refuge!" "The Lord is my Shepherd." When we can really say this—we are ready for anything. No danger can terrify us. It is not the assurance of personal safety which gives us confidence; it is the fact that we are in God's hands, that we belong to Him, and that He is taking care of us! We do not need to know just what He will do with us—or for us; whether He will deliver us—or let us suffer. The ground of the confidence is that we are in His hands—and that He will do the right thing. It is not the highest trust that merely believes in being brought out of the trouble—or being delivered from danger. Perhaps we shall not be delivered. God may permit us to suffer. Very well—our trust does not depend on deliverance. It has no condition. It is simply trust without stipulation or suggestion. The highest confidence is that which suggests nothing—but lies in God's hands, and leaves Him to decide the manner of the care and the blessing. The next three words are almost equally important: "Whom we serve." There are plenty of people who like to cry to God in time of trouble or danger—but they have never been willing to obey or serve Him—when there is danger. They even scoff at Him in the sunshine; but when the storm arises—they fall down on their knees and pray to Him!

These Hebrew young men were not of this class. They could cast themselves upon God's protection in this time of danger without shame, because they had been God's loyal friends and had been serving Him before the danger came. If we want to be able to call God ours and commit ourselves to His care when trial or peril comes—we must not only believe in Him—but must obey His will.

True religion is not all creed; it has also a very practical side, and we ought not to overlook this word "serve." We must serve God—as well as trust Him. We must be willing to serve Him, too, even if it costs and hurts and burns. We must continue to serve Him though He brings no earthly deliverance. "The Christian who lazily looks for nothing but His personal comfort—will never look at fiery furnaces with composure." So if we would be without fear in the day of danger—we must be God's loyal and faithful servants without condition.

Then comes the expression of the faith of these men. Our God is able to deliver us!" They did not say He would deliver them from the fiery furnace. They did not know that He would. They knew that He could—and that if it were best—He would. There they rested the matter.

God’s power ought to be a strong comfort to us in trouble or danger. He is able to deliver us—there is no doubt about that. No combination is too strong for Him. He can easily do whatever He pleases. Men say there are no miracles in these days—but God can always find a way to work any deliverance He desires to work for His people. He is never handicapped in His own world. And since He is our Father, and loves us and is taking care of us—we should know that if it is best that we should be delivered—He will surely do it. If He does not deliver us—we should know that it is because it is better for us and for His glory that we should suffer. True Christian faith is willing to leave to God—just whatever He shall do, confident in God’s power and in God’s love.

"But if not." They made no condition of loyalty to God. They would obey Him just as loyally—if He did not deliver them. There are some people who call themselves Christians who never get above self-interest even in their religion. They believe it will be best for them in the end—if not just at present, to be Christians and to be faithful to God. Their consolation in losses and sacrifices is that God will more than compensate them in some way. They like to quote, "To those who love God—we know that all things work together for good." This is true. We shall never lose anything in the long run—by doing right. God’s service brings great reward. Yet even this should not be the condition of serving God. We should serve Him for Himself, even if we know that serving Him will bring loss that never can be made up to us.

There is a legend of one in the old times, who walked the streets of Alexandria bearing in one hand a torch and in the other hand a vessel of water, crying, "With this water I will put out hell, and with this torch I will burn up heaven—that God may be served for Himself alone." It surely is not the highest kind of faith—which always thinks of the benefit to ourselves; it is far higher if we say, as these men said, "Whether God shall deliver us or not from the furnace—we will serve Him!" Or as Job, "Though He slays me—yet will I trust in Him!" The king was angered by the quiet determination of the young Hebrew children, and commanded that no time should be lost, and that their punishment should be as terrible as possible. "So these men, in their trousers, robes, head coverings, and other clothes—were tied up and thrown into the furnace of blazing fire!"

There are furnaces burning yet all over the world, and faithful ones are continually being cast into them.

There are furnaces of physical pain and suffering, in which saintly ones lie, sometimes for years. But they are not destroyed by the fire. The only result is—that they become more saintly. The sin and the earthliness are burnt out of their lives—and the pure gold remains.

There are furnaces of trial, too, in which men suffer loss for being true and loyal to God. We must not suppose that a holy life is always an easy one. Says one: "God’s judgments—it may be the very sternest and most irremediable of them—come, many a time, in the guise, not of affliction—but of immense earthly prosperity and ease."

Daniel in the Den of Lions

Daniel 6:10-23

Daniel was a wise man, and his wisdom and faithfulness made him a very valuable man in the affairs of the empire. When the new king appointed his officers—he put Daniel at the head of those who were set to rule. This made the other officers envious. They could not bear to see Daniel so honored. So they determined to find some way to drag him down. First, they sought to find something wrong with his official record. If they could only discover some dishonesty or some injustice they would soon get him put down.

There still is envy in the world after all these centuries of Christian teaching and life. Those who excel in any line or department are sure to suffer in some way for their excellence. Watkinson has a very suggestive chapter in one of his books on "The Sorrows of Superiority." The business man who succeeds above his competitors almost certainly incurs dislike and sometimes is made to suffer. It is so in school and even in the home. Envy was the cause of the hatred of Joseph's brothers. There are men in politics who are envious of those who have got above them, and this old Babylonian wickedness—searching into a man's record just to find some weak or questionable act in order to destroy him—is quite well understood.

"They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent." It is well when a man has lived so blamelessly, that even envy cannot touch any act of his life. This same wretched work of envy is done too among boys and girls at school. Many times have efforts been made to hurt the record of the most successful pupil. Envy is a very ugly passion. Before we get through with this story, we shall see that it usually harms most the person who indulges it. When they failed to find anything to hurt Daniel in his record, they thought of his foreign religion, and decided to arrange a plot that could not fail to get him out of their way. So they prepared the decree that for thirty days no one should make any petition to any god or man—but to the king.

They asked the king to sign the decree, and in his pride and weakness he did as they wished. "Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before."

Let us linger a moment at Daniel's window and watch him at prayer. His regular habits of devotion should be noted. He had set hours for praying. This is the only way to maintain a life of prayer. People may sneer at clockwork devotion—but clockwork has its essential place in all godly living. Wholesome habits are nine-tenths in business, in study, in friendship, in character. They are just as necessary in religion. One who has no regular habits of praying—will soon not pray at all.

Notice, also, that Daniel paid no heed whatever to the king's decree. Yet he was loyal and obedient to the king, never disregarding his commands. But there are some things with which the law of the land, has nothing whatever to do. God's law is to be the first guide of our life, and if the law of a country requires us to deviate from that, we have only one choice. A law forbidding us to pray to God, or read our Bible, or meet with others for God's worship, would have no authority at all over us. It was on this principle that Daniel acted.

It might be said that Daniel did not need to pray before the open window. Was there not a little unnecessary bravado in this? But this is answered by the words "just as he had done before." That was the way he had always prayed, and to draw a curtain that day would have shown fear and

would not have been a loyal confession.

Daniel’s enemies were watching, and when they saw the young Hebrew kneeling before his window in prayer, they lost no time in reporting the matter to the king. The king was angry with himself for having fallen into the trap set by Daniel’s enemies. It grieved him that he could not save Daniel—but his courtiers reminded him that no decree which the king established could be changed. He felt himself compelled therefore to have Daniel cast into the den of lions. "Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions." An incident told of Palissy, the Huguenot potter, illustrates the position of king and prisoner here. Palissy was in the prison for his devotion to the Protestant faith, and the king of France, who had a high regard for him, visited the prisoner in his dungeon. He told him of his friendship—but said that unless Palissy would comply with the established religion he should be forced, however unwillingly, to leave him in the hands of his enemies. "Forced! Sire!" replied the noble old martyr. "Forced! This is not to speak like a king. But they who force you cannot force me. I can die!" The king was distressed that he had to cast his favorite minister and friend to the lions. He went to his palace—but could not sleep. "Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep." No wonder. How could a man eat or sleep after such an act?

We see here, in the palace, what remorse does for a man. It turned the king’s royal bed-chamber into a chamber of horrors. By way of contrast we may look into the lions’ den which was Daniel’s bedroom that night. So far as physical surroundings were concerned, the king had far the better of it—with his luxurious apartment, his rich furniture, his soft couch, with all that the world could give him of pleasures; while Daniel had only a dark, filthy cavern, with wild beasts round him. But while the king was wretched, consumed with remorse, Daniel was in sweet peace. We can imagine him sleeping in the den, amid the lions, as quietly as ever he had slept in his own house. The fierce animals lay about him, as harmless as lambs, because God’s angel was among them. This is a picture of the safety and peace which are the portion of those who trust God and do His will. The king must have had a hope that in some way Daniel had been kept unhurt in the den through the night. His cry in the morning, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" showed that he knew of Daniel’s religion and hoped that God had delivered him. "Yes," said Daniel, from within the den, "my God has sent His angel, and has shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not hurt me." Of course, we are not to conclude from this, that in all cases of much danger God protects His own children from bodily harm. Many times since that day Christian martyrs have been thrown to the lions and have been torn to pieces by them. Yet this is no evidence that these were not godly men, or that God was not able to deliver them. Sometimes the best use that can be made of a noble life—is to have it offered to God for death, sacrificed for the truth. The king’s joy was very great. Then his thought turned to those who had brought about the attempt to destroy Daniel. "The king commanded, and they brought those men that had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions." We need not consider the question of right in this case. No doubt these conspirators deserved death, since they had deliberately and wickedly plotted against the life of Daniel. The point to be marked, is the doom which comes upon envy. These men conspired against Daniel, securing an edict by which he should be torn to pieces by lions. The outcome of the conspiracy, is that Daniel is preserved alive and is promoted to still higher honor in the kingdom for the remainder of his life—while the

men themselves who envied him and sought his destruction, to get him out of the way of their own promotion, were themselves cast into the den they had prepared for him. The principle is that envy always brings back the curse upon itself.

Sin, the Cause of Sorrow

Hosea 10:1-15

Hosea was one of the prophets of the Ten Tribes, near the end of the Northern Kingdom. Most of his prophecies refer to the condition and destiny of his kingdom. Little is known personally of the prophet. The first three chapters of the book contain a history or parable of the prophet's marriage, in which the love of God for Israel is graphically depicted, and the treatment of Him by His people is shown in all its blackness. The remaining portion of the book contains prophecies against the people's sins. In the chapter for our present study, we are reminded of the splendid opportunities Israel had had, and of the reckless misuse or abuse of these opportunities. "Israel is a luxuriant vine." The picture is of a vine that makes a great show in leaves—but in the time of fruit has no grapes on it. It represents a life of much religious profession—yet lacking in the fruits of righteousness, of character.

We understand its meaning as referring to Israel in Hosea's time. The nation made a great show of religion—but its religion was idolatrous. Possibly, too, we could find people or Churches in these very modern days that might have sat for the picture. It will be of more practical help to ourselves and a fitter use of the Bible, if we make careful scrutiny of our own personal lives to see whether this vine with luxurious leaves and no fruit—is in any sense a picture of US.

We profess to be good people. There is a great deal of religious privilege and profession in our lives. We have had fine opportunities. Have we the fruits of the Holy Spirit? Have we the love, joy, peace, long-sutfering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faith—which are given as samples of these fruits! Are we pure in heart, lowly in spirit, meek, peacemakers, as the Beatitudes paint the true Christian life? Have we the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians in our heart and disposition and life? The secret of this failure in the true results of life, is given in the words, "Their heart is divided." They thought they were very pious, with great show of devotion. But it was not really worship. They were only half-hearted, at the best. A divided heart is an abomination to the Lord. We remember what our Lord said about it. Indeed, what he really said was that a divided heart was an impossibility. That is, only part of a heart—does not count at all with God. Unless the heart is His altogether, it is not His at all. "No man can serve two masters." "You cannot serve God and mammon!"

There is room in a human heart for a great many things—but there is not room for two Gods. If one loves father or mother or son or daughter or anything else—more than Christ, he is not worthy of Him. We need to look carefully into this matter for ourselves—not troubling ourselves much at present about the ancient Israelites. Are OUR hearts divided between Christ and something else? Is our worship sincere and spiritual? The ancient emblem of prayer was fragrance. The incense that was burned on the golden altar was rich in its perfume. God spoke of smelling a sweet savor from acceptable sacrifices. Does God find our worship fragrant? Is there love in it? Is there hearty praise? Is there sincere penitence? A nation without God is like a ship adrift, without a rudder on the sea. This was the condition of the nation of Israel at this time. They were facing great

perils—and had no Pilot. They had cut themselves off from God by their own sin. They had a king in name—but what could their king do for them in their danger? He could not save them from their enemies. There are many people who give up God—for a human friend, or for money, or honor, or place. But in time of sore trial, what can their friend, or their money, or their fame do for them? This world's trusts are frail and poor dependences, when sore need comes. They are refuges of lies, even the best of them. What could Israel's king do to save his people from the Assyrians? What can friend or gold or honor do for a human soul in time of great struggle, in temptation, in sorrow, in the hour of death, in the day of judgment? A man was found dead at the foot of a precipice. He had fallen from the top. In his hand, clutched tightly, was a dried blade of grass. In his fall he had grasped this—but of what help was it to him? Of no more use will earth's trusts be to him who in life's great and sore needs clutches at them. They will be only dry straws in his hand. It is a fearful thing to give up God.

They thought they had gods—but they were only calves of gold. They had a very elaborate ritual of worship—but it was all only an empty form. There was no might, no heart of love, no power to help in these calves. Indeed, they could not even take care of themselves, and the people were now in dread lest their enemies should carry away their very deities. "The people who live in Samaria fear for the calf-idol. Its people will mourn over it, and so will its idolatrous priests, those who had rejoiced over its splendor, because it is taken from them into exile." Instead of turning to their gods for deliverance in their danger, they were in terror lest the gods might be carried away. There is something even ludicrous in the picture the prophet here paints—yet it is so true that it has its startling lesson for us. Anything that can be carried away into captivity—is not fit to be a god to an immortal soul. Israel's calf-diol was to be carried to Assyria as a present to the king. Think of one's god being given as a present to one's enemy.

Toward the close of the chapter, comes a call to repentance. God yearns over His apostate people with all tenderness. He pleads with them to do what is right. "Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek Jehovah, until He comes and showers righteousness on you." It is never too late to repent. At least God never shuts the door—on this side of the grave. Here amid the predictions of ruin and sorrow—the prophet breaks off to call the people to repentance, and paints for them a vision of hope. Even yet God would have mercy upon them—if they would but return to Him. But the returning must be sincere and real. They must sow righteousness, if they would reap mercy. Mercy never can come to the sinner—until he comes to God in the way of holiness. The fallow ground must be broken up, before there can be any harvest. The hard heart must be broken with penitence, to receive the good seed of the kingdom. "It is time to seek Jehovah." Surely it is! The prophet reminds them of what their sin had brought upon them. "But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception. Because you have depended on your own strength and on your many warriors." "Whatever a man sows—that shall he also reap," is as sure and fixed a law of the spiritual as of the natural kingdom. Those who sow righteousness, shall reap mercy. Then it is just as true, that they who sow wickedness, shall reap iniquity; and that they who sow lies, shall reap a harvest of lies. No man should hope to live in sin, doing wrong things—and then have the reward of the godly man, peace, joy, and blessing. No one should hope to be untruthful, false, faithless—and then have a name of honor, to be trusted and believed by others. One who forms the habit of lying—must expect to be regarded as a liar in the community where he lives. As a

general rule, we get about what we deserve from our fellow-men, in the way of reputation. Especially in God's distributions, we may be sure that sooner or later that we shall reap—as we have sown! The prophet warned the people of Israel of the doom that was coming upon them if they went on in their evil way. "The roar of battle will rise against your people, so that all your fortresses will be devastated— as Shalman devastated Beth Arbel on the day of battle, when mothers were dashed to the ground with their children. Thus will it happen to you, O Bethel, because your wickedness is great. When that day dawns, the king of Israel will be completely destroyed." Thus the coming of the calamity was foretold. Judgment was sure. Judgment is sure likewise, for every one who is living in sin! It may be delayed, for God is very merciful and waits to be gracious. But it will surely come.

Israel Often Reproved

Amos 4:4-13

Amos probably was a Judean. He was a small farmer and shepherd. He cultivated a few sycamore trees whose fruit was lightly esteemed. He owned a little flock of sheep, sheep of a peculiar breed which yielded an excellent kind of wool. He pastured his sheep in the wilderness of Judea.

Bethel, the ecclesiastical capital of the Northern Kingdom, was the principal scene of his preaching. "Go to Bethel and sin!" cried the prophet. Bethel was their place of worship—but every time they came there, they sinned because their worship was sin. Instead of bowing before the true God and adoring Him, they bowed before idols and gave them the honor which belonged to God alone. The more devout they were, therefore, the more they dishonored the Lord. Their great zeal, as shown in their sacrifices and tithes and free-will offerings, only multiplied their sin and heaped up sorer judgment against them. "Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years. Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings— boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do!" declares the Sovereign LORD." Amos 4:5-6 Their religion was all a pious farce, and the more there was of it—the more of an abomination it was unto God. God cannot be pleased with mere forms of worship and with ceremonials. The more we multiply these, the more do we grieve Him—if our heart is not in them. We may say we have no idols now in our churches; but are we sure of this? Do we truly worship God in our church services? When we sing the hymns, are our hearts fixed upon God? When we pray, are we really talking to God? When we confess sins, is the confession sincere? When we sit in God's house, are we truly in God's presence, breathing out our heart's love and worship to Him? If not, what or whom are we adoring, praising, worshiping? Empty religious forms—must have some idol at the heart of them. The prophet told them very plainly what was in their hearts. "This is what you love to do!" You love this! You love to make a great display in your religion. This display of piety—is just to your taste. You like to cover up your sins—with forms of worship, appearing as saints before the world, though in secret cherishing and practicing all manner of wickedness! This is God's own picture of these ancient 'worshipers'. We need to look honestly at it—to see if it is OUR picture. God looks at the heart! No external appearances are of any value—unless they are genuine expressions of what is in the heart! Pirate ships carry reputable flags to cover their dishonorable character. Religious hypocrisy often puts at its masthead, the colors of devout saintliness. But God cannot be deceived.

Someone told of past sorrows, sorrows which were sent with blessing, messengers bringing good in their hands—but which were rejected, turned away, resented as enemies, though they came as friends. When we sin against God—He sends penalties. Suffering always follows sin—but these penalties come to us really as friends, to save us from sinning again. God had sent penalties to the people of Israel—but they had not minded them. "I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town—yet you have not returned to Me," declares Jehovah." The Lord had not let them alone in their sins. He had not merely allowed them to go on in their evil ways, without any effort to save them. In these verses we learn of judgment after judgment which God says He sent upon His people.

First there was "empty stomachs"—famine, lack of bread. Next He had withheld rain from their land. To make it yet more clear to them that the hand of God was in this withholding, He had caused it to rain in one place and not in another, so that while on one piece of ground everything was green and fresh, on another piece near by—all life was withered and dead. Then He had sent blasting and mildew, hot winds and blight, to destroy what the drought had left.

After these, He had sent palmer-worms to eat up the vineyards and gardens which were watered by artificial means and thus escaped the previous judgments. Having thus destroyed their gardens and crops and vineyards, He had then sent a plague upon the people themselves, sweeping away many of them. War had followed pestilence, and their young men had been slain. After all these terrible things, an earthquake had come, overthrowing and destroying many.

There are lessons here, which we must not lose. We must not misinterpret God. No doubt some of these people, when pursued by trouble, said that God was hard and cruel and unkind—to send so many losses and sufferings upon them. So it seemed. But here we are permitted to look into God’s heart—and see a motive of love in all these sore troubles which He sent upon His people. They had gone far away from Him, and He would bring them back again. One affliction failed, and then He sent another and another and another. These sore troubles were all God’s angels of love sent to try to save God’s children. We ought to fix this lesson in our hearts, for some time we may need its light.

One came to a pastor with sore complainings against God. He had been most unkind, even cruel, he said. The pastor listened to a recital of a long series of bitter experiences—disappointments, sufferings, hardships. It certainly seemed that if these were God’s doings—they were strange expressions of love. But the pastor questioned a little further, as gently as he could, and he learned that his friend had not been living near God during the time of these troubles, and had not been brought nearer to Him through the things which had seemed so hard—he had indeed been drifting farther away all the while, out into the wintry cold of unbelief and rebelliousness.

We may not interpret providences, saying that the history of this friend was the same as that of these ancient people, whom God had chastened to save—but who only went farther away from Him. Yet there is no doubt that the design of God in all His severe dealings with His children is the same—to bring back those who have wandered, or to bring still nearer those who are already near to Him. It is always love, never anger, that comes in the messengers of divine chastening.

"Yet have you not returned unto Me! says the Lord." After each recital of judgment, comes this same sad refrain. God had sent famine to bring them back. "Yet have you not returned unto Me!"

He had withheld rain. "Yet have you not returned unto Me!" He had smitten their grain with blasting and mildew, and the palmer-worm had eaten up their vineyards and gardens. "Yet have you not returned unto Me!" He had sent pestilence and war, with terrible loss and devastation. "Yet have you not returned unto Me!" Earthquakes had caused terror over the land, laying much of it in ruin. "Yet have you not returned unto Me!" This recurring refrain is infinitely pathetic. It sounds like the sob of God's breaking heart. It tells of wonderful love in Him for His people—in spite of all their sin; of love that forbears and waits and pleads and suffers on, never wearying in its eiforts to save. It tells, too, of love's sorrow—when the erring do not return. It speaks of divine disappointment when even sore judgments fail to bring back the sinning children. It is a wonderful revealing of the heart of God. No one who catches its meaning, can ever again say that God is cruel or unkind in sending troubles upon His people. He wants to save them—not to hurt or destroy them. We learn, too, what we should always do when any chastening falls upon us; we should get nearer to God! No matter how holy our lives may be, there is yet a holier holiness, a nearer nearness, attainable. If we are conscious of specific sins—we should put them away. We disappoint and grieve God when in any chastening, we do not return unto Him.

God reminds the people of how mercifully He had dealt with them. "You were as a brand plucked out of the burning." This is a striking figure. In the overthrow, probably by an earthquake, some seem to have perished. Those who escaped were almost destroyed, coming out of the overthrow injured, barely saved. They were like a brand, a piece of wood, which has passed through the fire, and has been plucked out, not burned up altogether—but scorched and blackened, partly burned, bearing the marks of the fire upon it. The picture is very suggestive. Sin is a fire. Wherever it touches it burns, scorches, wastes, consumes the beauty. Secret sin is like hidden, smoldering fire, which, unseen—yet eats away the life's substance and defaces the divine image that is on it.

What fire does to the trees when it sweeps through the forests, blackening them, destroying their leaves and all their greenness; sin does to the lives about which its flames flow. We all know lives, once lovely—but now scorched and blackened by sin. If sin is like a fire, human lives are like trees which the fire consumes. Every one of us has been hurt by this fire. Unless plucked out by some hand of love—our lives shall be utterly destroyed by the flames of sin which roll over all this world. But the burning brand may be saved. A gardener saw one day in a pile of burning rubbish, a piece of root that was blackened and scorched, partly charred. But he plucked it out and, taking it away, he planted it, and it grew. It proved to be the root of a valuable species of grapevine, and in a few years the vine springing from it covered a large arbor and in the autumn days hung full of rich purple clusters. Saved lives are brands plucked from the burning. Thousands of them shine now in blessedness, redeemed from destruction, clothed in beauty, covered with the fruits of righteousness and holiness!

Jonah Sent to Nineveh Jonah 1:1-4; Jonah 3:1-10

It was not by any means an easy task that was given to Jonah—his mission to Nineveh. There was no Board of Missions behind him with ample funds. There were no comfortable missionary quarters in Nineveh to receive him. There were no fine railroads to carry him there. The journey was long, the duty was hard and full of danger. It is quite easy to sit in our pleasant rooms and criticize the prophet; but—would YOU have wanted to go, if you had been in his place?

Jonah suddenly conceived a strong desire to go to Tarshish, instead of to Nineveh. Distinctly it is said he did it—to flee from the presence of Jehovah. Perhaps Tarshish needed a preacher too—but that was not where the Lord wanted Jonah to go at that time. It is never a question of where we want or do not want to go—but of where God wants us to go. A reason for Jonah's reluctance comes out later. He didn't believe God would destroy Nineveh; that is, he believed the Ninevites would repent and God would spare them. The fact is, he didn't want these heathen people to be saved! He wanted God to destroy them. He was an Israelite with strong prejudices, and on principle didn't believe in foreign missions. He considered the heathen fit only to be destroyed, certainly not fit to be saved in the same company with him!

We will call this a very unworthy attitude for a prophet to have—and surely it was. But does no good, clean, respectable, well-to-do modern Christian, ever have a like feeling toward wicked, dirty, degraded, good-for-nothing sinners? Just think out the answer, and don't look too far away from home for your facts.

"He found a ship going to Tarshish; and so he paid the fare." He did not want to go to Nineveh, so he thought he would go on a trip in another direction. It is a very sad piece of history. Was there never a young minister, just through the seminary, whom God wanted to go to some heathen country—but who didn't want to go, and made excuse to go somewhere else in place? Was there never a minister whom God called to some lowly, needy field among the poor or the outcast—but who had a "providential" call about the same time—to a rich or a fashionable church, which he took instead? Are there no good Christian men and women—not prophets or ministers—who have had "calls" to duties which were hard and repulsive, perhaps attended with danger or requiring sacrifice, which they did not accept—running off toward Tarshish instead?

It is well enough to look honestly at Jonah's sin—but we must not exhaust our vision on him. It is no doubt a great deal easier to be honest with other people's sins than with our own—but it is with our OWN SINS—that we have the chief business. None of us shall ever be punished for Jonah's sins—but for our own we shall be—unless we repent of them. The fact is, there is a great deal more running away from distasteful duty—than we dream of; and the condemnation strikes close home with many of us. Do we never shirk a task, that we know in our soul we ought to perform? Do we never make errands for ourselves as excuses for not doing errands that God has assigned to us? Well, that was what Jonah did—he made believe that business called him to Spain, to get clear of going to Nineveh.

"The word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the second time." He had failed dishonorably the first time—but God gave him a second chance to do his work. This shows the divine patience with us. Strict justice would have left Jonah at the bottom of the sea—or in the maw of the great fish; but grace preserved his life and restored him to begin again. He had now gone through a discipline which left him submissive and ready to obey. This is the way God often deals with people in our own days. When they disobey Him, He does not cast them off—but puts them under some discipline, sometimes sore and painful—to teach them obedience, and then tries them again.

Many of us have to be whipped to duty; but God is very patient with us. Most of us owe all we are to His disciplines. By these, even our sins and falls become blessings to us. We should be very thankful to God, too, for these second chances that He gives us—when we have failed to improve the first chance. Very few people make of their lives what God first wanted them to make. Then He

sets them another lesson, that they may try again. Perhaps the second is not so beautiful or so noble as the first; still it is good, and if we are diligent and faithful—we can find blessing in it and make something noble even yet of our life. Most of us have to be sent more than once on our errands for God. Happy are we if we go even at the second bidding, although it is far better that we go at the first. The command to Jonah was very definite. "Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach the message that I tell you!" God knows just how He wants His work done. One of the most important things in a servant—is that he shall do precisely what his master bids him to do. We are too apt to be careless about exactness in obedience. A good many children err at this point in obeying their parents. They obey them perhaps—but they put very liberal construction upon their commands, and so their obedience is very inexact. They should learn the duty of precise obedience. In all business matters there is need for the same lesson. Railroad trains have been wrecked, with terrible loss of life, because a telegraph operator or some other employee obeyed his order inexactly. Wherever we are employed we should train ourselves to do our work just as we are bidden to do it.

One who would tell others how to be saved—must preach just the preaching which God bids His servants preach. Bad advice has wrecked destinies. Wrong sermons, and teaching of spiritual truth has wrecked souls! We are not to put our own construction on God's Word—and give that to the people. We are not to talk carelessly about the divine thoughts and teachings. We are reverently and faithfully to preach the message that the Lord bids us to preach, without abatement, without addition, without change!

Jonah had learned his lesson and learned it well. This time he arose and went to Nineveh. We are not told where he was after his deliverance—but no doubt he had a quiet time for thought and repenting. He would go over the story of his willfulness and disobedience in the matter of going to Nineveh, and would be ashamed of his conduct. Thus he learned humility and was ready now to do as God might command him. Indeed, he would become eager for another opportunity to do the work which he had first refused to do.

There is a story of a regiment of soldiers which in some war had dishonored itself in some way on a certain battlefield. In a later war the same regiment was again in the service, and at the first opportunity they displayed most heroic courage, thus "burning out the shame" of the former field. So Jonah in his humility, would long for another chance to go for God to Nineveh, that he might wipe out the dishonor of his former disobedience. When the command came a second time—he would rejoice. So we see prompt obedience this time, no parleying, no quibbling, no running away.

He delivered his message. "He cried, and said—in forty days Nineveh shall be overthrown!" The doom was announced, and forty days' warning was given. God always gives time enough for repentance. He is reluctant to punish. He waits to be gracious. This truthfully represents the heart of God and His dealing with sinners. He is slow to punish—and quick to forgive. "In forty days!" Still it must be noticed that the time for mercy is limited. The message was heard and believed. "The people of Nineveh believed God." They believed what God said through His prophet about their sins—and about the destruction that was swiftly coming upon their city. This is a kind of faith that is needed everywhere just now. God speaks very plainly in His Word about the penalties and consequences of sin—but there are many who do not believe God. They sneer at the thought of judgment or eternal punishment. The king and people entered heartily into the movement. "They

proclaimed a fast." They called upon the people of the city to turn every one from his evil way. Their repentance was genuine—so far as it went. They did not merely put on garments of sackcloth and mourning; they turned their faces to God and gave up their evil deeds. They humbled themselves; they confessed their sins; they cleansed their hands of the wickedness they had been committing; they cried to God, supplicating His mercy. It is along the same path that everyone must walk—who would find forgiveness and the turning away of God's wrath. Sins must be given up—and turned away from. Bible mercy is wonderfully full and blessed—but Bible repentance is also deep and thorough.

"Who knows whether God will not . . . turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?" The repentance of Nineveh was from fear, and to escape the judgment pronounced upon them. That was as far as they could go—a mere dim hope that God might turn away from His anger—if they would turn away from their sins. That was all the gospel they had. No promise of mercy had been made to them on any condition, so far as we are told. They were not assured that if they repented—the doom would be averted; they repented on the strength of the dim hope of mercy which their own hearts suggested.

It is different with us. The same message which tells us of our sins, and the penalty which is sure to be visited upon them—points us also to the cross and proclaims eternal salvation and life to every one who will repent and believe on Christ. We are not driven to any such mere "perhaps" when we see our sins and desire to be saved. We know that if we confess our sins—God will forgive them; that if we seek the Lord—we shall be saved.

Mercy was revealed at once. "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way." God is always watching the earth, every corner of it where a sinful soul is, and wherever there is true penitence He sees it. There is no danger that anyone ever shall repent and weep over sin—and God not know it. There is joy in the presence of the angels when even one sinner repents. The most beautiful and precious thing on this earth in God's sight, is the penitential tear.

Joshua the High Priest Zechariah 3:1-10

Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai. His prophetic career seems to have been brief. His mission was that of an encourager. The people in trying to rebuild Jerusalem had become greatly discouraged. A deep depression had settled on them. Zechariah sought to kindle hope in their hearts and to induce them to undertake the work of building. In visions which are interpreted by the angel, the prophet gives his message. Our passage gives one of the visions. "He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of Jehovah, and Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary." This is a strange picture—the high priest in his place before God, and Satan standing beside him. We understand at once that Satan is not there for any friendly purpose. He is never anywhere for a friendly purpose in behalf of a godly man, or for the good of the world. No matter in what guise Satan appears, or what his profession may be—his real object is always sinister and wicked.

Probably if we could see spirits with these eyes of ours—we should many times behold pictures like this—good people in good places with good intent—and Satan standing at their right hand. When we go to church, Satan no doubt keeps near us or has some of his messengers near us, not because he enjoys going to church, nor because he likes to be with us—but because he has some

evil design on us. He is always our adversary, whatever he may profess to be—never our friend.

Life is full of insidious dangers. Ofttimes when we think we are safest—we are in the greatest peril. Many of our gravest dangers are unsuspected, because they hide in the sunshine of our sweetest blessings. Prosperity has its perils, which are worse in many cases than what we dread so in adversity or misfortune. Disease is more apt to lurk in a soft, dreamy atmosphere, balmy and pleasant—than in the sharp, chill, wintry air of January. More demons hide in luxurious conditions, than in circumstances of hardship and honest poverty. So it is in spiritual things. Living in a church—would not keep the devil away from one's ear. The minister in his pulpit or at the communion table—is not sheltered from the assaults of Satan, the adversary. When the priest and the prophet stand before God, Satan always stands beside them!

While Satan was standing beside Joshua, so was the angel of Jehovah. That counteracted the danger. Satan could not harm the godly priest, while the Lord was taking care of him. Satan will no doubt follow us wherever we go, even intruding himself into the holiest places. But if we are where duty calls us or leads us—we know that God is beside us as well as Satan, and that no harm can come to us so long as we trust in Him and are faithful and obedient. If in the picture Satan alone stood, unseen, beside God's priest—it would be full of alarm, for no mortal is a match for Satan. But while the Lord also is present—there is a safe shelter into which the imperiled soul may flee. "God is our refuge ... a very present help in trouble!" "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it, and is safe!" The best way we can answer those who would harm us—is to let God answer for us. "And the LORD said to Satan: I, the LORD, reject your accusations, Satan. Yes, the LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebukes you." The Lord is the friend of His people and will not stand by inactive, when Satan is plotting against any one of them. He is the defender especially of the defenseless. This characteristic of the divine love is revealed in all parts of the Scriptures. God is the God of the weak. In the Mosaic laws, definite provision was made for the widow and the orphan. Something was to be left for them, when the harvests were gathered. The poor were put under special protection, to shield them from the oppression of the rich and the strong. Every child of God is an object of peculiar divine care. The weakest of them all—is as safe in God's keeping, even amid the greatest dangers—as safe as if they were already in heaven! In a great flood in one of the rivers of the West, some men in a skiff saw an infant's cradle floating in the middle of the wide, turbulent river, and, rowing to it, found in it a little baby sleeping sweetly, in quiet peace, wrapped warm and dry in its blankets. No harm had come to the child in the wild torrent. Just so does God hold His little ones in the midst of earth's wildest dangers. No harm can come to one of them—while nestling in His bosom. The form of the rebuke here suggests that we may safely leave our defense in the Lord's hands—when Satan assails us and when anyone would do us harm.

It is probable that Joshua did not see his adversary standing beside him, and did not see the Lord nor hear His word of rebuke to Satan. This suggests that many a time when we are not aware of our danger—the Lord has saved us from it by His own hand, delivering us from the hand of the adversary. The only true safety for us—is in trusting in God, for ofttimes we do not know when danger is near; and if we have not God to care for us—we must perish! True faith is simply doing our duty—and letting Christ look after the keeping of our life.

"Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" A "brand" is a piece of wood, charred, almost burned up—but then snatched out of the fire. Though so nearly destroyed, it yet has wood in it and may be capable of noble uses. A "brand plucked out of the fire" may seem hopeless—yet it may have in it the possibilities of great usefulness and beauty. This "remnant" of returned Jews was only a brand plucked from the fire of captivity—but it was not dead, and under God's gentle culture it would become a nation and be great and strong. We know well what did become of this brand—the Messiah, and at length Christianity. We ought never to despise nor despair of any life that has immortality in it. The vision was suggestive. "Take off his filthy garments." This was an acted parable. We may read a good deal of gospel teaching into it—and yet not wrest the Scripture. The filthy garments were a true picture of Joshua's moral condition in the eyes of the Lord God. The "adversary" meant to prove that the high priest was not a holy man. The Lord did not question this charge. But He commanded those who stood by—to take off those filthy garments, saying then to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you!" So the change of clothing meant more than just that. It was a picture of what the redemption of Christ does for all those who trust Him as Savior. It finds them clad in filthy garments. Satan stands by and accuses them. "They are not holy," he says; "not worthy of heaven or everlasting life. Look at their sins!" Very true in one sense. None are holy—none are worthy of heaven. But Jesus died for sinners. He made an atonement for sin. He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And He comes and strips off the filthy garments of the flesh, and clothes those who believe on Him in the beautiful clothing of righteousness. He says, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you!" The parable is continued: "So they put a clean priestly turban on his head and dressed him in new clothes." They put upon him the priestly dress. The mitre had a gold plate across the forehead, with the inscription, "Holiness to the Lord." This indicated the sacred character of him who wore it—set apart for God. It also signified that he on whose brow the words were shining, was a forgiven man—unworthy in himself—but cleansed and accepted. The garments were also priestly garments, beautiful and clean.

Christ's redeemed ones are a "kingdom of priests." When we are received by Him—we are clad in priestly turban and new apparel. We are to be holy. Every Christian life should be a transfigured life. Forgiveness means cleansing. The putting away of sins means not merely acquittal, the remission of penalty. It is the putting away of sin itself out of the life. This wonderful result is accomplished by the entrance into the heart of the Holy Spirit, who, making His dwelling place there, transforms the whole being. A promise of honor and power is given: "If you follow my ways and obey my requirements, then you will be given authority over my Temple and its courtyards. I will let you walk in and out of my presence along with these others standing here." The way to rise to higher places—is to be faithful in the humbler places in which our lot is cast. All promotion depends upon faithfulness. Unless we do well the smaller things which God gives us to do—He will not entrust greater things to us. The man who was faithful and diligent in the use of his two talents—saw the two become four, and found himself put in trust also with new responsibilities.

We are specially concerned with the lesson that faithfulness in the common duties of the passing days—is the most important thing of life with us. We need not seek promotion, nor think of honor or reward; we should desire and strive only to be true and loyal to God and to the duty He gives. Doing this, He will lead us step by step into the larger service or greater usefulness as He may find us ready. The words take a prophetic turn. "I will bring forth, my servant the Branch." Just then the

Jewish nation was like the mere stump of a tree which had been cut down. There was no beauty and but little sign of life. The glory of David’s days had failed. The nation was now in captivity. A few of the people had returned to their own old land, and there was a feeble effort made to renew the old national and religious life. But all this seemed very small and unpromising. It did not appear to human eyes—that the ancient glory could ever be seen again. Yet here is a promise that out of this mere stump should come a "Branch," a shoot, which should grow into great luxuriousness of life, far surpassing the splendor of the original tree which once had been so noble and so fruitful. We know how this promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who came of this lowly stock, and whose life and glory now fills earth and heaven.

Prosperity would follow: "In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree, declares the LORD Almighty." This is a picture of peace—under the vine and under the fig-tree. It suggests quiet and security, joy and gladness. The gospel brings peace!

Power Through the Spirit Zechariah 4:1-14 The visions of Zechariah all have a meaning. This one is of a candlestick supplied by olive trees. "Then the angel who had been talking with me returned and woke me, as though I had been asleep." It is a good thing to have anyone wake us up. We ought always to be awake. We will miss a great deal if we are not. It is a good thing to be awakened by an angel. An angel’s touch is soft, gentle, and inspiring. It does not rouse us roughly and rudely. It was an angel that touched Peter and awoke him when he lay sleeping in the prison, between the guards, expecting to be called to execution in the morning. The angels awake us to joy, to gladness, to beauty—not to alarms, to sorrow, to pain, to anxiety. This is a book of visions. We are not prophets, and God does not reveal His will to us as He did to Zechariah. But every earnest soul has visions, glimpses of better things, of nobler life. Whenever we ponder deeply some Word of God—there opens out in it a vision of spiritual beauty. Every time we read the biography of a noble life—we have a vision which should inspire ns to longings for like nobleness. In godly people—we have visions of qualities of character, and acts of self-denying love, which are like visions. We shall be always seeing visions if we live as we may. Heaven lies about us always, close to us; we are on its borders, and we see the rarest beauty at every turn if we will. Really it is a matter of eyes—the beauty is always there, if only we have eyes to see.

"What do you see?" asked the angel. We should learn to see things. The world is full of lovely objects, which only a few people really see. There are those who will walk through gardens and over fields filled with flowers and plants—and yet never see any beautiful thing that makes appeal to them, never have their souls stirred. There are those who walk under the starry skies every night through the years—and are never moved to any sense of wonder or any feeling of admiration, much less of adoration. Moses saw God in the burning bush and took off his shoes. Many people would only have seen a common bush. We should train ourselves to see nature in all its beauty of form and color—the highest beauty that is everywhere in God’s works. When the angel awakened the prophet—he looked and at once saw something which caught his attention. "I have seen, and, behold, a candlestick all of gold." Every Christian should be a light-bearer. God wants us to shine. The world is dark, and we are to pour light into its darkness. There are many ways to do this. The first always is in our own life. Our character must shine. That means, to put it very simply, that we must be holy. A pure, good, loving heart—will make the light shine. Nothing but love shines. We are, therefore, to be obedient, trustful, and reverent toward God—and gentle, unselfish, kind, thoughtful, patient, and helpful toward others. The candle wastes, burns itself up,

in shining. We must burn—to shine. It costs to be unselfish, patient, thoughtful, and useful. We must be forgiving; we must bear injuries; we must do good to unworthy people; we must deny ourselves and make personal sacrifices; we must be gentle and kind—when others are rude to us. As the prophet looked the vision became clear and distinct. "I see a candlestick all of gold . . . and seven lamps on it, with seven pipes to the lights. Also there are two olive trees by it." The meaning is that the lamps which burned brightly were supplied with oil—without the help of human hands—from the live olive trees through the golden pipes. The lamps themselves would not give light—they must have oil in them. They must also be continually refilled, so that they will continue to shine.

Just so, our lives are only empty lamps which must be supplied with oil from Christ's own fullness. That is, we must abide in Christ—so as to receive of His life continually. We can shine—only when the oil of divine love and grace is in us.

"Then I asked the angel: What are these, my lord? What do they mean?" The prophet wished to know the meaning of the vision he saw. He was of an eager, inquiring mind. He was not content to let anything pass, which he did not understand. This is a good rule for all of us. Some people get tired answering children's questions. They are annoyed by their desire to know what things are for. But children ought to ask questions. The world is all new to them. They have a right to learn what things are—and why they are. We ought to encourage a child's inquisitiveness and take delight in telling it every new thing we can. Moreover, we should be children ourselves, all through our life, in this—the desire to know the meaning of every new thing we come upon. The answer the angel gave the prophet, contained the whole wonderful meaning of the vision. "So he said to me: This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty!" If the completion of the temple had depended on human might or power—it never would have been finished. The people were few, poor, and weak—and the work was great, and enemies were on every side. The temple never could have risen from amid the old ruins—if it had depended on the human might that was in the field. But it did not. God's Spirit was in the work, and there is no power in the universe that can withstand God or successfully resist Him. He could do the work with small means or with great. He could not be hindered by opposition of enemies, for He is omnipotent!

It is still true in God's world, that it is not by might nor by power—but by the Holy Spirit, that things are done. God does not need human strength to work with Him; He would rather work with human weakness. When He sends us out to do anything for Him—He will always provide the means and open the way, that we may not fail—if only we trust Him. God uses little things to accomplish His great purposes. At this time the people were discouraged. It seemed that their work of building the temple could not go on. Human power was faint. The vision was a revelation of God working with His almighty power to accomplish the work. The candlesticks drew the oil from the olive trees. Human agency was unnecessary. "Not by might, nor by power—says the LORD Almighty!"

Enemies were boasting—but their power would be as nothing before the strength of God. "Who are you, great mountain? Before Zerubbabel, you shall become a plain." Zerubbabel was God's chosen builder, and before Him all hindrances and obstacles would melt away. Zechariah was an encourager, and he was giving assurance of success in spite of all opposition. All mountains of difficulty which stand in the way of God's order—shall be leveled down by faith's advance. When

we go anywhere for God—it is as if God Himself went.

Lessons in Giving Malachi 1:6-11; Malachi 3:8-12 The prophet reproves the people for their lack of loyalty and faithfulness to Jehovah. He had treated them as a father—but they had not given Him a father's love and honor. "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father—where is the honor due me? If I am a master—where is the respect due me? says the LORD Almighty."

Everywhere dishonor to parents is branded as a grievous sin. One who treats a parent unkindly or with neglect—may have many virtues and do many things well—but the one sin dims and blots all. One of the papers tells of a young woman at an old man's coffin. She kissed him and wept over him. She told the people how good he was. He was old and poor—and she was young and rich. She had ten rooms—but no room for her father. Yet he made room for her, when he had only two. He was not educated. She was, and at his expense. He had fed and clothed and sent her to college—until she grew refined and popular and married a rich man. Now she kissed him and cried by his coffin and buried him handsomely. But everybody said that this did not make up for her lack of kindness, in the years of his old age.

God is our Father. This revelation was made in all its fullness by Jesus Christ. We all love to say that He is our Father, and to talk of His wonderful goodness. Yes—but that is not all the honor we ought to give to such a Father. We ought to hallow His name, to advance His kingdom, and do His will. Does not God many times say to us, "If I am a father—where is My honor?" The people presumed to contend with God, claiming that they had been true to Him. "But you ask—How have we shown contempt for Your name?" Then we have Jehovah's answer, "You have despised My name by offering defiled sacrifices on My altar!" Still they deny to God that they have in any way dishonored His name or His service. "Then you ask—How have we defiled the sacrifices?" The answer is, "In that you say: The table of Jehovah is contemptible."

We may as well look at our own conduct—while we are hearing God's charges against His ancient children. That is true Bible reading—which allows the words to search our own heart and life. We should never offer to God—that which we would not use ourselves. Are not too many of our self—denials, only the giving up of things which we do not care for? Do we not too often keep the best for ourselves—and then let God have what we do not wish? The priests had been offering on the altar of Jehovah, sacrifices which were not worthy of His holy name. "When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he be pleased? says the LORD Almighty." The Jewish law required that every sacrifice offered unto God—must be without blemish. No lame, blind, or diseased animal would be accepted. It was an insult to God to bring to His altar anything that was maimed, blemished, or worthless. Yet the people had been taking the best of everything for themselves, and then bringing the refuse—the blind and lame animals—as offerings to God. "Suppose you treat your governor thus," asked the Lord, "what would he think? Would he be pleased?"

Well, how is it again with ourselves? The object in putting these verses in the Bible—was not to get us to condemn the people who lived twenty-three hundred years ago! It was to make us think whether we are doing this base thing ourselves! Do we give God the best of all we have—our best love, our best gifts, our best service? Or do we take the best of all for ourselves—and then give

God the blind and the lame? How many people in the church when the collection plate is being passed, pick out the smallest bit of money—to put in the plate! We give our strength to our own work or leisure, and then have only our weariness to bring to God. We save our best things for ourselves, and then have only worthless things to offer our wondrous King! What kind of service are we giving to our glorious Lord? The Lord’s answer to the arrogant defense of the priests is startling. "Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that these worthless sacrifices could not be offered! I am not at all pleased with you—and I will not accept your offerings! says the LORD Almighty."

People sometimes ask, with a sneer: "Is there anyone to hear you when you pray? Is there anyone to accept the worship you bring?" The Lord says plainly here that there was no one to accept what these ancient worshipers brought. It is said frequently in the Bible, referring to offerings, that God smelled a sweet savor. That is, sincere worship is like fragrance to God. But God assures these ancient worshipers that He has no pleasure in them and will not receive the offerings they bring. This is because they bring Him such unfit and unworthy sacrifices.

What do WE bring to God—when we go through the forms of prayer, when we sing the sacred words of our hymn, when we make our offerings, when we have our "consecration meetings," when we sit down at the Lord’s table? If there is only words, words, words in all our acts of worship—no heart, no love, no real presenting of ourselves to God, no laying of our best on the altar—God has no pleasure in us and will not accept our offerings at our hand. "God is a Spirit—and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." In the third chapter, the prophet prophesies the coming of the Messenger of the covenant and the beginning of His sifting work. The people were suffering from divine judgments. The reason for these, was that they had not been faithful to God. They are asked to return, and they ask, "'How are we to return?" The Lord then charged them with having robbed Him. "How have we robbed You?" and the answer is, "In tithes and offerings."

It seems incredible that anyone should rob God. It is terrible enough that one man should ever rob another man; and how can anyone rob God? Yet the Lord said these ancient people of His had been robbing Him. How? They had not broken into heaven and stolen the gold, silver, and precious stones from the walls and streets. They had robbed God by keeping back from Him the gifts they ought to have brought to Him. They had not paid their tithes, they had not brought the required offering. Not paying what we owe is robbery. Do we never rob God? Of course, we do not break open church offering boxes and steal money that has been given to God. But do we never fail to give to God what belongs to Him? Think of all the promises we make to God in our hymns and prayers. Do we keep them all? We promise to obey Christ and serve Him always, cheerfully, promptly, lovingly. De we do it? We promise to love our fellow-men and to be kind, patient, and helpful to all. Then we go among men with jealousy, envy, bitter feelings, keeping back the love and the ministry of love!

Perhaps we are robbing God even in the matter of money. Are we paying all we owe to God? Someone tells of a man who, speaking of the freeness of the gospel, said he had been a Christian for twenty years—and it had not cost him a penny! There are too many people whose religion does not cost them half enough! They rob God, keeping out of His treasury what is His—and spending it on themselves.

Robbing God brings a curse. An eagle stole a piece of lamb off the temple altar and flew with it to her nest on the crag. But a coal clung to the meat and set fire to the nest and consumed it. So a curse clings to everything stolen from God or withheld from Him, and brings its penalty!

5. Volume 5

Volume 5

Reserved

6. Volume 6

Volume 6

Volume 6. From the Gospel of Matthew

1. The Wise Men and the Child

2. John, the Forerunner of Jesus

3. The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus

4. The Beginning of The Galilean Ministry

5. True Blessedness

6. Some Laws of the Kingdom

7. Almsgiving and Prayer

8. Worldliness and Trust

9. The Golden Rule

10. False and True Discipleship

11. Jesus, the Healer

12. The Power of Faith

13. The Mission of the Twelve

14. The Question of John the Baptist

15. Warning and Invitation

16. Two Sabbath Incidents

17. Growing Hatred to Jesus

18. The Parable of the Sower

19. The Parable of the Tears

20. Pictures of the Kingdom

21. The Multitudes Fed

22. Jesus Walks on the Sea

23. The Canaanite Woman

24. Peter’s Confession

25. The Transfiguration

26. A Lesson on Forgiveness

27. Jesus on the Way to Jerusalem

28. The Laborers in the Vineyard

29. Jesus Nearing Jerusalem

30. Jesus Entering Jerusalem

31. Two Parables of Judgment

32. The King’s Marriage Feast

33. Three Questions

34. The Lesson of Watchfulness

35. The Wise and Foolish Virgins

36. The Parable of the Talents

37. The Last Judgment

38. The Anointing of Jesus

39. The Last Supper

40. Peter’s Denial

41. Jesus in Gethsemane

42. The Trial of Jesus

43. The Crucifixion

44. The Resurrection The Wise Men and the Child

Matthew 1 and 2 The Gospel of Matthew begins with a genealogy. Then comes the story of the birth and infancy. Jesus was born at Bethlehem. This was the most wonderful event of human history—the coming of the Son of God in human flesh into this world. Love was born that night. True, there was love in the world before. Mothers loved their children. Friend love friend. Natural affection was common. But the love which we know as Christian love had its beginning in the birth of Jesus Christ. It is well for us to note, however, that the historical event of Christ’s birth is not that which saves us. He must be born again in us.

Though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born,

If He’s not born in you—your soul is all forlorn. This greatest even in history, made little stir in the world. Usually when heirs to a throne are born, whole realms ring with joy. But when the Messiah was born, there was no earthly rejoicing. A few humble shepherds came and looked with wonder on the new-born Babe that lay in the young mother’s arms—but that was all. The Jews had been looking for their Messiah, but did not recognize Him when He came. His advent was quiet. There

was no blare of trumpets. Noise and show are not necessary accompaniments of power. The mightiest energies in this world are often the quietest. The grace of God always comes quietly. Angels minister noiselessly. The most useful Christians are not those who make the most ado at their work, but those who in humility and simplicity, unconscious of any splendor in their faces, go daily about their work for their Master.

We cannot understand just how the wise men were led to Jerusalem. They said they saw the King's star in the east and were led by it. There has been a great deal of speculation as to the character of this star, whether it was a natural or a supernatural appearance. But it does not matter; whatever it was, it led these men to the feet of Christ. Even the faintest glimmerings of spiritual light should be welcomed by us and their guidance accepted. We should not wait to know all about Christ, and to see Him in all His glory, before we set out to seek Him. We should follow the first faint gleams, and then as we go on the light will brighten, and we shall see more and more of Him, until at length we behold Him in all His blessed beauty, face to face. Certainly there is no one in Christian lands in these days, who does not have a great deal more light to guide him to the Christ, than these wise men had. The Herods have an unenviable record in New Testament history. When this Herod, Herod the Great, heard the inquiries of the wise men, he was greatly troubled. Hearing of Christ does not always bring joy. It brought gladness to the humble shepherds and to the wise men, but to Herod it brought great distress. Christ's name makes bad men think of their sins—and then of the judgment. It is only when we see Christ and want to have Him for our Friend, that the thought of Him is sweet and pleasant. "For you therefore who believe He is precious." Those whose faith is fixed upon Him, are never terrified by thoughts of Him.

Herod, unable himself to answer the question of the wise men, turned to the scribes and asked them where the Messiah should be born. It did not take them long to give the answer. They could even give chapter and verse, and could tell the very name of the town in which the Messiah was to be born. These facts were all down in their books. Yet we do not see that they made any use of their knowledge. They could tell the wise men where the Christ was to be born, but they did not themselves take one step toward Bethlehem to search for Him, when they learned of His birth there. Most of us know our Bible well, and can tell others glibly enough where and how to find the Christ. But have we ourselves gone to the place where He is, to search for Him and to worship Him?

"On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh." Matthew 2:11. The scene when the wise men found the Child-king was very beautiful. They saw only a little baby lying in a young mother's arms. There was no crown on His head. No glory gleamed from His face. His surroundings were most unkingly, without pomp or brilliance. The child did nothing before them to show His royalty—spoke no word, wrought no kingly act of power. Yet the wise men believed and worshiped Him. Think how much more we know about the Christ than they did. It is easy for us to find kingly marks in Him. Shall we be behind the wise men in our adoration? The wise men did more than adore—they opened their treasures and offered gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh which they had brought all the way from their own home. The sincerity of their worship—was thus attested by the costliness of their gifts. The treasures they had brought were of great value—the most costly things they could find, the best they had to give. It is not enough to give Christ an homage that costs nothing. He asks for

our gifts, the offerings of our love, our service, the consecration of our lives. Giving is the test of loving—the measure of our loving Christ—is what we are willing to give and sacrifice.

There are many ways of laying our offerings at the feet of Jesus Christ. He Himself does not need our money, but His cause needs it. The extension of His kingdom in this world at home and abroad requires money, and this must be brought by His followers. Those who have no interest in the saving of others, in the sending of the Gospel to those who have it not, have not themselves really tasted of the love of Christ.

John, the Forerunner of Jesus

Matthew 3:1-12 The time of John's coming was not accidental. It was "In those days,"—that is, when Jesus was still living in Nazareth. Jesus was now about to begin His public ministry and John was ready to go before Him to prepare the way for Him. Every man is made for his own time and work. John would not have fit in at any other date in the world's history.

John is not a very attractive person to our modern Christian eyes. He appears harsh, rugged and stern, and we think of gentleness and kindliness as ideal traits in a beautiful life. But there is need for stern, rugged men in Christ's kingdom—as well as for kindly, tender-hearted men. The storm has its ministry as well as the sunshine; winter its mission as well as summer; John the Baptist his work—as well as John the beloved disciple.

John came "a man, sent from God," a man with a message. He preached in the wilderness—not in the temple courts, nor in the synagogues, but away from the common haunts of men—and the people flocked to hear him. The theme of John's preaching was in one word, "Repent!" This is not the gospel, but it is a call which goes before the gospel. We must repent before we can receive forgiveness. We are in danger of making religion too easy a matter, and of being altogether too patient and tolerant with ourselves. Christ does not come to an unrepentant heart. We must make sure, too that we do thorough work in our repenting. Repentance is not merely a little twinge of remorse, over something wrong. It is not simply a burst of tears, at the recollection of some wickedness. Nor is it shame in being caught in some vile sin, impurity, or dishonesty. Confess and turn from your sins, is the meaning of the call. Repentance is the revolution of the whole life. Sins wept over—must be forsaken and given up. Repentance is a change of heart, a turning the face the other way. It is well for us to make diligent quest and be sure that we abandon the wrongdoing we deplore, that we quit the course we regret, that we turn away from the sin we confess. He who bewails a sin and confesses it, secretly intending to return to it again—has no good ground to hope that he is forgiven.

John declared that "The kingdom of heaven was at hand." What did he mean? He did not mean heaven, but a life on the earth in which heaven's kingdom ruled. The preacher meant that the King had come and was about to declare Himself. They were to repent to be ready to receive Him. When we pray, "May Your kingdom come," we ask that heaven's rule and heaven's life may come into our hearts, our homes, our lives, and our community.

John was not as anxious to have his name emblazoned before men as some people are. He was spoken of and speaks of himself as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness." The bible does not strive to attach men's names to every little piece of work they do. It matters little whether we are mentioned or not, in connection with the things we do for the Master. It is just as well to be an

anonymous "voice," speaking well for Christ, as to be known as some famous ’reverend’. The Christian worker who always strives to keep his name before people, lacks somewhat at least of the mind that was in Christ.

Part of John’s commission, was to make straight paths for Christ’s feet, paths to reach men’s homes and hearts. He will never go in any crooked paths, and if we wish Him to walk with us—we must see that the paths are straight. All sin’s ways are crooked. That is what iniquity means, inequities, and unequal ways. The only straight ways are those which run along the lines of God’s commandments. The great railroads are continually getting the curves out of their tracks, to make them straight, that trains may run more rapidly. They spend millions in straightening their tracks. Are there any crooked ways in our lives? If so, they should the made straight, that the feet of Christ may run easily and swiftly in them.

John was a sensationalist. He did not wear the dress of other men. He was like Elijah in his garb. The old prophet was girt and with a belt of leather; the new prophet, too, had his clothing of camel’s hair and wore a leather belt. His food was that of the very poor—locusts, roasted, boiled or baked—and wild honey. His poverty was not affected, but was real—a symbol of his sincere unworldliness. He was sent from God, God’s messenger, not man’s.

John did not spare the people to whom he preached. Among his hearers were the great men of the nation, but as he looked into their faces, he knew that their hearts were full of sin—and he called upon them to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. They must prove by putting away their sins, that their confession was genuine. It will not be enough to tell people we are Christians—the will wait to see the evidence of it in our lives. If a man, hitherto living an evil life, unites with the church on Sunday, and then goes back Monday morning to his worldly ways, will his neighbors credit his Sunday’s profession? The heart is the important member in all spiritual life, but the heart makes the life; and if the life is evil—the heart has not been changed. The way to prove that we have really repented—is really to repent, and then the fact will speak for itself.

Throngs flocked to hear the great preacher of the wilderness, "Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about the Jordan." Confession of sin was the gate of admission to baptism. Baptism meant cleanness—its necessity implied impurity, but the afterlife was white. But John saw some coming for baptism, whose sincerity he had reason to doubt. Some others of them thought they could get into the kingdom of heaven on their ancestry. They belonged to the family of Abraham, and thought this was sufficient. But John assured them that they must have more than good ancestry to commend them. God, he told them, could not be mocked. The ax was lying at the root of the trees to cut down every one on which no fruit was found. The picture is very striking. An ax leaning against a tree implies warning and also patience—delay to see if the tree will not prove fruitful. But the delay is not to be forever. The ax at the tree’s root suggests, also, thorough work—not pruning, merely, to make the tree more fruitful—the time for that is past—but judgment. We are the trees. If we are fruitless and useless, not living up to our privileges and opportunities, not filling well our place in the world, the ax is lying beside us, warning us that only God’s patience spares us—and the time for cutting down will soon be at hand! The humility of John appears in all the story of his life. He claimed no greatness. The coming of throngs to his preaching did not turn his head. He knew the secondary importance of his part in the work—he baptized only with water, and water could cleanse only the outside. The real work would be done by one who could baptize

the heart. Washing the body is a good thing, but it does not make one morally better, does not improve one's character. The change which will make a life like Christ's—must take place in the heart, and can be produced only by the Spirit. Water baptism is right as an ordinance and as an emblem of the inner cleansing; but if we depend upon it for salvation, without submitting ourselves to the Divine Spirit, we shall find our trust in vain!

John foretold the work of the Messiah as one of separation. He would gather the wheat into his garner—and he would burn the chaff up with unquenchable fire! There is a great difference between wheat and chaff. Wheat has life in it. Wheat grains drop into the earth, grow, and yield a harvest. Wheat is food; it makes bread and satisfies hunger. Wheat is valuable; it is highly prized in the market. But chaff has no life in it; it does not grow, and only rots in the ground. It is not food; it satisfies no hunger. It is of no value; nobody buys chaff, and it is good only to throw away or to burn. What sadder thing is there in this world—than a human life made to be golden wheat, to feed men's hunger, yet proving only worthless chaff! The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus Matthew 3:13-17; Matthew 4:1-11 The beginning of Christ's ministry was marked by two important events—His baptism and His temptation. These were thirty silent years, without any manifestation of Divine power, except the beautiful, sinless life which Jesus lived. We must think of those years, however, as part of the Incarnation. The Divine character was revealed not only in miracles and heavenly teachings—but in sweet, beautiful living.

John said that he was not worthy to unloose the shoes of the Coming One. Now when he recognizes this glorious One waiting before him to be baptized, he shrinks from the performance of the rite. He would have refused. "I have need to be baptized of You, and do You come to me?" But Jesus insisted on receiving baptism from John. "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." The words are full of meaning. The event was of great importance in the life of Jesus. For one thing, it was the identifying of Himself with humanity. He stood for us men and our redemption. He had no sin—but His people were sinful and He died for them. It was also the acceptance by Jesus of His Messianic work. The years of preparation were ended, and the time had come for Him to begin His public ministry. The call came, bidding Him turn away from His quiet life—and manifest Himself to His people. We can think of Him shutting up the carpenter's shop and leaving it forever. Then He stood before the Baptist at the Jordan and was baptized. He had a glimpse that hour of all that lay before Him in His Messianic ministry. The shadow of the cross fell upon the green banks and on the flowing water, fell also upon the gentle and lowly soul of Jesus as He stood there. He knew for what He was being baptized—the mission of redemption. We do not know to what we are devoting ourselves, what our consecration may mean—when we stand up and give ourselves to God. In a certain sense we go forth in the dark. Yet we may trust God with the guidance of our lives and should devote ourselves to the will of God without question or condition.

John obeyed the wish of Jesus and baptized Him. The baptism of Jesus became the occasion of a Divine testimony to His Sonship. Luke tells us that as He was being baptized He prayed, and as He prayed the heavens were opened unto Him. Prayer brought down upon Jesus, the Holy Spirit. This was Heaven's answer to Christ's consecration. This was the Divine anointing for His public ministry. Instead of a horn of oil poured upon His head, the mere emblem of grace, He received all the fullness of the Spirit. The Spirit came in the form of a dove. It is usual to think of the dove as in its nature, in some way a symbol of the character and disposition of the Spirit. Dr. Horton quotes

an old commentator: "The dove is a lover of men and bears ills patiently; for, robbed of its young, it endures and lets the robbers approach it just the same; it is the purest of creatures and delights in sweet frangrances." The first mention of the dove in the Bible is as a messenger of good news, bearing an olive leaf. An old legend relates that when Jesus was dying a dove sat on the cross above His head, and the legend has been interpreted to mean that even after the blood of the Lamb of God was given to redeem the world, it is needful that the Spirit shall come to soften men's hearts and incline then to yield to God.

There was another manifestation at the baptism—first, the open heavens, second, the descending of the Spirit, then a voice. The voice was the testimony of the Father to His Son. "This is My beloved Son, in who I am well pleased." From Matthew's account it would seem that the voice spoke to the people, declaring to them that Jesus was the Messiah. From Luke's Gospel it would appear that the words were spoken to Jesus Himself, assuring Him of His mission and of the Father's pleasure in Him. This was the real, the inner meaning of the baptism of Jesus. From this time, His consciousness of messianic authority was clear.

After this came the temptation. It was necessary that Christ should be tempted, before He offered Himself as the Redeemer of sinners. The first Adam was tried in Eden and failed. The second Adam must also be put to the test, before he could go forth as Lord of men. Several reasons may be suggested why He must be tempted. One was because He was human and must meet every human experience. His temptations were real—He "suffered being tempted." Another reason was that until He had met and overcome the tempter, He was not ready to offer Himself to men as a strong and victorious Savior. The Holy Spirit is not the tempter—but it is said expressly that Jesus was led by the Spirit, driven, Mark says, to be tempted. He must be tried, tested, proved—before He went forth to His messianic work.

We know now that Christ is able to deliver us out of the hands of Satan, and to defend us against his fiercest assaults. But if He had not Himself been put to the test, in all points tempted like as we are—yet without sins (Hebrews 4:15), we could not have had this perfect confidence. Another reason why Jesus was tempted, was that He might understand from personal experience, the nature and power of His people's temptations, and thus be able to sympathize with them in their struggles. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are told that because of His earthly experience of temptation, He can now in heaven be touched with the feelings of our infirmities.

There are very practical lessons we may learn from this narrative of our Lord's temptation. One is that Satan times his temptations to our hours of weakness, or our period of special stress. He does not tempt us with something we do not want—but with something that appeals to our cravings at the time. Jacob cold not have brought Esau's birthright for a thousand bowls of pottage, if Esau had not been hungry that day. Satan watches, and when he finds us exhausted and weary—he takes advantage of our condition. He comes to the boy when he is lonesome and homesick, tempting him to seek companions that will ruin him.

Jesus was hungry after His long praying and fasting—and Satan tempted Him to use His Divine power to turn stones into bread. Many temptations come to people who are hungry. They are tempted to be dishonest, to take employment that is sinful, or in some other way to sell themselves—to get bread. We need to be watchful against the tempter always—but especially in the times of our weakness and craving.

Why would it have been wrong for Jesus to exert His Divine power to provide bread for His hunger? Is it wrong to feed one's hunger? Jesus afterwards made bread by miracle, to feed the hunger of thousands. Why would it have been a sin for Him, to supply bread in this supernatural way for Himself when He was hungry? For one thing, it would have been receiving direction from the Evil One, instead of from His Father. Another reason was that He was in this world to live as men live. If He had used His Divine power to help Himself over the hard points of human experience, He would not have understood our life, for we cannot do this. Therefore, He never wrought a miracle for Himself. He met life just as we must meet it, enduring hunger, thirst, weariness, pain, wrong, without having recourse to supernatural power. Still further, it would have been distrusting His Father, for Him to make bread of the stones. He was under the Divine Care, and God had given Him no command to turn stones into bread. He must wait until His Father provided for His hunger. The answer of Christ to Satan's temptation, is very suggestive. He said that man shall not live by bread alone—but by every Word of God. Our physical needs are not our only needs. Sometimes men excuse their sin by saying, "Well, I must live," as if hunger excused theft or fraud. But it is not true that we must continue to live, or that living is in itself the best thing for us. It is true, however, that we must obey God's commandments and do His Will. We would better any day starve than commit even the smallest sin to get food. Getting bread should not be our first object in living—indeed, it is not our business at all. Life's first duty is to obey every Word of God, and then God will provide for our needs. The second temptation was to presumption. The tempter asked Christ to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, quoting words from an old Psalm (Psalm 91) to prove that he would not be hurt—but that God would take care of Him. Thus, the tempter whispered, He would prove to the people that He was their Messiah. What would have been wrong in this? Jesus said it would have been tempting God. If the Father for any reason had commanded Him to leap from the pinnacle into the street, then He could have claimed the promise of protection. But if He had thus accepted the suggestion of the tempter, the promise would have been void. We cannot claim protection in danger which we enter without the Divine bidding. Only when God sends us and guides us—do we have the Divine shelter about us. The third temptation was the boldest of all. Christ had just entered upon His public ministry, and at the end of it He saw the cross. Satan suggested to Him the worldly way of honor and power instead of the lowly way of suffering, sacrifice and shameful death. This temptation Satan uses continually with men. He shows them visions of wealth, of worldly success, and says: "Now all this may be yours—I will give it all to you. True, you must give up some of your old notions. You must get over some of you scruples. But throw these away—and this door is open to you, and see where the path leads—to all splendor and brilliance. You will be a millionaire. You will be highly esteemed. You will have all the pleasure you want."

Too many people yield to this temptation. The old ways of prayer, obedience, simple honesty and faithfulness, seem dull in contrast with the flowery paths which the vision shows. Yes—but we must look on to the end, beyond the glamour of the tempter's vision—before we can conclude that what Satan promises will be a good thing for us. The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

Matthew 4:12-25 In Matthew's gospel, the story of the first months of our Lord's public ministry is omitted. Several chapters of John's gospel come in between verses 11 and 12 of Matthew's fourth chapter. The mission of John the Baptist was to go before Christ and prepare His way. When he had done this, introducing Him to the people—John's work was really ended. But he continued to

preach for some months, until he was arrested by Herod and cast into prison. Then it was that Jesus went into Galilee. Why He did this, we are not told. Some suppose it was to avoid John's fate—but this scarcely seems a sufficient reason. Indeed, in Galilee he would be nearer to Herod than in Jerusalem. Is it not more likely that it was just because John was now shut up in prison and his voice silenced, that Jesus went to Galilee? John had spoken of Jesus coming after him, and He came at once and began to speak.

He dwelt in Capernaum. At that time Capernaum was an important city on the Sea of Galilee. Now nobody knows certainly what its site was. It was a city of wonderful privilege. For a long time Jesus made His home there. It was exalted in thus having the Son of God walk on its streets, speak His blessed words to its people, and do His works of mercy and love in its homes of suffering and sorrow. But in spite of all this honor and favor shown to Capernaum, Jesus was rejected there.

Matthew tells us that it was in fulfillment of prophecy that Jesus went to Capernaum. He was needed there. It was a region of moral and spiritual darkness. It is such places that always draw Jesus. Human need in every form, appeals to His compassion. When men travel over the world—they usually visit regions in which they will see scenes of beauty, of grandeur, of wonder. But Jesus was in this world to do good, to save the lost, to change wildernesses into gardens of roses—and He went where there was the greatest need, the deepest darkness. Churches sometimes move away from sections of cities which have been emptied of prosperous homes and the attractions of fashion. Whatever may be said of the expediency of following the drift of population with our churches—we need to beware of abandoning decaying communities, of taking away from the people who remain the blessings of the gospel. Jesus did not go into Galilee as a tourist—but as a missionary. He was a teacher come from God to tell the people of the love of God for them. The same words were used of John the Baptist in describing His ministry. Yet there was a great difference in the two men and in their preaching. John spoke sternly and severely. He spoke of the fire, the fan, the ax of the punishment of sin. Jesus came with gentle and winning words.

Yet His first call, like John's, was to repentance. All men need to repent. We never can reach the gates of heaven, unless we repent. The prodigal son had to rise and leave the far country, and walk back all the painful way to his father's house—before he could be restored to favor and be at home again. That is what every impenitent man must do. The first step in coming to Christ, is repentance.

We must be sure that we know just what this word means. Some people imagine, that if they are sorry for doing wrong, that they have repented. But mere sorrow for a wrong way—does not take us out of that way. Tears of penitence will not blot out sin; we must turn about and walk in holy paths. Repentance is ceasing to make blots on the record, and beginning to live a fair, clean, white life.

It was a familiar and homely scene which Jesus saw one day, as He was walking beside the sea. "He saw two brethren casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen." It is interesting to notice the kind of people Jesus sought for His disciples. He did not look for great and famous men. He did not go up to the temple and gather about Him rabbis and priests. He wanted men who were teachable, ready to listen to the truth and believe it, men who could be influenced by Him for good, whom He could train in the ways of His kingdom.

Jesus is always looking for men who will become His disciples. He has a great work in hand, and needs and calls for helpers. He wants those who will believe His message. He does not take prejudiced men, men whose opinions are so obstinately held, that they will not listen to His words nor accept His teachings; he wants teachable men. He does not choose those who are wise in this world's wisdom, for they might not readily accept the wisdom of God which He teaches. Nor does He seek idlers. He goes among those who are busy in the duty of the day. He found a king for Israel, in a boy who was keeping sheep. He found a prophet to succeed Elijah, in a young man who was plowing in the filed. He found a missionary for India, in a humble shoemaker, busy at his bench, ready for the Divine call, unable ever to say "No" to God. If we would be chosen to take part in Christ's great work—we must seek to be ready for it, with heart warm, mind open to receive truth, and ready for any service to which God may call us.

"Come, follow Me—and I will make you fishers of men." First of all, the disciple must go with Christ. This meant, in their case, leaving their business and attaching themselves to His household. It may not mean that to us—ordinarily we are to continue in the calling in which we are when we give ourselves to Him. But always it means joining ourselves to Him in heart and life. It means the complete surrendering of the mastership of our lives. No longer are we our own; we belong to Him. We are to go where He bids us to go—and do what He bids us to do. We are to think of His interests, not of our own. There can be no serving of Christ, no doing of His work, without first being with Him. "Without Me," he said, "you can do nothing" (John 15:5). But with Him, we are ready for any service, any duty, any work, and nothing is impossible to us.

First, they were to be with Him, and then He would make them fishers of men. They had been fishers of fish; they were to give up their old calling and take a higher one. The lessons of patience, quiet waiting and persistence, which they had learned in their daily and nightly work on the sea—would be of use to them in their new duties. They were to fish in the dark waters of sin for perishing men and save them, take them alive. Christ would teach them their new calling, "I will make you fishers of men." It was holy service to which He called them, and calls us. He does not want us to follow Him just for the joy of His salvation and the comfort of His friendship—He wants us to be His, that we may win others also to be His.

Instantly these fishermen dropped their tackle and their nets, left everything, and went away with their new Master. They were not a moment in deciding. They loved Him, and they were most glad to go with Him. "At once they left their nets and followed Him." Sometimes the sneer is heard, "They had little to leave!" True, it was not much in money value. Yet these nets and this fishing business were all they had. It was by these, that they earned their living. Now at the call of their new Master—they gave up all, cut themselves off from the means of support, burnt their bridges behind them, and in simple obedience and faith went with Him. That is what we should do, when we hear the call of Christ. We should obey instantly, without questioning. No matter how great the sacrifice involved, we should make it cheerfully for His sake. Though to obey cuts us off from our ordinary means of livelihood and leaves us without provision even for tomorrow, we should not hesitate. Christ will take care of His servants when they are faithfully doing His will. "At once" is also an important phrase in the sentence. A great many people are forever postponing duties. When Christ calls, they say, "Yes, tomorrow." But every call should be answered instantly. Get this "At once" into all your obedience. The charge never could be made against Jesus, that He thought only of men's spiritual needs and neglected their bodily needs. Continually we see Him doing good

in common ways and helping people in their common needs. Here He is "teaching," "preaching," "healing." He did not give good advice, exhort people to be true and honest, and then be indifferent to their sufferings. He fed them when they were hungry, opened the eyes of their blind, cured their sick children, healed their diseases. Always this is the law of Christ's ministry. He cares for our whole being. Every trouble of ours whatever, whether of body, mind, or soul—moves Him with compassion.

It is a great comfort to us to know that our Lord is not indifferent to our diseases, that He would use them for our spiritual benefit, that He is ready to give us the grace we need—if we endure them patiently and submissively, and that He will heal us when His wise purpose in our affliction has been accomplished. Jesus is the great Healer—He is continually healing all manner of sickness and disease among the people. Wherever the Christian missionary goes, the hospital is set up alongside the chapel. In our church work we should think of men's bodies as well as of their souls—if we would wholly fulfill Christ's mission and purpose. This picture of Jesus ought also to be a great comfort to all those who are suffering. He is going about everywhere healing. Is He any less strong now, than He was then? Does he love us less now, than He loved the sick people in Galilee? Will He not heal us, too, in the way that is best? In the sick-room of every Christian, Jesus sits, to give cheer. The sufferer may know, as he prays for healing, that his prayer will be heard and answered. Sickness has a mission—it sets lessons for us to learn. It is very unfortunate if one who is sick recovers and is not better in heart and life afterward. We should pray that the sickness may fulfill its mission in us and for us, and then that we get well.

"And His fame went throughout all Syria." No wonder. Such blessed news could not be suppressed. When Jesus healed all the sick people in one town, it could not be otherwise than that the report would fly abroad, reaching other towns. It is not to be wondered at that everyone who had a sick friend, hearing about the great Healer, would then want to bring that friend at once to Him. Thousands of people poured out to find Him who had this marvelous power.

Just so, whenever Jesus saves a sinner—the news should go out, and others who have unsaved friends should bring them at once to Him. We who know about Christ's power to heal and save—should go everywhere telling the news that those who are in their sins may be roused up to seek Him as their Savior.

True Blessedness

Matthew 5:1-16

Emerson's advice to Lincoln about hitching his wagon to a star—is the lesson Jesus sets for us in the Beatitudes. These blesseds shine like stars far above us, in their brightness and heavenliness. We may say that we never can reach them and that therefore there is no use in our trying to reach them. But the Master would have us strive after the highest attainments.

It has been noted, that if the world would make a set of beatitudes, they would be just the reverse of those that Jesus spoke. None of the classes pronounced blessed by Him would be called happy by the world. The poor in spirit, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and holiness—are not the world's favorites. These are not the qualities natural men consider most worthy of quest. The first beatitude is for the humble ones. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." This beatitude is not for the poor in an earthly sense, for one may be very poor—and yet proud; and

one may be rich in worldly goods—and yet be lowly in spirit, in disposition. The Bible everywhere praises humility. God dwells with the humble. Christ refers only once in the Gospels to His own heart, and through the window He opens, it is this picture that we see, "I am gentle and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29). To be poor in spirit is to be rich toward God; while pride of heart is spiritual poverty. Humility is the key that opens the gate of prayer; while to the loud knocking of pride, there comes no answer. The kingdom of heaven belongs to the humble. They may wear no earthly crown—but a crown of glory, unseen by men, rests upon their heads even here in this world. The second beatitude is for those who mourn. We do not usually regard mourners as blessed. We pity them and think their condition unenviable. Christ, however, has a special beatitude for those who are sorrowful. Probably He means particularly penitent mourners, those who are sorrowful on account of their sins. In all this world there is nothing so precious in the sight of God—as the tear of contrition. No diamonds or pearls shine with such brilliance, in His sight. It was Jesus Himself who said there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents (Luke 15:10). Truly blessed, therefore, are those who mourn over their sins. They are comforted with the comfort of God's pardon and peace. But the beatitude refers also to those who are in sorrow. Blessing never is nearer to us, than when we are in affliction, if we submit ourselves to God in love and trust. Someday we shall understand that we have received our best things from heaven, not in the days of our joy and gladness—but in the time of trial and affliction. Tears are lenses through which our eyes see more deeply into heaven and look more clearly upon God's face—than in any other way. Sorrow cleanses our hearts of earthliness, and fertilizes our lives. We grow the best when clouds hang over us, because clouds bear rain and rain refreshes. Then God's comfort is such a rich blessed experience, that it is well worthwhile to endure any sorrow in order to receive it. The third beatitude is for the meek. Meekness is not a popular quality. The world calls it a cowardly spirit, which leads a man to remain quiet under insult, to endure wrong without resentment, to be treated unkindly and then to give kindness in return. Men of the world say that the disposition of meekness is unmanly, that it shows weakness, cowardice, a lack of strength. So it might be—if we looked to the world for our ideal of manhood. But we have a truer, a diviner example for our model of manliness, than any that this world has set up. Jesus Christ is the only perfect man who ever lived in this world, and when we turn to His life—we see that meekness was one of the most marked qualities of His character. He was gentle of disposition, never provoked, patient under wrong, silent under reproach. When He was reviled, He reviled not again. When He suffered, He threatened not. Possessing all power, He never lifted a finger to avenge a personal injury. He answered with tender love, all men's wrath, and on His cross, when the blood was flowing from His wounds—He prayed for His murderers. Meekness is then no cowardly spirit, since in Christ it shone so luminously. Then it is not an impoverishing virtue—but an enriching grace. The meek shall inherit the earth. The fourth beatitude is for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. This, strangely, is a beatitude for dissatisfaction. We know that peace is promised to the Christian, and peace is calm repose and satisfied restfulness. The words hunger and thirst appear to suggest experiences incompatible with rest and peace. But when we think more deeply—we see that spiritual hunger must form a part of all true Christian experience. Hunger is mark of health. It is so in physical life; the loss of appetite indicates disease. So a healthy mind is a hungry one; when one becomes satisfied with one's attainments, one ceases to learn. In spiritual life, too, hunger is health. If we become satisfied with our condition of faith, love, obedience and consecration, we are in an unhappy condition. There is not growth after that. Often

invalids die amid plenty, die of starvation; not because they can get no food—but because they have no appetite. There are many professing Christians who are starving their souls in the midst of spiritual provision, because they have no hunger. There is nothing for which we should pray more earnestly, than for spiritual longing and desire. The fifth beatitude is for the merciful. Cruelty is opposed to everything Divine and heavenly. All that is unloving is condemned in the Scriptures. Blessing cannot come to the resentful, the unforgiving, the vindictive, to those who have no sympathy with distress, no hand to help human need. In our Lord's picture of the last judgment, in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, those on the right hand are those who have been kind, gentle, patient, thoughtful, ministering to suffering and need. Jesus Himself set an example of mercifulness. His miracles were for the relief of those who were suffering.

We must note in this beatitude also, that we receive in life what we give—the merciful shall obtain mercy. The unmerciful shall find the gates closed upon them, when they cry for help. A boy stood before a perpendicular crag, and when he began to shout he heard the echo of his own voice. When he spoke gently, a gentle voice responded. When he spoke angrily; he was answered back in angry tones. It is so in life. Those who show kindness to others, receive kindness in return. Those who are bitter, selfish and cruel—find this a loveless world to live in. The sixth beatitude is for the pure in heart. There is no beatitude for anything unholy. There is no room with God for anything that defiles. If we would enter heaven, we must prepare for heaven here. To a child who expressed a wonder how he could get up to heaven, because it was so far away—a wise mother's reply was, "Heaven must first come down to you; heaven must first come into your heart." Heaven must really be in us—before we can enter heaven. Just was we become pure in heart, are we made ready for the heavenly life. But what is heart purity? It is not sinlessness, for none are sinless. A pure heart must be a penitent heart, one that has been forgiven by Christ, cleansed by His grace. It is one also that is kept pure by obedient living, and close communion with Christ. An essential part of true religion before God is, to keep one's self unspotted from the world. It is an evil world in which we live—but if we carefully follow our Master, doing His will, keeping our hearts ever open to the influences of the Holy Spirit, we shall be kept, Divinely kept, from the corruption about us. As the lily grows up pure and unstained amid the soiled waters of the bog—so does the lowly, loving, and patient heart of a Christian, remain pure in the midst of all this world's evil. The seventh beatitude is for the peacemakers. Too many people are not peacemakers. Some people seem to delight in finding differences between neighbors or friends which they try not to heal—but to widen. Christ's beatitude is for those who seek always to make peace. When we find two people in danger of being estranged by some misunderstanding, we should seek to get them together and prevent their falling apart. If we would be true peacemakers, we must never be quarrelsome or easily offended. Paul says that love is not easily provoked, that is, it does not take account of little or great hurts—but is patient and forbearing (see 1 Corinthians 13). It is a great thing to be a peacemaker. Of the peacemakers it is said, "They shall be called sons of God." The eighth beatitude is for those who are "persecuted for righteousness' sake." Some people avoid persecution by conforming to the world, by being very careful never to offend the world. But Christ wants us to be loyal and true to Him, whatever the cost may be. Blessing comes upon those who suffer persecution for Christ's sake. Paul spoke of the wounds and scars he had received in persecution, as marks of Jesus, honorable decorations. We must notice, however, that is it when we are persecuted for righteousness sake—that we get this beatitude. Sometimes people suffer for being ill-natured, but the blessing cannot be claimed in this case. It is when we do the will of

God and suffer for it—that we can claim the Divine blessing.

We are commanded to rejoice and be exceeding glad when called to suffer reproach and injury for Christ's sake. It is not easy to do this, although many Christians have actually rejoiced in pain and trial, so strong was their faith. Ignatius, on his way to Rome to be thrown to wild beasts, wrote exultantly, "Now I am beginning to be a disciple!" In two striking figures Jesus showed His disciples what they were to be in the world, how they were to bless it by the influence of their lives. "You are the salt of the earth." You are, by living your new life in the world—to preserve it from rotting. This seemed a strange thing to say that day to a little handful of fishermen—but these men and their successors have done just that for the world through the centuries. We know what salt is and what its influence is. We are to be the salt of the earth, not merely in the words we speak—but especially in the influence of our lives. We must take heed therefore that the salt we are—does not lose its savor, its power to bless. We must make sure that the world is purified, sweetened and made better in every way—by our living in it.

"You are the light of the world." We are lamps which Christ lights and which are to shine upon the world's darkness for its enlightening. We must remember that the light of heaven can reach other lives and brighten the world—only through us. We must see to it, therefore, that the light in us never fails. We must never allow it to be covered up by anything. The object of the shining is not to glorify the lamp—but to honor God. We are not to parade our virtues—but to brighten the world and lead men to love our heavenly Father.

Some Laws of the Kingdom Matthew 5:17-26; Matthew 5:38-48

We are not to think of Christianity as a new religion, distinct from that of the Old Testament. Rather, the one is a development from the other. Jesus was careful to say, "I came not to destroy—but to fulfill." Then He added, "Truly I say unto you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or one tittle shall pass away from the law, until all things be accomplished." This is the law of all life. No particle of matter is ever destroyed. It form may be changed—but nothing of it passes out of existence. A log of wood may be burned in the fire—but it is not destroyed. Some of it lies in ashes and some of it escapes into the air in the form of smoke and steam and chemical elements—but not a jot or a tittle of the wood has been destroyed. All the wisdom of the ages still exists in the world. The songs men have sung, the words they have spoken, are living in the hearts and lives of our race. Our age is the inheritor of all past ages. Christianity holds all that was good and true and beautiful in Judaism. Jesus destroyed nothing of the religion of Moses. He was the fulfillment of all the prophecies. What went before Him was blossom; in Him the fruit appeared. The blossom was not destroyed—it only fell off because it had fulfilled its purpose. The Old Testament is not antiquated and outgrown. It, too, is the Word of God. Wherever we find Divine truth—we are to accept it. Of course, there is a difference in the relative importance of Scripture words—there are least and there are greatest commandments—but he who breaks the least has grieved God and sinned against Him. He who obeys every Word of God, however small it may seem—has lifted himself up in the rank of God's children. The Sermon on the Mount teaches the spirituality of all true obedience. The scribes and Pharisees were great sticklers for the letter of the law—but they went little farther. They missed its spirit. They interpreted "You shall not kill" literally as condemning murder—but they did not think of applying it to murderous thoughts. Jesus spoke startlingly, "But I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother—shall be in danger of

the judgment." That is, anger is murder. So serious is this interpretation of the law, that Jesus says we cannot truly worship God while we have bitterness dwelling in our heart. Hatred must give place to love, when we stand before God. If we have wronged another, and the hour of prayer comes with the wronged yet unrighted—we must stop before the altar, interrupting our worship until we have gone to the one we have wronged and confessed and been forgiven. Perhaps we do not always think how serious an offense to God—an unforgiving spirit is. Quarreling is not only ethically unlovely; it is also wickedly and spiritually evil.

Acts are bad—but thoughts are taken note of, in the presence of God. There is sin in a lustful look—as well as in an unchaste act. Our thoughts have moral quality. Jesus enters into particulars and names certain sins which His disciples should carefully avoid. The Christian life should be without spot or blemish. One lesson He taught, was reverence in speech. "I say unto you, Swear not at all." He does not refer to oaths taken in the courts of law—but to profanity in speech. There is much irreverence in the conversation of many people in our day. Those who indulge in it often do it almost unconsciously. Some people—far too many—are recklessly profane. The profanity one hears in many places, even from the mouths of boys, is shocking. But there are any who think they never use profanity, whose speech is full of such forms of oaths as Jesus here refers to. We need to guard against every form of profanity in our speech, however veiled it may be.

"Hallowed by Your name," we say in the Lord’s Prayer; we should be careful that God’s name is always hallowed in our thought and in our conversation also, that it is never used lightly or irreverently.

Jesus made a plea also for simplicity of speech. "Simply let your ’Yes’ be ’Yes,’ and your ’No,’ ’No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one." There is a common tendency to exaggeration and over-emphasis in speech. Many people always try to say things in a strong and emphatic way. They are not content to say yes or no—and stop with that. They rarely tell anything precisely according to the bare facts—but color even the most common happenings. It would be a great deal better if we would learn to use simple words, without exaggeration of any kind. Someone says, "The more swearing, the more lying." It would be well if we would remember that in speaking we are always overheard by One to whom the least shade of dishonesty is repulsive, and who is grieved by any profanity.

It was the custom in the old days to return evil for evil, hurt for hurt, injury for injury. "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," was the law. It is the common law yet with too many people. Our hearts urge us to seek revenge, and forgiving injuries is not natural with us. It is a law of the kingdom of heaven, which we are slow in learning. Even many who call themselves Christians, claim that they have a right to return evil for evil. A person who returns kindness for unkindness, who does an obliging act for one that was disobliging, is not commended as a manly man. The almost universal feeling, is that an offense must be retaliated. But that is not the way Jesus teaches us to do, when we have been wronged. "I say unto you, resist not him that is evil: but whoever smites you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also." We are to endure wrong patiently. We are to forgive those who have injured us. This is one of the hardest lessons we have to learn in becoming Christians, and in the cultivation of the Christian graces. It is hard when others treat us unjustly, to keep on loving them and to be ready any moment to do them good. Yet that is what Jesus did, and He wants us to be like Him. He suffered wrongfully, and went on loving.

He taught that we should forgive those who have injured us. When one of His disciples asked Him how often they should forgive others, and suggested seven times as a fair number; Jesus told him that not seven times—but seventy times seven, they should forgive. That is, they should never cease to forgive. The word of Jesus which tell us that when one compels us to go a mile with him to show him the way and give him help on his journey—we should go two miles, is suggestive of the spirit of all true Christian life. Some people do the best they possibly can do for others. They try to carry out the teaching of love in a very literal fashion. But they never go an inch farther than they are required to go; they never pay a penny more than the law demands. Jesus said, however, that we should cultivate this two-mile religion, doing more than we are expected to do, going father in helping others than we are required to go. Love should always abound in us. We are never to measure and calculate our kindness to others, giving just so much and no more. Generosity is to be the law of all our life. Anybody can go one mile with another—but we are to do more than others and go two miles. The law of love to neighbors was taught in the Old Testament—but like other Divine teachings which were not easy, the people made their own glosses over the Divine Commandment, changing the sense to suit their own nature feelings. They interpreted this ancient law thus, "You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy." They defined neighbors to include only certain pleasant, congenial people, people who were kind to them, people whom they liked. Jesus taught a higher law. "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you." According to His teaching, our neighbor is anyone who needs our help. The parable of the Good Samaritan was Christ's own illustration and explanation of the meaning of the commandment to love our neighbor. It was a Jew who was hurt, and lay bleeding by the roadside. It was a hated and despised Samaritan who proved neighbor to him, stopping on his way, at much cost to his own interests, caring for the man, nursing him, and providing a place in which he might recover. No matter who it may be that needs any help ministry or comfort from us—we are not to ask about his nationality, whether he has been a good friend to us in the past, or not, or whether he belongs to our set—we are to help him, because he is 'our neighbor'. The Divine example is referred to in enforcing the lesson. God is kind to the sinner as well as to the righteous man. "He makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust." When He finds anyone in distress, He does not ask who he is. He imparts blessing to all alike. Since God is patient with those who wrong Him and neglect Him, if we are God's children we must show the same spirit. The Master thus sets the highest standard for His followers. It is not enough for them to be as good as other people are—they must be better. "And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?" was His question. Anybody can love those that love him. Anybody will greet those who greet him graciously. The Christian is to do more. "You therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." We should keep before us always the question, "Whatare you doing more than others?"

Christian boys among their friends must not be content to live as the world's boys do—they must do more than they do, they must be better than they are. The Christian carpenter must do his work better than the carpenter who does not know Christ and follow Him. The Christian girl must be more gentle, more patient, more thoughtful, and more unselfish, more kind, than worldly girls are, because she belongs to Christ. In all life's affairs, we must remember that having given ourselves to Christ, there rests upon us an obligation for a more beautiful life, for nobler service, for sweeter living, for larger usefulness, for Christlike helpfulness, because we represent our Master, and are called to be perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect.

Almsgiving and Prayer

Matthew 6:1-15

It was characteristic of the Pharisees in our Lord's time, that they sought publicity and display for their religious acts. They made their prayers in as conspicuous a way as possible, so that the people would observe them, mark their 'devoutness' and be impressed with their fervor and their earnestness. This was one thing in which the disciples of Jesus were told that their religion must differ from that of the scribes and Pharisees.

"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them." This does not mean that they were not to be godly before people—they were to live righteously everywhere. There are many Divine words bidding us to be careful of our conduct in the presence of others. Jesus Himself in this same Sermon said, "So let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father." We are to live all the while so that we shall be blameless, that those watching us, to find fault, shall have no reason for speaking against us. We are to show always to all men, an example which shall honor Christ.

What is forbidden, is that we do our 'acts of righteousness' before others, in order to be seen by them. We are to live for the eye of God, to get His praise. Some of those who professed great devoutness in Christ's time, making much show of piety in the presence of men, were in their inner life cruel, unmerciful, grasping and unholy. The lesson Jesus taught, was lowly humility, devoutness of heart, a goodness which did nothing for display—but was always and everywhere true, faithful, genuine, thinking only of pleasing God.

One special example in illustration of the lesson Jesus gives, is regarding the giving of alms. It was the custom of some of the people in those days to give their alms very ostentatiously. If they did not literally sound a trumpet, announcing their gifts, they at least let all people know that they were contributing to the poor and how much they were contributing. They wanted praise for their generosity. The motive was, not to relive distress—but "to be honored by men." Jesus says they have received their reward in full. That is, they had the name of being charitable. Their deeds were known and talked about. They did not give their alms to please God, or because they cared for the poor—and so they had no honor from God, and no love from men as their reward.

Jesus teaches in contrast, in a very emphatic way, the true manner of giving alms. "But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." The lesson would seem to be, that our doing good to others should be, as far as possible, absolutely in secret. When others need our help in their distress, we are not to withhold it—but we are not to tell others of what we do. We are even, as it were, not to let ourselves know of it. We are to give out of love, to those who need to be helped, not humiliating them by making a spectacle of our kindness. Our giving, too, is to be only for the eye of God. Then He will reward us and recompense us. The lesson is applied still further to prayer. "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men." They do not pray to God at all, and their real desire is to have men think they are very devout. They have their reward—that is, they get what they seek for: men see them. We all need to guard against the performance of our acts of devotion, for men's eyes—and not for God's.

Jesus does not mean to teach that we are never to pray in the presence of others. Public prayer is a duty. What He is pressing is that we are not to do any religious act to have men see us, and think us devout. We are to pray to God only and our prayer will receive His answer of love and grace. In all our life of love and service, the same rule should be observed. We should never seek honor for anything we do. We should shrink from praise and publicity. To show consciousness of our goodness, and any worthy service we have done—is a blemish. We should hide away rather from praise of men.

Florence Nightingale, having gone like an angel of mercy among the hospitals in the Crimea until her name was enshrined deep in every soldier's heart, asked to be excused from having her picture taken, as thousands begged her to do, that she might drop out and be forgotten, and that Christ alone might be remembered as the author of the blessings which her hand had distributed in His name.

"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen." The Pharisees chose public places as their place of private devotion. They wanted people to see how devout they were. Jesus bids us to guard against all such display of our religion. He teaches here also the duty of secret prayer. We are to go away alone—other people about us disturb our thoughts. Then we are to shut the door to keep out all the world, that we may be entirely alone with God. He alone is to hear us when we pray, and in Him alone must our dependence be. No one can afford to leave daily secret prayer out of his life. Jesus went often alone to meet with God. The form of prayer which Jesus gave His disciples, was not meant as the only prayer they were ever to use—but as showing the spirit in which they should pray and the scope of their requests.

"Our Father in heaven." This is the golden gate of prayer. If we enter the temple at all—we must enter it as God's children. Of what open and loving access the name Father assures us. We know that He to whom we speak—has a father's heart, a father's gentleness; a father's yearning for his child. A true earthly parent withholds from his child nothing that is good, so far as his ability goes. God withholds from Him children nothing that is really good. We should learn also from a little child—how to pray to God. We should come to Him in simplicity, with childlike confidence, with unquestioning trust, with yearning love.

"Hallowed be Your name." To hallow is to honor, to make holy. If we pray this prayer sincerely, we will hallow the Divine name in our own heart, we will pray with reverence and love. Christian people sometimes grow very careless in speaking of God. They become so accustomed to using His sacred name in prayer and conversation, that they utter it lightly, as if it were the name of some familiar friend. A miner with black, grimy hand plucks a pure flower from the stem. It seems almost a profanation to touch that beautiful flower with the soiled fingers. But what shall we say to our taking on our unclean lips, the holy name of God? We should learn to hallow this blessed name in our speech. Then we should hallow it in our life. We are God's children and we bear His name. We must take heed that in every act of ours, in our behavior, in our whole character and influence, we should live so that all who see us shall see in us something of the beauty of God.

"May Your kingdom come." God's kingdom is where God is king. In praying this petition, we are to think first of our own heart. The one place we can surrender to God, is our own life. We cannot surrender our neighbor's heart to God. A mother cannot make God king in the heart of her child. But each one of us is master in his own life and can choose who shall rule in it. In praying "May

Your kingdom come," our prayer means nothing at all—if it does not first of all invite the Divine King to become our king, to rule in us. Then the prayer widens, and we ask God to set up His kingdom in our home, in community, then over the whole world.

"May Your will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Some people always quote this petition, as if it meant only submission to some painful providence, as if God's will were always something terrible. They suppose it refers only to losing friends or money, to adversity or calamity, or to being sick or in some trouble. But this is only a little part of its meaning. It is for the doing of God's will, not the suffering of it, that we here pray. Our desire should be always to let God's will be done by us and in us. It is easier, however, to make prayers like this for other people, than for ourselves. We all think others ought to do God's will, and we do not find it a difficult prayer to make that they may do so. But if we offer the petition sincerely, it is a prayer that we ourselves may do God's will, as it is done in heaven. We can pray it, therefore, only when we are ready for implicit, unquestioning obedience.

Then it may—sometimes it does—mean the giving up of a sweet joy, the losing of a gracious friend, the sacrifice of some dear presence, the going in some way of thorns and tears. We should learn always to make the prayer, and then hold our life close to the Divine will, never rebelling, nor murmuring—but sweetly doing or bearing what God gives us to do or bear.

"Give us this day our daily bread." This seems a small thing to ask. Why are we not taught to pray for bread enough to last a week, a month, or a year? It seems for one thing, that Jesus wanted to teach here the lesson of continual dependence. He taught us to come to God each morning with a request simply for the day's food, that we might never feel that we can get along without Him even for one little day. Another lesson He wanted to teach us, was that we should live by the day. We are not to be anxious about tomorrow's needs—we are to think only today's. When tomorrow comes, it will be right to seek provision for it and to take up its cares and duties.

"Forgive us our debts—as we also have forgiven our debtors." The first part of this petition is not hard to pray. But the second part is not so easy. When someone has done us an injury and we are feeling bitter and resentful over it—it is not easy to ask God to forgive us as we forgive others. Perhaps we do not forgive at all—but keep the bitter feeling against our brother in our heart; what is it then that we ask God to do for us when we pray, "Forgive us—as we forgive?" God has linked blessing and duty together in this petition, in an inseparable way. If we will not forgive those who have wronged us, it is evident that we have not the true spirit of repentance to which God will grant remission of sins.

"Bring us not into temptation." We ought never to seek any way in which we shall have to meet temptation. Temptation is too terrible an experience, fraught with too much peril, ever to be sought by us or encountered, save when God leads us in the path in which it lies. So if we make this prayer, we must go only where duty clearly calls us. If we meet temptation there, God will keep us from evil.

Worldliness and Trust

Matthew 6:19-34 The Christian life is very simple—if only we understand it. It has only one principle—single-hearted devotion to Christ. Paul stated this principle when he said, "To me to live is Christ" (Php 1:21) Jesus states it here also when He says, "Seek first His kingdom, and His

righteousness." In our present passage, we have a whole scheme of life. To begin with, we must find something real and permanent to live for. It concerns the matter of possessions. Earth's banks are not absolutely safe; and even if they were, they are not eternal. We are immortal, and we must find a place of deposit secure for immortal years. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal."

How can we lay up treasures in heaven? By living for God, by committing our lives to Jesus Christ, by spending our money for the glory of God. There are men who possess little money or property when they leave this world—but are rich in treasures laid up in heaven. Paul had only the clothes he wore, an old cloak and a few sacred parchments when his martyrdom came—but he was rich beyond measure in glory! There are millionaires here—who will be beggars in the next life; and there are poor men here—who will have an inheritance of glory in heaven.

Single-heartedness is the secret of true godly living. "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." Some people seem to think they can keep on safe terns with God—and at the same time maintain close relations with the world. The Master's teaching here shows us that it is impossible to be half God's—and half the world's. There is room for only one lord in our life, and we must settle who this will be. If we belong to God, the world is our servant. It seems strange indeed that anyone with an immortal soul, should be willing to have mammon—money—for his god. Money may do much good and be a great blessing, if it is used for God—but when a man gets down upon his knees to his money, crawls in the dust for its sake, and sells his manhood to get it—it has only curse for him. One who truly serves God—cannot give money half his heart. God will not share a human heart with any other master. A great many people are talking now about the secret of happy living. The Master gives it here. "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life." Anxiety is very common. There is a great deal of worrying in the world, even among good people. One does not meet very many whose faces shine always with the light of a perfect peace. The majority of faces show lines of care. Not many people pass undisturbed through all manner of experiences. Is worrying a sin—or is it only an infirmity? There certainly are a great many cautions and warnings in the Bible against worrying. But how can we help it? Paul tells us how to keep worry out of our life. "In nothing be anxious." But how can we obey this counsel? What shall we do with the things that we would naturally worry about? Here is the answer: "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." That is, instead of worrying about matters that would naturally fret us—we are to put them out of our own hands—into God's hands, by prayer. Then we have this assurance: "The peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus" (Php 4:6-7).

It will help us with our lesson, if we look carefully at the connections of the words as they stand in the Gospel. "You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious." That is, anxiety comes from serving mammon. We say we are God's children—yet when mammon seems to be failing, and then we begin to worry. That is, we trust mammon more than we trust our Father. We feel safer when mammon's abundance fills our hands—than when mammon threatens to fail and we have only God. If we truly served God only, we should not be afraid, though we have

nothing of mammon, not even bread for tomorrow.

Jesus illustrates His teaching: "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them." Elsewhere Jesus says that not even a sparrow is forgotten by our Father. The sparrows are the most useless and the most troublesome of all birds. You can buy two of them for a farthing. Yet God watches over them, and not one of them shall fall to the ground without His permission. If God so cares for quarrelsome sparrows, He will care much more for His own children. We are of more value than many sparrows. Souls are of great worth—it took the blood of the Son of God to buy us back from bondage. Birds do not bear the Divine image. They have no spiritual nature. The God who cares for the soulless little birds—will surely care much more thoughtfully, more tenderly, for a thinking, immortal being, capable of eternal life. God is our Father—He is not the birds' father; He is their creator and provider—but they are not His children. A woman will give more thought to her baby—than to her canary. Our heavenly Father will provide more certainly for His children—than for His birds.

Worrying is also most useless. "Which of you by being anxious, can add one cubit unto the measure of his life?" A short person cannot, by any amount of anxiety, make himself and inch taller. Therefore, why should he waste his energy and fret his life away—in wishing he were taller, and in worrying because he is not?

Worrying about a coming trouble—does not keep the trouble away! Worrying over a loss—does not bring back that which is gone. People find obstacles, difficulties and hindrances in their life. There are hard conditions in their lot. But is there any use in worrying over these things? Will it make them any easier? Will anxiety cure the lame foot, remove the ugly mole, reduce the undesired tumor, or put flesh on the thin body? Will fretting make the heavy burden lighter, the hard work easier, the rough way smoother? Will anxiety keep the winter away, put coal in the bin, or bread in the pantry, or get clothes for the children?

Even philosophy shows the uselessness of worrying, since it helps nothing, and only wastes one's strength, unfitting one for doing his best. But religion goes father than philosophy, and tells us that even the hard things, the drawbacks, the obstacles, may be changed into blessings—if we meet them in the right spirit. So we learn that we should quietly and with faith accept life as it comes to us, fretting at nothing, changing hard conditions to easier if we can—but if not, using them as a means for growth and advancement. The fact that God cares for us—ought to keep us from worry. "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these." Does God really care for the flowers? Yes, He weaves for them their matchless garments and fills their little cups with fragrance. Yet they live but for a day. If God clothes these frail plants so gloriously for only a few hours' beauty—will He not far more surely clothe His own children?

It is told of Mungo Park the great traveler, that once in the desert he was famishing for drink, and could find no water. In his exhaustion he had sunk down in the hot sands of despair, and had given up to die. He saw a tiny shoot of moss growing in the sand, and the thought came to him, "God tends this little plant. He placed it here and He is watering it. Surely, then, He will not forget me—but will provide for me, too." He roused up from his despair and passed on and was saved.

Here we come upon the great principle of Christian living. "Seek first His kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." That is, we are to put all the energy of our thought and life into one effort—to do God's will. We are not to to worry about our clothing or food—that is God's matter, not ours at all. We are to take thought, however, about our duty, our work, the doing of God's will, and the filling of our place in the world. Too many people worry far more about their food and clothing, lest they shall be left to need, than they do about doing well their whole duty. That is, they are more anxious about God's part in their life—than about their own! They fear that God may not take care of them—but they do not have any fear that they may fail in faithfulness to Him.

It will be a great point gained, if we learn here once and for all that providing for our needs—is God's matter, not ours; and that our first and only care should be our duty, the doing of our work. This God will never do for us—but if we are true to Him we shall never have any occasion to fret ourselves about our care. Suppose we are nearly starving? Well, we must go on, doing our duty in the circumstances, and not worrying; and in due time, perhaps at the last moment—but somehow or other, and in some way, the Lord will provide. Or if not, He will take us home. The Golden Rule

Matthew 7:1-12 When someone asked Raphael how he made his wonderful pictures, he replied, "I dream dreams and I see visions—and then I paint my dreams and visions." The teachings of Christ, if reverently received, fill our mind with dreams and visions of spiritual beauty. But there is something we must do if we would receive from these teachings the good they are intended to impart—we must get them wrought into our own life. The lesson on judging is not an easy one. We may as well confess that most of us are quite prone to the fault which is here reproved. Of course, the teaching is not that we should never have any opinions concerning the actions of others—we cannot avoid having judgments either of approval or disapproval. It is not understood either that we shall never express condemnation of the acts of others; we are required to censure men's evil courses. A little later in this same Sermon on the Mount, Jesus bids His disciples beware of false prophets which come in sheep's clothing, while in reality they are ravenous wolves. It is not an easy-going acceptance of all sorts of people and behavior, which is taught. What we are forbidden to do is to be censorious. Rather, we are to treat others—as we would have them treat us.

There are reasons enough why we should not judge others. One is that it is not our duty. We are not our neighbor's judge. He does not have to answer to us. God is his Master, and to Him he must give account.

Another reason is that God is patient with men's faults, and we represent God. If he bears with a man's shortcomings, surely we should do so, too. He is patient with people in their indifference to Him, in their disobedience, in their selfishness. Should we be more exacting with others than God is? Should we exercise severity—where He shows leniency?

Another reason we should not judge others is because we cannot do it fairly. We see but the surface of people's lives. We do not know what has been the cause of the disagreeable features, the faults, we see in them. Perhaps if we knew all—we would praise, where we now condemn. A young man was blamed by his fellow clerks for what they called his stinginess. He did not spend money as they did. They did not know that an invalid sister in another part of the country, shut away in her room, with none but her brother to care for her, received nearly all of his monthly salary!

Another reason for not judging others, is that we have faults of our own—which should make us silent about the failings of others. When we glibly condemn our neighbor's shortcomings, we assume that we ourselves are without shortcomings. But quite likely we have a beam in our own eye—at the very time we are pointing out to our brother the mote in his eye. A mote is a mere speck; a beam is a great log. The meaning is, that we make more of a little speck we see on another's life or in his conduct—than we make of a very large fault in ourselves. Our first business certainly is with ourselves. We shall not have to answer for our brother's faults—but we must answer for our own. It is not our business to look after his blots and blunders—but we must look after our own. We should be severe in dealing with our own faults—and then we will be able to help in curing the faults of others.

Another reason against judging, is that the law of love requires us to look charitably at the faults and sins of others. "Love covers a multitude of sins" (see 1 Peter 4:8). An artist placed his friend in the chair in such a position, that the blemish on one side of his face would not show in the picture. That is the way love prompts us to see our friends and neighbors, and show them to others—exhibiting the noble things in them—and throwing a veil over their defects.

Still another reason for not judging others, is that when we do, we are setting a standard for the judging of ourselves. "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others—you will be judged." If you criticize others—you must expect them to criticize you, and they will. Those who deal gently with the acts of others—may expect gentle treatment by others in return. People will give back to you—exactly what you give to them. The Master has more to say here about prayer. The promise is very large. "Ask—and it shall be given you." Thus our Father throws wide open the doors of all His treasure houses! There seems to be nothing of all His vast possessions, which He is not ready to give His children for the asking. "All things are yours, and you are Christ's" (1 Corinthians 3:21-23). We need not try to trim down the promise, and yet we must read into it other teachings about prayer. Elsewhere we are taught that in all our praying we must say, "May Your will be done" (Matthew 6:10). That is, we must submit all our requests to God's love and wisdom. We do not know what things will really be blessings to us. What would not be—our Father will withhold.

We get an important lesson here, too, on the manner of prayer, in the words "ask," "seek," "knock." They teach importunity and growing earnestness. Much that is called praying is not worthy of the name—is not praying at all. We have no burning desire, and there is neither importunity nor intensity in our asking. What did you pray for this morning? Do you even remember? The Father-heart of God is unveiled in the words about bread and a stone; a fish and a serpent. It is far more likely to be the other way, however—what we ask would be a stone to us, would not be a blessing; and God, knowing what we really need, gives us a loaf instead of the stone we cried for! We know certainly that our Father is kinder to His children, than earthly parents are to theirs—as much kinder as His love and His ability to give is greater than the largest human love and ability. Yet we must emphasize the words "ask," "every one who asks," etc. Some people never ask—and then wonder why they do not receive. Then, we must ask with the highest motives. "You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3). Selfishness in prayer gets no answer. The Golden Rule, as it is called, is wonderfully comprehensive. It bids us to consider the interests of others, as well as of ourselves. It bids us to set our neighbor alongside of ourselves and think of him as having the same rights we have, and

requiring from us the same fairness of treatment that we give to ourselves. It is in effect a practical way of putting the command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). It gives us a standard by which to test all our motives and all our conduct bearing on others. We are at once in thought to change places with the person toward who duty is to be determined, and ask: "If he were where I am—and I were where he is—how would I want him to treat me in this case?" The application of this rule would instantly put a stop to all rash, hasty actions, for it commands us to consider our neighbor and question our own heart before doing anything. It would slay all selfishness, for it compels us to regard our neighbor's rights and interests in the matter, as precisely equal to our own. It leads us to honor others, for it puts us and them on the same platform, as equal before God, and to be equal, too, before our own eyes. The true application of this rule—would put a stop to all injustice and wrong, for none of us would do injustice or wrong to ourselves, and we are to treat our neighbor precisely as if he were ourselves. It would lead us to seek the highest good of all other men, even the lowliest and the humblest—for we surely would like all men to seek our good. The thorough applying of the Golden Rule, would end all conflict between labor and management, for it would give the employer a deep, loving interest in the men he employs and lead him to think of their good in all ways. At the same time it would give to every employee a desire for the prosperity of his employer and an interest in his business. It would put an end to all quarreling and strife in families, in communities, among nations. The perfect working of this rule everywhere would make heaven, for the will of God would then be done on earth as it is in heaven!

False and True Discipleship

Matthew 7:13-29

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

There are two gates—one narrow and one wide—and two ways corresponding thereto. The easy way is not the right way. This is true in a very wide sense. It is true in the life of a child. There is a broad way of indulgence and indolence—but we know where it leads. There is a way of patient obedience in duty—and the end of this is worthy life and noble character. It is true in young manhood and womanhood. There is a way of pleasure, of ease—which leads to unworthy character. There is a way of self-denial, of discipline, of hard work—and this leads to honor. Then there is a broad way of selfishness and sin—which never reaches heaven's gates. And there is a way of penitence, of devotion to Christ, of spending and being spent in His service—which end is a seat beside the King on His throne!

It is a reason for great thankfulness, that there is a gate into the spiritual and heavenly life—and into heaven at the end. The glorious things are not beyond our reach. They are high, on dazzling summits—but there is a path that leads to them. We must note, however, that the gate is narrow.

Some people say that it is very easy to be a Christian. But really, it is not easy. It was not easy for the Son of God to prepare the way for us. It was necessary for Him to come from heaven in condescending love, and give His own life in opening the way. Jesus said also that any who would reach the glory of His kingdom, must go by the same way of the cross by which He had gone. He

said that the one who will save his life—that is, withhold it from self-denial and sacrifice, shall lose it; and that he alone who loses his life—that is, gives it out in devotion to God and to duty—shall really save it (see Matthew 16:24-25). In one of His parables, too, Jesus speaks of salvation as a treasure hid in a field, and the man who learns of the treasure and its hiding-place has to sell all that he has in order to buy the field (see Matthew 13:44). In another parable the same truth is presented under the figure of a merchant seeking goodly pearls, who had to sell all his stock of pearls—that he might buy the one peerless pearl (Matthew 13:45). The truth of the difficulty of entrance into the kingdom, is put in another way in this Sermon on the Mount. There are two roads through this world and two gates into the eternal world. One of these roads is broad and easy, with a descending grade, leading to a wide gate. It requires no exertion, no struggle, and no sacrifice to go this way. The other road is narrow and difficult—and leads to a narrow gate. To go this way one has to leave the crowd and walk almost alone—leave the broad, plain, easy road—and go on a hard, rugged road that often gets difficult and steep, entering by a gate too small to admit any bundles of worldliness or self-righteousness, or any of the trappings of the old life. If we get to heaven, we must make up our minds that it can be only by this narrow way of self-denial. There is a gate—but it is narrow and hard to pass through.

Jesus forewarned His friends against false prophets who would come to them in sheep’s clothing—but who inwardly would be ravening wolves! There is something fearful in the eagerness of Satan to destroy men’s lives! He resorts to every possible device. He sends his agents and messengers in forms and garbs intended to deceive the simple-minded and unwary. He even steals the dress of God’s own servants, in order to gain the confidence of believers and then destroy their faith and lead them away to death. There always are such false teachers and guides. They try to pass for sheep—but the sheep’s covering is only worn outside, while inside is the heart of a hungry, blood-thirsty wolf!

Many young people in these times fall under the influence of people who have caught smatterings of skeptical talk which they drop in the form of sneers or mocking queries into the ears of their confiding listeners. They laugh at the simple old cradle beliefs which these young Christians hold, calling them "superstitions." Then they go on to cast doubt upon, or at least to start questions about, this or that teaching in the Bible, or to caricature some Christian doctrine and hold it up in such a light as to make it look absurd. Thus these "false prophets" poison the minds of earnest young believers, and often destroy their childhood faith and fill them with doubt and perplexity!

Jesus makes it very plain in His teaching, that not profession but obedience is the test of Christian life. "Not everyone that says unto Me, ’Lord, Lord’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father." It is not enough to believe in Christ, intellectually, even to be altogether orthodox in one’s creed. It is not enough to seem to honor Christ before men, praying to Him and ascribing power to Him. Jesus tells us that some at last who thus seem to be His friends, publicly confessing Him—shall fail to enter the heavenly kingdom!

Why are these confessors of Christ, kept out of the heavenly kingdom? What are the conditions of entrance into this kingdom? The answer is given very plainly. Those alone enter the kingdom, who do the will of the Father who is in heaven. No profession, therefore, is true which is not attested and verified by a life of obedience and holiness. "Simply to Your cross I cling" is not all of the gospel—it is only half of it. No one is really clinging to the cross—who is not at the same time

faithfully following Christ and doing whatever He commands. To enter into the kingdom of heaven, is to have in one's heart the heavenly spirit. We must do God's will. We cannot have Christ for our Savior, until we have Him also as our Master. We pray, "May Your will be done by me on earth, as it is done in heaven." If the prayer is sincere, it must draw our whole life with it in loving obedience and acquiescence to the Divine will. The illustration at the close of the Sermon on the Mount, makes the teaching very plain. "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock." Everything turns on the doing or not doing of God's Word. Both the men here described hear the words—but only one of them obeys, and thus builds on the impregnable foundation. These two houses probably looked very much alike when they were finished. Indeed, the house on the sand may have been more attractive and more showy—than the house built farther up on the hillside. The difference, however, lay in the foundations.

There were two kinds of ground. There was a wide valley, which was dry and pleasant in the summer days, when these men were looking for building sites. Then way above this valley—were high, rocky bluffs. One man decided to build in the valley. It would cost much less. It was easy digging, and the excavations would be less expensive, for the ground was soft. Then it was more convenient also, for the bluffs were not easy of access. The other man looked farther ahead, however, and decided to build on the high ground. It would cost a great deal more—but it would be safer in the end. So the two homes went up simultaneously, only the one in the valley was finished long before the other was, because it required much less labor. At last the two families moved into their respective residences, and both seemed very happy. But one night there was a great storm. The rains poured down in torrents until a flood, like a wild river, swept through the valley. The house that was built on the low ground—was carried away with its dwellers. The house on the bluff, however, was unharmed.

These two pictures explain themselves. He who built in the valley is the man who has only profession—but who has never really given his life to Christ, nor built on Him as the foundation. The other man who build on the rock—is he who has a true faith in Christ, confirmed by loving obedience. The storms that burst, are earth's trials which test every life—the tempests of death and of judgment. The mere professor of religion is swept away in these storms, for he has only sand under him. He who builds on Christ is secure, for no storm can reach him in Christ's bosom!

Jesus, the Healer

Matthew 8:2-17 A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said: "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean!"

Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy!

After the Sermon on the Mount, we have narratives of many healings. The first was that of a leper. The case was remarkable because the disease was loathsome, contagious and incurable. The leper's cry to Jesus was very earnest. He had no doubt of Christ's power to cure him, "You can,"—but he seems uncertain regarding His willingness to do it. Instantly came the answer, "I will." As He said this He reached out His hand and touched him. Straightaway the cure was wrought. The man was ready to go back again to his home and to take his place once more in

society. Marvelous always, was the touch of Christ. It never took defilement; it was so full of health that it cleansed the utmost loathsomeness! The same touch that changed the leper's flesh into cleanness, changes the worst lives into whiteness and wholeness. The next act of healing was wrought on a slave. A Roman centurion had a servant who was very sick and a great sufferer. Somehow the centurion had heard of Jesus and the wonderful works he was doing, and he went to Him beseechingly and told Him of his trouble. We learn more about this soldier from seeing him at Jesus' door. He was greatly distressed, and yet it was not his child that was sick—it was only his slave. This tells us what kind of a man the centurion was—he had a gentle heart. All of us are continually manifesting what we are, through the little windows of our common, unconscious acts. By the way a boy treats his dog or his pony, or birds and insects, especially by his treatment of his sisters, and by his manner toward his playmates, and toward the poor and the weak—he is showing what he really is.

We see here also the immortality of good deeds. It is sweet to be remembered, long after one has passed out of life, by what one has done. It was a great while ago that this centurion went on his errand—but here we find his gentle deed set down among the memorials of Christ's own life. This deed of the centurion's is found imbedded on a gospel page. Every good deed done in Christ's name, is recorded in God's books and on human lives. It is worthwhile, therefore, to train our hearts to gentle thoughts and our hands to gentle deeds.

Jesus received the Gentile soldier most graciously and said at once He would accompany him home and heal the servant. Here we have a revelation of the heart of Christ. He was quick to respond to every cry of suffering. It will greatly help us in our thoughts of Christ in heaven, to remember that He is the same now, that He was while on the earth. He is still quick to hear our prayer and respond to our requests. His heart is yet tender and full of compassion toward pain. The gospel pages are not records of what Christ was—but glimpses of what He is!

Another lesson here is for ourselves. It is said that Dr. Livingstone rarely ever offered a prayer, even in his early Christian life, in which he did not plead to be made like Christ in all his imitable perfection. This should be the daily prayer of every Christian. We should seek to have Christ's great kindness of heart. The world is full of suffering—and we ought to seek in all possible ways to give comfort, relief or help. We have power to scatter happiness, to relieve distress, to give cheer and hope. We may not be able to heal diseases—but we can love people in Christ's name, and give them courage and strength to go on with their troubles and be encouraged. But the centurion shrank now in his lowliness from having Jesus enter his home. This was true humility. We cannot truly see Christ—and not be humbled. The reason we are so proud and self-conceited, is because we do not see Him. If our eyes but beheld Him in the glory and splendor of His Divinity—all our vain pretensions would instantly shrivel. We should look at Christ with a long, loving gaze—until a sense of His Divine greatness fills our hearts.

Another thing here to be noted, is the centurion's conception of Christ. He thought of Him as a great Commander with all the forces of the universe under Him. The soldier knows only one duty—to obey; and all these forces know only to obey Christ. Christ is the Commander of the army of the universe! The stars and planets are under Him and obey Him, all winds and tempests and all the powers of nature—are subject to His sway. All diseases, all events, come and go at His word. This ought to give us great confidence in the midst of dangers of whatever kind. Diseases

and pestilence are only Christ's soldiers. They are obedient to His will—and can never transcend it not to go contrary to it. They can go only where and as far—as He sends them. Death is one of His soldiers, too, and can do only His command. Why then should we dread death, since it is the obedient servant of our King? So of all events and occurrences—they are but the messengers of our Master and cannot harm us. It was not necessary for Jesus to go to the centurion's house to heal his slave. He had only to speak the word—and the illness would obey Him and flee away! The centurion's great faith wrought a great cure. "As you have believed—so be it done unto you." Blessing depends upon faith, the measure of blessing upon the measure of faith. Little faith gets little help. We have all God's fullness from which to draw, and there can be no limit to our receiving, save the capacity of our believing. It is because we have such small faith—that the answers to our prayers are so meager. The next case of healing was wrought in the home of one of the disciples. Jesus blesses homes. It was after a Sabbath service in the synagogue. When Jesus entered the house He found the woman lying sick with a fever. We are not told of any request for healing by any of the family. The thought seems to have been the Master's own. He saw her sick—and His heart was full of compassion. The record is very beautiful. "He touched her hand—and the fever left her." What strange power has that touch! There are other fevers besides those that burn in people's bodies. There are fevers of the mind, of the soul. There are fevers of discontent, of passion, of ambition, of lust, of jealousy, of envy! There are fevers of anxiety, of remorse, of despair. All of these, all life's fevers, the touch of Christ has power to heal. Let Him only touch the hot hand—and the fever will flee away and quietness and peace will come!

"The fever left her; and she arose, and ministered unto Him." She could not minister, until the fever was gone. Nor can we minister while life's fevers are burning within us. But when the fever leaves us—we at once to arise and begin to serve the Master. It would add immeasurably to our power among men and to the influence of our lives—if we would always get the touch of Christ upon our hands at the beginning of each day.

One says of his mother: "My mother's habit was, every day, immediately after breakfast, to withdraw for an hour to her own room, and to spend the time in reading the Bible, in meditation, and in prayer. From that hour, as from a pure fountain, she drew the strength and the sweetness which enabled her to fulfill all her duties, and to remain unruffled by all the worries and pettiness which are so often the intolerable trial of poor homes. As I think of her life, and of all it had to bear, I see the absolute triumph of Christian grace in the lovely ideal of a Christian woman. I never saw her temper disturbed; I never heard her speak one word of anger, or of calumny, or of idle gossip. I never observed in her any sign of a single sentiment unfitting to a soul which had drunk of the river of the water of life, and which had fed upon manna in the barren wilderness. The world is the better for the passage of such souls across its surface."

Let other weary mothers wait each morning to get the touch of Christ before they go the day's tasks and frets. Then the fevers of life will leave them, and they will enter upon a day of quiet peace and gentle ministry. The closing words of our passage present a most remarkable picture. "When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick." It would seem that there were scores healed in one hour! The Power of Faith

Matthew 9:18-34

"A ruler came and knelt before him and said: My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live."

Only comparatively few of our Lord's healings are recorded. He seems never to have refused to heal any who came to Him or were brought to Him. Besides, He healed some for whom no one interceded. Here was a ruler—an exceptional case, for the rulers were not His friends. Probably this man's great distress led him to seek healing for his child even in spite of his dislike of Jesus. The ruler and his prejudice, were lost in the father.

Trouble comes just as inevitably and as resistlessly, to the mansions of the great and rich—as to the homes of the lowly and poor. None are exempt. We can build no walls and set up no doors to exclude sickness and death! This is one lesson.

Another lesson, is that when sickness or any other trouble comes to us—we ought to send for Christ. We are to send for physicians, too, in sickness. They are God's ministers of healing. Usually God requires our cooperation in all that He does for us. But we should also send for Christ. He alone has original power to heal. Life is His gift and is under His care. Health is His alone to give. Medicines unblessed by Him—give no relief. Only at His bidding can anyone be restored from illness. While we use all the means within our reach—we should use them with prayer for Divine blessing on them, and in dependence on Divine power. Whenever anyone is sick in our house—we should send for Jesus and put the case in His hands.

Jesus was always eager to help those in trouble. He arose at once at the ruler's request, and followed him to his home. It seems strange, when we think who the man was, probably unfriendly to Jesus, that He should so quickly rise and follow this ruler. But it was always thus. He did not wait to make inquiry concerning the man, whether he was worthy or not, before going with him. The man that needed Him—was the man He wanted. In this alacrity in doing good Jesus was only showing the alertness of Divine love. In heavenly glory now, He is as quick to hear and as prompt to answer our cries—as He was that day in His earthly humiliation. He is always at our call. He never has so much to do or so many calls to answer—that He cannot attend to our case. Indeed, when we come to Him with any need, He has no other thing to do—but attend to us! We should be like our Master in all this. We should be quick to respond to the calls of need and distress about us. We ought to train our hearts to sympathy and thoughtfulness, and our hands to quick, gentle ministry in Christ's name.

Then came an interruption as the Master was hastening with the ruler to his house. "Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the hem of His garment." The street was thronged with people waiting for an opportunity to get near to the Healer. The "hem of His garment" is always within reach of earth's sufferers. He has gone up now on high, out of our sight—but His garment floats everywhere. We never can get beyond the sweep of its folds. We can always come near enough to Christ—to reach out a trembling finger and touch His garment and find healing! Of course, we must not make a mistake about this hem. It is not a crucifix, nor is it some relic of a dead saint, nor is it even a bit of the wood of the cross. It is not even the Bible, for touching the Bible will do no one good. Nor is it the Church and its ordinances; for we may belong to the Church and observe its ordinances, and get no benefit to ourselves. To touch the hem of Christ's garment—is to touch Christ Himself. His garment is His life, His love, His Spirit, His grace. A human physician, if hurrying on such an errand, would

probably have refused to listen to any calls for help on the way, as the ruler's child was actually dead. But Jesus stopped quietly and turned to see the woman who had touched Him. Mark says that He asked, "Who touched My garments?" How did He know that one touch amid all the jostling of the crowd? The multitudes were close about Him, pressing up against Him. Many of them touched Him. The disciples thought it strange that He should ask such a question. The people could not help touching Him. But there was one touch different from all the rest. There was something in it which sent a thrill through Him. There was a heart's cry in it, a piteous, earnest supplication. It was a touch of faith. It was not like the jostling of the crowd—an accidental or unconscious touch, the mere touch of nearness. It was intentional. There was a soul's cry in it. So, amid all the crude pressure of the multitude, He felt that touch, and turned about to see the one who had touched Him.

Jesus always knows the touch of true faith and prayer among all the touches of this great world. In one sense all men are near to Him, for He is everywhere present. We cannot move without pressing up against Him. But when among all earth's millions one person intentionally reaches out a hand to feel for Him, to touch Him with a purpose, with a longing or a desire, to seek for some blessing, or to beg some help—and He instantly knows the pressure of that touch and turns to answer it. He knows when a hungry heart wants Him—no matter how obscure the person, how poor, or how hidden in the crowd.

Notice His graciousness in answering the woman's prayer. "Jesus turning and seeing her said, Take heart, daughter, your faith has healed you." This was a bit of Christ's wayside work. He was hastening with Jarius to his home, to restore his dying child—and healed this poor woman on the way. We would call it incidental work, unpurposed, unplanned. The things we set out in the morning to do—are not by any means all the things that we do in any well-spent day. If we have the life of Christ in us, everyone that touches us gets some blessing from us. While busy at our work, we speak kindly to those who meet us or who are near us—and an influence of warmth, cheer or encouragement, or an inspiration toward better living—goes from us to them. We meet one in trouble as we hurry by—and stop to give a word of comfort. We hear of a case of distress—and we send or carry relief. Thus, if we have the spirit of Christ, our wayside service will be a most valuable and important part of our work in this world.

We do not know how long Jesus was detained in healing and comforting the woman on the way. "Jesus entered the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd." The child was dead and they were preparing for the funeral. So it seemed that He had tarried too long along the way. To us it appears, that He ought not to have stopped at all to heal or talk with the woman. She could have waited. But when we read the story through to the end—we are glad that He did stop to help the woman. We learn form His delay—that Jesus never is in a hurry. He is never so much engrossed in one case of need, that He cannot stop to consider another. He is never so pressed for time, that we have to wait our turn. No matter what He is doing, He will always hear instantly our cry for help.

Another thing we learn from this delay—is that Jesus never comes too late; He never waits too long. True, the ruler's child died while he lingered—but this only gave Him an opportunity for a greater miracle. He delayed, that He might do a more glorious work for this family. There is always some good reason for it—when Christ seems to delay to answer our prayers or come to our help.

He delays, that He may do more for us in the end.

"The girl is not dead—but asleep." This was Christ's word always about death. He said His friend Lazarus was asleep. He says the same of all His friends. They are not dead. Indeed, they never lived so really, so richly, so fully—as they live, when we call them dead! They are away from all the limitations of earthly life, set free from the hampering prison of the flesh, cleansed of all sin, "spirits of just men made perfect."

Christ changed the whole aspect of death for His people! To them death is but the passage to life—rich, blessed, glorious life. Even bodily death is a sleep—and sleep is not a terrible experience. It is restful and refreshing, and then we wake again from sleep and live on beyond it. So the body sleeps, and will rise again renewed and wearing immortal beauty. Christ called this child from her sleep very soon; it will be longer before He will call those whom we lay down in death's sleep—but He will surely wake them in His own time, in the blessed, glorious morning. It is wonderful comfort to us—to know that Christ has care of our sleeping dead and has the keys of their graves and can call them when He will.

Another phase of human need is met in the next incident. "Two blind men followed Him." There are a great many people, who are blind in another way. They can see certain things—but certain other things, they cannot see at all. They can see mountains and plains and blue skies, and human faces, and money and real estate, and all earthly things; but they cannot see God, nor heaven, nor the beauty of holiness, nor the inheritance of believers, nor any of the unseen things of blessedness and Divine glory. They can see only material things, which are neither enduring nor eternal; but they cannot see spiritual things, which alone are real. Natural blindness is a sore loss. A blind man misses all the glorious beauty of this world. He cannot see where to go—and has to be led by the hand. But spiritual blindness is an infinitely more sore loss. Christ alone could give sight to the blind. He opened eyes, that had always been closed. He alone can open the eyes of the spiritually blind. If we cannot see spiritual things, we should call upon Christ to have mercy upon us.

Always faith was required. "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" The men must have faith, before Jesus would heal them. When we come to Him asking Him to do anything for us, He wants to know if we believe that He is able to do it. Once a father came to Him for his demon possessed son, and his prayer was, "If You can do anything, have compassion on us, and help us." But the "if" marred the request—the father was not sure that Jesus could cure his son, and Jesus sent him back to get a better faith. "If you can!" He answered. "All things are possible to him that believes." As soon as the man could say, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" Jesus cured the boy (Mark 9:22-24). May it be that the reason why many of our prayers are not answered, is because we do not believe that Christ is able to do what we ask of Him? If we can believe—He can give what we ask. If we cannot believe—He will not do anything for us. The Mission of the Twelve Matthew 9:35-38; Matthew 10:1-15, Matthew 10:40-42

Jesus never rested. He went about doing good. His work is summed up here in three words: teaching, preaching, and healing. He was in this world to seek and save the lost, and He went everywhere on His holy mission of love. He did not stay in one place, because then other places would have been neglected. He knew that He had blessings for the sad, suffering world—and His soul was burdened until He had borne these blessings to everyone's door. So He went

everywhere, from house to house. He was a shepherd seeking the lost, and we can see Him pressing through the dark ravine, up the steep cliffs, out upon the wild crags and over the rugged mountain, through storm and darkness, cold and heat—searching for the lost sheep! That is what He wants us to do now; for we are left in this world in His place, to carry on His work.

"When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them." Christ's compassion was astonishing. The sight of suffering humanity filed Him with grief. We have a picture here of the way that Jesus looked upon people, "When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." This means that they were neglected by those who ought to have been their friends and helpers. The rulers were intended to be shepherds to their people. Instead of this, they showed them no love, no kindness, no care—but wronged them, and even robbed them! Jesus was among them as a true shepherd, and His heart was full of compassion toward them!

Out of the deep pity of His heart, Jesus begins now to plan for the great work of saving men. "The harvest truly is plentiful—but the laborers are few." He seems to have been almost appalled at the vastness of the work as He looked out over the people and thought of their condition. But His vision was not limited to His own country. He had come to save the world, the whole world, and all nations. No wonder He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful." To meet the great need, there must be many laborers enlisted. This is the beginning of the great missionary movement which is now reaching out all over the world.

"The laborers are few," said the Master as He looked upon the great fields with their vast human needs, their sorrows, their hungering. Indeed, Jesus himself was the only laborer at that time. There were only a handful of apostles, and they were still untrained.

Note the first word His heart uttered as He thought of reaching the world with mercy. "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." The Lord of the harvest is God Himself. At that time the chief duty, was prayer that the Lord would send forth laborers. Men were first to be called for the work and then trained for it. There is still need for making the same prayer, for even yet the laborers are few—in consideration of the vastness of the field to be harvested. But few young men are entering the Christian ministry, and the ranks are growing thin. The gates of missionary lands are open, and the money is ready to send men into the fields—but the men are not offering themselves.

Already Jesus had chosen the twelve apostles. Luke tells us of this. It is said that He spent all night in prayer to God before choosing these men. He thus sought His Father's guidance in making His choice and His blessing on the men to be chosen. The work of the kingdom was to be committed to their hands, and it was of the greatest importance that they should be in every way the right men. We have a suggestion here also—as to the importance of choosing our personal friends. It should be with prayer. Their influence upon our lives will be vital and far-reaching, and only God can choose them for us.

Here we have a description of the mission and work of the apostles. "He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority." First He called them to Him. No one is ready to go out for Christ—until he has come to Him. Discipleship must come before service. There is no place to start—but at the Master's feet. We must lie on His bosom and catch His spirit. It is not enough to

attend colleges and theological seminaries, and be graduated from these. It is not enough to be commended by committees and mission boards; every one who would go as a worker for Christ or as a missionary, must first come to Christ. Christ must choose and call His own apostles—and send them out with His blessing. None are ready to go, until Christ has given them power and authority. He is the King, and He alone can commission any to represent Him. If we want to help Christ save the world—we must personally surrender ourselves to Him, and let Him prepare us and then send us out with authority to represent Him. The names of the apostles are given. They were not famous men when they were chosen. They were very plain and ordinary men; but afterward they became men of wonderful power, and all the world felt their influence. We see out of what common stuff Christ can make great men, holy saints and heroic missionaries.

There is something in His method of preparing His apostles, that those who would be preachers and teacher should note. He took these men into His family and kept them there for three years. He lived with them, pouring the light and the love of His holy life upon their dull, sinful lives—until they were literally permeated with His Spirit. Thus He stamped His own impress upon them so that they were ready to go out and repeat His life and teaching among men.

Perhaps many of us scatter our work too much. If we would select a few people and give to them continually our strongest and best influence, month after month, and year after year, carrying them in our prayers, and in our thoughts, and doing all we can to impress them and make them noble, true and Christlike; we might do far more for our Lord in the end—than by trying merely to touch a hundred or a thousand lives? The apostle had their field of work laid out for them. They were not to go into the way of the Gentiles. This was not the final command; it was only for the first tour of the country. The Gentiles were not always to be left out from the proclamation of the gospel. The great final commission was universal; they were to carry the news of salvation to every creature under the heavens. But as yet the gospel was not ready to be proclaimed everywhere. The blood of the Lamb of God had not yet been shed. The alabaster box of the Savior’s precious life had not yet been broken, to pour out the ointment. For the present, the messengers were not to go beyond the limits of the Jewish nation. The great law of Christian life is: that we receive—in order to give; that we are blessed—in order that we may be a blessing. "Freely you have received—freely give." Christ has liberally blessed us—but the blessing is not for ourselves alone. The things He has given us—we are to pass on to others. He wants to reach the many—through the few. We sin against Christ, and therefore against others—if we keep in our own hands, and do not use the good things He has so generously bestowed upon us. We take the bread and are to pass it to those who are hungry. We receive the cup and are to give it to those next to us. We are disloyal; therefore, to Him if we close our hands and hold the blessings He gives us in tight clasp, just for ourselves. Let us freely pass on—all that Christ has so freely given to us! The Question of John the Baptist

Matthew 11:1-19

John was a brave man and a firm believer in Jesus as the Messiah—but in his prison, questions arose. "When John heard in the prison the works of the Christ, he sent two of his disciples." There were some things which he could not make out himself, and he sent promptly to Jesus to ask Him about them. That is just what we should learn to do in all our perplexities. There often are times when all seems dark about us. We cannot understand the things that are happening to us. We are

apt to get very much worried and disheartened. The true Christian way in all such experiences, is to take the matters at once to Christ.

John’s faith in the Messiahship of Jesus wavered in his hard circumstances. "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" Some people think that John could not really have been in doubt. It is impossible, they say, that such a brave, grand man should ever have wavered in his confidence. They forget that John lived in the mere dawn of Christianity, before the full day burst upon the world. He had not the thousandth part of the light that we have—yet do we never have our questions? The truth is, there are very few of us who are not sometimes disheartened without a hundredth part of the cause John had! We are amazed at every person’s blindness or dullness—but our own! Other people’s failures look very large to us—but we do not see our own at all. We wonder how Moses, once, under sorest provocation, lost his temper and spoke a few hasty and impatient words; while we can scarcely get through a single sunny day ourselves without a far worse outbreak, at a far smaller provocation! We wonder how the beloved disciples, with all his sweet humility, could once show an ambition for a place of honor, while we ourselves are forever miserably scrambling for preferment! We say, "Isn’t it strange that the people of Christ’s time would not believe on Him when they saw all His power and love?" Yet we do not believe on Him any more readily or any more fully than they did—though we have far greater evidence! We think it strange that the Baptist grew despondent when his trials were so great, though many of us are plunged into gloom by the merest trifles!

Somehow Jesus was not realizing John’s expectation as the Messiah, and he thought that possibly there was yet another to come after Him. "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" It is the same yet with many people. When everything is bright and sunny—they think they surely have found Christ, and their hearts are full of joy. But when troubles come and things begin to go against them—they wonder whether after all they really have found the Savior. They begin to question their own experience. Christ does not do just the things they thought He would do for them. Their religion does not support them as they supposed it would do. If they are indeed Christians, why does Christ let them suffer so much and not come to relieve them? So they sink away into the slough of despond, sometimes losing all hope. But we see from John’s case, how unnecessary all this worry is. Of course, we must have some earthly trials. Christ does not carry us to heaven on flowery beds of ease. We must expect to bear the cross many a long mile. The true way is never to doubt Him. Suppose there are clouds, the sun still shines behind them, undimmed, and the very clouds have their silver lining. Suppose we have disappointments, Jesus is the same loving Friend as when all our hopes come to ripeness. There is no need to look for another; all we need we find in Him. If we turn away from Him, where shall we go? When John’s messengers came with their questions, Jesus did not give a direct answer. He went on with His ministry of love and mercy—that they might see what His work was. Then "Jesus answered." Jesus always answers. Many of our prayers to Him are mixed with doubts. Many of them are full of complaints, fear and murmuring. Still He never grows impatient with us. He never shuts His door upon us. We must cause Him much pain by our distrusts and our unhappy fears. We wonder whether He loves us or not, whether He really has forgiven us or not, whether or not he will take care of us all through our life. Half the time we are worried or perplexed about something, and are full of frets and cares. Does Jesus ever get tired of listening to such prayers? No, no! He listens always, and though His heart must often be pained by the discordant

notes of our murmurings and fears—He never grows impatient, and never chides but always answers. He remembers how frail we are, that we are but dust, and gives loving answers.

Jesus let the messengers get their own conclusions from what they saw. "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see." Here we see how Jesus proved His own Messiahship. The best evidence of Christianity is not a long array of arguments—but the things Christianity has done. The tree's fruits are the best index to the tree's character. Jesus pointed to the miracles He had wrought. Yet it was not to the miracles as miracles, merely as wonderful works, that He pointed; it was the character of these works that proved His Messiahship. The blind received their sight, the lame were enabled to walk, lepers were cleansed, and the deaf were made to hear. All these were works of Divine mercy and love. Pulling down mountains, floating in the air, performing remarkable feats of magic, would not have proved our Lord's Messiahship; the miracles He wrought were never ostentatious, never for show—but were acts of love, done to relieve suffering, lift up fallen men, give joy and help—and thus manifest the Divine character. Once He walked on the water—yet it was not for show—but in carrying relief to His imperiled and terrified disciples.

Jesus said nothing about John, while the messengers from John were there—but when they were gone, He spoke of him. "As they departed, Jesus began to say." What a beautiful thing this was for Jesus to do for His friend! The people and the disciples would misunderstand John's perplexity about the Christ, and would be sure to misjudge Him, thinking Him weak and vacillating. Jesus would not rest a moment until he had removed any unfavorable impression about John that might have been left in anyone's mind. He was most careful of the reputation of His friend. The lesson is very important. We should always seek to guard the good name of our friends. We should not allow any wrong impression of them or of their acts to become current. We should hold their name and honor sacred as our own. If we find that anything they have done is likely to leave an unfair or injurious impression on others who do not know all the circumstances, we must try to set the matter right. It is very sad to see people sometimes even apparently glad to find others unfavorably regarded. Instead of hastening to remove or correct wrong impressions, they seem quite willing to let them remain and even to confirm them by significant silence or by ambiguous words. Surely that is not the Christlike way.

John was not a weak man, blown with every breeze. He was not a "reed shaken with the wind." That is what many people are. A reed grows in soft soil by the water's edge. Then it is so frail and delicate in its fiber, that every breeze bends and shakes it. There are people of whom this is a true picture. Instead of being rooted in Christ, their roots go down into the soft mire of this world and are easily torn up. Thus they have no fixed principles to keep them upright and make them true and strong, and they are bent by every wind and moved by every influence. They lack nothing so much as backbone. The boy that cannot say 'no', when other boys tease him to smoke or drink or to go places he ought not to go, is only a reed shaken with the wind. The girl who is influenced by frivolities and worldly pleasures, and drawn away from Christ, and from a noble, pure, beautiful life—is another "reed shaken with the wind." They are growing everywhere, these reeds, and the wind shakes them every time it blows. Who wants to be a reed? Who would not rather be more like the oak, growing with roots firm as a rock, which no storm can bend?

It was a splendid commendation that Jesus gave His friend. "There has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist." So a man may sometimes have doubts and perplexities of faith, and yet be a

very great man. Christ does not cast us off, because we sometimes lose faith. Of course, we ought never to have any doubts about Christ, or about His way being the best way—but if ever we do yield to such discouragements, we must not think we have lost our place in Christ's love. He makes a great deal of allowance for our weakness and for the greatness of our trials, and keeps on loving us without interruption. Thousands of good people have their times of despondency, and Jesus is always gentle and tender to all in such experiences. He does not chide. He does not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. He restores the sick or wounded soul to health.

Warning and Invitation Matthew 11:20-30

"Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent." Matthew 11:20

It seems strange to hear Jesus upbraiding. His words usually were most gracious and loving. Here, however, we hear Him speaking in tones of sharpness and severity. Yet the phase of His character which is now revealed is not inconsistent with other representations of Him in the Gospels. We must not think of Jesus as having no capacity for anger. He was all love—but love can be severe, even dreadful. While He was a friend of sinners and went to His cross to redeem the ungodly—yet He hated sin. He was just and holy.

We should notice carefully, however, the reason for this upbraiding. It fell upon the cities in which Jesus had done most of His mighty works. These were not His first words to the people of these cities. There had been long months of loving ministry, with miracles of mercy, with words of grace, revealings of the Father-heart of God, and offers of eternal life—before He spoke the words of chiding we now hear Him speak. But the people of these favored cities had been unaffected by all this love. They had gone on in their sins, unrepentant. They had accepted Christ's gifts of love—but had not accepted Him as their Lord. They had taken His help, His kindness, the things He had done for them so lavishly—but they had rejected Him. The upbraiding of these cities was because after all that he had done for them, after all their spiritual opportunities and privileges, they had rejected Jesus. It was not impatience on His part that made Him severe. He had not grown weary loving, even without return. But the fact that the cities had received so much Divine favor, made their sin in rejecting Christ far greater.

Tyre and Sidon, great commercial cities which had been denounced by the prophets for their sins, would have repented, Jesus said—if such Divine blessings as had been shown to Chorazin and Bethsaida had been given to them. Sodom was the great historical example of wickedness in the history of the world, and its destruction was a notable instance of judgment. But even Sodom would have repented, if it had received such calls and had enjoyed such privileges as had Capernaum. And Sodom's judgment would be more tolerable than that of Capernaum.

There is something startling in what Jesus says here about the doom of these Galilean cities, and the reason for it. They had had high privileges, and had disregarded them. What then about the places in our own day which have had exceptional privileges and have not improved them? What about those who have been brought up in Christian homes, amid the most gracious influences, who have seen Christ continually and have known the beautiful things of His love from infancy—and after all have kept their hearts closed upon Him, refusing His love! The question with

which we are really personally concerned is not with Chorazin or Capernaum, but ourselves, our privileges and what we are doing with them.

"More tolerable." So we would better have been born and brought up in some heathen land, never hearing of Christ—than to have had the highest Christian privileges, and then to have turned our back on the Savior of men. We may perish with Christ at our door. Christian privileges will not save us. The question after all is, "What are you doing with Christ?" The other part of our passage is in a different tone. Here we find mercy again in its most gracious mood. The invitation in the closing verses is better understood when we have studied the great words that precede it. "All things have been committed to me by my Father," said Jesus. All things had been put into His hands, all power, all mercy, all gifts, all life. This ought to be a great comfort to us, amid this world's mysteries and perplexities, when there are things which threaten to destroy us. It is Jesus Christ, the Christ of the gospel, in whose nail-marked hands are all our affairs.

There can be no revealing of the Father, except as Jesus Christ wills to reveal Him. It is very important then to learn how He dispenses the revelation which is in His hand exclusively. Will He impart it only to a few great saints, to a little company of wise men, to certain rare spirits? The answer is in the gracious invitation which follows, "Come unto Me, all who that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Yet there is a distinct class of people to whom the gracious invitation is especially given, "all who that labor and are heavy laden." This does not mean the rich, the noble of birth, the high of rank, the wise the great among men. It includes the lowly, the oppressed, the over burdened, the weary, those who are in distress. Need is the only condition. There is no one anywhere who desires the blessings of love, of mercy, of grace, to whom this wonderful invitation is not given and who may not claim it and accept it with all confidence.

Perhaps no other of Christ's words has given comfort to more people, than this promise of rest. It meets every heart's deepest longing. What is this rest? It is not cessation from work. Work is part of the constitution of human life. It is necessary to health, to happiness, even to existence. God works. "My Father works," said Jesus, "and I work" (see John 5:17). There is a curse on idleness.

It is rest of soul that Jesus promises. The life is at unrest. It is all jangled and can have no rest until it is brought into harmony. Sin is the cause of this universal human unrest, and rest can come only when forgiveness has come. And this is the first rest that is promised. Everyone who comes to Christ is forgiven.

There are two rests promised. "I will give you rest." This rest comes at once. Every weary one who comes to Christ in penitence and with repentance—is forgiven, reconciled and restored to Divine favor.

Then there is a rest which comes later and only through self-discipline and patient learning. "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me… and you shall find rest." To take Christ's yoke on us is to take Him as our Master, to let Him rule our life. The thought of a yoke is suggestive of bondage and humiliation. But the yoke of Christ is nothing galling or dishonoring in it. "My yoke is easy," He says. He is a gentle taskmaster. He requires entire submission to His will. He will not share our subjection with any other master. We must take His yoke upon us willingly, cheerfully, without reserve. But His commandments are not grievous, His burden is light. Then we will find honor and blessing in it. A yoke implies two united, serving together, walking side by side under the same

load. It is Christ’s yoke we are to bear, which means that He shares it with us. His shoulder is under every load of ours. If we have a sorrow—it is His, too. In all our afflictions—He is afflicted. Thus it becomes a joy to take Christ’s yoke. When He is our Master, we are free from all other masters. In bearing His yoke, we will find rest unto our souls. Our lives under His sway will be at peace.

Another step in finding rest is to enter Christ’s school. "Learn of Me," said the Master. We are only beginners when we first become Christians. A good man said, ’It takes a long time to learn to be kind—it takes a whole lifetime." He was right—it does take as many years as one lives, to learn the one little lesson of kindness. Paul said, and said it when he was well on in life, "I have learned in whatever state I am, therewith to be content" (Php 4:11). We would suppose that such a wonderful man as Paul was, did not have to learn the lesson of contentment. We can scarcely think of him as ever fretting about his condition and circumstances. But evidently he did, and it was a long, difficult lesson for him to learn to be content anywhere, in any and every experience. Even Jesus Himself had to learn life’s lessons. In the Epistle to the Hebrews it is said that He learned obedience by the things that He suffered (see Hebrews 5:7-8).

All of Christian life is a school. We enter it when we first come to Christ. We begin at the lowest grade. We do not have to wait until we know a great deal before we begin to attend school. School is not for finished scholars—but for the most ignorant. We may come to Christ when we know almost nothing. He is a teacher and He wants us to become learners. Gentleness is a lesson which we are to learn. One young girl said, "I never can get over being jealous. I cannot bear to have my friends love anybody else. I want them to love only me." But she must learn the lesson of generosity in friendship. She must learn to want her friends to love others. It probably will take her a good while, the lesson will be a long one—but she must learn it because it is in Christ’s curriculum for all His students, and no one can get His certificate of graduation without learning it.

Patience is a lesson that has to be learned. An impatient person is not a complete Christian. Thoughtfulness is another necessary lesson. There are a great many thoughtless Christians. The poet tells us that evil is wrought by lack of thought—as well as lack of heart. Many people are always blundering in their relationship and fellowship with others. They say the wrong word, they do the wrong thing. They leave undone the things they ought to have done. They are always hurting other people’s feelings, giving pain to gentle hearts. Yet it is all from thoughtlessness. "I didn’t mean to offend him. I didn’t mean to be unkind. I just never thought." There are few lessons in Christian life that more people need to learn than this of thoughtfulness.

We have to learn to trust. Worry is a sin. It is probably as great a sin as dishonesty or profanity or bad temper. Yet a good many Christian people worry at first, and one of the most important lessons in Christ’s school, is to learn not to worry. Joy is a lesson to be learned. Peace is another. Humility is another. Praise is a great lesson. All of life is a school, and it is in learning these lessons—that Jesus says we shall find rest for your souls. Christ Himself is our teacher, and with Him we should never fail to learn, though it be only slowly. Then as we learn, our lives will grow continually more and more into quietness, peace and Christlikeness. All our questions will be in the faith that accepts God’s will as holy and good—even when it is hardest.

Two Sabbath Incidents

Matthew 12:1-14 The question of proper Sabbath observance arose several times during our Lord's public ministry. The Jewish law made careful provision for keeping of the seventh day of the week—but the Rabbis had added many rules of their own, making the Sabbath really a burdensome day. Jesus did not recognize these added requirements, and hence often displeased the rulers by what they considered violations of the law. The criticism at this time was caused by our Lord and His disciples going through the grain fields on the Sabbath. They were probably on their way to the morning synagogue service. The disciples were hungry, and as they walked along by the standing grain, which was then ripe, they plucked off some of the heads and, rubbing them in their hands and then blowing away the chaff, they ate the grains. The Pharisees were always watching Jesus that they might find something of which to accuse Him. There are two ways of watching godly people. One way is to watch them to see how they live—that we may learn from their example; the other way is in order to criticize and find fault with them. It was the latter motive which prevailed with the Pharisees. They went along with Jesus, not because they loved to be with Him—but as spies upon His conduct. The conduct of Christians is always watched by unfriendly eyes, eyes keen to observe every fault. We need to live most carefully, so as to give no occasion for just censure. Yet the example of Jesus shows us that we are not to be slaves of traditional requirements which have not authorization in the Word of God.

Godly people can find better business than to play the spy upon the lives and conduct of others. The unfriendly espionage of these Pharisees on Jesus and His disciples, appears in our eyes very far from beautiful. We are behaving no better, however, than the Pharisees did—if we keep our eyes on others for he purpose of discovering flaws. Perhaps they do not live quite as they should live; but are we their judges? Do we have to answer for them? Then, perhaps, our sin of censoriousness and uncharitableness is worse than the sins we find in them. There are some people so intent on trying to make other people good—that they altogether forget to make themselves good! When the Pharisees said to Jesus that His disciples were doing that which was not lawful on the Sabbath, He reminded them of what David did when he and his companions were hungry. "Have you not read?" It was in their Scriptures. David, fleeing from Saul, went to Ahimelech very hungry, he and his companions, and asked for something to eat. There was no bread about the place, except the showbread. It was not lawful for any but the priests to eat this bread. But the men's need satisfied the custodian of the tabernacle, that he might deviate from the letter of the law in this emergency (see 1 Samuel 21:1-6). The act of the disciples in plucking and rubbing out the heads of grain to satisfy their immediate hunger was a work of necessity, and therefore not a sin. Though the letter of the law may have been violated—yet it was not violated in spirit. What works of necessity are, cannot be established by minute rules and regulations. The settling of the question must be left in each particular case to the enlightened consciences of faithful followers of Christ.

Jesus made a starling claim when He said to His critics, "One greater than the temple is here" (see v.6). It is usually supposed that He refers to Himself. But a marginal reading suggests "a great thing," meaning the law of love. That is, love is always the highest law. This different rendering seems to be favored by the words which follow. "If you had known what this means—I will have mercy, and not sacrifice—you would not have condemned the guiltless." Love would have made you think of men's needs, as higher than the observance of the letter of a Sabbath rule. No Divine law intends to have men go hungry.

Then Jesus uttered another startling word, "For the Son of man is lord even of the Sabbath day." He thus claimed the right to interpret the laws of the Sabbath. In Mark 2:27 we have also this strong assertion, "The Sabbath was made for man—and not man for the Sabbath." The Sabbath was part of the Divine constitution which God had ordained for His children. Christ came not to destroy—but to fulfill. He took the Sabbath, therefore, and stripped from it the burdensome regulations which men had attached to it, and put into it its true spiritual meaning. He set the Church free from the cumbersomeness of a rabbinical Sabbath, and made it a day of joy and gladness, a type and foretaste of heaven.

Almost immediately afterwards, another question of Sabbath observance arose. It was in the synagogue. A man was present who had a withered hand. Again the Pharisees were watching Jesus to see what He would do. They asked Him if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath day. They were not humble seekers for the truth—but were looking for a ground of accusation against Him. It was a violation of the rules of the Pharisees to attend the sick or even console them on the Sabbath. Jesus knew the intention of the Pharisees in their question and bade the man arise.

Then He asked them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out?" In this He appealed to simple common sense. Whatever their traditions said about the Sabbath day, the practice of the people would be on the merciful line. The Talmud says that if the animal is in no danger in the ditch—it should be allowed to remain unrelieved over the Sabbath. But the form of our Lord’s question shows that this was not the practice of the people. "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out?" Then He added, "How much more valuable is a man than a sheep!" If it was right to help a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath, it certainly was right to relieve a human sufferer from his sickness on that day. So we have the lesson, "Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath!" It is right for physicians to attend to their patients on the Lord’s day. It is right for those whose duty it naturally is to nurse the sick—to care for them on the Sabbath. It is right to visit the sick when they need our sympathy and when we can carry to them blessing or cheer. It is right to visit those who are in affliction when we can carry comfort to them. It is right to visit the poor when we can minister to their needs or relieve their distresses. It is especially right to go out among the unsaved, when we can do anything to bring them to Christ. It is right to gather neglected children from the streets and from Christless homes, and bring them under the influence of Divine grace.

We must be careful not to pervert our Lord’s teaching here. Not all kinds of work can be brought into the class indicated in the words, "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day." It was the Jewish Sabbath concerning which Jesus was speaking here, and our Christian Lord’s day is in every way more beautiful, more joyous. Yet we need to keep most holy guard over it, for there are many influences at work to rob us of it. There was a time when very much of the old rabbinic spirit was exercised in some parts of the world toward the Christian Sunday. Now, however, the tendency is in the other direction, and we are in danger of losing the sacredness of this day. The Lord’s Day is not well kept—when its hours are devoted to mere social purposes. The best preparation that can be made for its proper observance, is to prepare for it as far as possible on Saturday. This was the old-time way. Everything was done on Saturday that could be done to lighten the burden of the work on Sunday.

Jesus never was deterred from His work of mercy, by the censorious criticism of His enemies. He bade the man to stretch forth his hand. The arm was withered, dried up, dead. How could the man stretch it forth? But when Jesus gave the command it was implied that he would also give power to obey. The man must make the effort to do what he was bidden to do. That was the way he showed his faith. Then with the effort—came new life unto the dead arm.

Whenever Christ gives us a command He is ready to give us strength to obey it. We may say the thing required is impossible—but it is the privilege of the Christian to do impossible things. Anybody can do possible things; but when Christ is working in us and through us—we need not ask whether the things He commands are possible or not. "I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me" (Php 4:13). People often say that they cannot begin a Christian life because they have not the strength to do what Christ requires of them. True—but if they will begin to obey, they will be enabled to obey, helped by the Master Himself.

Growing Hatred to Jesus Matthew 12:22-32, Matthew 12:38-42 The heart of Christ was a great magnet that ever drew to it all human suffering and human need. The description given of Him in a quotation from Isaiah (Isaiah 42:3), in the verses immediately preceding this incident, are wonderfully suggestive. His compassion and His gentleness are depicted in the words, "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out." This prophetic picture of the Messiah found its perfect realization in the life of Jesus. He was the friend of the frail, the feeble, and the bruised. In those days, men despised the weak. The deformed and the incurable were not considered worth saving—but were thrust out to perish. Jesus, however, had special compassion for that which was crushed or broken. He invited the weary to come to Him. The sick, the lame, the blind, the paralyzed and all sufferers soon learned that He was their friend. Wherever He went throngs followed Him, and these throngs were made up largely of those who were distressed and those who had brought distressed friends to be helped or healed.

Now it was one possessed with a demon, and also blind and dumb, that was brought to Him. Nothing is told of the manner of the cure. All we learn is that, "Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see." No wonder the multitudes were astonished. "Could this be the Son of David?" they asked. They thought that possibly a man who did such wonders might be the Messiah—yet it did not seem to them that He was. Or it may be that they feared to give expression to the feeling, knowing how bitter the Pharisees were against Him. When the Pharisees heard what the people were suggesting, they became greatly excited and set to work to account for Jesus and His power. They felt that they must account for Him in some way, that they must give the multitude some explanation of Him which would satisfy them and prevent their concluding that He was the Messiah. In Mark’s account of this incident, we learn that there were scribes and Pharisees present that day who had come down from Jerusalem to watch Jesus and to make a report of what they saw and heard. They set to work to create in the minds of the people the impression that Jesus was working in cooperation with evil spirits, and that it was through Satanic power, that He did the wonders they had seen Him do. So they answered the people’s question, "Is not this the son of David?" by saying, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons!" Beelzebub seems to have been an infamous name for Satan, probably having its origin in the story of Ahaziah’s idolatry in inquiring of Baalzebub, lord of flies, a Philistine deity (see 2 Kings 1).

One thing to notice here, is the admission that Jesus had really done wonderful works, had actually wrought miracles. They did not attempt to deny this. They felt that some explanation must be given to the plain, simple-minded people who were following Jesus in such numbers. There was no doubt about the supernatural works. We find the same admission throughout the whole story of Christ's public ministry. Herod believed that Jesus had wrought miracles; and in his remorse imagined that John, whom he had beheaded, had risen from the dead. No opponent of Christ in those days ever even hinted that He did not actually do miracles.

Another thing to notice here, is the strange explanation these learned men gave of the miracles of Jesus. They frankly admitted them—but to account for them without confessing that He was the Messiah—they said that He was in league with the prince of evil! The giving of such an explanation of the power of Christ, shows a prejudice that was not only stubborn, but evil. Of course, it was intended also to discredit Jesus by impugning His character. They said He was an agent of the devil. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God and said He was doing His Father's will and the works of His Father. They sought thus to slander Him and make him an imposter, an enemy of God.

Wicked men often resort to the same course in our own days, when they are seeking to destroy the influence of Christianity. They cannot deny the good that is done—but they seek to account for it by alleging wrong motives in those who do the good. Sometimes they try to blacken the names of those who represent Christ. They start evil stories about them, to defame their character. That is, they accuse the saints of being in league with Satan. The answer of Jesus to this charge is clear and convincing. "Jesus knew their thoughts." He well understood their motives. He knows all men's thoughts. We can carry on no schemes or conspiracies without His knowing of them. We can keep no secrets from Him. His answer was: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to ruin." This proved at once the absurdity and preposterousness of the charge His enemies had made. They said He was an agent of Satan. Yet He was not doing the work of Satan—but the work of God. Satan had a man under his power whom he was destroying. Jesus had taken the man, driven out the demon, opened his eyes and ears and healed him. Who could believe that He was in league with the Devil—and was thus undoing the Devil's ruinous work? "If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand?" This shows the folly of their charge. All the works of Christ were good works. He came to bless men, to save them, to heal the sick, to make the lame walk, to raise the dead. Are those the works of the Evil One?

One of the strongest evidences of Christianity, is in what it does for the world. In chapter 11 when the disciples of the imprisoned, John the Baptist came asking for Christ, inquiring whether Jesus was indeed the Messiah, they were told to tell John what they had seen Jesus doing, "the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up." These were all works of love, and they proved that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. Men are trying to prove today that He is not Divine, denying His miracles, taking away every vestige of the supernatural from His person, His life, His work. But look at Christianity, not as a creed merely—but as a regenerating force. Look at the map of the world and find the white spaces which show the effect of Christianity in the countries where it has gone. Was it an impostor that wrought all this? Was it one in league with Beelzebub who left all these records of blessing, who transformed these countries? Was it an agent of Satan that made the home life of Christian lands, that built the churches, the asylums, the hospitals, the orphanages, the schools; and that

has given to the world the sweetness, the beauty, the joy, the comfort, the fruits of love, which are everywhere the results of Christian teaching and culture? Could anything be more absurd—than trying to account for the mighty works of Christ—by saying the devil did them through Him!

Jesus gives the true explanation of His works in the words: "But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." Christianity is the kingdom of God—in battle with the kingdom of evil. The work of Christ in this world—is to destroy the works of the devil. This is a work in which every follower of Christ has a part. "He who is not with Me," said the master, "is against Me; and he who gathers not with Me, scatters abroad."

One of the most frequently misunderstood of all the words which Jesus spoke, is found in His reply to His defamers: "And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven." Does not this seem to refer to the act of the Pharisees, in imputing to the prince of evil—works which Jesus had done through the Spirit? One writes, "The conclusion of the whole is—you are on Satan's side, and knowingly on Satan's side, in this decisive struggle between the two kingdoms, and this is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit—an unpardonable sin."

Thousands of people, however, have stumbled at this word of Christ's and fallen into great darkness, fearing that they themselves had sinned a sin which never could be forgiven. There is not the slightest reason why this saying of Christ should cause anxiety to any who are sincerely striving to follow Christ. It may be said that those who have any anxiety concerning themselves and their spiritual state—may be sure that they have not committed such a sin. If they had committed it, they would have no concern about their soul. Actually, the only unforgivable sin—is the sin of final impenitence. All sin that is confessed and repented of—will be forgiven. "This sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit is unforgivable, because the soul which can recognize God's revelation of Himself in all His goodness and moral perfection, and be stirred only to hatred thereby, has reached a dreadful climax of hardness, and has ceased to be capable of being influenced by His beseeching. It has passed beyond the possibility of penitence and acceptance of forgiveness. The sin is unforgiven because the sinner is fixed in impenitence, and his hardened will cannot bow to receive pardon."

"Much torture of heart would have been saved if it had been observed that the Scripture expression is not sin—but blasphemy. Fear that it has been committed, is proof that it has not; for if it has been, there will be no relenting in enmity nor any wish for deliverance." Alexander Maclaren

Accustomed as we are to think of the gentleness of Jesus, His lips ever pouring out love, it startles us to read such words as He uses here in speaking to the scribes and Pharisees who were contending with Him. "You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good! For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks!" We are reminded of the manner of the Baptist's speech, when he was calling men to repent. But we must not forget that love is holy, that roses become coals of fire when they fall upon unholiness. The scribes and Pharisees demanded a sign, something that would assure them that Jesus was what He claimed to be. Sincere and earnest inquirers after, truth always find Christ most patient in answering their questions and making their real difficulties plain. When Thomas could not believe on the testimony of the other disciples, and demanded to see for himself the hands with the print of the nails—Jesus dealt with him most

patiently (John 20:24-28). He is always gentle with honest doubt—and quick to make the evidence plain to it. But the men who here demanded a sign were not honest seekers after truth. Jesus knew their thoughts and spoke to them in words of judgment. They were an evil and an adulterous generation—estranged from God, false to Him. They had had miraculous signs—but they had disregarded them. Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah—and before them now was a great Preacher than Jonah. The queen of the South came from afar to hear the Wisdom of Solomon, and a greater Man than Solomon now stood before them. But they believed not, repented not. Impenitence gets no sign. The Parable of the Sower Matthew 13:1-9; Matthew 13:18-23

Jesus was always teaching. On this particular day His pulpit was a fishing boat, from which He spoke to the multitudes standing on the shore. Perhaps there was a sower somewhere in sight, walking on his field, carrying his bag of grain and slinging his seed broadcast. The sight may have suggested the parable.

"Behold, a sower went forth to sow." Christ Himself is the great Sower—but we all are sowers—sowers of something. Not all who sow, scatter good seed; there are sowers of evil—as well as of good. We should take heed what we sow, for we shall gather the harvest into our own bosom at the last. "Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap"—that, and not something else (Galatians 6:7). In the parable the seed is good—it is the Word of God. The soil likewise is good—it is all alike, in the same field. The difference is in the condition of the soil. The first thing that strikes us in reading the parable, is the great amount of waste of good there seems to be in the world. On three parts of the soil—nothing came to harvest. We think of the enormous waste there is in the Lord’s work, in the precious seed of Divine truth which is scattered in the world. What comes of all the sermons, of all good teaching, of the wholesome words spoken in people’s ears in conversation, of wise sayings in books? What waste of effort there is whenever ever men and women try to do good! Yet we must not be discouraged or hindered in our sowing. We should go on scattering the good seek everywhere, whether it all grows to ripeness or not. Even the seed that seems to fail—may do good in some way other than we intended and thus not be altogether lost. The wayside is too hard to take in the seed that falls upon it. There are many lives that are rendered incapable of fruitfulness in the same way. They are trodden down by passing feet. Too many people let their hearts become like an open common. They have no fence about them. They shut nothing out. They read all sorts of books, have all kinds of companions, and allow all manner of vagrant thoughts to troop over the fields. The result is that the hearts, once tender and sensitive to every good influence, become impervious to spiritual impressions. They feel nothing. They sit in church, and the hymns, the Scripture Word and exhortations, the appeals and the prayers fall upon their ears—but are not even heard! Or, of they are heard, they are not taken into the mind or heart—but lie on the surface.

"The birds came." The birds always follow the sower, and when a seed lies within sight—they pick it up. The wicked one "snatches away that which has been sown." So nothing comes of the seed which falls on the trodden wayside. The lesson at this point is very practical. It teaches our responsibility for the receiving of the truth which touches our life, in whatever way it is brought to us. When we read or listen—we should let the word into our heart. We should give attention to it. We should see that it is fixed in our memory. "Your word have I hid in my heart," said an old psalm writer (Psalms 119:11). The next kind of soil on which the seed fell was stony—only a thin layer of

soil over a hard rock. There is none of the fault of the trodden wayside here. The seed is readily received and at once begins to grow. But it never comes to anything. The soil is too shallow. The roots get no chance to strike down. The grain starts finely—but the hot sun burns up the tender growths because they lack depth of rooting.

There are many shallow lives. They are very impressionable. They attend a revival service and straightway they are moved emotionally and begin with great earnestness. But in a few days the effect is all worn off. Life is full of this impulsive zeal or piety which starts off with great glow—but soon tires. Many people begin a holy book, read a few chapters, and then drop it and turn to another. They are quick friends, loving at first—but it is soon over.

One of the pictures of the crucifixion represents the scene of Calvary after the body of Jesus had been taken down and laid away in the grave. The crowd is gone. Only the ghastly memorials of the terrible day remain. Off to one side of the picture is a donkey nibbling at some withered palm branches. Thus the artist pictures the fickleness of human fame. Only five days before, palms were waved in wild exultation as Jesus rode into the city. The goodness of too many people lacks root. The resolves of too many lack purpose. The intentions of too many lack life and energy. There are many shallow lives—in which nothing good grows to ripeness. What this soil needs—is the breaking up of the rock. What these shallow lives need—is a thorough work of penitence, heart-searching and heart-breaking, the deepening of the spiritual life. The third piece of soil in which the seed fell was preoccupied by thorns whose roots never had been altogether extirpated. The soil was neither hard nor shallow—but it was too full. The seed began to grow—but other things were growing alongside of it, and these, being more rank than the wheat and growing faster, choked it out.

Jesus tells us what these thorns of the parable stand for. They are the cares, riches and pleasures of this world. CARES are worries, frets, and distractions. Many people seem almost to enjoy worrying. But worries are among the thorns which crowd out the good. Martha is an illustration of the danger of care (see Luke 10:40-41). There are plenty of modern examples, however, and we scarcely need to recall such an ancient case as hers.

RICHES, too, are thorns which often choke out the good in people’s lives. One may be rich and his heart yet remain tender and full of the sweetest and best things. But when the love of money gets into a heart—it crowds out the love of God, and the love of man, and all beautiful things. Judas is a fearful example. The story of Demas also illustrates the same danger. A godly man said to a friend: "If you ever see me beginning to get rich, pray for my soul." The PLEASURES of the world are also thorns which crowd out the good. It is well to have amusements—but we must guard lest they come to possess our heart. We are not to live to have pleasures; we are to have pleasures, only to help us to live. The fourth piece of soil was altogether good. It was neither trodden down, nor shallow, nor thorny; it was deep plowed and clean. Into it the seed fell and sank and grew without hindrance. By and by a great harvest waved on the field. This is the ideal for all good farming. The farmer must have his field in condition to receive the seed and to give it a chance to grow. That is all the good seed needs. This is the ideal, too, for all hearing of the Word of God. If only we give it a fair chance in our life—it will yield rich blessing. The Parable of the Tares Matthew 13:24-30; Matthew 13:36-43 The sower is Christ Himself. He always sows good seed in His field. When he was living here in this world, He went up and down the country, dropping the words of life

wherever He found a bit of heart-soil that would receive them. It is wonderful to think of the blessings which have come to the world through the words of Christ. They have changed millions of lives from sinfulness to holiness. They have comforted sorrow. They have guided lives through the world's perplexed paths. They have been like lamps for the feet of countless pilgrims. In this parable, however, Christians themselves are the seeds. "The good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom." Everyone who has received into his heart the grace of God, becomes himself a living seed. Wherever a good seed grows, it springs up into a plant or a tree. Every good life has its unconscious influence, diffusing blessings, making all the life about it sweeter. Then it yields fruit. Paul talks about the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of those who receive the Spirit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering. There are also fruits in the activities of the Christian life, in the words one speaks, in the things one does, in the touches of life upon life.

We here come upon the truth of an Evil One who is in the world, an enemy, of Christ, marring or destroying Christ's work. The Bible does not tell us about the origin of evil—but it everywhere takes for granted that there is a kingdom of evil, at the head of which is the great enemy of God and man. Evil is not dropped accidentally into lives or homes or communities. The bad work is done designedly. "But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away."

People sometimes wish that there was no evil in the world. But, unfortunately, the feet of the Adversary go in every path. He is always watching for opportunities to steal in and do mischievous work while no one is watching. He is represented here as coming by night when good people are asleep. Our hours of greatest peril, are those in which we are least conscious of peril. What can we do to protect ourselves in these unsheltered, unwatched times? If a man knows that a thief is coming, he will be on the watch. But the thief does not come then—he comes when he knows that no one is watching. How can we keep ourselves safe from the dangers we know not of? All we can do is to keep our lives ever in the hands of the sleepless Christ.

We are in danger of underestimating the enmity of Satan, and the evil wrought by his sowing. His own distinct purpose is to destroy the work of Christ. Whenever any good seed has been sown in a heart, he comes and tries to get some bad seed in among it. He whispers his evil suggestions in our ears, even while we are reading our Bible, praying, or partaking of the Lord's Supper. The devil is far more busy among good people than among bad. Those who are wholly given over to sin—he can afford to let alone—they are safely his already; but those who are trying to be Christian, he seeks to destroy.

Young people need to guard against the baleful evil which seeks entrance in vile books and papers, in indecent conversation or unchaste pictures. When an officer in General Grant's presence was about to tell an obscene story, he glanced about him and said, "There are no ladies present." The general promptly answered, "But there are gentlemen present." Nothing that should not be said in the presence of a lady—should be said in any presence. In the early stages of growth, the tare or darnel, is so much like wheat—that the two can scarcely be distinguished. Evil in its first beginnings is so much like good that it is often mistake for it. By and by, however, as they grow, the true character of the tares is revealed. Seeds of evil sown in a heart may not for a while make much of a manifestation. A child under wrong influences or teachings, may for a time seem very innocent and beautiful—but at length the sinful things will show themselves and will shoot up

in strength. Many a man falls into ruin at mid-life, through bad habits which he began to form when he was a boy! The time for young people to keep their hearts against evil is in the time of their youth. The farmer's servants wished to clean out the tares before they had come to ripeness. The farmer said, however: "No, you would do more harm than good if you began to do this. Wait until the harvest, and then we will separate the tares and the wheat." Good men must live among the evil in this world. Sometimes they grow together in the same home, or in the same group of friends, or are associated in the same business, dwelling in constant communication and association. Even in the apostle family, there was one traitor. Besides the impossibility of making a separation, there is a reason why the evil should remain—the hope that they may be influenced by the good and may yet themselves be changed into holiness. Every Christian should be an evangelist, eager in his desire and effort to bring others into the kingdom of God. In Old Testament days, God tolerated many evils like polygamy, divorce, blood revenge, and did not root them out at once because the people were not then ready for such heroic work. We are not to grow lenient and tolerant toward sin—but we are to be wise in our effort in rooting it out. Especially must we be forbearing and patient toward the sinner. If our neighbor has faults—we are not to rush at him with both hands and begin to claw up the tares by the roots. We must be patient with his faults, meanwhile doing all we can by love and by influence to cure him of them. We are never to lower our own standard of morality, nor to make compromise with evil; we must be severe with ourselves; but in trying to make the world better—we need much of the wise patience of Christ.

There will be at last a complete separation between the good and the evil. Hypocrites may remain in the Church in this world and may die in its membership and have a royal burial—but they cannot enter heaven. This solemn word should lead all professors to honest and earnest self-examination. Are we wheat—or are we tares? The same law applies to the good and the evil in our own lives. In the holiest character, there are some things not beautiful. In the worst men—there are some things that are fair and to be commended. But in the end the separation will be complete and final. When the disciples had an opportunity of speaking to the Master alone, they asked Him what this parable meant. "Explain unto us the parable of the tares of the field." That is what we should always do with our difficulties concerning the teaching of Christ, and with all perplexities concerning our duty as Christians—we should take them all to the Master himself. Some things may be explained to us at once by careful reading and study of Christ's teaching. Some things that once were obscure and hard to understand, become very plain as we go on; experience reveals them to us. Then the office of the Holy Spirit is to guide us into all truth.

Some people talk about this world—as if it belonged to the devil. Indeed, Satan himself said that all the kingdoms of the world were his. It looks sometimes, too, as if this were true. But really this is Christ's world. After His resurrection Jesus Christ sent His disciples forth into all the world, claiming it, bidding them go everywhere to make disciples of all the nations.

Jesus taught plainly that there is a personal spirit of evil, called the devil. He says here distinctly, "The enemy that sowed them is the devil." The devil is the enemy of Christ. No sooner had Jesus been baptized, than Satan began his assaults upon Him, seeking to overcome Him and destroy Him. Satan is the enemy also of every Christian. He takes the utmost delight in getting his poison into the lives of Christ's followers. Sometimes people think that they can play with evil and not be harmed—but it is always perilous play, and everyone who thus ventures, will surely be hurt. One great comfort we have in thinking of Satan as the enemy of souls and our enemy—is that Christ

overcame him at every point. While Satan is our enemy, strong and alert—he is a vanquished enemy. We cannot ourselves stand against him—but with Christ's help, we can stand. "In all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him who loved us!" (Romans 8:37).

Pictures of the Kingdom Matthew 13:31-33; Matthew 13:44-52 The parables of Jesus are unforgettable pictures. They are stories laden with truth. Some preachers tell stories which thrill those who hear them, and yet they are tales with no lesson. The parables of Jesus are rustic and interesting, and yet they are vital with spiritual meaning. The mustard seed is little, so small that one can scarcely see it. Yet it has life in it, and when it is sown in a field it grows and becomes a tree, so large that the birds come and nest in its branches. There would be no reason for our Lord's telling us about this little seed and its plant merely as a bit of natural history. It is beautiful and interesting even in this way—but He had a further purpose in His parable. He uses it as an illustration of His kingdom in the world.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed." Christianity began in a very small way. A little baby lay in a manger—that was the beginning of the kingdom of heaven in this world. A kingdom implies a king. Christ ruled over a very small kingdom that night. His mother loved Him as mothers always love their children, and He reigned in her heart. Some shepherds came in during the night and saw the Child-King and worshiped Him. Their lives were never the same again, for one who has had a God-given vision of Christ can never lose the influence out of his heart. They returned to their lowly duty—keeping watch over the flock—but they were better shepherds afterwards and better men. The kingdom of heaven had entered their hearts. But the beginning of the kingdom was small indeed—like a mustard seed. For thirty years it seemed to have no appreciable growth. The child grew—but dwelt in a lowly home in a peasant village. His childhood was not unusual. He was not an unusual boy. There was no halo around His brow. Nothing showed that He was kingly. There were no flashings of divinity on His face. He did no brilliant things. He wrought no miracles. He went to school and learned His lessons—but revealed no greatness. According to the customs of His people, he entered the carpenter's shop at twelve as an apprentice, and for eighteen years worked at the carpenter's bench. "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed… which indeed is smaller than all seeds."

We know what the kingdom of Christ is today. It has touched many lands with its holy influence. It has become a great tree with many wide-spreading branches. On its boughs the birds sit and sing. In its shadows the people rest. Its fruits feed the hunger of multitudes. The tree is still growing. The great missionary movement of today is extending it, and it is destined to fill all lands. "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field.

Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches." The next parable tells of the pervasive and permeating influence of the gospel of Christ. "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough." Usually in the Bible, leaven stands for something evil. It was a symbol of sin in the Mosaic dispensation. Paul exhorts believers to purge out the old leaven. But here it is used in a good sense. The teaching is very apt. Leaven works secretly and silently. It makes no noise. It works pervasively, creeping out through the dough until every particle of it has been affected. Thus it is that the influence of Christianity permeates society, penetrating everywhere, touching every

institution, changing all things. The illustration may be widely applied. Thus individual lives are changed. The leaven of Divine grace in the heart works out until the whole character is changed. Henry Drummond in one of his books tells of a girl whose life was transformed into great spiritual beauty. Her friends wondered what had wrought the change. At length the secret was discovered in a verse of Scripture which she carried in a locket, "Whom having not seen, you love" (1 Peter 1:8). The leaven works also in communities. Neighborhoods are changed, transformed by the gospel. In mission lands there are many notable illustrations. The truest work of Christianity is quiet. It is a religion less of organization, than of personal influence. It is not always the most active person who does the most for the advancement of the kingdom of God; often it is the quiet man or woman whose life is holy and beautiful, who really does the most for the changing of other lives. Many an invalid, who cannot take any active part in the affairs of the Church—yet exerts a sweetening and ennobling influence in a home, in a community, which far surpasses in its value the busy ministry of one who is always going about, talking, doing good. The lesson from the leaven, is that it does its work by being put into the midst of the loaf. It will not do any good if laid on the shelf; in however close proximity to the dough. It must be in the mass. There are some Christian people who seem to feel no responsibility for the touching or influencing of other lives. They incline to keep away from people and to be exclusive. But leaven will never do its work if kept away from people. Thus Jesus did—He was called a friend of publicans and sinners. He ate with them and mingled with them in all social ways, and His pure, loving, gentle life left its impress on their lives. Jesus did not teach His disciples to hide away from people, to keep out of the world—but to live in the world, to be friends of men, to seek to influence others by being with them. He said they were salt—but salt to do its work, to perform its mission, must be rubbed into that which it is to preserve.

We need to take the lesson. Be leaven wherever you are. Let your godliness be felt. Let your kindness touch others. Let your example have in it a contagion of joy, of peace, of unselfishness, of sweetness, of purity, which shall be a blessing everywhere. Be sure that you make one little spot of the world better, cleaner, whiter, brighter, gladder—because you live in it. In another parable Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field." There were no banks in ancient times, especially in unsettled countries. It was common therefore to hide treasure in the ground. Not infrequently did one come upon such concealed treasure. Of course, Jesus had spiritual treasure in His thought, as He is illustrating the kingdom of heaven. We do not dream of the wealth of invisible riches that are always close to us as we go through this world. A man may work for years in a field, digging and plowing over it, not thinking of anything of value in it, and then suddenly someday discover that there are valuable minerals or even gems hidden under his pick and plow.

Dr. Newell Hillis says: Lecturing in Kentucky recently, I saw a cave of diamonds, newly discovered. One day a farmer, plowing, thought the ground sounded hollow. Going to the barn he brought a spade and opened up the aperture. Flinging down a rope, his friends let the explorer down, and when the torches were lighted, behold, a cave of amethysts and sapphires and diamonds. For generations the cave had been undiscovered and the jewels unknown. Wild beasts had fed just above those flashing gems, and still more savage men had lived and fought and died there. And yet just beneath was this cave of flashing jewels.

We do not know what hidden treasures of spiritual good there are all the while so close to us that our hand could take them if we saw them. Sometimes we come suddenly upon them, and then we should instantly seize them and appropriate them, whatever it may cost us. The man in the parable sold all he had and bought the field in which the treasure was concealed. We should be ready to give up all we have to get the spiritual riches that we find. The parable of the pearl teaches almost the same lesson as that of the hidden treasure. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it." The merchant sought goodly pearls—the best that could be found. Then when he heard of this best of pearls, he was willing to give up all he had that he might possess it. Too often, we do not live for the best things. When we find something even better than the good—we should be eager to possess it, no matter if we have to give up all we have to buy it. The Multitudes Fed Matthew 14:13-21; Matthew 15:29-39

"As soon as Jesus heard the news, he went off by himself in a boat to a remote area to be alone. But the crowds heard where he was headed and followed by land from many villages. A vast crowd was there as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick."

It was just after the death of John the Baptist. John’s disciples went and told Jesus of their great sorrow. Their grief touched the heart of their Master, and He withdrew, seeking a little season of quiet. The best comforter in our times of trouble is God—and when our hearts are sore, we can do nothing so wise as to flee into the secret of His presence!

Jesus went out in a boat to cross the lake. But the people saw the boat departing and flocked around the lake to meet Him on the other side. As He stepped from the boat, the multitude began to gather, eager to see Him. Although He was seeking rest, His compassion drew Him to the people that He might help them.

It was always thus that Jesus carried people’s sorrows. When He looked upon the great throng who had flocked after Him and saw among them so many suffering ones—lame, sick, blind, palsied—His heart of compassion was stirred. When we remember that Jesus was the Son of God, these revealings of His compassion are wonderful. It comforts us to know that there is the same compassion yet in the heart of the risen Christ in glory. He did not lose His tenderness of heart when He was exalted to heaven. We are told that as our High Priest, He is touched by ever sorrow of ours. Every wrong that we suffer—reaches Him. Every sorrow of ours—thrills through His heart. It was not their hunger, their poverty, their sickness, nor any of their earthly needs that appeared to Him their greatest trouble—but their spiritual needs. Our worst misfortunes are not what we call calamities. Many people may seem prosperous in our eyes, and yet when Christ looks upon them He is moved with compassion, because they are like sheep with no heavenly Shepherd.

Yet the first help Christ gave that day, was the healing of the sick. He thinks of our bodies as well as our souls. If we would be like Him, we must help people in their physical needs—and then, like Him, also, seek further to do them good in their inner life, their spiritual life. There are times when a loaf of bread—is better evangel than a gospel tract. At least the loaf must be given first, to prepare the way for the tract. As the day wore away, it became evident that the people were very hungry. They had brought no provisions with them, and there were no places in the desert where they

could buy food. Combining the stories in the different Gospels, we get the complete narrative of what happened. Jesus asked Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" (John 6:5). Philip thought it was impossible for them to make provision for such a throng. "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" The apostles could think of no way to meet the need of the hour, but by dispersing the people. "Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." To this suggestion the Master answered, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

We are like the disciples. We are conscious of having but little of our own with which to help or bless others—and we conclude hastily that we cannot do anything. If we feel responsibility, we meet it by deciding that it is impossible for us to do anything. Our usual suggestion in such cases, is that the people go elsewhere to find the help they need. We suggest this person or that person who has means, or who is known to be generous, thus passing on to others the duty which God has sent first to our door. We are never so consciously powerless and empty in ourselves, as when we stand before those who are suffering, those in perplexity, or those who are groping about for peace and spiritual help. Our consciousness of our own lack in this regard leads us often to turn away hungry ones who come to us for bread. Yet we must take care lest we fail to do our own duty to Christ's little ones.

Jesus said to His disciples that day, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." That is precisely what He says to us when we stand in the presence of human needs and sorrows. He says, "Feed these hungry people!" There is no use sending them to the world's villages—there is nothing there that will feed them. Nor need you send them to people who seem to have more than you have—they have no duty in the matter. Whenever Christ sends to us those who are need, whether it be for physical or spiritual help—we may not lightly turn them away. The help they actually need—we can give them. They would not have been sent to us if it had been impossible for us to do anything for them. If we use the little we have in Christ's name, He will bless it so that it shall feed the hunger of many.

We learn how to use our resources by studying the way the disciples fed the multitude that day. The first thing they did was to bring their loaves and fish to the Master. If they had not done this—they could not have fed the people with them. The first thing we must do with our small gifts—is to bring them to Christ for His blessing. If we try with unblessed gifts and powers to help others, to comfort the suffering, to satisfy people's spiritual hungers, we shall be disappointed. We must first bring to Christ whatever we have, and when He has blessed it, and then we may go forth with it. The miracle seems to have been wrought in the disciples' hands—as the bread was passed to the people. They gave and still their hands were full. In the end all were fed. So with our small gifts, when Christ has blessed them, we may carry comfort and blessing to many people.

It was a boy who had these loaves. Here is a good lesson for the boys. Someone say that this boy was a whole Christian Endeavor Society himself. He and Jesus fed thousands of people with what ordinarily would have been a meal for but one or two. The boys do not know how much they can do to help Christ bless the world through the little they have. The young girl who thinks she cannot teach a class in Sunday-school, and takes it at last tremblingly but in faith, finds her poor barley loaf grow under Christ's touch, until many children are found feeding upon it, learning to love Christ and honor Him. The young man who thinks he has no gifts for Christian work finds, as he

begins that his words are blessed to many.

We must notice, also, that the disciples had more bread after feeding the multitude, than they had at the beginning. We think that giving empties our hands and hearts. We say we cannot afford to give—or we shall have nothing for ourselves. Perhaps the disciples felt so that day. But they gave, and their store was larger than before. So the widow's oil was increased in the emptying (1 Kings 17:12-16). The disciples said that Mary's ointment was wasted when she poured it upon the Master's feet (John 12:3-8). But instead of being wasted—it was increased, so that now its fragrance fills all the earth.

Jesus Walks on the Sea Matthew 14:22-36

It was after the feeding of the five thousand. As we learn from John's account, the people were so excited by this miracle that they wished to take Jesus by force and make him king. To prevent this act, Jesus sent the multitude away and then went up into a mountain for prayer.

Before going into the mountain, however, He sent His disciples out upon the sea in the boat, to go before Him to the other side. The record says He "constrained" them. It ought to have been a comfort to them that night, in the midst of the storm, to remember that their going out upon the lake was not at their own suggestion—then they might have thought it a mistake—but that the Master had bidden them to go. They were in the way of obedience. When we are doing Christ's will—we are under Divine protection, and need fear no storm.

We must not expect that every voyage we take at Christ's bidding, shall be without storm. We may be pleasing God—and yet meet dangers. When we find obstacles in something we are doing under God's guidance, we may not conclude that we have made a mistake, and that these difficulties are indications that we ought not to have taken such a course. On the other hand, such troubles are not meant to discourage us—but to inspire us to stronger faith and greater endeavor.

"He went up into the mountain alone to pray." No doubt His prayer was partly for Himself. There had come to Him a temptation of earthly honor and power—and He sought relief in prayer. Then He prayed also for His disciples. Mark tells us that from this mountaintop, He saw them that night on the sea, distressed in rowing. Jesus always sees us when we are toiling in any tempest, any struggle, and speaks for us to His Father.

"In the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea." He did not come to them immediately; indeed, it was almost morning when He appeared. The boat in the wild storm, represents Christ's friends in this world in the storms of life. Sometimes we think we are forgotten, that Christ does not see us, or does not care. Here we have an illustration. From His mountaintop He sees His disciples in their struggles in the wild sea. He does not forget them. He watches that no wave shall engulf them. Then at the right time—He comes to them with help. So it is in all our experiences of danger and distress. He is interested in our earthly life. Some people tell us sneeringly that there is no one who cares, no one who thinks of us. But the picture here is the true one. Christ cares, watches, keeps His sleepless eye upon us, and keeps His omnipotent hand on all affairs so that no harm can come to us on the ocean or on the shore. When He came—He came as no other friend could come. "He went unto them, walking on the sea." No human help could have possibly arrived to them that night in the wild sea. If their friends were standing on the shore, and saw their peril—they could not have done anything for them. So we may stand and look

at our friends in their sorrow, and our hearts may break for them—but we can do nothing. We cannot get to them through the wild waves. But there is One who can reach them—Jesus can walk on the roughest billows, as if they were a crystal floor.

Sometimes Jesus alarms His friends by the way He comes to them. It was so that night. "When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled." In their terror and superstition they thought it must be an apparition, and they were frightened. Yet it was their best friend, and He was coming to deliver and save them. They were terrified, because He came in such a strange way. It is the same with us often. He comes in the black cloud of trial, sickness, loss, bereavement, disappointment; and we think it is some new peril, when really it is our Savior! We should learn to see Christ in every providence, bright or painful. The sternest things of life carry in them Divine blessing and good—if only we have faith to receive them.

"Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid." As soon as the disciples heard the voice of Jesus, they recognized Him, and their fear changed to joy. So it was with Mary at the sepulcher. He whom she took to be the gardener, was her own Master; she knew Him as soon as He spoke her name (John 20:15-16).

Then comes the story of Peter’s venture and failure. Peter was always impulsive. As soon as he heard the voice of Jesus, and knew who it was that was walking on the waves—he was seized with a desire to rush to meet Him. "Bid me come unto You on the water," he cried. Jesus said, "Come!" and for a time Peter walked on the waves and did not sink. His faith was simple, and he was upheld by Divine power. But as soon he took his eye off his Lord and looked at the tossing waves—he instantly began to sink. That is the way most of us do. We go a step or two as if we were borne up on wings, while our faith is strong and our eye is fixed upon Jesus. But soon we begin to look at the dangers, and then our faith trembles and we begin to sink. If we could always keep our eye upon Christ, not thinking of the perils—our faith would not fail.

"Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him." In his fear and helplessness, Peter did the right thing—he turned to Jesus for help, crying, "Lord, save me!" Said an old Alpine guide to a tourist who was timid at some point of danger, "this hand never lost a man." Christ never lost a man out of His hand! As soon as Jesus was in the boat with the disciples, the storm was over, the boat was at the land, and the tired rowers, after their long night of toil, dropped their oars, and all went on shore. So will it be at the end of life, if we have Christ with us. As the morning breaks—we will pass out of the storm into the quiet calm—and will find ourselves on the shore of eternal blessedness! The Canaanite Woman Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus seems to have gone out of His own country into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, seeking a little quiet. He needed rest. But He could not be hidden. A Canaanite woman somehow heard of His being there, and came immediately to Him. Her daughter was in a distressing condition! This woman was a Gentile, and yet she must have known something of the true God. How she had learned about Jesus, we are not told. No doubt the fame of His ministry of healing had reached her. So when she heard that He was in her vicinity, she became instantly determined to see Him. The world is full of sorrow. Few are the homes in which there is not some grief or affliction. Many are the sad mothers who move about through the world, carrying their heavy burden of pain or grief. No wonder this mother was glad when she heard of Jesus coming to her neighborhood. No wonder she was so persistent in her pleading that He would heal her child.

We may notice here that while the trouble was in the child—it was the mother's heart that carried the burden. Whenever we see a child sick or in any pain or distress, and the mother watching—the mother suffers more than the child. Children never can understand how the hearts of their parents are bound up in them. To this woman's intense pleading with Jesus, her appeals to His mercy, her cries of distress—Jesus answered her not a word. This is one of the strangest incidents in the entire story of Jesus. Usually He was quick to hear every request made of Him by any sufferer. Scarcely ever had anyone to ask twice for His help. His heart instantly responded to cries of distress. Often He gave the help unasked. Yet now He stood and listened to this woman's piteous pleading, and answered her not a word. Like a miser with hoards of gold, at whose gates the poor knock—but who, hearing the cries of need and distress—yet keeps his gates locked and is deaf to every entreaty—so Jesus stood unmoved by this woman's heartbroken cries.

Why was He thus silent? Was this a weak moment with Him, when He could not give help? The most compassionate man has days when he can do nothing—but there never were such hours in the life of Jesus. Was it because He was so engrossed in His own coming sorrow, that He could not think of any other one's trouble? No, for even on the cross He forgot His own anguish, and prayed for His murderers and cared for His mother. He was preparing her to receive in the end a far richer, better blessing—than she could have received at the beginning. Our Lord sometimes still seems to be silent to His people, when they cry unto Him. To all their earnest supplications, He answers not a word. Is His silence a refusal? Does it indicate that His heart has grown cold, or that He is wary of His people's cries? Not at all. Often, at least, the silence is meant to make the supplicants more earnest, and to prepare their hearts to receive better blessings! The woman's cries seem to have disturbed the disciples. They grew almost impatient with their Master for keeping her waiting so long. They wanted her daughter healed because they could not endure the mother's crying. Yet Jesus was in no haste to yield to her imploring. He is not so tender-hearted, that He cannot see us suffer when suffering is the best experience for us. He does not immediately lift burdens from our shoulders, when it is needful for our growth that we bear the burdens longer. There is about some people's ideas of Christ—a mushy sentiment, as if He were too gentle to endure the sight of suffering. Here we get a glimpse of a different quality in Him. He does not promise always to save us from suffering—His promise rather is to bless us through the suffering. It is possible to be too tender-hearted toward pain and distress. It is possible for parents to be too emotionally kind to their children. Uncontrolled pity is great weakness, and often works great injury!

Christ's gentleness is never too tender to be wise and true—as well as tender. He never makes the mistake of yielding to anyone's entreaties, so long as denial is better than the granting of the favor. He never lets us have what we want, because He cannot bear to say "No" to our tearful cries. Nor is He so emotionally kind, that He cannot bear to punish sin. He will not let even His truest disciples go unchastened, when only by chastening can he save them or best promote their spiritual growth. But one thing we must not forget—it is love which prompts what seems to be severity in Christ. He was silent here—that in the end He might give the full, rich blessing which He wished to give to this woman—but which in the beginning she could not receive. He denies us our requests and is silent to us when we cry—that He may draw out our faith and give us His best blessings in the end!

Jesus told the woman that it was not "fit to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs." This seemed a strange word to fall from the lips of the gentle Christ. If it had been some Pharisee who spoke to this poor woman as a dog, we could have understood that. Even if Christ's own disciples had spoken thus to her, we could have understood it, for they had not yet departed from Jewish prejudices, nor had their hearts grown gentle with love for all humanity. But it certainly seems strange to hear the sympathetic, loving Jesus—speak to the lowly sufferer at His feet as a Gentile dog. We can understand it, only when we remember that in all His treatment of her—He was trying her heart, training her faith, schooling her into truer submission and more earnest believing.

Both the woman's humility and here alert, eager faith—appear in her answer, "True, Lord! Yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." She was not hurt by the offensive words Jesus had used. She was willing to be as a little dog under the Master's table. She was ready to grant to the Jews, the children's place at that table. The position Jesus had assigned to her, quite satisfied her. For the dogs under the table did not starve. The children were first served, and then the pieces of bread they let fall, rejected, or did not eat—belonged to the dogs at their feet. All she asked was the portion which usually went to the dogs. Even the crumbs from that table were enough for her. Thus her humility and also her faith were shown in her answer, and in both—she is an example to us. We should come to Christ with a deep sense of our unworthiness, ready to take the lowest place; and we should believe that even the crumbs of His grace are better than all the feasts of this world!

It is most interesting to trace the growth of this woman's faith. There were many difficulties in her way—but she surmounted them all. She was a Gentile—and her Healer was a Jew. When she first came to Jesus she was repulsed and called a dog. But none of these discouragements chilled the ardor of her faith, or hindered her in her determination. So at last she got the blessing and won from the lips of Jesus one of the highest commendations ever given by Him to anyone, "O woman, great is your faith!" Large faith gets large blessings; small faith receives but small favors. We should go to God making large requests, believing His promises. We should never be discouraged by delays, by seeming repulses, by obstacles and hindrances. We should fight our way to victory. With infinite fullness in our Father's hand—we should not live in spiritual hunger as so many of God's children do. This is a wonderful saying, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." These words simply throw heaven open to our faith! We can get—we do get—according to our faith. So upon ourselves comes the responsibility of the less or the more blessing which we receive from the bountiful God.

Peter's Confession Matthew 16:13-28

Jesus had led the disciples to a quiet place, away from crowds and excitements. The time had come to declare to them His Messiahship. It was a new epoch in His ministry.

He asked two questions. The first referred to the opinion of the people concerning Him. "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" The disciples told Him that there were different opinions about Him. Some thought He was John the Baptist risen again; others, that He was Elijah returned to earth; still others that He was Jeremiah, or some other one of the old prophets. There still is a wide diversity of opinion among people concerning Jesus. Some think he was only a man, others, that He was a great teacher—but nothing more. Others then think that He was the only-begotten Son of God, Divine as well as human.

Jesus asked another question, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" What other people thought about Him, was not half so important as the opinions the disciples themselves had of Him. We may be able to state what the creeds say about Jesus Christ, and yet never have brought ourselves to answer the more important question, "Who do you say I am?" Some people tell us that it makes very little difference what our beliefs are, even about Christ—that conduct is everything in life. But it is of greatest importance what we think of Christ. If we think of Him as only a man, though the best of men, the wisest of teachers—we may learn much from His words and from His life; but can one who is only a man—be to us all that we need to find in Him to whom we look for salvation? We may change the question a little and ask: "What is Jesus Christ to you? Is He only in your creed, or is He also in your life as your personal Savior, Lord, Friend, and Helper?" This is the question which decides our relation to Christ.

Peter was always the first one to answer Christ's questions. Sometimes he answered rashly and unwisely; this time he answered well. "You are the Christ—the Son of the living God!" It was a noble answer. Jesus was the Messiah promised through the ages, come at length to save His people from their sins. This is the true thought about Christ. God sent Him to earth on an errand of love. He became man, thus drawing close to us. He is also the Son of God, Divine, possessing all power, infinite in His love and grace—able to do for us all that we need, and to lift us up to eternal life and glory. If our belief is like Peter's, and Christ is all to us in our life that we make Him in our creed—we are resting on the Rock! The true test of every creed, of every system of theology, of every life's hopes, is, "Is Christ in it?" Too many people, however, have Christ only in their creeds, and not in their lives. The true test of every creed, every system of theology, and every life's hopes—is Jesus. If Jesus is not there, there is nothing to give rest, nothing to bring life and salvation.

Peter had made a noble confession, and now Jesus said to him, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church." Peter was the new name which Jesus had given to Simon, when Andrew brought him and introduced him. Jesus saw in Simon the possibilities of a noble future and so He said to him, "You shall be called Peter." The new name was a prophecy of his future. Jesus sees the best that is in people—and inspires them to reach the best. At that time Peter was very far from being a rock, which means stability and strength. But, by and by, he became rocklike—firm and strong, under the training and discipline of his Master. Whatever view we take of the meaning of the Lord's words, it is a great comfort to know that Christ's universal Church is indeed founded upon a rock, an impregnable rock. As soon as Peter had declared that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus lifted the veil and gave the disciples a glimpse of what Messiahship meant to Him. They were thinking about a worldly Messiah. Jesus swept all this dream away—and told them that, instead of being an earthly conqueror, He was going to die on a cross! That was the way marked out for Him from the beginning—the will of God for Him, God's plan for His life. They were so overwhelmed by His saying that He must be killed—that they had no ear for the bright, joyous word, the note of victory, which came after—that He would rise again the third day. However, Jesus Himself saw through the darkness—to the light that shone beyond. He knew that He must suffer and die—but He knew also that the grave could not hold Him and that He would rise again. It is always in the story of Divine grace as it was with Jesus Christ—the cross is the way to glory. Beyond every dark valley in the Christian's path—is a hilltop bathed in light!

Peter was always making mistakes. Jesus commended his confession. But a little later we again find him speaking rashly and ignorantly. When Jesus had said that His Messiahship meant suffering and death, this impulsive disciple, in his great love for his Master, possibly, too, lifted up by the praise of his confession which the Master had given, sought to interfere. "Never, Lord! This shall never happen to You!" He would have held his Master back from His cross. But suppose Jesus had listened to love's entreaty that day—and had not gone forward; what would the world have lost? We should never meddle with God's plans, whether for ourselves or others. This is one of the dangers of friendship. A loved one of ours is called to some hard service, to some great self-denial or sacrifice. In our warm-hearted affection, we try to hold our friend back from the costly calling. We may say almost as Peter said, "Never! This shall never happen to you!" The answer of Jesus to Peter's rash though loving restraint, is full of suggestion. "He turned and said unto Peter; Get behind Me, Satan!" What Peter said had proved a temptation to Jesus, suggesting to Him an easier way in place of the way of the cross. The friends of Paul once tried to keep him from going to Jerusalem when a prophet had foretold that he would be seized and bound there. Paul begged his friends not to weep and break his heart—by urging him not to go on to peril which had been foretold. They were only making it harder for him to do his duty. It is a constant danger of friendship, that we shall try to keep our loved ones from hard tasks to which God is calling them.

Jesus lifted another veil. He told his disciples that not only was the way of the cross God's way for Him—but also that His followers must go by the same way. "If any man will come after Me—he must deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." We can never follow Christ—and walk only on flowery paths. There is no way to heaven—but the way of self-denial and sacrifice.

We may notice that it is "his" cross, that is, his own cross, which each follower of Christ must take up and bear. Each life has its own burden of duty, of struggle, of self-denial, of responsibility. Each one must take up and carry his own load for himself. Each one must bear his own burden. This is a most solemn truth. No one can choose for us, no one can believe for us, no one can do our duty for us. A thousand people around us may do their own part with beautiful faithfulness—but if we have not done our part—we stand unblessed amid all the multitude of those who have done their part and received their reward. Our Lord closes with the question no one ever has been able to answer, "What shall it profit a man—if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" Even the whole world, with all its wealth and splendor, would give no real benefit to us—if our souls should be lost. We could not buy pardon, peace nor heaven, even with the treasures of the whole earth in our possession. Also, we could not keep the world and carry it with us into the next life—even though we had won it all.

Selfishness is unlovely—but it is worse—it is the way of death. The law of Christ's cross runs through all life. A young girl, beautiful, cultured, honored, with a lovely home and many friends, turned away from ease, refinement, and luxury—and went to teach blacks in the South. She lived among them and gave out her rich young life in efforts to lift them up and save them. "What a waste of a beautiful life!" said her friends. But was it really a waste? No! Losing her life for Christ—she really saved it. If she had held herself back from the duty to which God was calling her—she might have saved her life in a sense, saved her from cost and sacrifice—but she would have lost her life in the higher sense. The losing of one's soul is an irreparable loss. Whatever we may seem to get in exchange, we get really nothing. For if we gain the whole world, we can keep it but for a little while, and it will have no power to deliver us from death or give us the blessing of

eternal life. The world cannot give peace of conscience, or comfort in sorrow. It cannot purchase heaven. All we can do with the world—is to keep it until death comes. We cannot carry any smallest portion of it with us into the eternal world. "How much did he leave?" asked one of his neighbors, referring to a millionaire who had just died. "Every cent!" was the reply. So it is easy to see that there is no profit—but rather a fearful and eternal loss—in gaining even all the world, at the price of one's soul.

Then think for how much smaller a price than this, "the whole world," many people sell their souls! Some do it for an hour's guilty pleasure, some for a political office, some for money, and some for honor which fades in a day. In a newspaper this advertisement appeared: "Wanted—A nice cottage and grounds—in exchange for choice liquors." No doubt many people answered the advertisement. Men are continually giving home and property and peace and love and life—for strong drink. They are selling their souls also in many other ways—for pitiably small trifles! The Transfiguration Matthew 17:1-8, Matthew 17:14-20

Three men, Peter, James and John—were with the Master when He was transfigured. All the disciples belonged to His personal family—but these three were taken into the inner circle and enjoyed closest intimacy with Him. On several occasions we find Him choosing the same three for special companionship. In the Garden of Gethsemane these three were chosen to be nearest to Him, that by their sympathy and tenderness, they might strengthen Him and thus help Him to endure His sore agony. We know that the holiest will get nearest to Christ. Faith brings men near, while doubt and unbelief separate from Him. Purity of heart brings us close—the pure in heart shall see God. Likeness to Christ—fits for close personal friendship with Him. Jesus said that those who serve most self-forgetfully, are first in His kingdom. Selfishness keeps us far off. It is a comfort to find that Peter, though a very faulty disciple—was one of those who were admitted to closest friendship with Christ.

It is interesting to learn from Luke's gospel (Luke 9:28-36) that Jesus was praying when this wonderful change in His appearance occurred. While He knelt before His Father—the change began to come on His face. It is recorded of certain saintly men, that a like change has come upon them when they prayed. We learn thus that prayer has a transfiguring power. Communing with God—brings heaven down into our life. It was after Moses had spent forty days on the mountain alone with God—that the people saw the dazzling brightness on his face. So it was when Stephen was looking up into heaven, beholding the glory of God, that even his enemies saw his face as if it had been the face of an angel. Only the upward look—can give heavenly beauty. Our communings make our character. If we think only of earthly things—we shall grow earthly. If we dote on gold, our lives will harden into sordidness. If we look up toward God—we shall grow like God. A life of prayer—will transform us into spirituality and bring upon us the beauty of the Lord. Not only was the face of Jesus transfigured—but His very garments shone. A writer suggests that the garments here may represent the circumstances and experiences of the Christian's life. When one lives near Christ, everything that concerns him is transfigured—for example, care. Every life has its cares, its burdens, its anxieties—its experiences that would naturally fret and vex the spirit. Paul tells us that if we make known all our requests to God, the peace of God shall guard our hearts and our thoughts. The same is true of life's toils and tasks. Many of us find life hard, with its incessant duty and drudgery. But when the secret of the Lord is in the heart—we can sing songs of joy, even in the most wearisome way. The same is true of sorrow. Every life has sorrow. But if Christ is ours,

we have comfort in sorrow. Thus all the garments of life—all life's experiences and conditions—are brightened by peace in the heart.

While the disciples were awed by the shining on the face and garments of their Master, they became aware of the presence of heavenly visitors beside Him. "Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus!" How they learned who these men were, we are not told. Perhaps the Master told them afterward. This was something very wonderful. For more than nine hundred years Elijah had been in heaven, and for more than fourteen hundred years Moses had been away from this world; both reappear here on the earth, still living, speaking and working! There are many proofs of immortality; here is an illustration—we see two men long centuries after they had lived on earth—still alive and busy in God's service! It will be the same with us and our friends—thousands of years after we have vanished from earth—we shall still be alive and active. This is a great thought. If we could only get it into our heart—how much grander it would make all life for us! We would then form our plans to cover thousands of years—not merely the little space which we now call time. The transfiguration was not a purposeless incident in the story of Jesus. Evidently it was intended to prepare Him for what was before Him. It had just been discussed, that He was to die at Jerusalem. He had known long before, that He was going to the cross. Yet as He now set out on His last journey and saw the end, He needed encouragement and cheer, and it was for this that the transfiguration was given, with its embassy from heaven and its confirming voice. When we keep this purpose in mind, the meaning of the several incidents become plain.

It is interesting, with this in mind, to think of the talk which these two men had with Jesus. It was about His decease, His exodus from this world, Luke tells us. They had been sent from heaven to comfort and strengthen Him—as He set out on His journey to His cross. He would have bitter sorrows and great sufferings, and they came to speak their world of cheer before He entered the experience. No doubt, all the way unto the end, His heart was braver and stronger because of this visitation.

Peter could not keep quiet. Even heavenly glory did not silence him. When he became aware of the wonderful splendor which he was witnessing, he proposed to keep it on the earth and not allow it to depart. "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." Peter was right—it was good to be there. But at this very moment work was waiting for Jesus at the foot of the mountain. There was a poor demoniac there, whom the disciples could not cure. Then, farther off, were Gethsemane and Calvary—for Jesus; and for Peter there was Pentecost, with years of earnest apostolic service, and then martyrdom. It is very sweet to commune with God in the closet, at the Lord's Table—but we must not spend all of our time even in these holy exercises. While the raptures fill our soul—we must not forget that outside are human needs—and needs are crying for help and sympathy. We may not build tabernacles and keep our heavenly visions; we must get the vision into our heart—and then go out to be a blessing to the world.

Then came the other witnessing. Moses and Elijah had come to talk with Jesus about His death, and the blessed outcome it would have in human redemption. Then, from heaven the Father speaks, witnessing to the Messiahship of Jesus. The disciples had been greatly startled by what Jesus had said a week before—that He must suffer and be killed. Their idea of the Messiah—had been an earthly one. Their faith must have been strengthened by the words, "This is My beloved

Son," and by the command that they should listen to His voice—and to His voice only. Even if they could not understand, and if the things He said seemed to destroy their hopes—they were content now to hear.

There are times when God's ways with us seem mysterious—when we think disaster is coming to every fair prospect in our life. In all such hours—we should remember that He who rules over all, is the Son of God, our Friend and Savior—and our trust in Him never should fail. We should listen always quietly and submissively to what He says, and when everything seems strange and dark—we should never doubt nor be afraid. What so staggered the disciples then concerning the Messiahship of Jesus—we see now to have been the most glorious and loving wisdom. So in our strangest trials—there are the truest wisdom and richest love. This voice came out of the cloud; out of the clouds that hang over us—come the voices of most divine love. When Jesus and the disciples came down next morning from the Mount of Transfiguration, they found the other disciples in trouble. In the Master's absence and epileptic boy had been brought to them for healing. They tried to cure him—but failed. When Jesus appeared, the distressed father knelt before Him, pleading that He might have mercy on his son. He told his story in all its pathos—the boy's grievous suffering, and his bitter disappointment when the disciples could not cure him. Jesus listened with compassion and then said, "Bring him here to Me." A word from Him was enough, "The child was cured from that hour!" A Lesson on Forgiveness Matthew 18:21-35

"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked: Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Perhaps no other lesson is harder to learn—than to be forgiving. It never gets easy, to bear injury or wrong. Yet the lesson is essential. We can ask Divine forgiveness for our own sins—only when we are ready to forgive those who sin against us.

Jesus had been speaking to His disciples about forgiving others. He said that if anyone sin against us, we should first go and talk the matter over with him privately. Mutual explanations will likely settle the matter. It will be still better if the two kneel and pray together, before they begin to talk about their differences. If the matter cannot be settled between the two—then one or two witnesses are to be taken along. If one man still remains implacable, the other has done his part.

It was always Peter who spoke first, and when he heard the Master's words, he asked Jesus how often his brother should sin against him—and he forgive him. This question still troubles many people. In some people's minds, patience quite soon ceases to be a virtue. If they have forgiven another two or three times—they think they have really acted very generously. Peter supposed he was going to the very extreme of Christian forgiveness, when he suggested that seven times would be a good limit for Christ's disciples. The rabbis said, "Forgive the first offense, the second, the third time; and punish the fourth time." But the answer of Jesus showed that there should be no limit in our forgiveness. That is what seventy-seven means—not any definite number, however great—but infinitely. We are to forgive others—as God forgives us, and He does not keep account of the number of times. He forgives all the multitude of our transgressions. The time never comes therefore when we may say: "I have exhausted the requirements of Christian love. I cannot forgive you anymore."

Jesus told a little story to illustrate and enforce His teaching. He said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants." We must never forget that there will be a reckoning with God. We are told that on the last day, the books will be opened—the books which record men's acts, words, motives, dispositions, tempers. But we do not have to wait until the judgment day, to have these reckonings. But God reckons with us also—as we go along in this world. He is constantly calling men to give account to Him. Sometimes the call is given by the preaching of the Word which convicts them of sin and makes them stand trembling before the bar of conscience. Sometimes it is by an affliction which compels men to stop and think of their relations to God, revealing to them their sinfulness. Sometimes it is by a deep searching of heart, produced by the Holy Spirit. There is no man who some time or other is not called, even in this present life, before God for a reckoning. The final reckoning is individual—each one must stand before the judgment seat and give an account of his own life. Among the king's servants "one was brought unto him that owed him ten thousand talents." We need not trouble ourselves about the exact monetary equivalent of these figures. It is enough to know that the figures stand for our debt to God, and that this is immense and unpayable. This makes us think of sin as a debt. We owe to God perfect obedience in act, word, thought, and motive. Duty is what is due to God—and the obligation is beyond computation. We may flatter ourselves that we are fairly good people, because we stand well in the community; but when we being to reckon with God—the best of us will find that our debt to Him is of infinite magnitude!

It was seen at once, that this servant had nothing to pay for his infinite debt. There was no possibility that he ever could make up the amount that he owed to his king. So it is with those who are called to make a reckoning with God. There is no possibility that they can ever make up to Him their enormous debt. Many people imagine that in some way, they can get clear of their guilt—though they do not try to know how. Some suppose they can do it by tears of repentance; but being sorry that we are in debt—does not cancel the debt. Some imagine that because their sins do not trouble them anymore, therefore the debt has been overlooked. But forgetting that we owe a man a thousand dollars—will not release us from our debt to him. We are hopelessly in debt to God—and have nothing with which to pay.

If the law had been enforced, the servant would have been sold into slavery, along with his wife and family and all that he had. But this servant came to his king and begged for time. "Be patient with me—and I will pay back everything." This appeal to the king touched his generous heart. "The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go." This is a picture of the Divine forgiveness. We never can pay the enormous debt we owe to God—but His infinite mercy is sufficient to wipe it all away. Bankrupt people sometimes pay so many cents on the dollar, and are allowed by their creditors to go free. But that is not the way God forgives. He does not require anything on our part, because we have nothing to give. We are justified freely by His grace.

One would think that this servant, after being forgiven such an enormous debt, would have gone out with a heart kindly disposed toward all men. But the reverse was the case. "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred pence. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded." He had forgotten how much he had been forgiven. A little while ago he was at his master's feet, pleading for time and for patience. But the memory of this wonderful forgiveness, had failed to soften his heart.

What his servant owed him—was a mere trifle in comparison with his infinite debt to the king—yet he demanded payment and refused to show mercy. How is it with us? This morning we knelt at God's feet, implored His forgiveness, and received from Him the assurance that all our sins were blotted out. Then we went out, and someone said a sharp word to us, or did something to irritate us, or injured us in some way. How did we treat our fellow—who did these little wrongs to us? Did we extend to him the same patience and mercy that God had shown to us in the morning?

Soon again the servant was before his king. His harsh treatment of his fellow servant had been reported. Very stern was the judgment the unforgiving man now heard: "You wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt… should not you also have had compassion on your fellow servant, even as I had pity on you?" The king was right in his severe censure. The man who had received such kindness at his hand—should certainly have been kind to his neighbor who had wronged him in such a little matter. An old Spanish writer says, "To return evil for good—is devilish; to return good for good—is human; to return good for evil—is godlike."

Jesus makes the application of His parable very plain: "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you—unless you forgive your brother from your heart." This does not mean that God actually revokes the forgiveness He has once granted. In fact, the person who acts thus—never has been truly forgiven at all. "If you get pardon from God—you will give it to your brother; if you withhold it from your brother—you thereby make it manifest that you have not received it from God."

Thus we are brought face to face with a most definite practical teaching which we dare not ignore. Have we the forgiving spirit? An old proverb says, "Revenge is sweet!" But this is not true. "The unforgiving spirit is a root of bitterness from which there springs a tree whose leaves are poisonous, and whose fruit, carrying in it the seeds of fresh evil, is death to all who taste it!"

Jesus on the Way to Jerusalem Matthew 19:1-2, Matthew 19:13-26 The words, "He departed from Galilee," have significance, when we consider the circumstances, which give them a peculiar sadness. This was our Lords' final departure from Galilee. He had been brought up there. Much of His public ministry had been wrought there. In that part of the country, He had met with the kindliest reception. He had multitudes of friends in Galilee. He had performed countless miracles there, and had been a comforter of numberless sorrowing and suffering ones. Now He was leaving the dear familiar scenes—and the people He loved so well. No wonder the throngs followed Him. The farewell must have been tender.

Some incidents of the journey are given. One was a discussion with the Pharisees concerning divorce. Jesus in His words gave most important teaching on the sacredness of marriage. "So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

Another incident was the bringing of little children to Him that He might bless them. It is not said that the mothers brought them—but this is probable. The language in Luke strengthens this inference. "Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them." The disciples probably thought their Master ought not to be troubled with babies and little children, and so they rebuked those who were bringing them. But Jesus was moved with indignation when He saw what His disciples were doing, and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." This was one of

the few times when it is said Jesus was angry. It grieved Him to have his disciples try to keep the children away from Him. He would not have anyone kept from coming to Him—but if any are more welcome than others, they are children. Very beautiful is the picture we see. He welcomed the children to Him, took them in His arms, laid His hands on them and blessed them.

Another incident in this journey to Jerusalem is that of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus with such earnestness, and then went away from Him so sadly. All that is told to us about this young man's coming to Jesus, shows us his sincerity and earnestness. "A man ran up to Him—and fell on his knees before Him" (Mark 10:17). The running shows how eager he was, and his eagerness tell of an unsatisfied heart. He seems to have attained the best that a young man could reach, without taking Christ into his life. He was young, with powers fresh and full. He was rich, with the honor, ease, distinction and influence that riches give. The fact that he was a ruler shows the confidence his fellow men put in him. Is moral character was above reproach, for he said, without boasting, that he had scrupulously kept the commandments. He was a man of winning disposition, for Jesus loved him and was drawn to him in a peculiar manner. It would be hard to conceive of a man—with more to satisfy him.

Yet with all his good qualities, his worldly advantages, his good name and his conscience void of offense—he was not satisfied! He needed something more to make his life complete. The question which this young man asked of Jesus is the most important question ever asked in this world. "What shall I do that I may have eternal life?" We do not know how much he understood about the eternal life concerning which he inquired. The fact, however, that he asked the question, shows that he had at least some glimmering of the better life for which he hungered. No matter how much pleasure, or how great success, or how high honor one may gain in the world, if at the end of three score and ten years—he passes into eternity unsaved—what comfort will it give him to remember his fine success on the earth? A rich man failed in business. He gathered up the fragments of his wrecked fortune—a few thousand dollars. He determined to go to the West and start anew. He took his money and built a splendid car, furnishing it in the most luxurious style, and stocking it with provisions for his journey. In this sumptuous car he traveled to his destination. At length he stepped from the door of his car—and only then thought for the first time of his great folly. He had used all his money in getting to his new home, and now had nothing with which to use there. This incident illustrates the foolishness of those who think only of this life—and make no provision for eternity.

Answering the young mans question, Jesus turned his thoughts to the commandments. "If you would enter into life, keep the commandments." He referred him to the law, which he might show him how he had missed the mark, how far short he had come of gaining life by his own obedience. "You know the commandments." It is easy enough to imagine one's self quite obedient, while one puts easy interpretation upon the Divine law. But when one has seen the law in all its lofty purity, in its wide spiritual application, in its absolute perfection, and then has compared his own life with it—he soon learns that he needs a Savior! A pupil may think his writing is good—until he compares it with the copy at the top of the page, and then all its faults appear. The young artist may think his pictures are fine—until he looks upon the works of some great master, and then he never wants to see his own poor painting again. So long as on has no true conception of the meaning of the commandments, he may think himself fairly good; but when he undertakes what the commandments really require, he is at once convicted of sin.

There must have been pity in the heart of Jesus, as He looked upon the young man and heard him say glibly, "All these things have I observed from my youth." He did not know what he was saying, when he spoke thus of his own obedience. But Jesus very frankly answers his question, "One thing you lack!" (Mark 10:21). He was not far from the kingdom of God, and yet he was not in it. Many men are good, almost Christians, and yet not Christians. It may be only one thing that is lacking—but that one thing is the most important of all, the last link in the chain that would unite the soul to the Savior. It is the final step that takes one over the line—from death into life, out of condemnation into glorious blessedness. One may go to the very edge—and not step over; he may reach the door—and not enter. Almost a Christian—is not a Christian. Almost saved—is still lost.

Jesus made a very large demand upon this young man. He said to him, "Sell everything ou have, and give to the poor… and come and follow Me." This is not a prescription for being saved by good works—that is not the way Christ saves men. He saw this young man's weakness, that with all his excellent qualities—his heart was still wedded to the world, and the test which He gave, required him to give up that which stood between him and eternal life. He would not be saved by giving his riches to the poor. Charity is not a way of salvation. But the young man could not be saved until his idol was broken! So the demand was to get him to give up his money—and take Christ into his heart.

It was a hard battle that was fought those moments, in this young man's heart. It grieved him not to be able to enter the circle of Christ's followers—but he could not pay the price. "At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth." He wanted to go with Jesus—but he could not accept the conditions. Let us think of him after this day. He kept his money—but every time he looked at it—he would be forced to remember that he had give up Christ and eternal life for the sake of it. He would see written over his piles of gold and his deeds and bonds, "These things cost me eternal life!" His experience was just the reverse of the man who found the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:46) and then sold all he had—and bought it. The young ruler found the pearl, asked the price, and considered the purchase—but did not buy it, because he was not willing to pay so much. As the young man turned away Jesus was grieved, and said to the disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" Just so, it is not easy to be rich—and to be a Christian. Christ spoke many earnest words concerning money and the danger of loving money. Yet not many people seem to be afraid of getting rich.

One morning a pastor found on his pulpit desk a bit of paper with these words on it: "The prayers of this congregation are requested for a man who is growing rich." It seemed a strange request—but no doubt it was a wise one. No men more need to be prayed for—than those who are becoming prosperous, becoming rich. A priest said that among all the thousands who had come to him with confession of sin—not one had ever confessed the sin of covetousness. Men are not conscious of their danger—when they are growing rich.

Jesus did not say that a rich man cannot be saved. He said, "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." This means that every man growing rich, needs God in order to be saved. If riches master him, he is lost. Unless God is his Lord—he cannot enter the heavenly kingdom.

There is a story of a rich man, one of whose ships was delayed at sea. When one day had passed with no tidings, the man was anxious, and with each added day his anxiety increased. At length, however, he awoke to the fact that his money was having a tremendous hold upon him. He then ceased to worry about the ship and became anxious for his own soul. He was determined to break the perilous mastery, and taking the value of his ship, he gave it at once to a charitable object. We all need to deal thus rigorously with ourselves, whether we have only a little money or much—that money may never be our master—but that Christ may be Master always; and money our servant, to do our bidding and Christ's. The Laborers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16 The key to this parable—is found in what goes just before. A young man came to Jesus eager to follow him and asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus said he must give up his riches—and follow Him. The young man found the cost too great—and went away sorrowful. Then Jesus spoke seriously to His disciples about how hard it was for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. It cannot have been a high spiritual thought which was in Peter's mind when he said to Jesus, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" Evidently he was thinking that they had done a very worthy thing in leaving all and going with Christ. But his question showed a spirit which was not pleasing to the Master, a mercenary spirit, a disposition to get the best out of duty and service and sacrifice. He expected reward, and large reward, for faithful service. In true following of Christ—such a question is never asked. Love never thinks of wages in anything it does. If, as a man does for another hard and self-denying things, he is always thinking of the way the other will pay him, expecting large compensation, there is no love whatever in what he does. He is a hireling. A mother never asks, as she cares for her sick child, losing rest, and suffering, "What shall I get for this?" The answer Jesus gave Peter, assured him that the disciples who had left all—should be amply rewarded. But the parable we are now studying, is not always thought of as a part of our Lord's answer to the question. The chapter division in the King James Version obscures this pact. In the Revised Version, however, there is no break in the passage. The words, "For the kingdom of heaven is like," connect this parable directly with the foregoing incident, and show that Jesus would warn Peter and His other disciples, against the disposition to bargain and haggle for pay; or to compare their work with that of others, quibbling about proportionate rewards. The parable makes it plain, first, that an agreement was made with the laborers. The householder needed men, and when the first came, they accepted his offer of a denarius a day, and agreed to work for that. Later in the day, at different hours, other men were also hired and sent into the vineyard to work. Some were even hired, only an hour before the day closed. The evening came, and the workmen gathered to receive their pay. It happened that those who were last hired and had worked only one hour, were paid first. They received the full amount for a day's work. We need not raise the question of fairness. It is evident that the men who had been in the vineyard only one hour—had not done as much as those who began in the early morning and had worked all through the long hours. The parable was spoken for a definite purpose—to condemn the greedy, grasping, bargaining spirit—and to commend the thought of doing duty for its own sake, whether there was adequate compensation or not. Those who came at later hours—made no bargains as to their wages, leaving to him who employed them—how much they should receive. The parable is not meant to be a lesson in business. No doubt it is better to have an understanding as to wages, so that there may be no misunderstanding at the time of settlement. But it is in the Fathers' business, that Jesus is giving instructions, and here we need not trouble ourselves to put our contracts written down in black and white, and need

not ask, "What shall we get for this?"

"So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.'" Peter could scarcely help hanging his head when the Master came to this part of the parable. He could have no doubt that He had him in mind—in what He said about those who clamored for more pay.

Peter's words, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" had shown in Peter a feeling at least of satisfaction with himself. Somehow he felt that he had done a good deal for his Master, had made great sacrifices—and that he ought to have a substantial reward for it all. Especially had his words revealed a feeling that he and his fellow-apostles should have a greater reward—than those who had done less, come into the service later, made smaller sacrifices. When Jesus spoke of the first-hired laborers and their dissatisfaction with the pay they had received, Peter must have felt rebuked.

If these all-day laborers had the true spirit, they would have rejoiced that they had the opportunity to serve so many hours for their Lord. Instead of counting the hours they had wrought and considering themselves overburdened, overwrought, they should have felt themselves honored in the privilege. The Christian who heard the call of Christ in his youth and began in the early morning hours to serve Him—should never cease to be glad for his long service. He should not consider the man who gave eleven hours to the world—and then for one hour followed the Master, as more highly favored than himself—who had devoted all his life to the service of the Lord. "It is impossible that a man whose chief desire was to advance his Master's work, should envy another laborer who had done much less than himself."

These first men were vexed because they did not receive more for their work—than those who had come in at later hours. There are some who are envious of others, because they seem to have easier work, lighter burdens, and more cheerful circumstances. This is an unhappy mood. They think God is not quite just and fair to them. They fret and chafe when they see others called to more prominent positions. They tell of what they have sacrificed, how hard they have worked, how much they have done—and are quick to fret and complain, because they have not the recognition they think they deserve. Other men who have been Christians not half as long as they have, and have not given or worked as hard as they have done—are officers in the Church, are talked about and praised among men for their worth and service. This is a most unwholesome disposition! It makes one wretched and unhappy. The true Christian spirit—is glad for all the years of opportunity to do God's service. It begrudges even one opportunity that has been lost. It does not complain that it has served so long—but it grieves that it has not served longer and more faithfully! The question of pay or reward for Christian work—is one that should never have a place in any heart. All true Christian service is inspired by love. Of course, we have to live—and it costs to live. The minister, for example, who devotes his whole life to the work of Christ, has to live. But when Jesus sent out His disciples to preach, He warned them especially against anxiety concerning their food and clothing. They were not to provide luxuries for themselves. They were not to have extra garments—they were going out under their Master's command, and He would see to it, that they should be cared for. The full time minister ought to be supported, ought to have his needs provided

for. But when he haggles about the matter, shows anxiety and frets and complains—he is not pleasing the Master, nor practicing the spirit and disposition which He commends. The motive in Christian service—should always be like the Master's. We should work for love—never for reward. We should never say to Christ, when called to any hard service, "What shall I get for this task, this self-denial, this sacrifice?" We should be ready to go anywhere, to do anything—that the Master would have us do. We should never bargain for any reward, whatever we may do. We know that we shall have a reward—but we should never let that be our motive. We should devote ourselves with all the earnestness and all the energy we have—to the service of Christ, whether we are to receive pay for the work or not. This parable teaches that all our service of Christ—is to be lowly and self-forgetting. We are to be eager to do God's will whatever it may be, serving unto the uttermost—but never thinking of reward. We shall have reward if we are faithful—but our service is never to be for the reward. The true reward is that which comes in the serving itself.

Jesus Nearing Jerusalem Matthew 20:17-34

Jesus was setting out for Jerusalem on His last journey. Did He not know that He was going straight into danger? He was safe in Perea; why did He not stay there? Why did He leave this shelter—and go straight into the den of lions at Jerusalem? He knew all that awaited Him—but He did not shrink from it; He resolutely set His face to go, because it was the way marked out for Him. The picture shows Him hastening on, as Mark tells us, "They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way." (Matthew 10:32). It were as if He were eager to reach the city and endure what lay before Him there, and could scarcely wait for the slow steps of the disciples.

Why was Jesus so eager to suffer? It was because His time had come, and He was eager to do the Father's will. Besides, it was the receiving up to heaven which He saw, and the cross and darkness were forgotten, in the triumph and glory beyond. "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2). There ought to be wondrous inspiration in Christ's example here, for all who are called to suffer and endure affliction for His sake. We should be eager to do God's will, however hard it may be; and we should train ourselves to look beyond the suffering and the trial—to the blessing and joy that will come after.

He took the disciples apart and told them what lay before Him. "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified!" Jesus knew, when no others saw it, that the blackness of the cross was approaching Him and would overwhelm Him, and knew the very moment He would enter it.

One of Holman Hunt's pictures represents Jesus as a boy in the carpenter shop. It is evening, and He is weary. Stretching out His arms, the light of the setting sun, shining in from the west, casts its shadow on the floor of the shop, and lo—it is in the form of a cross fell upon Jesus, that from the beginning He was conscious of the fact that He must die by crucifixion. What a pathos it adds to the life of Christ to remember this: that all the time, in the midst of His human joys, while He was scattering blessings among others, while He was working miracles of mercy; in all the holy peace and calm of His soul—that dark shadow hung over Him continually! He was going at last to be crucified! Yet the consciousness never kept Him from speaking one gentle word, nor from doing one kindly deed, nor from being cheerful and loving. Knowing from the beginning all that lay before Him—He went on with His daily duty quietly and joyfully. This reveals something of His love for

us—and His joy in doing the Father’s will.

There is a strange contrast between the words of Christ as He spoke to the disciples of His approaching death—and the coming of this mother with her ambitious request: "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." Mothers should be ambitious for their boys, and want them to have high places. They should make sure, however, that the places they desire for them—are really high places. Earth’s pinnacles are not always such. Taking out of her request its mistaken worldly thought, no parental ambition for a child can be fitter than hers—that her sons should have places near to Christ. It is to be feared, however, that very many parents think more of getting for their children high positions in this world—than places near to Christ, and high in holiness.

Jesus spoke to the sons in reply, not to the mother: "You do not know what you are asking for." It was an ignorant prayer which they had offered. They did not know what they were asking for. We know that one dark day, two malefactors had the places on the Lord’s right and left hand. We all many a time ask for things which we would not dare request—if we knew what they would cost us.

There is a heathen legend which tells that once a man asked for this gift—not to die; and it was granted him by the Fates. He was to live on forever. But he had forgotten to ask that his youth and health and strength might last forever also; and so he lived on until age and its infirmities and weakness were weighing him down and his life grew to be a weariness and a burden to him. Existence (for it could not be called life) was one long torment for him; and then he wished to die and could not. He had asked for a thing which he was totally unfit to enjoy—but he had to take the consequences of it when it was once given. The better way to pray is to let God choose for us—and to give what He sees best for us—and in the way He knows is the best.

"To sit at my right or left is not for Me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by My Father." We see here, that there are places in heaven higher and nearer Christ than others. Surely, too, the high places are worth striving for. We see how men scramble after earth’s high positions; but heaven’s positions are infinitely better. But how can we gain the seats nearest to Christ in glory? We have many hints. A little farther on this passage, we are taught that the path of humble self-forgetful service leads upward in spiritual life. In the book of Revelation, our Lord says that those who overcome in their struggles with sin and trial—shall sit with Him on His throne. In Daniel (Daniel 12:3) we are told that those who turn many unto righteousness; that is, they who are active and successful in saving souls—shall shine as the stars, forever and ever. We know also that the "pure in heart" (Matthew 5:8) shall see God. These and many other hints show that the more like Christ we are in character and work here on earth—the nearer we shall get to Him both in this world and hereafter.

Jesus was always having difficulty in getting His disciples to understand the spiritual meaning of things. They thought here that rank and official position were the symbols of greatness. "No!" said Jesus; "whoever wants to become great among you—must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first—must be your slave." This seems a strange way of getting on and getting up in the world. According to this, all men’s scrambling for place and power—is really scrambling downward rather than upward! The real heights in human life are the heights of self-forgetfulness and service. Of course, this does not mean that a Christian is never to accept nor hold a position of honor and trust. A king, ruling millions of people, can be the very highest of servants—by ruling only for the

glory of God and the good of his subjects. A rich man has an opportunity to get very near to Christ—if he uses his wealth to bless the world. It is not the worldly position which settles this question—but the spirit of the life. A servant in a family may be a great deal farther from it—than the mistress whom she serves. The kind of serving that our Lord means—is that which forgets self, and thinks only and always of the need and interests of others. The art of photography is now so advanced, that a whole page of a newspaper can be taken in miniature so small—as to be carried on a little button, and yet every letter and point be perfect.

Just so, the whole life of Christ is photographed in this one little phrase, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:28.

He did not come to be served—if this had been His aim, He would never have left heaven's glory, where He lacked nothing, where angels praised Him and ministered unto Him. He came to serve. He went about doing good. He altogether forgot Himself. He served all He met, who would receive His service. At last He gave His life in serving—He gave it to save others, to redeem lost souls.

You say that you want to be like Christ? You ask Him to print His own image on your heart. Here then, is the image: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."

It is not a vague dream of human greatness which we are to think of, when we ask to be like our Master. The old monks thought that they were becoming like Christ—when they went into the wilderness, away from men, to live in cold cells. But surely, such a dream of uselessness is not the thought which this picture suggests. "To serve—to give our life" that is the Christ-like thing! Instead of fleeing away from people—we are to live with others, to serve them, to live for them, to seek to bless them, to do them good, to give our lives for them—that is the meaning of the prayer for Christ-likeness.

Jesus Entering Jerusalem

Matthew 21:1-17 The triumphal entry was one of the most remarkable incidents in our Lord's life. Usually Jesus made no public demonstration, did nothing to draw attention to Himself in any way. Indeed, He avoided notoriety and fame; He did not strive nor cry aloud; neither did anyone hear His voice in the streets. He spoke to His disciples confidentially of His Messiahship—but did not publicly proclaim it. On this occasion, however, He made a public demonstration; riding into the city as a king would ride, thus proclaiming to the multitudes assembling for the Passover feast—the fact of His Messiahship. How shall we explain this? May we not say that it was another way of presenting Himself to the people, offering Himself to them as their Messiah, for the last time? A prophet had foretold that He would thus in this spectacular way, ride into the city—but He did not do it merely to fulfill prophecy. The prophecy was part of the will of God for him—and there was a reason for it beyond the fulfilling of what had been foretold.

"As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them: Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me." Note their obedience. "The disciples went—and did as Jesus had instructed them." They were glad to have a part in the honoring of their Master. No doubt they themselves shared the expectations of the multitude regarding Jesus, hoping that the time had now come for Him to assume His place as King. It was a lowly errand on

which they were sent—to bring to their Master the animal on which He was to ride—but they were proud to be chosen for this service. We should be glad always to run any errand, even the humblest, for our Master. If He were here now, and wanted to ride somewhere, who would not be eager to bring Him his horse to ride upon?

Jesus has told us that we may now do just such errands for Him—since what we do for any of His little ones, even the least, in His name, is done for Him. We may so set Jesus before us—that our very drudgeries shall be made Divine; we may thus transform them into heavenly ministries, by doing them for Him. The angels never think about the degree of honorableness in the tasks they are set to do.

Promptly the disciples returned, bringing with them the animals they had been sent to bring. "They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them." The donkey was a symbol of peace. If Jesus had ridden on a horse, it would have spoken of war—but He was the Prince of Peace. In those days there was nothing degrading on riding on an donkey. It was the royal animal. The disciples were told to say to the owner, that the Lord had need of the animals. There is nothing that Christ may not use—nothing of ours, however lowly, which may not have its place in advancing His kingdom and glory. It is said that once Queen Victoria was traveling through the Highlands and stopped a little while at the home of a poor woman to rest and sat in a common chair. When the royal party was leaving, one whispered to the old woman, that it was the Queen who had been in her home. She took up the chair on which the Queen had been sitting and carried it away, saying, "No one ever shall sit in this chair again, because my Queen has used it!" Our King will use anything we have, and what of ours He uses—is lifted to highest honor. He has need for our money, our hands, our feet, our lips—and we do well when we hold all our possessions ready at any call of His—to be used as He desires.

It was a strange scene—the enthusiasm of the people that day as Jesus rode toward the city. "A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road." Xerxes, history tells us, when passing over the bridge of the Hellespont, found the road strewn with branches of myrtle, while perfumes filled the air. When Alexander the Great was entering Babylon, flowers were strewn before him. It is no wonder that these Jewish pilgrims honored Jesus that day. For the moment they regarded Him as indeed their Messiah. They were escorting Him into the city, as they thought—to take His place on David’s throne. They were not deceived, either, for Jesus was really going to His coronation, though not to such a coronation as they thought. He was to be crowned—but with thorns! The people were indeed escorting the Messiah—but not such a Messiah as they were looking for. The time of His triumph was indeed at hand—though not such a triumph as they expected to see. His kingdom was not of this world. His glory was to be reached through disgrace and shame. He was the king of sorrows, because through sorrow He prepared redemption for the world. The strange pageant of that day was a picture, a Divine foreshadowing, of the coming day, when all nations shall join in honoring Christ as King.

Glad were the songs that rang out on the air that morning: "Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" The people were disappointed in a sense. In a little while all their bright hopes had vanished—Jesus went to a cross instead of a throne! Soon "Hosanna!" was changed to "Crucify Him!" Soon the palm branches were withered and trodden

underfoot by the throngs. Yet the people sang that morning better than they knew. They thought of the restoring of David's kingdom; the King that was coming was really far more glorious than David. They expected liberty from the Roman yoke; Jesus brought liberty from the yoke of Satan and sin. They expected restoration of homes, riches and honors; Jesus had restored us to our place in our Father's family. They looked for physical prosperity; He brought the peace of God and the prosperity which comes by righteousness. They expected the conquest of all nations by their Messiah; he will conquer the whole world by His grace and truth. The earthly blessings they looked for as a result of the Messiah's coming—were but the shadows of the heavenly joys which He actually brought. A remarkable scene occurred in the temple. "Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves." The temple was the house of prayer—but it had been changed into a den of robbers, as Jesus says. Not only did these traders desecrate the sacred house by making it a marketplace—but they robbed the people by usury and overcharging. Jesus cast out the traders and the money changers and cleansed the holy place. Thus it is that He would do—when He comes as King into our hearts. Made to be temples of God, houses of prayer, homes of purity and peace—sin has turned them into dens of robbers, desecrating them and filling them with unholy things. Christ's first work is to drive out all that defiles them, all that is unholy, and make them ready to be God's dwelling-places! The rulers were vexed when they saw all that Jesus had done. They seemed to have been especially annoyed by hearing the children singing their hosannas to Jesus. He reminded them, however, that their own Scriptures had foretold this very scene: "Have you never read: From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise?" Everywhere in the Bible we learn that children are dear to God. He wants their earliest love. He is pleased to hear their voices in songs of praise. A sweeter music rises to heaven from the children's singing, than from trained choirs of insincere, formal, or mere professional worshipers. The children should always be in the church services and should join in the songs. The service is completed, perfected by their voices. The great triumph of Christ is still going on in this world. The palm branches which were waved that day have long since faded, and the music of the songs has died away on the air; but uncounted millions are following in the procession of those who honor Him. Among these are prophets, apostles, martyrs and saints of all ages. Countless multitudes have been gathered from the darkest abodes of sin, and, wearing white garments washed in the blood of the Lamb, are now among those who honor Christ. Old men and boys, feeble women and maidens, all saved by the power of the cross—are now singing the song, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

Two Parables of Judgment Matthew 21:33-46

"Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey." The parable interprets itself. The people of Israel were familiar with the use of a vineyard as an image or illustration of themselves. The prophets had employed it. It is easy to explain the parable in its historical sense—but it has a reference also to us. God is continually planting vineyards and leaving them in the care of farmers. He has placed one in your care—it is your own life. He has placed in it many vines, which, if well tended and cultivated, will produce rich fruits. He has put a hedge about it, the walls and defenses of your own home and of the Church, and the restraints and safeguards of Christian friendships and associations. You were

not born in a heathen land, your life open and unfenced like a public common, to be trodden down by every unholy foot. God has made every provision for His vineyard that is necessary for its fruitfulness. It is well watered—the influences of Divine grace flow all through your life. He has done for His vineyard all that could be done. It is yours now to keep and care for, not as owner—but as tenant. You are not your own; you belong to Christ (see 1 Corinthians 1:1); your life is His, and you are to keep it and cultivate it for Him. You are really one of God's tenants. He has "assigned" to you a little vineyard, for whose care and cultivation you are responsible. You He does not compel you to obey Him, to keep your heart, to bring forth fruit; you are free—but He holds you accountable for the way you keep your vineyard. The analogy is followed: "When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit." This is the way the farmers were to pay their rent; they were to give to the owner each year a certain proportion of the fruits of the vineyard. God expects us to return something to Him of the fruits of the vineyard He has assigned to us. It belongs to Him, and he has done all that needs to be done to render it fruitful. He expects a proper "rental." The rental of this vineyard was to be paid, not in money—but in the fruit of the vineyard itself. This is suggestive. God is not satisfied with the mere giving to Him of money or of a portion of the earthly possessions that may belong to us. Of course, our money is part of our vineyard and should pay rent, too; a share of its fruit or earnings should be returned to God, to whom it all actually belongs. But the vineyard proper is our own life—and we are to pay our rental to God, the owner, in the fruits of our life—in love, obedience, worship, honor, service. No amount of money will ever satisfy God—if we do not also love Him and do His will. This businesslike illustration of our relation to God is very suggestive. We are His tenants, and all we are and all we have belong to Him. Every tenant must pay a proper rent, or he cannot remain on the property that has been assigned to him. The larger our vineyard and the greater our privileges and blessings—the more rent we must pay. If we do not thus make suitable return—we are robbing God. The reception given to the servants sent to receive the rental was not merely discourteous, it was cruel and an act of rebellion: "The farmers took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third." The servants who come to us are those that God sends to us to call us to duty. Of course, none of us ever treat the messengers God sends to us—as His ancient people treated the prophets. We do not beat our teachers and preachers. We do not stone them and kill them. We are very kind to them. We show them courtesy. We even love them very much and, as a rule, we listen with great respect to what they have to say to us. We never think of arresting them and putting them in prison or of sawing them asunder. Surely, then, this part of the parable cannot have any application to us.

But, wait a moment. On what errand are the servants sent? What is their request of us? They come to get the rental which we owe to God, to receive the fruits which are His due. We do not beat the messengers—but do we grant what they in God's name ask from us for Him? Do we give up our sins—when they ask us to do it? Do we yield our hearts to God and begin to love and obey Him and live for Him—when they ask these things of us? We are very respectful to God's servants—but we go on in our evil ways, and they carry back nothing from us, no fruits, to the God whose we are. We treat the messengers with high honor—but the message we disregard and Him who sends it to us we reject and neglect. Nothing is sadder to the heart of a pastor or teacher than this, that while those to whom he bears God's message treat him with finest courtesy and gentlest love, and are kind to him—they do not learn to honor God and love and serve Him.

"Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way." We read the story of God’s dealing with His ancient people, and wonder at His marvelous patience with them. Though the treated His servants so badly—He continued to send others. He seemed never to tire of trying to bless them. But is it not our own history as really as it was theirs? As soon as we are old enough to understand anything, God begins sending messengers to us—loving mothers, faithful fathers, godly pastors, teachers and friends, the voices of conscience, of the Scriptures, of the Spirit, the leading of Providence. But we hear the calls—and then go on as before, unheeding, despising, sinning. But God does not grow weary. He continues to send His messengers. Not only is this true of the impenitent—but to every believer He sends again and again, seeking for fruits—and finding none. We never can measure God’s patience. But we must remember that there will be a last call.

"Last of all, he sent his son to them." Mark says, "He still had one to send, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them" (Mark 12:6). There is a matchless pathos in these words when we think of them as referring to God and defining the acts of His love and mercy. All he had left now was his son. His servants had all been sent, and the last of them had been killed. There was no other messenger that he could send unless he would send his son. If he gave him—he gave all, for he had not many sons—but one, his only-begotten son. "Finally he sent him to them." He kept nothing back, spared not even his own son, in his great desire to have men reconciled to him. Thus the sending of Jesus was the climax of a long history of gracious acts of love.

There is another thought here. He sent his son last. Then there is no messenger of mercy after Jesus. He is God’s best and final gift. There is nothing more that even God in His infinite power and love can do to induce men to be reconciled. When men reject Christ, they throw away their last hope of mercy—they lose their last opportunity. No other messenger will be sent—no other can be sent.

"This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance!" The rulers killed Jesus that the power might still be theirs. There are many now who reject Christ for very much the same reason. They think that the way to get liberty, pleasure and gain—is to thrust Christ altogether away from their lives. To become Christians would interfere too much with their plans, perhaps with their business, or with their pleasure. They think that Christian people make great sacrifices. But the Bible puts it very differently. It tells us that those who receive Christ, instead of losing—gain a glorious inheritance; they become children of God, and if children, then heirs to an unfading inheritance. The rulers killed their best friend—when they killed Jesus. Had they accepted Him, they would have received His inheritance, becoming "joint-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). Rejecting and killing Him, they lost the very inheritance they thought to seize! Those who now reject Christ, reject the only One who could give them eternal life. Since Christ is God’s last messenger of mercy to men—the rejection of Him is the thrusting away of the last hope of mercy.

"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone." They did not think Jesus suitable to be their Messiah, and so they rejected Him; now, however, He is the King of glory. The very men who rejected Him and crucified Him, when they awake on judgment morning, shall see Him whom they thus despised sitting as their Judge. But again, we must not apply it to the first rejecters only. A great many people now think Christ unsuitable to be their Lord. They do not consider it an honor to be called a Christian. They blush to own His name or enroll themselves among His followers.

They do not care to build their life on Christ. But He has now the highest honor in heaven. The highest angels are not ashamed to own His name. Redeemed spirits praise Him day and night. The Father has exalted him to the throne of power and glory. Why then should sinful men be ashamed to own Him as their Lord? They should remember further that God has made Him the capstone of the whole building not made with hands. No life that is not built on Him can stand. If men ever are saved—it must be by this same Jesus whom they are now rejecting. The King’s Marriage Feast

Matthew 22:1-14

Christ is soon to be condemned by the rulers and put to death—but as He stands now in the holy city, He speaks as the Judge, pronouncing the doom upon the people who are rejecting Him as their Messiah. "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son." The marriage feast suggests two great thoughts concerning gospel blessings. The figure of a feast pictures abundance of provision, and also gladness and good fellowship. Then the figure of marriage suggests the closeness of the relation into which God invites us. Marriage represents the highest ideal of love and friendship. It expresses mutual affection and delight; on the one hand, protecting care; on the other, perfect trust. The blending of two lives in one, which is the meaning of true marriage, suggests the union of Christ and His people in thought, purpose, feeling and motive. We are Christ’s, and Christ is ours. Christ and we become one. He lives in us, and we live in Him. The forms of Oriental life are preserved in the framework of the parable. The king sent forth his servants "to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come." They had already received a preliminary invitation, and now they are formally called by the king’s messengers. The refusal to accept such an honor was a distinct and intentional insult and showed that they were in heart rebellious and disloyal. The meaning of the parable is plain. God was the King who made the feast. The invitation shows the Divine earnestness in seeking to bless men. God does not merely invite them once and then if they refuse, give no more thought to them; but He invites them again, and most urgently presses upon them the invitation.

We all have been invited many times to the feast of Divine love. The invitations begin to fall upon our ears in childhood, and are repeated all through our life. Marcus Dods says: "If God is in earnest about anything, it is about this—it is in the tenderness and sincerity with which God invites you to Himself."

After all that God had done for His people, and all His efforts to win them to accept His love—they treated His mercy with contempt. "But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business." That is, they simply ignored the invitation, paid no heed to it, treated it as a matter of no importance, and hurried on to their own business. It is in this way that a large class of people always treat the gospel invitation. They do not oppose Christ in any active way. They do not rush into great wickedness—they are fairly moral people. They speak patronizingly of the gospel and of the Church. But they pay no heed to the calls of Christ. They treat them as if the gospel were only a sort of child’s play, something for sick people and the very old—but not important enough for them to give thought to. They treat the gospel as if there were no real importance in the messages of love it brings, which break so urgently upon their ears. They regard their worldly business, as of far more importance than personal salvation.

Silent neglect is one of the most offensive ways of treating anyone, and those who "make light" of the gospel insult God even more than those who openly refuse its invitation. Yet these people imagine and often say that they have never rejected Christ because they have shown no open enmity to Him. Countless thousands of souls have been lost—by simply making light of the guilt and danger of sin and neglecting the way of mercy!

Those who were first invited and made light of the invitation "went off—one to his field, another to his business." That is, their business was more important in their estimation than their king's feast. It is easy to see the same spirit today. There are thousands who have more interest in their business affairs, than they have in the affairs of God's kingdom. This is the way some of the king's servants treated his son's marriage and the invitation to it which they received. They made light of it, paid no respect whatever to it, and went on with their business as if they had never received an invitation to the royal marriage!

Then there was another class of the king's servants who rose up in anger against the messengers, "The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them!" There are those who are not content with ignoring Christ and His messengers—but become open enemies and violent rejecters. The king turned to others, when the first invited had refused. "The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come." This does not mean that those who had been invited were too wicked to be saved, for the gospel is offered for the worst. Their unworthiness was shown in their refusal to come. The final responsibility when men are shut out of heaven, cannot be laid on God—his part is fully and faithfully done. The feast is ready, even at infinite cost. The invitations are given in all sincerity and pressed with Divine urgency. But if men will not accept the mercy, there the matter must end. They will not be compelled to come to the feast. The weakest sinner can refuse the greatest honor of Divine love. The final responsibility rests upon the rejecters. "They would not come!" is the reason that they are shut out. The king then bade his servants to go into the streets of the highways—that is, among the Gentiles, and in a little while the tables were filled. The king came to see his guests, to know whether they had fulfilled the conditions of their invitation. "The framework of the parable presupposes the Oriental custom of providing garments for the guests who are invited to a royal feast." When the king made his inspection, he "saw there a man who was not wearing a wedding garment." The man came to the feast—but came in his own way, refusing to accept the conditions and to wear the garment prescribed by the king. The man may represent those who enter the Church but do not accept the garment which is the invariable mark of all Christ's true followers. Church membership is not this garment—one may have this honor and not have on a wedding garment. Nor is it baptism or the Lord's Supper—one may observe these sacraments and yet lack the essential mark of true discipleship. The wedding garment is the righteousness of Christ. We do not become Christians merely by associating ourselves with Christians, by adopting the forms of religion. We must have in us the mind of Christ, conformity to God, an abhorrence of that which is evil, a love for that which is good, a sincere desire to honor God and do His will.

Notice also that this garment is an individual matter. One man in all that great company lacked the required dress, and was excluded. Each one must have the garment for himself. God looks at us as individuals, not in companies. Being in a godly family, or among holy people, or in a Church of saintly members—will no excuse the lack in the one of us who may lack the prescribed garment. When the king asked the man why he had come to the feast without the wedding garment, he had

nothing to answer. "He was speechless." He had no excuse to offer. He knew that he alone was to blame for this lack of preparation, since he had rejected what was freely offered to him. So will it be with any who refuse the grace of God. They are not speechless now; they find many excuses when they are urged to accept Christ. But when they stand at length before the omniscient Judge, they will be speechless; they will have nothing to say for themselves.

Three Questions Matthew 22:15-22; Matthew 22:34-46 The Pharisees, on those last days in the temple, were in continual and bitter controversy with Jesus. They sought to trouble Him, to ensnare or entangle Him in His conversation. We may be glad, however, for the questions they asked, because they drew from Him great utterances which are of priceless value to us.

First, they took counsel together and prepared a question which they thought would entrap Him whichever way He answered it. They began by praising His sincerity and truthfulness, as if to flatter Him. Then they asked, "Is it lawful to pay taxes unto Caesar, or not?" They thought He could not possibly avoid being ensnared. If He would answer Yes, He would be denounced as lacking in Jewish patriotism. If He should answer No, He would be denounced as disloyal to Rome. But He was not ensnared by their question. He knows men’s thoughts. He knew their hypocrisy and falseness, and easily baffled them. His answer lays down a great principle. "Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s." The use of the coinage of Caesar by the people, was an admission of his rule. But there was something higher than that. God was over all, and no duty to Him must be neglected. They must be good citizens of Rome—but there was a higher citizenship, and they must also be good citizens of heaven. The Sadducees came next with their question about the resurrection. They did not believe in the resurrection nor in the existence of spirits, and they thought their question would completely puzzle Him. "In the resurrection… whose wife shall she be of the seven? For they all were married to her." They thought to make the doctrine of resurrection ridiculous. The answer was wonderfully wise. They were thinking only of the earthly life—but in the immortal life all will be different. In the resurrection there will be no marriage. Christ does not mean that the love which binds husband and wife together and grows into such sacredness and beauty in true marriage, shall perish in death and have no existence in the resurrection life. Love never dies—it is immortal. It is only the incidents of birth, death and marriage that have no existence beyond the grave.

Then a lawyer had a question to ask Jesus, "testing Him," the record says. "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" The question was a theological one that was discussed much among Jewish teachers, who were proverbially fond of splitting hairs. However, it is an important question for us, too. It is well for us to know which are the first things in life.

Jesus answered promptly, "You shall love the Lord your God will all your heart." God comes first. Nothing else in all the universe can be put before Him in true living. The first words of the Bible are, "In the beginning God." God was at the beginning, before anything—a grain of sand, the tiniest flower, the smallest thing—was created. There was nothing before God. There is nothing which God did not create. But He is also at the beginning of everything of good and beauty. The same is true in every true heart. We cannot get a blessing, until we have God first. Not God first in order, merely—but God first in love, in the place of confidence and trust. He must have the chief place—we must love Him with all our being. It is idle to think of any other religious act or effort, until we have begun to love God. This is the beginning of all true religion. Not to love God—is not

to have taken the first step in a true and holy life.

Then something else follows. "And the second is like unto it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love for our neighbor is second, in two ways. It must be second in place and in degree. God must be loved supremely. To love any being or anything more than God—is idolatry. It will not do to preach a religion of humanitarianism and not to have first "You shall love the Lord your God." Love to a man is second also, in the sense that it must spring out of love for God. There must be a first before there can be a second. There can be no love for our neighbor, if there is not first love for God. "We love, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19), We love our neighbor, because God loves us, and we love God and because this love warms our heart toward others. But when we truly love God—we will love our brother also.

There has been altogether too little stress put by the Christian Church in the past on this commandment of love to our neighbor. A careful study of the teachings of Christ, will show that He Himself insisted continually on love as the very proof and test of Christian life. We cannot get God's forgiveness, until we forgive our fellow men. We are to love our enemies, if we would be the children of our Father. By this shall all men know that we are Christ's disciples, because we love one another (see John 13:35). The epistles, too, are full of teachings concerning the duty of love. Paul's wonderful thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians shows how essential love is, and then shows us the way we must live—if we are indeed Christ's. John also makes it plain to us that if we love God we will love our brother also. The claim that we love God cannot be true—if it appears that we do not love our brother. "If a man says, I love God, and hates his brother—he is a liar; for he who loves not his brother whom he hat seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"

Jesus asked the Pharisees a question, too. "What do you think of Christ?" It was not an easy question to answer. They had very mistaken ideas about their Messiah. Many stumbled at the Messiahship of Jesus, because it was not what they were expecting. Even Christ's own disciples did not understand the matter. The Jews were looking for a king who would reign on David's throne—an earthly monarch, a worldly conqueror. The Pharisees said the Messiah was to be David's son. Jesus then asked them another hard question. "How then does David in Spirit, calls him Lord?" But they had not thought about the particular Scripture to which Jesus referred. If they had, they would have had different ideas of the character and reign of their Messiah.

Jesus then asked them again, "If David then calls Him Lord, how is He his son?" No wonder that no one was able to answer Him a word after hearing this question. The question was simply unanswerable on any theory that made the Messiah an earthly monarch. It is unanswerable also on any conception of the character of Jesus which considers Him as no more than a man. If David called the Messiah his Lord, the Messiah must be Divine, the Son of God. We may worship Him, therefore, and give Him the supreme place in all our lives.

It is thus, indeed, that Christ offers Himself to us in the Scriptures. He claims the supreme individual love of His followers. He who loves father or mother more than Him—is not worthy of Him. He claims the place of absolute Master in the life of every man who would be His. We must obey implicitly, unquestioningly, wholly. We cannot take Christ merely as Savior, trusting in Him as our Redeemer, without at the same time taking Him as Lord, as Master, and obeying Him. What David did in calling the Messiah his Lord, is what everyone who accepts Him must do. Paul put his whole creed in a single sentence when he said of Christ; "Whose I am, and whom I serve" (Acts

27:23). The confession of Thomas should be the confession of everyone who receives Christ and believes in Him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). The Lesson of Watchfulness Matthew 24:32-51

It was Tuesday evening. Jesus had left the temple, to return to it no more. His last words to the people had been spoken. On the way His disciples called His attention to the temple, perhaps suggesting its magnificence and its solidity. It was indeed a wonderful building. But Jesus said, "I tell you the truth—not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." The little company moved out to the Mount of Olives and sat down. A deep solemnity filled their hearts. The disciples asked Him to tell them when the things He had foretold should come to pass. They had in mind three events—the destruction of the temple, the Lord's final coming, and the end of the world. He warned them first against being led astray by impostors. "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ, ' and will deceive many!"

He bade them to be in readiness for whatever might come. The parable of the fig tree taught them to expect tribulations. The precise day and hour, "No one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." The stupendous events would come unheralded. It would be as in Noah's days. "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and swept them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man!" The great lesson Jesus taught His disciples was in the word "Watch!" which sounds in every-recurring strokes in His discourse like a great bell. Questions as to when or how are discouraged—but they are always to watch. "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come!" Matthew 24:42

We must be always watching—watching ourselves—lest we do wrong; watching our Guide—that we may follow Him closely and carefully; watching our duty—that we may always know it and do it; watching for danger—for on every hand danger lurks. It is not a safe world to live in—that is, it is not safe unless we watch, and unless we are in divine keeping. Satan is so vigilant, his approaches are so insidious and stealthy, and sin is so alluring and deceptive, that only sleepless vigilance can insure our safety. In this passage, however, the watching is for the coming of Christ, for which we are commanded to be always in readiness. He will surely come, and His coming will be sudden and unannounced. There will be a great final coming of Christ—but really He is always coming. The only way, therefore, to be prepared for Him at any most sudden moment, is to be ready all the time. If there is one hour when we relax our vigilance and cease to watch, that may be the hour when He will come.

There is an old legend of a man who waited a thousand years before the gates of paradise, watching for them to open, that he might enter in. At last, yielding to weariness, he slept for just one hour. And during that hour—the gates opened for a few moments and closed again. Thus by being off his guard a little while, he missed his opportunity. The coming of Christ will be so sudden that no preparation can be made for it after He appears. We must learn to live so that there will not be a moment, day or night, when we would be afraid or ashamed to have Him come into our house or place of business and find us as we are. There is no day which may not be our last. Therefore, we should keep our work done up to the moment, finishing it every evening as if we were never to

come back to it anymore.

Christ illustrates His teaching to make it more emphatic. "If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into." Thieves do not send a notification of the hour when they will break into the house; they make their coming as stealthy as possible. They come when they will be the least expected and when the master of the house is least likely to be watching. If one would be prepared against them when they come—he must always be prepared. Christ will come as a thief in the night. That means that His coming will be without warning, without any token to indicate His approach. All efforts of wise men to compute the time and settle upon a year or a day when He will come—are useless, for Jesus Himself said, "Of that day and hour knows no man, no, not the angels of heaven!"

What is it to be ready for the coming of Christ? For one thing, it is to be at peace with God, reconciled to Him, saved. In a sense, death is a coming of Christ to individuals, for it ends their probation and ushers them into the presence of God. What is it to be prepared for death? No one is prepared, who has not accepted Christ as Savior and Lord, finding forgiveness of sins and new life and love in Him. Nothing could be more terrible than the sudden coming of death to one whose sins are not forgiven, and who is thus unprepared to meet his God. But forgiveness is not the only thing in preparation for death. One’s work should be well done. There is a story of man who had wasted his life and who at last, near the end, found peace in believing. A friend said to him, "Are you afraid to die?" He answered, "No, I am not afraid to die; but I am ashamed to die." He meant that while his salvation was assured in Christ, he was ashamed to go home, having wasted all his years and having done nothing for the honor of his Master. We should do our best possible work every day—that we should never be ashamed to have Christ come.

Jesus sought to make the meaning of His words very clear. "Who then, is a faithful and wise servant," He asked, "whom his lord has made ruler over his household?" The answer is implied in the form of the words used. He is both faithful and wise. Then comes the assurance of reward, "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he comes, shall find so doing." Doing how? Doing his work with fidelity. The watching that Christ wants—is not sitting at the window and looking out to see Him approach—but diligence in all duty. If a man went away, leaving a servant in charge of a certain work, fixing no time for his return—what should the servant do? Stand in the door, gazing down the road, watching to get the first glimpse of the master’s return? No, that is not the kind of watching that would please his master. The way to be ready for Christ’s coming, is not to sit down in idleness to wait and watch for His appearance—but to keep at one’s work with unceasing diligence, so that when He comes—He may not find us in the midst of unfinished tasks, away behind with our work.

There can be no better rule in life—than to make every day of life complete, to finish everything each night before retiring, so that if we should never come back to our work again, nothing would suffer. A Christian woman was told by her physician that she could not live a great while, and that she might die any hour. She did not, however, drop her work and shut herself away to prepare for death. She went on with all her usual duties, only with more earnestness and greater diligence, knowing now that the time must be short. Some people would suppose that in a case like this, one should give up all active work and spend the short and uncertain time in praying and reading the

Bible; but this Christian woman’s way was the better way. Long before she had made her peace with God, and all her life had lived in readiness for eternity. When the warning came that the time was growing short, she was not flustered. Thus far she had done her duty as well as she could—and all she had to do now was the work of the few remaining days and hours. This she did with love and faith, and with diligence, and when the Master came—she quietly went away home with Him.

"But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ’My master is staying away a long time,’ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!" Matthew 24:48-51

While there is reward for the servant who is faithful, there is punishment for the evil servant who fails in his duty. Judgment will come upon him suddenly. "The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of!" There are several things said her about this unfaithful servant. He is unbelieving. The delay of his lord leads him to conclude that he is not going to return at all. His unbelief leads him to abuse his position—he becomes tyrannical and despotic in his treatment of those placed under his care. Then his own habits become unworthy; we find him eating and drinking with drunken men. These are characteristics of those who reject Christ through unbelief and become unfaithful. The punishment of the unfaithful servant is vividly described. It is a fearful thing to live regardless of life’s sacred trusts and solemn responsibilities. It is a terrible thing to die after having lived thus. We should compare these two pictures—the faithful and the unfaithful servant—and know positively which one of the two is our own portrait. The Wise and Foolish Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13 The three parables in this chapter teach great lessons. They are based on the promise of Christ’s return. He is surely coming again, but when—no one can know. But we should live always so as to be ready for His most sudden coming any moment. The ten virgins were alike in some ways. An onlooker in the early evening could not have told which were the wise, and which the foolish. Each had her lamp. In any Christian congregation the members may all seem alike true friends of Christ, as they sit in their pews in common worship or at the Lord’s Table. The testing comes in other ways.

All the virgins slept while the bridegroom tarried. There was nothing wrong in this. We all have to sleep some time. We should be sure that we are safe against any surprise while we are asleep, that no duty has been omitted before we slept, which is essential to a complete life. The wise virgins were ready for the coming of the wedding party at any hour, however long the delay might be. We are not required to wake and watch every moment for the coming of Christ; we are to be ready for the event so that we cannot be surprised. For example, we are not to think every moment of death—but we are so to live always that whenever death may come, however suddenly, it will not find us unprepared. "Not what death finds us doing—but how death finds us furnished, is the important question." The lamps of the foolish virgins did not hold much oil and would soon burn out, and these maidens had no oil in reserve to refill their lamps when they became empty. This was their folly. The difference in the other virgins, was that besides having their lamps filled, they had oil in reserve with which they could quickly refill them when they had

burned out. This is plain enough as regards these virgins. Applied to human lives, the teaching is also clear. The wise Christian is the one who is not content with a mere profession or with external marks of godliness. These may seem to be satisfactory in the easy days when there is no stress but in the hour of trial, they will not stand the test. The essential thing is the grace of God in the heart, or real union with Christ. This is represented in the parable by the supply of oil by which the wise virgins were made ready for the need which the midnight brought. If we have only the little lamp of our own life, we may get along while there is not great stress—but in the hour of trial, we shall fail. But if we have Christ with His Divine fullness—we can draw from Him for any sorrow, struggle or hard duty.

Midnight came and brought great commotion. The virgins were all sleeping, waiting until they should be summoned out to meet the bridegroom. Life is full of emergencies which come so suddenly that there is not time to prepare for them. If we are not ready at the moment of need we cannot become ready. Now it was that the watchfulness of all the virgins was tested. The delay had been so long, that all the lamps were burning low. Now appeared the wisdom of the five who had oil in reserve. Their lamps were quickly filled, and they were ready to go with the bridegroom. Now was brought out also the folly of the other virgins. Their lamps were going out, and they had no oil to refill them.

It is such occasions as these that test character. They show what is in us. No one is ready for life's sudden emergencies unless he has made preparation in advance for anything that may happen. One who has missed his lessons and trifled in school days—will by and by find the doors of opportunity shut to him, because he is not ready to go in. Many a man fails in life, because through early neglect he has not the training for his place or business, the reason being that he wasted the time when it was his duty to make the preparation. Many a woman fails in her homemaking and wrecks her own happiness and that of her family, because at the right time she did not learn the simple household arts which fit a girl for being a good wife. The foolish virgins missed the wedding joy and were shut out in the darkness, because earlier they had not laid up a reserve of oil. Many people's religion fails them in times of need, because they have not really the Word of God laid up in their hearts. "A man has only as much religion, as he can command in trial."

It was a natural request that these distressed virgins made: "'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out!" At first thought, too, we would say that the wise virgins should have granted this pathetic request of their sisters. If you were very hungry and I had even a crust of bread, it would not be right for me to eat all of my crust myself. We are taught that we should bear one another's burdens and that the strong should help the weak. Yet the refusal of the wise is reasonable and right when we look at it thoughtfully. If you and your neighbor have each signed a note for a certain sum, to fall due on a certain date, and you by dint of economy and perseverance have been able to lay by just enough to meet your obligation, while your neighbor, wasting his hours on trifles, has made no provision for the day of settlement; and if on the morning when the note falls due, he should come beseeching you to give him some of your money to help him pay his debt—would you give it to him? Does the law of love require that you should?

There is also an important spiritual lesson which the parable is meant to teach—that the gifts and blessings of grace are not transferable. No matter how eagerly one may wish to impart them, he cannot do it. If one woman has improved her opportunities and grown into refined and disciplined

character, while her sister has missed her chance and has grown up into weak and uncultured womanhood; the first sister cannot give of her strength, self-control, and noble spirit to the other, to help her through some special emergency.

If one man has studied diligently and learned every lesson, at last reaching a position of eminence and power—-he cannot give of his trained ability to his brother, who has trifled through years, to help to make his life a success. A brave soldier in the battle cannot share his discipline and courage with trembling comrade by his side. In temptation, one who is victorious cannot give part of his strength to a friend by his side who is about to fall. We cannot share our forgiveness of sin with our dearest friend. Each one must live his own life, bear his own burden, and have the grace of the Holy Spirit for himself. No one can give another these gifts.

It was a tragic moment when the foolish virgins got back to the house and found themselves too late: "The door was shut!" It had stood open long enough for all who were ready to enter. Then it was closed and could not be opened again. This teaches us the meaning of opportunity. We may apply it to the matter of personal salvation. There is a time to be saved, and when that time is past, the door is shut! Life is full of opportunities. There is a time when we can enter God’s family, receiving all blessing. Then there is a time when the door is closed, and all the powers of the universe could not open it again. To the young people every door stands open. They can get an education and a training to fit them for noble, beautiful and worthy life. They can make good friends, friends whose companionship and help would enrich their whole life. They can form good habits which would build up fine character in them and make them respected and influential in the community. They can read good books which will fill their minds and hearts with noble thoughts and upward inspirations. They can win victory over their own lives and become self-controlled and kingly among men. But the doors stand open only a reasonable time—there is not a moment to lose. By and by they will be shut. Then no imploring cry will open them again. The lesson for all is, "Watch therefore!" We know not the day nor the hour. That is true of our Lord’s coming. It is true of death. But it is true also of nearly every other experience of life. We go on, not knowing. The future is closed to our eyes. We know not what awaits us at any turning of a street corner, or what we shall have to meet any moment as we go. The only way to be ready for the unknown events of tomorrow, is to improve every opportunity of today. The Parable of the Talents Matthew 25:14-30

"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey." The particular teaching of this parable is not the same as that of the parable of the virgins. That was the duty of preparation; this is the duty of working—using one’s powers and capacities. Every one of us has received a talent or talents, some portion of our Lord’s goods. The Master has gone away, leaving us to use whatever of His, He has entrusted to us until He returns. Then we shall have to give account to Him. It is not a voluntary matter with us, nor is it a matter of indifference, whether we will be Christ’s servants or not. Christ is the rightful Lord of every man. Declining to accept Him and to enter His service—does not exempt anyone from the responsibility.

"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them." Perhaps we do not realize how entirely Christ has entrusted His affairs and His interests in this world, to His followers. This puts a serious responsibility on us. If the gospel is to get to

men—then we must proclaim it. If the work of the Church is to be done—then we must do it. The only hands Christ has for work in this world—are our hands. If the sorrowing are to receive comfort—then we must give it. If the world is to see the beauty, the gentleness, the patience, the compassion, the helpfulness of God—then we must be the interpreters of these Divine affections. Christ has delivered His goods to us.

We notice also that in the distribution of talents the same is not given to all. "To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability." Each person received what he was able to care for. This principle is observed in all Divine endowments. No one has duties allotted to him, which he has not the ability to perform. Nothing impossible is ever asked of any person. Men differ in their ability to manage their Lord's affairs, and the talents given into their hands vary accordingly. The merchant does not take the man with capacity only for lifting heavy bales—and put him in the counting-room. When a woman wants a fine dress made, she does not give the costly materials to a washer woman, a hairdresser, or to a teacher of German or music—but to a skillful dressmaker. Our Master gives each particular disciple, the duties he has ability to do. We need never say, therefore, that we cannot do the things that seem to be required of us. We can do whatever we are given by our Master to do. He makes no mistakes in the allotment of tasks. The story then tells what the servants did with their share of their master's goods. "The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more." This man used faithfully what had been put into his hands, and the result was that it was doubled—his five talents became ten. He used his gifts—traded with them, and in the trading came the increase. This is the Divine law in all life. God gives one a gift of music—but it is only in its possibilities as yet. It must be cultivated, developed, disciplined, or it never will become of any practical value. Love must be exercised, if it is to grow. It is only a capacity at first. The same is true of all human powers, whether of body, mind or heart. The trouble with too many people, is that they are indolent and do nothing with their natural gifts, and then these gifts never increase. Talents that are exercised, put to work, traded with—always multiply. "The hand of the diligent makes rich" (Proverbs 10:4). The boy who is so shy and diffident that he can scarcely speak a work in public, by using his small abilities, becomes a great orator, able to sway a vast multitude. The girl, whose voice is sweet but undeveloped, puts her talents to use, and by and by sings so as to thrill countless hearts. The man with the two talents was faithful, too. "So also, the one with the two talents gained two more." Not many of us would claim, that we have five talents. This is the distinction of only a few. And many of us would not be quite willing to say we have only one talent. That would seem to put us low in the scale. Perhaps, however, some of us would admit that we have about two talents. It is the great middle class that does most for the world.

It would not do for all to be great—to be five-talented. If all the soldiers were fit for generals, who would make up the rank and file? If all Church members were eloquent preachers, who would do the countless little, quite services that need to be done? If all men and women were great poets, who would write the prose? There is need for far more common people than great brilliant ones. One Niagara is enough for a continent—but there is need for thousands of little springs and rivulets. A few great men are enough for a generation—but there is work for millions of common folks. So this diversity of gifts, is part of the Divine plan. The world needs more people of average ability, than it needs of the extraordinary sort, and so we are sure always of being in good

company. Lincoln said God must love the common people, for He made so many of them. People who are very great must feel lonesome, for there are so very few of them. In the case of this two-talented servant, as with that of the five-talented, it was diligent work that redeemed the mediocre man from the obscurity of the commonplace, and gave him distinction. Presently he had four talents. The practical lesson in all the parable, is the using of our gifts, that, if we really have only two talents, we should not vex ourselves—but should go to work with what we have, and it will grow by and by into something worthy. William Dawson speaks in one of his sermons, of the commonness and pitiableness of "contented insignificance." The talents were not given to the servants; they were only committed to them to be used. Then there would be an accounting. "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them." There is an important suggestion in this "long time." We are given plenty of time to make use of our talents. It takes time to learn to work well and to develop and train our faculties to their best. Even if we have buried our talents for a season, there is ample time to dig them up and try to put them to better use. We owe far more than we can tell, to God’s patience in waiting so long for us. But we must never forget that the Lord will come—and we shall have to reckon with Him for whatever of His we have. The character of the reward should be noticed. The successful man was not give a year’s vacation that he might take a long rest. He was not given an easier position where he would have less care and less work. The reward for doing his work well—was more work! Because he had done well with the little that had been entrusted to him—more was put into his hands. That is the way of honorable promotion among men—not rest and luxury—but a higher position with harder work, increased burden. "Joy" is promised, too, "the joy of your Lord," the joy which comes of serving, of doing the Lord’s work. The deepest joy experienced in this world—is the joy which comes of serving. But one of the servants had failed to do his best with his talent. "Then the man who had received the one talent came." The story of the one-talented man is pathetic, and yet it has its startling lesson. If only he, too, had been faithful, doing his best with his little gift—he also would have multiplied his talent. Many who have done the most for the world—had only one talent to begin with. The discovery that we have only one talent, never should discourage us. We should accept what we have, however small it may be, and set about making the most of it and doing the most with it. The last thing to do with our gift or ability—is to despair about it and then hide it away. The gifts that are not used—are lost. "Take therefore the talent away from him." In all life it is the same—faculties unused are lost, become extinct. Natural eyes would lose the power of sight—if one lived in darkness continually, and never used them. The eye that is never turned toward God, by and by loses even the power to look toward God. The capacity for believing, which never believes, at length ceases to be able to believe. "Capacity is extirpated by disuse." The lesson comes with tremendous force to the young. If they will not use the abilities which God has bestowed upon them—these powers will be taken away from them. The Last Judgment Matthew 25:31-46 This passage gives us a wonderful picture of the last judgment. It is not a parable—but a prophetic presentation of the great scene. The sheep and goats are used as representing the good and evil. Christ will be the Judge. He will appear as the Son of man, that is, in His humanity. It is a comfort to think of this, that it will be our Brother whom we shall see on the throne of glory. Christ came first in lowly form. He was born in a stable and cradled in a manger. No retinue of angels then attended Him except the host that sang their song in the shepherd’s ears. In His first coming, He was lowly and despised. He was so poor that often He had nowhere to lay His head. He had but few followers and made but little name for Himself on the earth. But He will not come this way

the second time. He will appear in glory, and will be attended by hosts of angels. For once the whole human family will be together. "All the nations will be gathered in his presence." Yet in our thought of the grandeur of this scene—we must not lose sight of the individuality of the judgment. We shall be there—but none of us will be lost in the crowd; each one shall have personal judgment.

During a war the telegraphic reports from the field say that in a great battle ten thousand men were slain. Not knowing any of them personally, we think only of the vast aggregate number. But suppose some friend of ours—brother or father—was among the slain; we think no more then of the ten thousand—but of the one. And every one of the ten thousand is mourned in some home—is somebody's father, husband, brother, son, friend. From that battlefield ten thousand cords stretch to ten thousand homes. The heaps of slain are simply ten thousand individuals. So in that countless throng on judgment day, not one person will be lost in the multitude. "Everyone must bear his own burden."

There will be a division that day—the whole human family will not be as one. "All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left." Our Lord's teachings are full of this thought of final separation. The tares and the wheat will grow together until the harvest; but then there will be an infallible separation—not a tare will be gathered into the barn with the wheat. The net draws good and bad fish to the shore—but there the two classes are separated. The ten virgins were together during the time of waiting—but the midnight cry caused an instant, final and irrevocable separation, as the door opened for those who were ready to enter and shut upon those who were unprepared. Nothing is more plainly taught in the Word of God, than that the evil and the good, the believing and the rejecting, the righteous and the unrighteous shall be separated at the last day, each going to his own place.

These separations will cut very close in many cases. "Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left." When we are sure of our place on Christ's right hand, we should never rest until we are sure also that all those whom we love shall be in the same company. The King speaks to the people as if He had personally lived among them, "For I was hungry—and you gave Me something to eat." It seems from this picture of the judgment, that the eternal destiny of men shall be settled by their works. Feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty, are mentioned as reasons for the favor shown to those upon the right hand. But a careful study of the passage shows that in the judgment, all will turn upon one question—how men have treated Jesus Christ. If they have believed on Him, loved Him, honored Him, and lived for Him—they will be honored by Him, gathered at His right hand and admitted to His kingdom of glory. But if they have not believed on Him, have not honored Him, have not lived for Him in this world—they will be rejected by Him at the last and shut out of the heavenly kingdom. In other words, all will depend upon whether men believe or do not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. But believing in Christ means more than giving assent to a correct creed—it means also a life of obedience and service. The whole of Christian life is love, not only love for Christ—but love for Christ's own. If we love God—we will love our brother also, says the beloved disciple. If we do no love our brother, it is evident that we do not love God. If we have the love of Christ in our heart, it will show itself to all those who belong to Christ. While there is love for all the world, there should be a special love for those who belong to

the Master. The King speaks as if He had come to the people in the great company, in many experiences of personal suffering and need. "For I was hungry—and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty—and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger—and you took Me in; I was naked—and you clothed Me; I was sick—and you took care of Me; I was in prison—and you visited Me." There is something very pathetic in this thought of Jesus as a stranger, as hungry, or as sick, coming to our doors in those whose appeals are made to us. If we allowed it to enter our heart and exercise its proper effect upon us—it would inspire in us sympathy and love, and would make us very gentle to all who are in need.

Mr. Wesley, one winter day, met a poor girl in one of the schools under his care. She seemed almost frozen. He asked her if she had no clothing but the thin garments she was wearing. She said she had not. His hand was in his pocket in an instant—but there was no money there. He went to his room—but the pictures on the wall seemed to upbraid him. He took them down, saying to himself: "How can the Master say to you, 'Well done, good and faithful servant'? You have adorned your walls with the money which might have screened this poor creature from the bitter cold! O justice! O mercy! Are not these pictures the blood of the poor maid?" So he sold the pictures to get money to relieve the girl's distress.

Those to whom the King spoke, could not understand what He meant. "Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or without clothes, or sick, or in prison—and help You?" Their surprise need not seem remarkable. The truest greatness, is not conscious of itself. Moses knew not, that his face shone. The best Christians put the lowest value upon their own good works. No doubt many of the commendations and rewards of the righteous in the judgment, will indeed be surprises to them. They keep no record of their good deeds. Their sense of personal unworthiness hinders them from seeing anything worthy in what they do. We do not dream of the real value and helpfulness of the things we do. Besides, we do not indeed see Christ in the lowly and suffering ones who come before us, needing love and help—we see only poor, sick, unfortunate people, with no marks of glory, no hints of nobility, no traces of heavenly beauty. We do not see things as they are. Jesus Himself is ever before us, in lowly guise. We are unconsciously serving the Master, whenever we do in His name the holy things of love. Every lowly, faithful Christian is preparing for himself many a blessed surprise in glory.

Jesus is still in this world. Once He was here in human form, as the Son of man. Now He is here in His Church. "You are the body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:27), said the apostle. The smallest kindness shown to a Christian, even the least, Christ accepts as done to Himself. Parents understand this. Any honor shown to a child—a father receives as shown to himself. If a son is in a strange land and meets with some misfortune, or is sick, and someone finding him there as a stranger in trouble shows him kindness, no greater act done to the parents at home would be as pleasing to them—as is that little ministry to their child in a foreign land. Christ loves His people so much, that whatever is done to any of them—He accepts as if He Himself had been the recipient of the kindness. The same is true, on the other hand, of any unkindness or any lack of kindness shown to another. "For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me. I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these—you did not do for me." We must beware how we treat the lowliest Christian, for if we neglect him in his need—it is as if Christ were in the same need, and

we had neglected Him!

We must learn that we are judged not only by the things we do—but by the things we fail to do. These people had not been cruel or unkind to any of Christ's little ones—no such charge is made against them; they had not done the kindnesses which they ought to have done. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, neither the priest nor the Levite did any harm to the wounded man, and yet they are severely condemned. They sinned against him grievously by not doing the things of love which he needed to have done for him.

"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." The Anointing of Jesus

Matthew 26:1-16

We enter now upon the last events of our Lord's life. We are within two days of the Passover. We have a glimpse of the plotting of the priests and elders, and their desire to take Jesus by subtlety to kill Him. They wished, however, to wait until after the feast, fearing excitement and tumult, and had so determined. The culmination of the plot was hastened, however, by the unexpected treachery of Judas. The incident of the anointing is given here apparently out of its proper order, probably because of its influence on the treason of Judas. The incident occurred, according to John's gospel (John 12:1-8), six days before the Passover. Judas was offended by Christ's rebuke of his criticism of Mary's anointing, and under the sting of this, went to the priest, offering to betray Christ.

Bethany was a sacred place to Jesus. There He found a home of love where His heart was rested many a time after the conflicts and controversies of the day in the temple. There His greatest miracle was wrought—the raising of Lazarus. We know Martha and Mary well. They differed in their dispositions—but they were alike in their warm and loyal friendship for Jesus.

These two sisters had each her own way of expressing her love for her Friend. The other evangelists tell us that Martha served—Martha always served. There are certain people that we never fail to recognize by some unmistakable feature. We always know Peter by his impulsiveness. We know John by his lying upon the Savior's bosom at the last supper. We know Thomas as the man who doubted. We know Felix as the man who trembled, and then sent the preacher away for a more convenient season. We recognize Martha wherever we see her, by her serving. She represents those whose love for Christ takes the practical form, rather than the form of meditation and devotion.

Some people like to criticize Martha and find fault with her; but after all, her type of piety is important in this world where there is so much need for service and ministry. Beautiful as the Mary spirit is, it would not do if all were Marys, for who then would do the work of serving that needs so much to be done? A wife and mother, for instance, who would spend all her time in Bible reading and prayer, giving no thought to her household duties—would not make a very happy home. The picture of Mary is also familiar. We see her three times in the Gospels, and each time she is in the same posture—at Jesus' feet. When we have our first glimpse within the Bethany home, we find Martha in her characteristic attitude—serving; and Mary we see sitting at the Master's feet, eagerly listening to His words. Our next view of Mary, is when Jesus came back to Bethany after the death of Lazarus, and the sisters came out to meet Him. Again, she is at the feet of Christ, this time in

deep sorrow, seeking comfort. And here again we find her at the Master's feet, and now it is in an act of honor and an expression of love and gratitude to Him.

We think of Mary, therefore, as a woman who was always at Christ's feet. In the bright, happy days, she sat there as a learner. When grief was in the house and Jesus came, she went to His feet for comfort. Then when the trouble was over, we find her again in her familiar place, honoring Him with her heart's richest and best gifts. There is no fitter place for the redeemed life—than at the Master's feet!

Mary came in during the feast and anointed Jesus. We must distinguish this anointing from another by a woman who was a sinner. That anointing was an expression of penitence; this was an outburst of grateful love. Mary brought the best she had, the richest gift in all her possession. Her ointment was very costly. We should bring our best to Christ. No ointment in the world is half so precious to Him—as the love of a human heart; we should bring Him our best love, giving Him the first place in our affection. We should give Him the best of our life, the best of our time, and the best of our service.

It seems a sad pity that any occasion so sacred as this, should be marred by human littleness and baseness. The disciples had indignation. "Why this waste?" they asked. John tells us that Judas led in the criticism, and when we know this—we are not surprised. Judas thought it was waste when the ointment was poured out on the feet and head of Jesus. There still are many people who think everything wasted, which is not coined into dollars, or that does not show in direct practical usefulness. But the truth is, that much of the richest and sweetest blessing scattered in this world, is the fragrance from the breaking of alabaster boxes. It is well to give food and clothing to the poor—but sometimes love and sympathy are better. But the truth is, the fragrance of love always carries a blessing wherever it reaches. Besides, Christ looks into the heart and is pleased with love there, whether the expression of the emotion takes the form of garments for the poor—or flowers for the sick room.

It is beautiful to read how promptly Jesus came to Mary's relief when she was blamed. "Why are you bothering this woman?" He asked. It was a shame for big, strong men like the apostles—to pounce with such ill manners and cowardly rudeness—on a timid young girl like Mary. They ought to have been gallant enough to encourage and praise her deed of love.

"She has done a beautiful thing to Me!" said Jesus. This was what gave her act distinction and honor—it was wrought for the Master.

Anything done for Christ is lifted up to honor. It is this that makes all lowly Christian service beautiful—it is something done for Jesus. Judas had said the money ought to have been given to the poor. But Jesus said they could always do good to the poor—but they could not show kindness to Him much longer.

Then Jesus said further that this ointment had been poured on His body to prepare Him for burial. Mary probably did not know He was so near death—but Jesus knew it and accepted the honor as for His funeral. We do not know half the real meaning of our lowliest deeds of love! In Mark's Gospel (Mark 14:3-9) we read that Jesus said: "She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial."

Many people would have kept that box sealed up, to anoint His cold and dead body. When a man dies, there is never any lack of kind words about him, nor of flowers for his coffin. This is all well in its place—but Mary's way is better. Let us not wait until our friends are gone, before we show our love for them—but rather, let us bring our ointment while they are alive to enjoy its fragrance. Fill the lives of your friends with sweetness; speak approving, cheering words—while their ears can hear them and while their hearts can be blessed by them. The flowers you mean to send for their coffins—send to brighten and sweeten their homes before they leave them! Let us learn the lesson today—to anoint our friends beforehand for their burying. The Last Supper Matthew 26:17-30

Jesus left the temple for the last time on Tuesday evening, and spent Wednesday in retirement. He gave instructions to two of His disciples on Thursday morning, concerning preparations for the Passover. "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house." The man was to be known by a certain sign—he would be carrying a pitcher of water (see Mark 14:13; Luke 22:10). As women carried the burdens in those days, the sight of a man carrying water was uncommon. Hence the identification would be easy. Evidently secrecy was intended in the choosing of the place for the Passover. It is thought that the reason for this secrecy was to keep from Judas the knowledge of the place, as he was watching for an opportunity to betray Jesus. The Master is always coming to people and saying, "I am going to celebrate the Passover at your house." He wants to be a guest in every family. Blessed is the home that opens to Him and gives Him its upper room as His guest chamber.

It was a sad announcement that Jesus made to the disciples that night when they had gathered about the table. "Truly I say unto you—that one of you shall betray Me." Judas himself was at the table, and possibly one reason why Jesus made this announcement was to give him an opportunity to repent even at he last moment. It is remarkable that not one of the disciples seem to have suspected anyone as the traitor to whom Jesus had referred. They did not begin to say: "I wonder which of us it is? Do you think it can be Andrew? Do you suppose it can be Peter?" Instead of suspicion, each one shuddered at the possibility that he himself might, after all, be the one. "Is it I, Lord?" they all began to say. "Surely not I, Lord!" is the more accurate rendering. We should examine ourselves rather than look at others for sins we find condemned.

It is very much easier to see faults in our neighbors than in ourselves; and to think others capable of doing evil things, rather than suppose it possible that we should do them. But our business is with ourselves alone. We do not have to answer for the sins of our neighbors. Then it is not enough to ask merely whether we have done such and such things; we should ask also whether we are in danger of committing them. "Let him that thinks he stands—take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). We do not know the dark possibilities of evil which lurk in our hearts. We dare not say, when we learn of someone who has fallen into terrible sin, that it would have been impossible for us to have done the same thing. What any man has done—any man may do! The answer of Jesus, "He who dips his hand with Me in the dish, the same shall betray Me," was not meant to point out any individual as the traitor. He merely meant to indicate the greatness of the crime—that one of those who had eaten at His table, and enjoyed the familiarity of closest friendship—and they all had—was now to betray Him. In the East, those who ate together, by that very act pledged to each other loyal friendship and protection. This made the crime of Judas all the darker and blacker.

What Jesus said about the traitor is very suggestive. He said, "The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." It is a great privilege to live. It is a great thing to be able to stay in this world for a certain number of years and leave our impress upon other lives. It is a great thing to sow seeds which may bring multiplied harvests of blessing in the future. But there are those who live, who perhaps, it may have been better had they never been born. Judas had a magnificent opportunity. He was chosen to be an apostle. He would not have been thus chosen if it had not been possible for him to be a faithful and worthy apostle. He might have gone forth to help bring the world to Christ's feet, and his name might then have been written in heaven. Now, however, the face of Judas is turned to the wall and the place is blank which might have been filled with a story of noble deeds. He wrecked all the possibilities of his life by rejecting the Divine will. He left only a black shadow and then passed to his own place in the eternal world. It would indeed have been better for him—if he had not been born! The story of the Lord's Supper is told very briefly in Matthew. We may notice, however, that Jesus sets aside the ancient Passover and substitutes in its place for Christian observance, this memorial supper. "Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it; and gave it to the disciples." Bread is a fit emblem of Christ's body. By it our bodies are nourished and strengthened. Christ is food to our spiritual life. Unless we feed upon Him—we must perish. The giving of the bread to the disciples signified the offer to each one, by Christ Himself, of all the benefits and blessings of His love and sacrifice. Thus Christ ever stands with outstretched hands holding out to every human soul all the precious things of His salvation. The use of the words, "This is My body," "This is My blood," ought not to occasion any difficulty. Jesus often spoke in a similar way. When he said, "I am the door," no one supposed that He meant He was literally changed into a door, or when He said, "I am the vine," no one ever thought that He meant to say He had become an actual vine. Here it is just as plain that He spoke figuratively, meaning that the bread was an emblem of His body.

We should notice also that the disciples themselves had a part in this supper. Jesus offered Himself to them as bread—but they must voluntarily accept His gift. "Take, eat; this is My body." It is not enough that God loved the world and gave His Son for its redemption. It is not enough that Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice for men. These stupendous acts of love and grace alone will not save anyone. We have a responsibility in the matter. We must reach out our hands and take what is graciously offered to us. Bread must be eaten before it can become sustenance, so Christ, as the bread of life, must be received into our lives before it can become the food of our souls. Much of the failure of Christian life is at this very point—we do not take what Christ offers and even presses upon us. We pray for blessing, while all the time the blessing is close beside us, waiting only to be received and appropriated.

After giving them bread, Jesus took a cup from the table and gave it to them, too. "He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you." A little later that same evening Jesus Himself too a cup from the hands of the Father and drank it to its bitter dregs. Into that cup there had been poured, as it were, all the world's sorrow. Yet full as it was of the very gall and bitterness of human guilt, He pressed it to His lips and drank it, saying, "The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" This cup, however, which Jesus handed to His disciples, was a cup of blessing. Into it He Himself poured, as it were, the concentration of all heaven's joy and glory. Again, however, we must notice the words, "Drink from it, all of you." It is not enough

that the cup shall be prepared and then offered to us. Unless we accept the blessing of Christ's atonement, we shall not be helped.

Jesus said that this cup represented the covenant. "This is My blood of the New Testament (new covenant), which is poured out for many for the remission of sins." In ancient times covenants were sealed by the blood of animals. The covenant of redemption was sealed by Christ's own blood. Christ's dying was not an accident—it was part of the great purpose of His life, that for which, above all else, he came into the world. We are saved, not merely by being helped over the hard places, not merely by being taught how to live, not only by having a perfect example set before us—but by having our sins remitted. No one can be saved until he is forgiven, and no man's sin is put away except through the blood of Christ.

Jesus announced to the disciples that this was the last time He would eat with them at an earthly table. "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." In telling them this, He gave them great comfort in the assurance that He would sit down with them again, by and by, in the heavenly kingdom. The earthly supper was only a symbol; the heavenly would be a glorious reality.

Jesus left the upper room with a song on His lips. "When they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives." He knew where He was going—and to what. Just before Him was Gethsemane, with its agony. Beyond this experience would come His trial, and next day His death. Yet He went to these terrible experiences, with a song of praise.

Peter's Denial Matthew 26:31-35; Matthew 26:69-75 As Jesus walked with his disciples from the upper room on the way to Gethsemane, He warned them of the peril into which they were about to enter. "This very night you will all fall away on account of of Me." Their trial would be very great. He quoted from an Old Testament prophet a word which described the situation as it was about to be: "I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad" (see Zechariah 13:7). He knew what was coming. He would be smitten. He was the Shepherd and had kept His sheep in safe protection thus far. Now He was to be smitten—and they would be exposed to the power of their enemies and His.

Yet even in the shadows of the gathering night, He saw the breaking of the morning. "But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee." He was to be killed—but He would be raised again from the dead. He was not to be finally torn away from them. Death would not be defeat to Him. He was to lie in the grave—but He would come again and lead them once more, away beyond the grave. Hope never failed in the heart of Christ. He was never discouraged.

Peter was always the first of the disciples to speak. The most holy occasion could not awe nor quiet him. He had heard the Master's warning—but he resented it. There was no need to fear for him, whatever others might do. "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." His self-confidence was very strong. It was not possible, he said, for him to be untrue to his Lord. It was Peter's rash boldness that made him weak. Jesus repeated His warning, making it personal. "Truly I say unto you, that this night, before the rooster crows, you shall deny Me three times." Still Peter resented the warning. "Peter said unto Him: Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." We would say that such solemn words spoken by the Master could never be forgotten to commit such a sin against his Master that same night. Yet the fact that Peter actually denied Him

with such positiveness, and so repeatedly, shows how terrible the temptation was—and how weak the strongest friend of Christ is in such an hour.

Gethsemane came next, with its hour of anguish. Then came the arrest, on the edge of the Garden, when Jesus was betrayed by one of His disciples and led away to the palace of the high priest. It was far on in the night. "Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard." There are several steps leading to Peter's present position in the courtyard, that we must recall in order to understand his denial. It began farther back. Earlier in the evening he disregarded, even resented, the warning that he would deny his Lord that night. That was a serious mistake. We would better listen when God speaks to us in this way. Peter was not a hypocrite. He was sincere, he loved Christ—but he was too self-confident. He lacked that distrust of self which should lead the best and holiest to know that only in Christ are they safe. Peter was weak that night—because he sought no Divine help.

Next we find him sleeping—when he ought to have been watching. That hour in the Garden was given in order that the disciples might be prepared for temptation. Peter did not improve it and was found unready. He failed in love's duty to the Master. Next was his rashness in drawing his sword. This act made him liable to arrest and led him to try to hide his identity and his connection with Christ, lest he might be seized by the officers. Again we find him following Jesus "afar off." This showed timidity and failing faith. His courage was slipping. Following at a distance is always perilous. It shows a weakening love and a trembling loyalty. It is in itself a partial denial. The only really safe place—is close up to Christ.

Another fatal step was taken by Peter when he went in and sat down among the servants in the court. He was in bad company. He had seated himself among Christ's enemies. His object was to conceal his discipleship. He wanted to be thought one of their company when he sat down among mockers and revilers. He hoped thus to escape detection. Thus he acted denial before he spoke it. Had he been altogether loyal and faithful, he would have kept out of such company and as near his Master as possible. The only true and safe thing to do when among Christ's enemies, is to take one's right place quietly and firmly at the beginning. Starting wrong puts one in a false position, in which it is almost impossible to be faithful afterward. Peter was in a bad place for a disciple when "sitting out in the courtyard." He was ready to fall. We must guard against taking the steps that lead to denial of Christ.

Peter's denial was not premeditated, as was the betrayal by Judas. He was caught in the entanglement of circumstances. His first denial was partly owing to the suddenness of the assault and his previous false steps. He was not false at heart—but loved his Master even when denying Him. We must remember that when all the other disciples forsook Jesus, Peter was the only one, save John, who followed Him when in the hands of His enemies. True, he followed Him afar off, timidly—yet he followed. We must keep in mind his character also—impulsive, impetuous, always doing rash things—yet withal bold and loyal. These considerations palliate though they do not excuse Peter's denial. After all, this is one of the saddest chapters in the Bible. This favored disciple, at the twitting of a slave girl, denies his Lord; and then goes on denying Him, with increasing earnestness and with oaths and curses.

There are several things that made Peter's denial peculiarly sad and sinful. One was that he had received so many marks of special favor from his Master. He was not a disciple only—but an

apostle. He was one of the three who had been chosen as the Master's particular friends. He has been honored, too, by the Lord on several occasions, even that very night in the Garden when he was chosen to be with Him. He had made the boldest confession of Christ and had also loudly professed his allegiance.

Another aggravation of Peter's denial—was that he had been so earnestly forewarned. Even that night he had been told that he would deny Christ—and he had utterly disregarded the Lord's words, declaring that he could not possibly do such a thing. No railroad engineer runs past a red light. Forewarning makes sin, worse because it leaves it inexcusable.

Another thing that made the sin worse—was that it was in the Lord's hour of sorest need that Peter had denied Him. If it had been on the Transfiguration Mount, or during the triumphal entry, it would not have been one-hundredth part so bad. But it was when Jesus was deserted and in the hands of the enemies. Was that a time for the bravest disciple, the most highly favored friend, the noblest confessor, to turn his back upon his Lord? When the shadow falls on your friend, when the tide turns against him, when others have forsaken him—is that the time for you, his long-time bosom companion, and the recipient of his favors, to turn coward and leave him alone? How much Peter might have comforted Jesus in His trial! Instead, however, the only words the Master heard from His friend's lips, as he stood amid enemies and revilers, were words of denial, which cut like sword-thrusts into His heart. A simple lie becomes a lie sworn to, and then a lie sworn to with imprecations and curses. Simple denial is bad enough—but this apostle even went so far as to invoke curses upon himself if he were a disciple, if he even knew the man, and to utter oaths to emphasize his denial. How this aggravated his sin! But how could an apostle who had been with Jesus so long, hearing and using only pure speech, curse and wear in this way? The answer is that it must have been an old habit with Simon the fisherman, which now cropped out in the excitement. This is a way old evil habits have. It is impossible to root them out—so that they will never give trouble again. They are like weeds; you may dig them out and think there is not a root left in the ground, and for a while none may be seen; but someday they will reappear. Bad habits of any kind formed in early life always leave weak points in the character. It is very easy to fall again in sudden temptation where one has fallen before. It is always easy to take old paths on which the feet were once accustomed to go. One who drank alcohol in is youth, though he becomes a total abstainer and is true for years—is never as safe at that point, as one who never acquired the habit. It is so with lying, swearing, obscenity, dishonesty and all vices. At last Peter came to himself. "Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him… And he went out, and wept bitterly." The rooster crowed, and then Jesus turned and looked upon Peter (Luke 22:61), who, glancing up at that moment, caught his Lord's eye. The cock-crow and the Master's look, aroused him to a sense of what he had done. An incident, a remembering, a look, were the means by which the sinning apostle was brought to repentance. We can think of that look. Jesus was in the hands of mocking enemies, and while they were scoffing and beating Him, there fell on His ear the voice of His favored disciple, denying Him with curses and imprecations. Surely this was the bitterest drop in the bitter cup of that terrible night. What pain and sorrow there were in the look that fell upon Peter! But, thank God, the look broke his heart and saved him. He went out into the night—but not like Judas, to despair. He went out into the night—but the angel of mercy went with him and pointed him to hope. He wept bitterly—but the memory of that look—grieved, chiding—yet full of love—told him that he had not yet lost his place in the Master's heart. He

repented of his sin and was saved to become one of the noblest of our Lord’s apostles. So we may thank God for this sad story, because it shows us such a door of hope when we have sinned.

Jesus inGethsemane Matthew 26:36-56

There was something strangely significant even in the name of the place where Jesus endured His midnight agony. Gethsemane means oil press. It was the place where oil was crushed out of the olives. Olive oil was very valuable. It was used chiefly for food and for lighting. The sufferings of Christ have yielded the highest blessings to the world—food for men’s souls, and light to shine in darkness.

We cannot begin to understand the anguish of Christ that night. He said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." We should take off our shoes as we stand by the edge of the scene. Some of the elements of His suffering, however, may be suggested. Before Him lay the betrayal, the arrest, the trial, and then death on the cross. By his pre-vision, He saw all these cruelties and tortures. Another element of His suffering lay in the falseness of the human hearts about Him. There were the traitorous kiss of Judas, the denial of Peter, the desertion by the other disciples, the rejection and crucifixion by the people He had come to save. All this, He saw from Gethsemane. But that which made the essence of the anguish that night—was that He died for sin. "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). What that meant—we never can know. He was dying, the just for the unjust. He bore our sin in His own body on the tree. We may not try to fathom the mystery—but the fact we should never allow to be forgotten. The humanness of Jesus also appears in the Garden. He craved the sympathy of His friends in His suffering. While they could not lessen the anguish nor bear any part of it for Him; feeling with Him, would make Him stronger to endure. There is a picture which shows two women seated side by side. One is in deep sorrow. Some great grief has fallen upon her heart and crushed it. Her face tells of deepest affliction. The other woman has come in from without. She is sitting beside the sufferer, in silence, holding her hand, while her face expresses deep sympathy. The near presence of one we love when we are in any trial, makes us stronger to endure. This suggests one way in which we may do good. True sympathy with those in trouble, is often the best service we can render them. No longer does Jesus Himself need that we should watch with Him—but in his little ones, He is ever saying to us, "Tarry here, and watch with Me." While Jesus wanted His friends near to Him—yet they could not share the actual experience of that hour. "He went a little further, and fell on His face, and prayed." We, too, must meet all our deepest experiences alone. Even our most tender human friends, we must leave back a little way. In sorrow, others may hold our hands and we may lean upon their strong arm for support; but that is all—the sorrow itself we must endure without companionship. No one can take our pain and bear it or our sorrow and endure it. The prayer which Jesus offered in the Garden was very intense, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me." Without attempting to fathom the mystery of His experience as He prayed this prayer, we get some suggestions from it for ourselves. For one thing, in all our troubles—we should seek refuge in prayer. There is no other place to go. "Being in agony—He prayed" (see Luke 22:44). He let His heart-cries go out in pleadings and supplications. Whatever our trial may be, it is a comfort to know that we may take it to God in prayer.

Another lesson is that however earnest we may be in our pleading, we must always submit our requests to the will of God. "Nevertheless, not as I will—but as You will." How can we know what is

best? Even Jesus in His anguish would not trust His own judgment—but said, "If it is possible—as You will." Our prayers should always be modeled on our Master's. Anything but God's will—would be a mistake. It may be that the sorrow from which we implore God to save us—is bringing blessings we could not afford to miss. So we can only safely leave all to Him.

It was a bitter disappointment to our Savior when, after His first great struggle, He returned to the disciples and found them asleep. He had longed for their sympathy. He felt that if they were waking and watching—He would be stronger to endure the anguish. He came back seeking refreshment and renewal of strength from their sympathy. Instead of watching, however, the disciples were sleeping! We may not chide them, however. How is it with ourselves? Jesus is ever setting us to watch with Him and for Him. Does He always find us awake when He comes? Is He never disappointed in us? Do we never lose interest in His service?

He showed the pain of His disappointment in the way He spoke to the disciples. "What, could you not watch with Me for one hour?" It was to Peter He said this especially, because Peter was the one who had boasted but a little while before, that whatever others might do—he would be loyal. The time they were expected to watch, was short—only "one hour." It is very sad that the help Jesus craved that night from His own disciples, they failed to give Him. He is calling us to watch with Him. Even in His Divine glory, He still craves human affection, trust and faithfulness. We still may grieve His heart, by lack of fidelity. We have constant opportunity of watching with Christ. There always are those that need our sympathy, our cheer, our encouragement, and our help. The disciples that night lost an opportunity of lightening their Master's load in His darkest hour. Let us not fail Christ in loyalty, in affection, in service.

Even in the midst of His own aguish He thought of His disciples in their danger—and sought their safety. "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation." It is not enough to pray, that you "enter not into temptation." It is not enough to pray without watching. An army in the enemy's country never rests a moment without its encircling line of pickets, keeping watch at every point against danger, and reporting instantly every indication of a hostile movement. We are living in the enemy's country, and we dare not pass an hour without watching. But watching is not enough, for we are not able to guard ourselves in danger. Hence we need also to pray continually, asking God to protect us. God means for us to keep our wits about us as we pray, as well as call to Him for help. "Watch and pray!" When Jesus prayed the second time, the form of His pleading was modified. "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it—may your will be done." While the prayer was not answered directly, the Suppliant was growing stronger, and His will was coming more and more into acquiescence with the Father's will. This is often the way our prayers are answered. The things we ask for are not given to us—but we are strengthened so as to accept the pain and endure it.

Very sad was the word which Jesus spoke when He returned to His disciples the last time, "Are you still sleeping and resting?" Their opportunity for watching with Him was now gone. He did not need them anymore, because the struggle was over. Waking now would do no good, and they might as well sleep on. There is a time for each duty—and the time soon passes. The time to show sympathy with a suffering friend or neighbor—is while the suffering is being endured. There is no use in our coming next day—when the need is past. The time to watch against a danger—is when the danger is impending; there is no use to wake up—when its work is done. Watching then will

not undo the evil. We may almost as well then sleep on, and take our rest. The betrayal of Jesus is graphically described in Matthew’s gospel. It was "one of the twelve" who did it. This makes it terribly sad. It was a strange place to see a disciple—one who had lived with Jesus in such close relations, eating with Him, enjoying all the confidences of His friendship—acting now as guide to those who came to arrest his Master. The kiss, which was the honored token of affection and the sacred seal of friendship, became in this case the token of disloyalty and the sign of treason! The last word Jesus spoke to Judas shows love, ready even then to accept the traitorous disciple. "Friend, do what you came for."

There was a bewildered attempt by the disciples to defend their Lord against those who had laid hands upon Him. But they did not know what they were doing. They were loyal and devoted—but powerless in their fright and confusion. Quickly Jesus bade them put away their swords. He was not dependent on human force. He could by a word have had legions of angels sent to His defense. But that was not God’s way. His hour had come.

"Then all the disciples forsook Him, and fled." Shall we call them cowards and chide them with abandoning their Lord? Yes—but their Lord was infinitely patient with them. The Trial of Jesus Matthew 26:57-68

We speak of the trial of Jesus—but really it was not a trial. There was no intention of giving Him a fair and just hearing. The Sanhedrin had firmly made up its mind to condemn Jesus, and they went through the form of a trial, not to discover the truth about Him—but to endeavor to get some pretext for what they had determined to do. When we think who Jesus was, looking at Him in the light of our belief in Him as the Son of God, the scenes of His trial reveal His enemies in strange character indeed. Think of men arresting the Son of God, binding His hands, and putting Him on trial in their courts!

Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, just after the close of His anguish there. The effect of His arrest on the disciples, was to cause them to scatter and leave Him. While they all fled, John seems to have returned very soon, and we think of him as following close behind his Master on the way to the palace of the high priest. Peter also followed—but "afar off." This was the beginning of his denial. The rulers had no difficulty in getting men to testify against Jesus. There always are men who can be bribed to do anything. "The chief priests and elders and the council sought false witness against Jesus," that they might put Him to death. Their intention was not to bring out the truth about Him—but to get such testimony as would seem to justify their determination to kill Him! It was false witness they sought—no other kind of witness against Him could be found, for there were none. In all the land there was not a man, woman or child—who could truthfully say a word against Jesus. His was the one life in all the world’s history—in which there was no flaw, no blemish. No wonder the question was asked by Pilate, when the Jews clamored for the condemnation of Jesus, "Why, what evil has He done?" The rulers could have found thousands of witnesses to tell of the good things He had done—but they could not find even one to testify of any evil against Him. Hence they deliberately sought false witness. But even this testimony was not of any use, for one witness swept away what another had said. They found it not, "though many false witnesses came." There are many in these days, too, who are willing and eager to witness against the Bible and against Christianity—but there is no agreement among them. One man, for example, goes about with his hammer, breaking off bits of rock and studying

ancient fossils, saying that his deductions demolish the statements of the Bible. But another man, also hostile to Christianity, follows, with his little hammer, and reports others deductions which sweep away the theories and conclusions of the first. So it is with all opposition to Christianity. One witness antagonized another. Amid enmities and assaults, the New Testament stands really unassailable, an impregnable rock, and Christ Himself abides the same yesterday, and today, yes, and forever. At length, however, two men were found who seemed to agree in their testimony, saying the same thing. Probably they had been drilled and taught just what to say. "At the last came two false witnesses, and said… This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days." Really, Jesus never said this. What He did say was, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," referring to the temple of His body. The Jews taught that any word spoken against the temple, was blasphemy. Jesus had not said, however, that He would destroy the temple—but that if they destroyed it—meaning His body—He would restore it, foretelling His own resurrection. The witnesses perverted His words, however, so as to give the impression that Jesus had actually spoken blasphemy against the temple. There always are those who insist upon garbling and misrepresenting what Jesus said—in order to bolster up their own peculiar opinions.

"But Jesus remained silent" before all that the false witnesses said. There was no reason why He should speak, for there were no charges to answer. His calmness angered the high priest, and he stood up and fiercely demanded, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" Still He answered nothing. There is a time to keep silence. When others say false or bitter things of us or to us—it is usually better not to answer back. Answering does no good—when enemies are in such mood. It only irritates them the more—it does not convince them or soften their hearts.

There is something very majestic in our Lord’s silence at this time. There He stood, pale and suffering—yet meek, patient, undisturbed, showing no bitterness, no resentment, and no anxiety concerning the outcome of His trial. "Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). The lesson is for us, and we should not fail to get it—when we are wronged or hurt, when others say false things of us—or bitter things to us—we should keep love in our hearts, and say no unloving word and cherish no unloving thought, committing all the wrong, all the injustice—into the hands of our Father, who judges righteously. But as there is a time to keep silence, there is also a time to speak. Despairing of getting any real ground of charge from the false witnesses, the high priest determined to make Jesus convict Himself. He demanded of Him whether He were indeed the Christ. "I adjure You by the living God—tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." Instantly the silence was broken. Not to have spoken now—would have been to deny His own Messiahship. To answer would cost Him His life—but He paused not a moment to think of the cost. There come times in everyone’s experience, when silence would be disloyalty to Christ. We should have courage then to speak the truth, regardless of consequences. Not only did Jesus answer the high priest’s question—but He went farther and gave him and his fellow-judges a glimpse of the glory of His power. "Yes, it is as you say! But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." Recall this scene before the council—the pale, meek One, standing there as a prisoner, bound, mocked, spit upon, smitten. Then go forward and think of the other scene which His own

words bring up, when this same Holy One shall sit on the throne of His glory, wearing the crown of universal power, and when the priests, scribes and elders of that ancient court shall stand before Him, and recognize Him as the very prisoner of whom they looked with such contempt that night of His trial. Who can conceive of the shame, the remorse, the anguish, of that moment? The rulers supposed that Jesus was on trial before them; but really, they were on trial before Him!

There are many who are now, treating Christ with contempt, rejecting His mercy, despising His love, refusing to believe His words. There are those who flippantly deny the deity of Christ and laugh at the claims made by His followers for Him. These, too, will be compelled to see Him when He comes in glory to judge the earth. "Every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him" (Revelation 1:17). How are we treating Jesus Christ? Are we looking on Him in love, believing on Him as our personal Savior, following Him as our Master, cleaving to Him as our Friend? Or are we spurning Him from our doors, insulting Him, mocking Him? We must read ourselves and our own relation to Christ into the scene before us. The last item in the passage, is the formal vote of the Sanhedrin on the question of Christ's guilt. When Jesus had answered, the high priest rent his garments, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard his blasphemy. What do you think?" Instantly came the answer, "He is guilty (or worthy) of death." Thus the vote of the court condemned Jesus as a blasphemer, condemned Him to death because He claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God. This was the signal for the beginning of mocking and insult. They spit on His face and buffeted Him. They blindfolded Him and smote Him and bade Him prophesy who it was that struck Him. The Crucifixion Matthew 27:33-50 The story of the crucifixion has the most sacred and tender interest for everyone who loves Jesus Christ. It is not merely an account of the tragic death of a good man—He who was crucified was the world's Redeemer, our Redeemer, suffering for us! Some of the old preachers used to say that our sins drove the nails in the hands and feet of Jesus. He died for us. Paul speaks also of being crucified with Christ (see Galatians 2:20). He means that Christ's death was instead of his death. No other death in all history, means to the world what the dying of Jesus means.

They led Jesus out of Golgotha. There He was met by those who offered Him "vinegar to drink mingled with gall." It is supposed that the act was one of kindness, that the mixture was intended to stupefy Him so as to deaden in some measure, the awful suffering of crucifixion. But Jesus refused the drink. He would not have His senses dulled, as He entered upon His great work of death for the world, nor would He have His sufferings as Redeemer lessened in any degree. The garments of men who were crucified were by custom the perquisites of the soldiers in charge of the crucifixion. They "divided His garments, casting lots." We love to think of the garments which Jesus had worn. Perhaps they had been made by His mother's hands—or else by the hands of some of the other women who followed Him and ministered unto Him of their substance. They were the garments the sick woman and other sufferers had touched with reverent faith, receiving instant healing. What desecration it seems when these heartless Roman soldiers take these garments and divide them among themselves! Then what sacrilege it is when the soldiers throw dice and gamble for His seamless robe—under the very cross where the Savior is dying!

"They sat and watched Him there." Roman soldiers kept guard—but they were not the only watchers. There was the careless, heartless watch of the soldiers. They knew nothing about Jesus. They saw three poor Jews on three crosses, and had no conception of the character of Him

who hung on the middle cross. It is possible yet—to always to look at Christ on the cross—and see nothing more than these soldiers saw. We all need to pray to have our eyes opened when we look at Christ crucified, that we may see in the lowly sufferer—the Son of God, bearing the sin of the world.

There were also jealous watchers, the enemies of Jesus, so full of hatred that they even hurled scoffs at Him who hung in silences upon that central cross.

Then there were loving watchers—the women and John, Christ's friends, with hearts broken as they looked at their Lord dying in shame and anguish.

Then there were wondering watchers—angels, who hovered unseen above the cross and looked in amazement upon the suffering Son of God, eagerly desiring to know what this mystery meant.

All the words that Jesus spoke on the cross were full of meaning. One, the very first, was a prayer for His murderers, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). The words seem to have come from His lips—just as the nails were being driven through His hands and feet. The torture was excruciating—but there was no cry of pain, no execration of those who were causing Him such bitter anguish; only an intercession. The answer to the world's daring defiance of God—was the hands of Christ stretched out to be pierced with nails for the world's redemption!

It was the custom to fasten on the cross, a board bearing the name and crimes of the sufferer. "They set up over His head his accusation written, this Is Jesus the King of the Jews." It was only in mockery that Pilate wrote this superscription. He did it to vex the Jews. Yet never were truer words written. Jesus was indeed the King of the Jews. They had looked forward to the coming of their Messiah with expectations of great blessings from Him. "He came unto His own—and His own received Him not" (John 1:11). This was the way they were treating their King. But He is our King, too. The crown He wore that day—was a crown of thorns. Thorns were part of the curse of sin, and the crown of Jesus—was woven of sin's curse. We have the promise of crowns of glory in heaven, because on Christ's brow rested that day the crown of shame.

"He saved others; He cannot save Himself." Unwittingly in their mockery they spoke a deep truth. Jesus had saved others, and even now He was saving others in the most wonderful way of all—by dying for them. He could have saved Himself, however, from the cross—if He had desired. His offering was voluntary. He said, "I lay down my life for My sheep. No man takes away from Me" (John 10:15-18). He said He could have summoned twelve legions of angels to deliver Him. He could have saved Himself—but then He would not have saved others. The soldier cannot save himself—and save his country. Jesus could not save Himself—and redeem His sheep. So He gave His own life a willing sacrifice to redeem lost men.

It was a strange scene that came on at noonday. "From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land." A yet deeper darkness hung around the Redeemer's soul those hours. It was so dark—that He even thought Himself forsaken of God. We never can understand the mystery of it, and we can know only that He wrapped the gloom of death about Himself that we might be clothed in garments of light. He died in darkness—that when we walk in the valley of the shadow of death, that the light of glory may shine about us. His head wore a matted crown of thorns—that under our heads may be the pillow of peace. He drank the cup of woe—that we may drink the cup of blessing.

"Jesus when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the Spirit." His loud cry, "It is finished!" which John records (John 19:30), was a shout of victory. His work was completed. The atonement was made. Then followed the word, given by Luke, "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23:46). The shadows were lifted. There was no longer any feeling of forsakenness. Again we hear the sweet name, "Father," showing that the joy had been restored. We see also in this word, that death was to Jesus—only the breathing out of His spirit into His Father's hands. We cannot see into the life beyond—but revelation assures us of the Divine presence close beside us. Dying is but fleeing from the body—into the arms of the Father. All this is ours because Jesus tasted death for us. Because He had the darkness—we have the light. The Resurrection

Matthew 28:1-20

We think of death ordinarily as the end of a man's life. He can do no more work in this world. Only his influence remains. But it was not the end of the life of Jesus Christ. He came again from the grave after a brief rest—and took up once more His work of redemption. The women watched beside the grave after the burial of the body there, until they were compelled to hasten into the city before the gates would be shut upon them. Meanwhile they were in deep grief. The Sabbath was a sad and dark day for them. They were eager to get back to the grave to honor their Lord's dead body. So at the very dawn, after the Sabbath, as soon as the gates would be opened, they left their home and hastened away to His grave, carrying spices and ointments to anoint His dead body. No one saw the resurrection. We are told something, however, of what took place. "There was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it." The rulers thought they had the sepulcher well-secured. The stone had been sealed with Pilate's seal, so that to meddle with it would be a high crime. Besides, they had procured a guard of Roman soldiers to watch by the grave. They seem to have expected thus to keep Jesus from rising. When they asked for the guard, they gave this as the reason, "He said: After three days I will rise again" (Matthew 27:63). They pretended to suspect that the disciples would try to carry away the body by night, to give the impression that their Master has risen. But we see how useless were all their precautions. There was no power in the universe that could keep the body of Jesus in that rock-prison. The effect of the resurrection and its attendant circumstances upon the Roman soldiers who kept watch, was startling. "There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men." The soldiers were hardened to all sorts of danger. They never recoiled in the presence of any enemy. But when an angel of God stood before them, with shining face and shining garments—they were in great terror. But the angel who caused such dread in the Roman soldiers, spoke with all gentleness to the women who stood before the grave in great sorrow. "The angel said to the women: Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay." This was the first announcement of the Resurrection. It was made by an angel to the Lord's women friends. They had ample proofs of the fact thereafter. No event in all history is more incontestably sure, than that Jesus arose from the dead. Nor can the importance of the fact be overestimated. Everything depends upon Christ's Resurrection. All the hopes of redemption waited outside that sealed sepulcher. Jesus had said

that He would rise; His Messiahship therefore depended from confirmation on His rising. He had made promises to His disciples that He would come again from death and live forever. Indeed, His kingdom depended altogether upon His rising. If He had remained under the power of death, no soul that trusted in Him could have been saved. For a Savior vanquished and held as a prisoner—could not be deliverer of others. A Savior locked in a grave—could not appear before God to intercede for men, could not walk with His people in their trials and sorrows, could not lead the dying safely through the valley which He had not Himself been able to pass through victoriously, could not bring believers from death's prison from which He had not Himself been able to come.

These are hints of what depended upon Christ's rising from the dead. Thus we see something of the tremendous importance of the fact which was announced by the angel to the women that early morning. "He is not here; he has risen, just as he said!" We have a living Christ, therefore, for our Savior. He was victorious over all enemies—then, over death, the last enemy. Therefore, He is able to deliver us from all our enemies—and from death's power at the last. He stands before God for us, and also walks with us on the earth in all our experiences, a living Friend, to love, to help, to comfort, to deliver, to keep, all who have committed themselves to Him in trusting faith. The angel sent the women on an errand the disciples to bear to them the glorious news. "Go quickly, and tell His disciples." They obeyed promptly and with joy. "They departed quickly." On their way Jesus Himself appeared to them. "Jesus met them, saying, Greetings!" Notice that it was as they were hastening in the path of obedience, that they met their Lord. It is always and only in the way of duty that we ever meet Christ, and find blessing and joy. Had the women loitered by the grave instead of hastening away as they were bidden, Jesus would not have appeared to them. It is only in the way of obedience, in the service of love, that Jesus meets us. There are Christian mourners who never go away from the grave where they have buried their loved ones. They hear the words of hope which the gospel brings—but sit still in their grief, and no comfort reaches their sad hearts. Jesus does not meet them. If they would rise and hasten on errands of love to the living, the Divine comfort would come to them. They would meet Jesus Himself in the way, and receive His Greetings!" Grief is often selfish. It forgets the living—in its sorrow for the dead. To such mourners, true comfort never comes. Rise up and go on errands of service—and Jesus will meet you. The women worshiped their Master, rejoicing that they had Him back again from the grave. He then Himself sent them on an errand to the disciples. "Go tell My brethren to go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me." Whenever Jesus makes an appointment with His friends, He will keep it, He will be present, and will have blessings to bestow upon those who meet Him there. Suppose that some of our Lord's disciples had stayed away from the appointed meeting in Galilee, not quite believing his promise, or having other things to do instead—what would they have missed? Or they might have said, "It is a long distance to the place"; or, "The mountain is steep, and I do not like to climb it"; or, "I fear it will rain or be stormy"; or, "Perhaps He will not be there at all—I cannot understand how He can indeed be risen." For any of these reasons, or for any other reason—some might have been absent that wonderful day. But they would then have missed the glorious sight of the risen Jesus, and would not have received His commission and promise. To the end of their lives they would have regretted that they had not kept their Lord's appointment that day.

Jesus makes appointments with us to meet us at times of prayer in church services, at the Holy Communion, at some holy appointed place. Sometimes we do not think these appointments very important, and are easily influenced to omit them. We never can know what we lose by these failures or neglects. Jesus always comes where He asks us to meet Him, and gives blessings there to those who have been faithful in gathering to wait for Him. We do not know what we may miss by staying away from any appointment with our Master. The risen Lord’s promise to His disciples when He sent them forth is one of great comfort. "Lo, I am with you always—even unto the end of the world!" If Jesus had given His commission without adding His promise, His disciples might well have shrunk from going forth to the work to which He assigned them. But having His promise, they could not hesitate. This assurance was not for the first disciples only; He says to us also, "I am with you always!" In what sense is Christ with us always? It is not merely as our departed human friends are with us—in the sweet memories of their lives. It is a real and personal presence. He is present with us—as He was with Mary and Martha when He came to them that day after their brother had died. He is present with each one of us, not only on the bright days but on the dark days. Let us believe in the actual presence of Christ with us, and then let us act as if we believe that He is with us. This is he secret of Christian power and Christian peace!

7. Volume 7

Volume 7

Volume 7. From the Gospel of John The spiritual volume of the Gospel according to John is supreme. It would have been easy to extend these readings indefinitely, but it seems best to limit this volume to the size of the preceding ones. The aim has been to make the chapters simple, practical and devotional.

1. Christ the Life and Light of Men

2. The Witness of John to Jesus

3. The First Miracle in Cana

4. Jesus Cleansing the Temple

5. Jesus and Nicodemus

6. Jesus at Jacob’s Well

7. The Second Miracle in Cana

8. Jesus at the Pool of Bethesda

9. Christ’s Divine Authority

10. The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes

11. Jesus, the Bread of Life

12. Jesus at the Feast of the Tabernacles

13. The Slavery of Sin

14. Healing the Man Born Blind

15. Jesus the Good Shepherd

16. The Abundant Life

17. The Raising of Lazarus

18. The Supper at Bethany

19. Jesus Entering into Jerusalem

20. Serving, Following, Sharing

21. Washing the Disciples’ Feet

22. The New Commandment

23. How Christ Comforts

24. Why Does No One See God?

25. The Way, The Truth, and the Life

26. The Comforter Promised

27. The Vine and the Branches

28. The Spirit’s Work

29. Alone, yet Not Alone

30. Jesus Prays for His Friends

31. Christ Betrayed

32. Jesus Before Pilate

33. Pilate Sentencing Jesus

34. The Crucifixion of Christ

35. It is Finished!

36. The Resurrection

37. "Peace Be Unto You!"

38. The Beloved Disciple Christ the Life and Light of Men

John 1:1-18 The first three Gospels begin on the earth; the fourth Gospel begins back in eternity. There are no sublimer words in all language than the first words in John’s prologue. They give us a glimpse of the eternal past and show us the Word existing then. In the beginning, before anything else was—He was. Genesis is the book of earthly beginnings, but this first verse of John’s gospel carries us back far beyond Genesis. We find precious comfort in human friends when we can rest in their love and know that they are indeed ours, true to us and faithful. Yet all the while, as we lean upon them, we know, too, that they are only creatures of a day. They have not lived long, and their wisdom is only inexperience, their strength only weakness. Their love is liable to change and decay; their very life is only a breath, a mere comma in the great sentence of eternity. But in the friendship of Christ we know that we are in the clasp of One who is eternal—the same yesterday and today, yes, and forever.

We are told also plainly who this divine Friend is. "The Word was God." A word reveals thoughts. We cannot know what is in our friend’s heart—until he speaks. We never could have known what God’s thoughts about us are—if He had not spoken to us. Jesus Christ is the Word, that is, the revealer to us of the mind and heart of God. The Incarnation of Christ brings Him very close to us. In His human life He is one of ourselves, our brother, with feelings, affections and sympathies like ours. But when we can add to our thought and experience of Christ’s humanity the wonderful truth that He is divine, it puts a marvelous element of strength and security into our trust. The Incarnation is God coming to us with a great heart of love, offering Himself to us. A great preacher

says, "In the last analysis Christianity is nothing more or less than a great dear Figure, standing with outstretched arms." God is love, and He is love yearning, that comes to us in the Word.

All divine revelation has been made to the world through the Word. "All things were made by him." One was showing an old watercolor picture which hung in his room. It was beautiful, but the good man said that nothing among his possessions was so precious to him as this faded bit of painting, because his mother had made it. Just so, everything in nature is made sacred and beautiful to one who loves Christ, when he remembers that his Savior made it. The sweet flowers by the wayside would be sweeter to us—if we remembered, as we looked upon them, that the hand of Christ painted them. This is Christ's world. His touch is on everything in it. Everything speaks of Him and of His love.

Christ is also the source of all life. "In Him was life." He is the one fountain of life. No one in the world, except God, can produce life. With all his skill, man cannot make the smallest living seed, or create the most infinitesimal particle of matter. Science, with all its wondrous achievements, has never been able to produce life in even the lowest form. No man can make a blade of grass, or the tiniest flower, or the lowest insect. All life comes from Christ. Our lesson turns now to the revealing of the divine Word. First, preparation. "There was a man sent from God." He came as God's messenger, to prepare the way for the divine revealing. Each one of us is likewise "sent from God." We know what John's mission was. We may not know yet what our own mission is—but God will show it to us as we go on, if we are faithful. We may be sure, however, that we are here on no haphazard errand; we are really sent on some errand, some definite mission. There is some word that we were born to speak—and if we do not speak it, the world will be poorer, some life will not know God's message and will not know what God wants it to do.

John came to tell men of the Messiah. "He came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light that all men through him might believe." Our highest duty in this world is to give honor to Christ, to show some phase of His glory. Some men in their self-conceit, think only of making a show of themselves, getting people to see them and praise them. The mission of every Christian is to bear witness of the Light, to point others to Christ, that men may believe. It was said of a great preacher, that wherever he went, people, when they saw his life, fell in love with Jesus Christ. They forgot the preacher—and thought only of the Master whom the preacher proclaimed, both in his words and in his life. John hid himself out of sight—and wanted people to see only Christ. We cannot save any soul—but we can point lost ones to Him who can save. We may bear witness of Christ in many ways. We may do it by our words, telling what He was and what He did for us; and by our life and character, showing what Christ can do for all who come to Him.

It is strange that when the Son of God came to his world, He was not received. We would say that such a glorious being would have been hailed with highest honor. But there was not welcome for Him. "He came unto his own—and his own received him not." This was one of the saddest things about Christ's mission to the world. For ages He had been waited for and watched for—but when He came He was not recognized; He was even rejected and crucified. We say, "If He came now—He would find a warm welcome." But would He? He does come now as really as He came then. He comes to save us, to be our Friend, to help us in our need, and many of us turn our backs upon Him. He stands yet knocking before many a door which does not open to Him.

There were some, however, who received Christ when He came, and to these He brought wondrous blessings. "As many as received him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God." Here we have the way of salvation made plain. We have only to accept Christ as He comes to us—and we are led into the household, among God's own children. We need not understand all about Christ, about His person or His work—there may be a great deal of unexplained mystery about Him. There cannot but be, for the Incarnation is the most profound mystery of all ages. But we do not need to understand everything—all we need to do is to accept Christ as our Savior, our Master, our Friend—and we are led by Him into the full light. Then some day we shall understand. In the experience of divine love—our joy will be so full that there shall be no question unanswered, no desire unsatisfied. The beginning of our passage tells us of the Word existing in the eternity past, the Word with God, the Word as God Himself; now we come to the revealing of the Word: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." It is not said that the Word was changed into flesh—He continued to be divine. He became flesh. It does not mean, either, that He took up His abode in a human body merely—He took upon Him the whole of human nature, body, soul and spirit. We cannot divide the activity of Christ into two sections and say, "This the divine nature did, and this His human nature did"; the human and the divine were inextricably blended into one. When we see Christ's compassion, His thoughtfulness, His mercy, His kindness, His gentleness, these are divine qualities, revealed in human ways, through human life. It was all divine, all glory.

Christ is the only revelation of God. "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father—he has revealed him." We never can know God, except through His Son. There is no other possible revelation of Him. Christ came in lowly form, and appeared to His friends as a man; but when they learned to know Him, when their hearts had fixed their tendrils about Him, they found that He was divine, the Son of God. If we ever see God and know Him, and enter His family as His own—we must accept Christ. There is no other way. To reject Him is to shut ourselves away from God—in darkness unillumined by a beam of love from His face. The Witness of John to Jesus

John 1:19-34

John was a good witness. He had a strange training. He was brought up, not in any school with human teachers—but in God's school, in the wilderness, away from men. At last he came out ready to begin his work. His preaching had tremendous power. From near and far, the people came in throngs to hear him, and they were deeply impressed by his words. The effect produced by the Baptist's work was so great, that the authorities at Jerusalem felt it necessary to send a delegation to inquire into it. They claimed to have direction of the religious affairs of the nation, and wished to know the meaning of John's work. These men asked John, "Who are you?" There was a general unrest at the time, with much feverish excitement concerning the coming of the Messiah. There was a widespread feeling that this even was near at hand. The impression that John made upon the people was so great, that many thought that he might be the Messiah. If John had been so disposed, he might have claimed to be the One who was to come, and would have had a great following. But his loyalty to truth and to his Master forbade this, and he eagerly and with grief at the suggestion replied, "No, no! I am not the Messiah." They thought then that he must be some other great personage—Elijah, who was expected by the Jews as the forerunner of the Messiah, or "the prophet"—that is, the prophet "like unto Moses," promised and vaguely looked for it. It was felt at least that this preacher by the Jordan was no ordinary man, He was a very great man, and his

power as a preacher was startling. The way John met these questions showed the kind of man he was. If he had been weak and ambitious, he would have been tempted to encourage the people's thoughts about him and to accept the homage they wanted to pay him, and to which he knew that he was not entitled. He shrank with pain from all such offers of honor not rightly his, and instead eagerly turned all the expectation and enthusiasm of the people—to Jesus. This showed nobleness in John worthy of his mission. He sought only to honor Christ. He hid himself way out of sight, that nothing in him might win any eye from his Master. This is a lesson we all need to learn. When asked again to tell who he really was, if not the Messiah nor one of the great men prophesied of, he said that he was only a voice. He sought no honor for himself. He had been sent with a message which it was essential that the people should hear, while the personality of the messenger was unimportant. "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness."

Thus he identified himself with a well-known Messianic prophecy—but in his lowliness he had no care to have his own name known. He was only a voice, speaking a word for God, delivering a divine message to men. It is honor enough for anyone to be a voice—a voice uttering heavenly words, words of divine comfort or cheer or hope to those who are weary, discouraged, and lonely or in disrepair. Titles and degrees and earthly honors, which some men strive so hard to win, are pitiably empty—in comparison with the distinction of being a clear, true voice speaking God's messages to men. In this part of the story of John, we learn two beautiful lessons. One is the splendor of humility. Humility is the loveliest of the virtues, and yet it is the most divine. Nothing so shows the greatness of the Baptist, as his lowliness in declining human honor and praise. The other lesson is, that we should be sure we are really a voice, with a message from God, in this world, speaking out distinctly for God. Too many lives mean nothing, stand for nothing, declare nothing to others, and make no impression of beauty, of cheer, of holiness. The voice of John's life is heard yet throughout the world—and the world is better, truer, and holier, because of it. We should be a voice with unmistakable note, a voice that shall be heard wherever we go, whose sound will make men happier, stronger, braver, kinder, more like God—and that shall prepare the way for Christ into men's hearts.

John's message was important. It called men to prepare the way for the great Coming One. "Make straight the way of the Lord!" "Among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." So John turned all thoughts and all eyes away from himself as not worthy even to do this lowest service for Him whose way he had come to prepare. Thus he honored Christ and set Him high above all men—One worthy to receive the deepest worship and the highest praise. John's humility was not pretended. He was so conscious of the real glory of Christ, that he felt himself as truly unworthy to perform even the lowliest service for Him. No matter how lofty the place one occupies, Christ is infinitely higher—and it should be our joy to serve Him in the lowliest ways.

John's witness to Jesus continued next day. He was standing among the crowds when a young man was approaching him. Pointing to Him, John said to the people, "Behold the Lamb of God—who takes away the sin of the world!" This was a distinct declaration that Jesus was the Messiah who had been foretold as a lamb led to the slaughter, as the Paschal Lamb, as the sin-atoning sacrifice. This part of the witness of John concerning Jesus must not be overlooked. He saw Him as the Lamb of God. It is not enough to think of the name "lamb" as referring to His gentleness, His meekness, His steadfastness in enduring wrong. The chief thought in the name is

that of sacrifice. The paschal lamb prefigured Christ, who was thus foretold as the world's sin-bearer. We must see Christ first as our Savior. In heaven the song of the redeemed is, "worthy is the Lamb who was slain." Until we see Him as Savior—He can be nothing else to us.

John witnesses also to the divine anointing of Jesus as the Messiah. "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him." This was infallible testimony. John had not the slightest doubt of the Messiahship of Jesus. "I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God!" In these days, when so many people are doubting and trying to pout doubts into the minds of others—it is well that we have such a testimony as this which tells us positively that He in whom we trust as our Savior and Lord—is indeed the Son of God. It gives us an impregnable rock on which to build, in which to find our refuge.

Every Christian should, first, be a witness of Christ in his own life, and secondly, should bear witness to Christ in his confession of the blessed Name, wherever he goes. The First Miracle in Cana

John 2:1-11

There were thirty years of silence before Jesus began to speak publicly. The only miracles in those days were miracles of love, of obedience, of duty, of sinless life. At length He began His public ministry, and the first miracle He wrought was at Cana.

It is pleasant to remember that Jesus attended a wedding feast at the very beginning of His public ministry. Indeed, this was His first appearance among the people, and the beginning of His signs, as John puts it, was produced at this marriage festivity, where the simple country folk met in all the freedom of their gladness. Christ is a friend not merely for our sorrow hours—but also for our times of joy. Then His presence and His miracle at this time, indicate His approval of marriage and give it a holy sanction. We should notice also that He was invited to this wedding. If He had not been invited He would not have gone, for He never goes where He is not desired. If we would have Him attend our weddings and give His blessing, we must be careful that He receives an invitation. No matter who performs the ceremony, Christ's hands should bestow the blessing. The failing of the wine at this marriage feast, is an illustration of the way all earth's pleasures fall short. It comes in cups, not in fountains; and the supply is limited and is soon exhausted. Even amid the gladness at the marriage altar—there is the knell of the end in the words, "until death do us part." Human love is very sweet, and it seems to answer every craving of the heart. But if there is nothing but the human—it will not last long enough. One of every two friends must hold the other's hand in farewell at the edge of the valley, must stand by the other's grave, and then walk on alone the rest of the way. The best wine of life and of love, will fail. Very striking, however, is the picture here, and true also—the failing wine, and then the Master supplying the need. When human joy fails, if we have Christ with us, He gives us new joy, better than the worlds, and in unfailing abundance. The mother of Jesus came and told Him of the failing of the wine. She had become accustomed to take all her perplexities to Him. That is what we also may do. His answer to His mother was, "My hour is not yet come." He seems to have referred to His time for supplying the need. We may notice here, however, our Lord's perfect devotion to His Father's will. We find the same all through His life. He did nothing of Himself; He took His work moment by moment from the Father's hand. He always waited for His "hour." He had no plans of His own—but followed the divine purpose in all His acts. Though appealed to now by His mother, whom He loved so deeply—He would not do

anything a moment before His hour had come. We cannot learn this lesson to well. Sometimes we find it hard to wait for God—but in no way is our obedience more beautifully shown, than in our self-restraint under the direction of God's will. Too many of us run—before we are sent. It requires great patience at times not to put forth the power we have—but to wait for God's time. The word of the mother to the servants is suggestive: "Whatever he says unto you—do it." She was not hurt by the reply Jesus had given to her, which to some seems harsh. It shows, too, that she did not understand His answer as a refusal to relieve the perplexity of the family in due time. She bade the servants to stand ready now for His bidding, not knowing what He would do—but sure it would be the right thing. "Whatever he says unto you—do it!" is always the word for the Master's servants—and we are to take our commands from Him alone. We are not to follow our own impulses in doing things for others, not even the impulses of kindness and affection; we are to wait for the Master's word. His "hour" was not long in coming. Apparently but a little while after the mother's words to the servants Jesus said to them, "Fill the water pots with water"; then at once, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." Thus the servants became co-workers with the Master in this miracle. So He calls His people always to be His helpers in blessing the world. We cannot do much ourselves. The best we can bring—is a little of the common water of earth. But if we bring that, He can change it into the rich wine of heaven, which will bless weary and fainting ones. The servants helped Jesus in this miracle. The divine gifts of mercy can only get to the lost—through the saved. Then, how striking is the other side of the truth—the servants carried only common water from the spring—but with Christ's blessing it became good wine. So it always is, when we do what Christ bids us to do; our most mundane work—leaves heavenly results. Our most common work amid life's trivialities, in business, in the household, among our friends, which seems like the carrying of water, only to be emptied out again—is transformed into radiant service, like angel ministry, and leaves glorious blessings behind. We do not know the real splendor of the things we are doing when we do the commonest things of our daily task-work. What seems only giving a cup of cold water to a lowly man is blessed service to one of God's children, and is noted and rewarded by the Father.

We have an impartial witness to this miracle in the master of the feast. He knew not whence the wine was. No one had told him that it was only water in the vessel whence it had been drawn. This suggests how quietly Jesus produced this divine sign. He did not announce it, nor advertise it. He said nothing to call attention to what He was going to do. The people about Him did not know of the wonderful work He had done. So He works always quietly. His kingdom comes into men's hearts, not with observation—but silently. An evil life is changed into moral purity—by His words. Miracles of grace are performed continually, and no one sees the hand that works the marvelous transformation. Silently help comes in the hours of need; silently answers to prayer glide down, silently the angels come and go.

It is significant also that "the servants who drew the water knew." They had put the water into the vessels, and knew it was only water. They had drawn out the water, and knew that it was now wine. Those who work with Christ are admitted into the inner chamber, where Omnipotence is unveiled, where the mysteries of His grace are performed. Christ takes into His confidence those who serve Him; calls them no longer servants—but friends. Those who do Christ's will, know of His doctrine and see His ways of working. If we would witness Christ's power and glory—we must enter heartily and obediently into His service. Often it is in the lowliest ways and in the paths of the

most humble, self-denying service—that the most of Christ's glory appears.

We have the testimony of the ruler of the feast, as to the quality of the wine. "You have kept the best wine until now." That is what Christ always does—He keeps the best until the last. The world gives its best first—and the worst comes afterwards. It is so in sin—first exhilaration, then remorse. It is so in the chase for wealth, power and fame—first gratification, then disappointment. But in spiritual life it is the reverse of this. Christ Himself had His humiliation, darkness, the shame of the cross—and then came exaltation, power, and glory. In Christian life the same rule holds: first the cross—then the crown; first the self-denial, the loss, the suffering— afterwards the blessing the peace, the joy. We never get to the end of the good things of divine love—we never get to the best even in this world. There is always something better yet to come. Then Christ keeps the good wine, the best wine to the very last—in heaven. As sweet as is earth's peace to the Christian, he will never know the best of peace, until he gets home. This was Christ's first miracle—but it was not the beginning of His grace and love. The record says that in "this beginning of miracles" Jesus "manifested forth his glory." The word "manifested" suggests that the glory was there before; it had been slumbering in His lowly human life all along the quiet years of toil and service at Nazareth. For those first thirty years, the glory manifested itself in ways which no one thought of as supernatural—in the beautiful Life that grew up in the Nazareth home, with its attention to daily tasks and duties. The story of the eighteen years from twelve to thirty is told in one short verse, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). The glory was in Him those days—but no one saw it shining out. The neighbors did not think of His gentleness of spirit, His graciousness of disposition, His purity and simplicity of life—as revealings of the divine glory.

Now the glory was manifested for the first time. We say there are no miracles now—but there may be less difference than we think between what we all natural and supernatural. Luther said one day: "I saw a miracle this morning. The sky stretched overhead and arched itself like a vast dome above the earth. There were no columns supporting this dome—it hung there with nothing to hold it up. Yet the sky did not fall." You see the same every day—yet you do not think of calling it a miracle—you say it is only natural. In the life of Christ there were a thousand simple and beautiful deeds. During the days of the feast at Cana, if there was a shy and bashful person among the guests, He was especially kind to that one. If there was one that the others neglected, Jesus sought him out. If there was one in sorrow, Jesus tired to comfort him. But nobody thought of these common kindnesses as miracles. Next hour, He changed water into wine to relieve the embarrassment of the host, and that was manifesting His glory.

It is pleasant to notice, too, that it was in a simple act of thoughtful kindness to a perplexed household, that this divine glory was thus manifested. Really it was just a beautiful deed of common kindness. Someone calls this the housekeeper's miracle. It was a most embarrassing occasion. In the midst of a marriage feast the wine failed. There were more guests than were expected, and there was not enough wine to serve them all. The host would have been disgraced if there had been no way of adding to the meager supply. Jesus, by His timely manifesting of power, relieved the awkwardness of the occasion. He performed the miracle; we may be sure, primarily for the sake of the host, to save him from humiliation. When the writer, referred to, calls this the housekeeper's miracle, it is because it shows Christ's sympathy with those who attend to domestic affairs, His thought for them, and His readiness to serve them, relieving them of

embarrassment of perplexity. There is no annoyance too small to take to our Savior.

He manifested His glory in just this—His great kindness. When we think of the matter carefully, we know that the most divine thing in the world is love. That in God which is greatest—is not power, glory, not the shining splendor of deity, as it was shown at Sinai—but love, which shows itself in plain, lowly ways. When the disciples besought the Master to show them the Father, they thought of some brilliant display, some revealing of God which would startle men. Jesus replied: "Have I been with you so long—and have you not yet known Me? He who has seen Me has seen the Father." He had been showing them the Father in all His days—not alone in His miracles of goodness and mercy—but in the thousand little kindnesses of the common days. It was to His daily life as the disciples had seen it, that He referred. He meant that the truest revealing of God to men—is not in great Theophanies and transfigurations—but in a ministry of gentleness, helpfulness and kindness, such as Jesus Himself had performed.

Jesus Cleansing the Temple

John 2:13-25

Over and over again in the Gospels, we read of Jesus going to the feasts of the Jews and to their synagogue services. In this He set an example for us. We are to follow Him, putting our feet into the prints of His shoes. One of the things we may learn from Him, is the habit of attending Christian worship. He was always faithful in attending religious meetings. He began at the age of twelve to go to the Passover, and went every year as long as He lived. We ought in youth to form habits of faithful attendance upon the ordinances of religion. If young people do not learn in childhood to attend church, it is not likely they will ever form the habit. Children learn readily, and childhood habits do not easily forsake one. There is a great protection for moral and spiritual life—in regular church attendance. It keeps one continually under the influences of holy things. It brings one into the presence of God, where all the impulses are toward the better things. It aids in brotherhood life and Christian fellowship, by which great good comes to every Christian. It helps us to be more useful, tying us up with other good people in work for Christ. Every Sunday-school pupil ought to attend the church services. The example of Jesus should be followed in this as in all other things. When Jesus entered the temple precincts, He was grieved by what He saw, "In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money." No doubt the evil practice had grown by degrees. Jews coming from foreign countries needed animals to offer as sacrifices. They would have to buy them at the market in the city and bring them to the temple. Men with an eye to business would establish themselves near the temple, so as to get business. By and by they would begin to herd their animals at the gate, and then soon within, in the court of the Gentiles. So gradual was the encroachment of the business, that no one felt shocked when at last the traffic was firmly established in the temple court. It was such a convenience, too, to have the animals and the money-brokers just at hand, that the people were slow to want things the old way.

It is thus that most wrong customs come in. First only the camel’s nose is admitted, then he gets one great foot in, and then another, and by and by his whole immense body is in the tent—and the man has to get out. Thus the world creeps into the church and into the Christian’s life. Thus perfectly legitimate business encroaches on the heart’s sacred places until all that is tender and holy is driven out. We need to watch lest the world’s traffic sets up its stands in the very temple of

our lives, and desecrates the place where only God would be admitted. It is against the beginnings of the encroachments that we should guard. When the first approaches have been permitted, it is hard to check the advance. Our Lord's act was not a mere outburst of temper, but an expression of His righteousness indignation. It was His Father's house in which He was standing, and He was also Lord of the temple and had a right to cleanse it. He was the Messiah and had authority. The singular manifestation has an application also for us who are studying the story. Our hearts are now temples of the Holy Spirit. Christ comes to them to see if they are kept clean for the divine indwelling. What does He find when He comes? Does He hear the clatter of the world's noisy traffic, where only holy voices should be heard? Does He come upon herds of cattle driven up into the sacred precincts, where only God and God's messengers should tread? Does He see the broker's table—where the altar of incense should stand? If our heart is the temple of God—we should see to it that nothing undivine, nothing that is unworthy of God, shall ever invade its courts.

How is it, just now, in your heart? Is there any need for Christ to come with His whip of cords to drive out the traders, the sellers of cattle and doves, and the money-changers?

Very picturesque is the scene. "So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables!" His next word set forth the character of the offense of the men He was reproving. "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" Marketing is legitimate business in the proper place. It is not sinful. There was nothing wrong in selling animals and doves for sacrifice, or in changing people's money for them, from foreign to Jewish coin. If these sellers and money-changers had been somewhere else, on some of the city streets, Jesus would not have disturbed them. It was because they were where they ought not to be—that His anger was so kindled against them. This is an important distinction. "If I regard iniquity in my heart—the Lord will not hear me" (Psalms 66:18).

Two or three years later, Jesus repeated this act in substance. This was at the beginning of His ministry, and the other was at its close. Whatever impression was made in His first cleansing of the Temple, had been forgotten. Things seem to have grown worse. Jesus said they had made the temple court a "den of thieves." His charge implied that the dealers and brokers were dishonest, overcharging, cheating and defrauding. Too often the same may be said of hearts made for God. Into them has come all manner of wickedness. But here we learn that things which in themselves are right enough—may become very offensive to Christ, because they are where they ought not to be.

It is right to have business and worldly work—indeed, not many are doing their whole duty in the world, unless they are carrying some share of what are called secular duties. However, there is a proper place for these things. Meanwhile, no matter how full our hands are of the common tasks, there ought to be a sacred place in our heart into which nothing of this world ever shall come. We are to be in the world to do our share of the world's work—but we are not to be of the world. The world is not to be in us. The problem in sailing a ship is not to keep the ship out of the water—but the water out of the ship! We are commanded, "Love not the world." Christ is to have our love while we are busy doing the things in the world that come to our hands. So we get our lesson—that Christ did not condemn merchandising as something sinful—but found fault with it because it was in the place which ought to have been kept altogether for God. And His disciples

saw their Master’s intense earnestness and heard His words, they were impressed with His holiness and His zeal in behalf of God’s house. "His disciples remembered that it was written: Zeal for your house will consume me." (see Psalms 69:9). These words well describe not this one experience alone—but the whole of the human life of Jesus. The zeal of His Father’s house consumed Him, wore Him out. It burned in Him a flame, like the flame of a lamp—until it burned out His whole life. He lived intensely. Love for God and for man possessed Him and ever constrained Him. He did His Father’s will—until that will led Him to the cross. He so loved men—that His life was utterly consumed, poured out, in service for men.

One of His words was: "Whoever will save his life—shall lose it; and whoever will lose his life for my sake—shall find it." He never saved His life. He kept back absolutely nothing He had, which anyone needed. He never withheld Himself from the sick, the leprous, the demon possessed. He went everywhere, at every call. He never took rest. Virtue went out of Him continually, as He healed and comforted and helped others. His own life was poured out—to become life to those who lacked. His own joy was given—to be joy to those who were in sorrow. His own love was given—to fill the hearts of those that were loveless. So He lived—giving, giving, giving; loving, doing, and serving—until at last He died on Calvary to save sinners! So this sentence really tells the story of all His years. It becomes also a fitting motto for every follower of Christ. Zeal for Christ should consume us. "I have only one passion," said Zinzendorf, "and that is Christ!" The Jews demanded "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" He answered in words which we are to hear again, as they were used with perverted meaning by the false witnesses on the trial of our Lord: "Destroy this temple—and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews quibbled over His words, and the Evangelist gives us the Lord’s meaning: "He spoke of the temple of his body." Then he went on to tell us how in the light of the Resurrection, the mystery became clear. "When He was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had said." This is an illustration of the need of the "afterwards" to make many things plain. At the time, the disciples probably understood their Master’s allusion to "this temple" no better than His enemies did. But by and by events occurred which threw light upon His saying, and then its meaning flashed out plainly and clearly. When the temple of His body had been destroyed by the Jews, and He had indeed raised it up in three days—then they understood.

Many other of Christ’s words were in like manner enigmas to the disciples when they were spoken. All His references to the cross were such. They never realized that He must die, although many times during His last months He spoke of His coming death. However, when the cross had been set up and taken down, and when the grave had been sealed and then opened—the mystery vanished. To all of us, even yet, there are many truths and teachings which cannot be made plain—until we have passed through certain experiences. We could never know that there were stars in the skies—if night never came. We cannot know the beauty of the divine promises—until we enter the needs the promises were given to meet. The same is true continually of events of our lives; their meaning is wrapped in mystery for us—until afterwards. The early story of Joseph of the Old Testament was dark and sad. It could not be understood. It seemed all strange and wrong. It was hard to see divine love and goodness in it. But when the story was finished—the wisdom, the love and the goodness are apparent. There are things in every life which, at the time, seem tangles and puzzles—but which afterwards reveal divine love and grace in every line. The lesson

is: When you cannot see His hand—trust His heart, and wait.

"Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men." Evidently Jesus made a deep impression at this Passover. He performed many miracles or signs. What these were we are not told—but many believed on Him. Their faith, however, seems to have been impulsive, and not based on strong conviction. It was not such believing, as in the case of the disciples. Jesus saw into the hearts of the people who were ready to believe—and did not accept Him as true followers. "Jesus did not entrust himself unto them." Nothing came of His work at this time. Our Lord's knowledge of men is very clearly stated here. "He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man." We should not forget this. There is immeasurable comfort in this truth—if we are living truly. He knows our love for Him, thought it is so feeble that the world can scarcely know that we love Him at all. This was Peter's refuge when, after his threefold denial, Jesus plied him with the threefold question: "Do you love Me?" "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." It is a comfort for us to know that Jesus understands all our struggles, all our temptations, how hard it is for us to be godly; and that He has infinite patience with us. It is a comfort, too, for us to know that He is acquainted with the innermost things of other lives as well. He knows the plots, the schemes to do us harm, and is able to shield and protect us from them. What folly is hypocrisy, when we remember that Jesus knows all that is in man! How silly it is to talk about "secret sins," when the deepest thoughts of all hearts are known to Him with whom we all have to do!

Jesus and Nicodemus

John 3:1-15

Nicodemus is well-known. His story has often been told. We study here, the beginning of his Christian life. It is the fashion to speak slightingly of his coming to Jesus by night. It is sometimes said that it was cowardly. But this may not be a fair criticism. Night may have been the best time for him to make his visit. It may have been the only time when he could hope to find Jesus free for an undisturbed hour's talk with him. We must read the story through to the close, and see if the subsequent mentions of Nicodemus, confirm the charge of timidity or cowardice in him. We shall find that just the reverse is true. It is said that he desired to be a secret disciple. If that was his thought, we know that he did not persist in this kind of discipleship—but that the time came when his secret friendship for his Master grew into majestic strength. We may be glad, therefore, that he came to Christ, even though he came first under cover of darkness. The end of the story, justifies its beginning.

"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." John 3:3. The heart of the lesson which our Lord taught Nicodemus, is the necessity of the new birth. The natural human birth is not sufficient. We must be born of the Spirit, or we cannot even see the kingdom of God, much less enter into it. That is, we are not fitted for heaven or the heavenly life—while we have only our old sinful nature. We would not enjoy heaven even if we could be taken up and set down in the midst of it—unless our hearts have been changed. A wicked man would not enjoy a prayer meeting in one of our churches, where the exercises consist of prayer, hymns, singing, preaching and conversation on spiritual subjects. He finds no pleasure in reading the Bible. Think of this ungodly man, his heart full of worldliness, without love for God, without the spirit of

prayer—finding joy in heaven! To one who was speaking of heaven being so far away and asking how one could ever find the way there, the answer was given: "Heaven must come down to you. Heaven must begin in your heart." Nothing could be truer than this. Heaven must come into our heart before we can enter into the heavenly life. Our nature must be so changed that we shall love holiness, purity, and the things that God loves. This change can be made only by the Holy Spirit. A second natural birth, even if it were possible, would not effect the change. We would be the same being still, with the same carnal desires, the same evil nature, and the same hatred of God and of holiness. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The new birth is more than education—the drawing out of the powers that are in the nature. There would be no improvement in this process. The new birth is more than the refinement produced by good society, by familiarity with beautiful things, by association with gentle and refined people. It is a new life which must come down from heaven into the heart of him who believes. Without this we cannot be made into the likeness of God. This new life is like its Author. "That which is born of the Spirit—is spirit." John 3:6. Like produces like. Everyone who is born of God—will bear the features of God's likeness. He will begin to love the things that God loves—and hate the things that God hates. He will be like God in holiness, in forgiveness, and in love.

If we would know what God is like—we need only to look at Jesus Christ, for He is the image of God; and if we are born again, we will have the same features in us. At first they may be very dim—but they will come out clearer and clearer—as we grow in spiritual life. We can tell whether or not we are born again—by looking closely at our lives, to see if they bear the marks of the Holy Spirit. Do we put away sin and strive to live holy lives? Do we love the Bible and prayer? Do we love the pure worship of God? Do we love to be with Christ in Christian fellowship and in personal communion? Is it our deepest desire to have the divine features stamped on our lives?

It would put strong confidence into our hearts if we would learn to think of Christ's words as eternal verities. They are not like any other words. A dying woman cried to the minister who entered her room, to try to comfort her, "Oh, give me a word that I can lay hold of!" She felt herself drifting out upon the sea with nothing to which she could hold. We will all need words of this kind—as we come into life's crisis places. Nothing but the words of Christ will then meet our needs.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen—but still you people do not accept our testimony." Very much of human science is only guessing and speculation; we cannot be sure of it. Every now and then some new discovery is made which overturns and sweeps away whole volumes of boasted theories. We have to be all the time buying new books—just to keep up with the times; and we are afraid to quote from any but the newest editions, lest there may have been some recent discovery which contradicts the older. But Christ's teachings are eternal certainties. He came down from heaven, where from all eternity He had dwelt, and He knew what He taught. We may accept His words without the slightest doubt—and may build our soul's hopes upon them. We need never fear that there will be a revision of these teachings—or that anything yet to be made known to us will contradict or set aside what we have already been taught. What Jesus said about God, about God's love, about the way of salvation, about Christian duty, about the judgment day, about the future life—is all eternal certainty. We may infallibly believe and unfalteringly trust every word of Christ—and be sure of these eternal verities.

There is no other infallible teacher but Christ. "No man has ascended up to heaven." There are some people these days who take it upon themselves to question what Christ revealed about the heavenly life. They talk as if they knew more about these matters, than did He who lived from all eternity in heaven, and then coming to earth, told men of the invisible things of God. Christ's words to Nicodemus mean that there is no other one, that there never has been any other one so qualified to speak of heavenly things—as was God's own Son, who came to reveal Him. He was an infallible teacher and a true witness. There is no guesswork about the statements which He makes concerning God and God's love for men, God's will and the provision made in the heavenly kingdom for God's children. All manner of books have been written, telling us of "gates ajar" and "gates wide open," and we find whole volumes of guesses and theories about the eternal world. But these are of no value whatever when they go beyond what the Son of God has made known to us. We must turn to Christ's words for any real knowledge of the land beyond. The shadow of the cross lay upon the heart of Christ from the beginning. He knew in what way He was to make salvation for men. He says here, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness; even so must the Son of man be lifted up." The reference to the incident of the brazen serpent is instructive—so must Christ be lifted up. He referred to the cross—He knew He must die on it. It was at the beginning of His ministry, that Jesus spent the evening with Nicodemus. Even then He knew what was before Him. Why the "must"? Not merely because it had been foretold by the prophets. The prophets foretold it because of the necessity that He must suffer. Only by dying for sinners—could He save them. The way in which bitten ones in the Hebrew camp could be saved by the uplifted serpent, illustrates the way lost men can be saved by Christ on His cross. Those who looked lived; those who behold the Lamb of God shall live. Anyone who looked, whatever his condition, was healed; "whoever" believes on Christ, no matter who he may be, of what nation or color or condition, shall have everlasting life!

Jesus at Jacob's Well

John 4:4-15 The record tells us that Jesus in His journey, "must need go through Samaria." There was no other way unless He had gone far around it. But we may believe that there was another "must need" for His passing that way—there was this woman at Samaria who needed Him. It was worthwhile to go a long distance out of His way—to carry the water of life to a thirsty soul. If He had not gone through Samaria, this wonderful chapter in John's gospel would never have been written, and the New Testament would have been less rich. It is worth our while to think of the way God is always directing our movements, so as to bring us to the places at which He wants us to be—and to the people He wants us to touch and to help. There are no 'chance' meetings in this world. Jesus met the woman at the well, at the right moment. When we are doing God's will—He guides our movements, orders our steps, and there is a sacred meaning in our crossing of other's paths. A well of water in the East, was of great importance, and this well, no doubt, was especially valuable. People came from far and near to draw water from it, and weary passers-by were refreshed as they drank of the pure, wholesome spring. It is interesting to think of how many people along the centuries, were helped by the water they drew from its cold depths. It is not longer of value, however—it is now only a useless excavation, a mere relic of the past, choked by rubbish.

There are some people like this old well. Once they were full of life, with kindness flowing from them wherever they went, a blessing to all who came near to them. Now the well of love in them

flows no more, or only intermittently; it has been choked up by the worldliness or by worldly care. We should keep our heart-wells ever open and the water flowing fresh and pure in them—as long as we live. Christian love never should cease to pour forth its streams of kindness. The picture of Jesus being wearied with His journey, sitting down by the well-curb, is very suggestive. He had come a long distance and was tired after His hot journey. Such incidents as this help us to realize the humanness and the human-heartedness of Christ. He has not forgotten, now in heaven—His experiences of earth. He remembers in his glory—this day at the old well, how tired He was after His long journey, and how the rest and the water refreshed Him. We need not be ashamed to grow weary, since our Master Himself was weary. We are sure of His sympathy with us, for He understands, too, when we are exhausted by our toils or struggles; and He is glad to comfort and strengthen us. When the woman of Samaria left her home that morning, to go to the well, she did not know what unusual thing would happen to her before she returned. She did not know that she would meet a Stranger who would bring her a new meaning of life and set her feet in new paths. We never know when we set out, on any day—what the hours may bring to us, whom we shall meet, and what new friend, whose influence that day shall change all our future course. We do not know what may happen any common day—which will make all our life different ever after. We should go forth every morning with our hand in Christ's—that He may guide us in the best way, so that we may not reject the good that is offered to us.

Jesus began His conversation with the woman by asking a little favor of her. He said, "Will you give me a drink?" This was better in the beginning of the conversation, than if He had offered to do something for her. This was the way to gain the woman's attention. Though so weary that He could not journey farther with His disciples, He was not too weary to be interested in this woman's life. This was a bit of Christ's wayside ministry. He was always ready to do a kindness, even in His resting ours.

Much of our life's best work—is produced in wayside ministries; things we did not plan to do when we set out in the morning: little helpfulnesses which we render as we pass on the way; words of cheer which we speak as we move along the common paths. Often these bits of wayside service mean more than the things in our lives which seem greater, which we plan for with care.

Jesus asked this woman for a little kindness—a drink of water. Who of us would not be glad any day to give our Master a cup of cold water? We say we cannot do anything like this for Him now, for He comes no more to our gate or along our way—a weary man needing our kindness. But He has told us how we may always have this privilege. In the least of His little ones who need our help—He Himself comes, appealing to love's ministry (see Matthew 25:40). We must be careful always, lest in our neglecting to show a kindness to some human being—we thrust Christ Himself away! The woman was surprised to have this Stranger speak to her. It was not considered proper in those days, in that country, for a man to speak to a woman in public. Especially was it not customary for a Jew to speak to a Samaritan. The Jews and Samaritans were not in cordial relations. So she answered Him with a question, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" The answer which Jesus gave to her flippant question hints at His own character and mission. "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

She saw only a weary, dust-covered Jew sitting there by the well, asking for a drink of water. She saw nothing unusual in Him. She did not know that this footsore Man was the Messiah, the Son of God, who had all life and all good in Him, and all things to bestow! He had asked only for a drink of common water—but He would give to her the water of life. Really, she was the famishing one—not He! And if only she would ask, He would give her infinite blessing. It is always the same. We go about with our great needs, our hungering hearts, our unrest, our consciousness of guilt—not knowing that close beside us stands the Christ, with all we need in His hands, ready and eager to supply our every want. We go on, meanwhile, chattering about the trivialities of life, and the unsatisfactory vanities of earth, not knowing what infinitely great blessings are within our reach, to be had simply for the asking! The woman was impressed by what the Stranger said—but she did not yet comprehend His meaning. So she talked to him about the difficulty of getting water out of that deep well, and asked Him if He were greater than Jacob. Jesus replied again, using the water of the well as a symbol of earthly blessing. "Whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again." These words tell the whole story of the thirsts of human life. Men turn everywhere to satisfy themselves—but at best they find only temporary satisfaction, followed by still deeper thirst.

There is said to be a strange plant in South America which finds a moist place and rests there for a while, sending its roots down and becoming green. When this bit of earth dries up, the plant draws itself together and is blown along by the wind until it finds another moist spot, where it repeats the same story. On and on it rolls, stopping wherever it finds a little water, and staying until the water is exhausted. But after all its journeyings, it is nothing but a bundle of dead roots and leaves. The life of this plant, tells the story of those who drink only at this world’s springs. They go from spring to spring, and at the last, at the end of the longest life—they are nothing but bundles of unsatisfied desires and burning thirsts. In contrast, Jesus here tells also of the heavenly water which He gives to those who believe on Him. "Whoever drinks of the water which I shall give him—shall never thirst." In Christ, all the soul’s cravings are met. There is no lack or desire in our nature, which cannot in Him find perfect satisfaction. One of the Beatitudes reads, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled." Noah’s dove flew from the ark and went on weary wing everywhere—but found only a waste of desolate waters, with no place to alight. Then she flew back to the ark and was gently drawn within, where she found warmth, safety and rest. This story of the dove, illustrates the history of every soul that, having wandered everywhere in search of rest—at last returns to God and finds rest in Him! The saying of Jesus about the well of water in the heart, is very suggestive. "The water that I shall give him… shall be in him a well of water." Thus every Christian becomes a fountain of blessing in this world. As from the great Fountain, Christ, all the streams of life flow—so from the little fountain in the heart of each believer, flows a stream of the water of life to give drink to those who are thirsty. Blessed ourselves, our thirst quenched, our life stratified—we become in turn centers or sources of blessing to others. Are we indeed wells of water at which others quench their thirst? Does our life make us a blessing to all who come near to us? Do we give forth kindness, patience thoughtfulness, gentleness and all helpful influences? Or do we pour out bitterness, impatience, angry words, ill temper, selfishness, and thoughtlessness? The answer which Jesus made deeply impressed the woman, and she cried, "Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." She did not understand the meaning of Christ’s words, and yet her pathetic appeal is full of meaning. The first desire of our hearts should be to receive the grace of Christ, that we many no longer be dependent upon the world’s pleasures and comforts. It is a

weary life which those live who have no source of good, save the little springs of earth which soon dry up. The Second Miracle at Cana

John 4:43-54

"Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum." After leaving Sychar, Jesus seems to have gone at once to Cana. He never rested. When His work was done in one place He hastened to another. He was never in a hurry, never flustered, never feverish in His haste—but He never loitered nor lost a moment's time. If we keep our heart at peace, and live according to God's laws, there is little danger of our injuring our health by too much work. Then, even if duty demands serious toil and self-denying labor—it is Christlike not to withhold ourselves from it. "For whoever will save his life—shall lose it." Taking too good care of oneself—is the way to make the least of one's life.

Jesus was no exception to the well-known rule that "A prophet has no honor in his own country." It is a common saying that no man is a hero to his own servant. Those who live in familiar relations with the great or the good, are the least likely to recognize the elements of greatness or goodness in them. Many of the men whose names shine in the galaxy of fame, and whose work lives in the world with undying influence—had little honor from those among whom they walked, and perhaps would have little honor today if they were to return and live in the old relationships. We often fail to recognize the true excellence of our best friends, while they stay with us. It is not until she is gone out of a home—that a mother's real value is appreciated. The same is true of each member of the household and of each friend upon whom we lean much, and whose life is a great deal to us. Jesus walked among the people in Judea, taught, produced His miracles, and lived out His sweet, beautiful life of love in their midst—but they failed to recognize the Messiah in Him. "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him—and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own—and His own received Him not" (John 1:10-11). We are in danger in these very days of failing to appreciate the blessings of Christianity, because they are so familiar to us.

Sickness and suffering are everywhere. No one is exempt from them. Even the mansions of the noble are not sheltered from the invasions of disease. There is no charm in wealth or rank or power—to keep fever away. Into the home of this nobleman suffering came. It was only a child, too, who was sick. Even to the youngest, illness comes—as well as to the old.

Trouble often sends to Christ, those who would not have gone—if the trouble had not touched them. It was the sickness of the nobleman's child, that sent him to Jesus. He had heard of the great Healer—but probably had never sought Him, nor even thought of seeking Him. But when his child was stricken down and seemed about to die—he remembered what he had heard about Jesus that He was able to heal the sick and even bring back to life those who were near death. So this great man hastened away all the long distance to Cana—to find this Healer. We all owe far more than we know to our troubles. We do not recognize our need of divine help—until we are in some sore distress when human help can do nothing for us. Then we turn to God. If we never had a sense of sinfulness, we would never seek Christ as our Savior. If we never realized our powerlessness in the midst of temptation, we would never turn to Christ as our helper. Indeed, the Bible becomes a new book to us—in times of trouble. Many of the best things in it we never would have found—had it not been for some great need which made their meaning real to us. We do not

turn with our heart's cravings to God—until we realize the insufficiency of this world's friendships and blessings. The child seemed about to die. The record says "he was at the point of death." The point of death is a point to which all of us must come sometime in our life. We must pass through this world along many different ways—but every one of us comes at last to the point of death. All earthly roads pass that way. No matter how bright the path is on which our feet are now walking, somewhere on it, perhaps far away yet, perhaps closer than we think—awaits this point of death. We should learn to live so that if at any sudden hour we find ourselves facing death—we would not be troubled nor disturbed. In this nobleman's earnest pleading we have a revelation of a father's heart. He pleaded, "Come down before my child dies!" We do not realize the value of father-love as an impulse in this world. The secret which sends thousands of men every day to their tasks, their struggles, their heroisms—is back in the homes from which they come, where children stay. We idealize mother-love, not overmuch—but perhaps sometimes to the exclusion or at least to the forgetting of father-love, which has scarcely a less powerful motive in the inspiring of the noble things of human life. The sickness of a child sent this nobleman miles away to plead with Christ.

There was a great faith also in the father's heart—he believed that Jesus could save his child's life. He seems not to have thought, however, that even the Master, with all His power, could do anything without journeying all the way to his home. He thought the Healer's presence necessary to the putting forth of His power. So he insisted on having Jesus go with him to his home, where his child lay dying.

Jesus recognized the father's faith and assured him at once that his child would recover. "You may go. Your son will live." More than twenty miles off the sick boy lay—but the power of Jesus healed him there just as easily as if He had been at the bedside. The word of power flew through the air all that long distance like an electric flash, and on his couch of pain, the suffering child suddenly felt a thrill of health. A moment later, and the fever was entirely gone and the child was altogether well. This miracle should have much comfort for us. We cannot now bring Christ in bodily presence to the room where our loved one is lying—but we can pray to Him, and He can heal our friend just as easily from His heavenly home—as if He were present where he lies. We can also ask God to bless our friend twenty miles away from us, or a thousand miles away—and He can do it just as easily as if the friend were close by our side when we pray. The father hastened home, and on the way learned that his request had been granted. "While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living." Ever after that day, when he looked upon this child, the father would remember that his boy's spared life, was an answer to a prayer. The child would always know, too, that he was living in the world—because his father had thought about him one day when he was very sick, and had gone all the way to Cana to speak to Jesus on his behalf. Children do not know how many blessings they are enjoying, because their parents, teachers, pastors, and other friends have gone on errands to Christ for them, in the days of their need. The manner of the answer to this nobleman's prayer made a deep impression on the father. He compared the time and learned that the beginning of the child's recovery, was at the very moment when Jesus had said that the boy would live. He believed before—now his faith was confirmed. He found it just as the Master had said it would be. There were many other cases in which the words of Jesus were put to the test at once—and proved to be exactly true. He told the woman of Samaria all about her past life. He told Peter that the coin would be in the fish's mouth with which to pay the temple tax. He told the disciples they would find a colt tied, and rehearsed the

conversation that would take place with the owner—and it all came out just as He said it would. He told the disciples, again, that they would meet a man bearing a pitcher of water, who would conduct them to the guest room; and the words came true. From these illustrations in common life, we learn that every word of Christ will be found to be true. He promised salvation and eternal life to those who will believe on Him, and everyone who believes and commits his life to Him—will find this promise fulfilled. He said that in His Father's house are many mansions, and that He will come again, to receive to Himself each believer; we shall find this word true. When we pass into the valley of the shadows, we shall find ourselves in the personal care of Christ, and shall be led by Him home, to enter the mansion which He has been preparing for us.

Jesus at the Pool of Bethesda

John 5:1-15

"One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years." John 5:5. It is not easy to be sick year after year. Prolonged invalidism very seriously tests the quality of life. Some people fret and chafe in such experiences. Pain is hard to bear. Then their illness seems a sad interruption to their activities, breaking into their plans for lifework. It is much easier to go to one's tasks every day, toiling for long hours—than it is to lie quietly in bed, doing nothing, yet keeping sweet. Yet invalidism, when accepted in faith and trust, and endured with patience—often produces very beautiful life. There are shut-ins whose rooms are almost like heaven in their brightness and joy. Some of the most wonderful revelations of divine grace have been made in cases of long and painful illness, when the sufferers have accepted their condition as God's will for them and have found it a condition of blessing. Richard Baxter, who himself had been an invalid for long years, has a note on this passage which is worth repeating: "How great a mercy was it to live thirty-eight years under God's wholesome discipline! Oh, my God, I thank You for the like discipline of fifty-eight years; how safe a life is this, in comparison with full prosperity and pleasure!" The furnace fires of sickness burn off many a chain of sin and worldliness. Many now in heaven, no doubt, will thank God forever for the invalidism which kept them from sin when on the earth.

Jesus came down to the Bethesda spring that Sabbath and, as His eye looked over those who were waiting there, He noticed one man to whom His sympathy went out at once. He saw all the sufferers who were sitting in the porches that day, and He was moved with compassion as He looked upon them. He saw them, however, not merely as a company of sad people—but as individuals. He knew the story of each one—how long he had been suffering, how hard his life had been. Among all who were there that day, He singled out one for special thought and help. Probably he had been a sufferer longest. At least this man's case made its appeal to the heart of Jesus. He knows about each patient in a hospital, or each shut-in in a town. This personal interest of our master in those who are sick or broken in their lives, is wonderfully comforting. He knows all about us—our pain that is so hard to bear, our disappointments year after year, growing at last to hopelessness. It is very sweet to be able to say always, "He knows!"

Coming up to this man, Jesus asked him, "Do you want to get well?" He wished to rouse him from his lethargy. He asks the same question now of each one who is in any trouble. He comes especially to those who are spiritually sick, and asks them if they will be made whole. The question implies His willingness and readiness to heal. He can take these deformed, crippled, and helpless lives of ours—and restore them to strength and beauty. It seems strange that anyone should

refuse to be made whole, when Christ comes and offers to do it. If we were sick in body, and He wished to make us well, we would not say, "No." If we were crippled and deformed, and He wanted to make us spry and straight, we would be glad to accept His offer. Why is it that when He comes to us and asks us if we would have Him make our maimed and crippled souls whole—so many of us say, "Oh, no! "Or, "Not yet!" The man did not answer the question directly—but uttered a complaint. He had been so long used to hopelessness, that the song had altogether died out of his heart. He had always been pushed aside when there had seemed a possible chance for him. "I have no one, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool." Other people always got ahead of him. He had no one to help him, and he could not go himself. There are some people who really seem to have no friend. Nobody ever gives a thought to them. There are many unsaved people who might almost say the same, "I have no one to help me to Christ." No one cares for their souls. True, there is none who could not come to Christ if he would. Yet Christian people must not forget that the unsaved need the help of those who are saved, that the forgiven must carry the news of mercy to the unforgiven. Part of our mission in the world—is to help others to Christ. This man waiting at the fountain's edge is a type of many people about us—close to the healing waters, with hungry, unsatisfied hearts, needing only the help of a human hand or the sympathy of a loving heart to lead them to Christ, yet never getting that help or that sympathy, and sitting close to the waters year after year, unhealed, unsaved.

It was an important moment for this man when Jesus spoke to him. There was a shorter way of help for him than by waiting for someone to put him into the water. "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk!" The man might have said: "Why, I cannot rise. That is the very thing I have not been able to do for thirty-eight years. Take up my mat! Why, I could not lift a feather; and as for walking, I could as soon fly. I cannot obey His command, until I get strength to do it." There are people who talk just in this way about beginning the Christian life. They plead their helplessness as a reason for their delay. There is a fine lesson for such people in this man's prompt obedience. The moment he heard the command—he made the effort to rise, and as he made the effort—strength was given to him.

New life came to this lame man, with the obeying. Christ never commands an impossibility. When He bids us rise out of our helplessness and begin the Christian walk—He means to give us the grace and strength to do it. The command to take up his mat was a sign that he would not have any more need for it. He had been lying upon it for many years. Now it should be rolled up as no longer required. Some people enter upon the Christian life as an experiment. They will try it and see if they can hold out, yet they still keep the way open for return to the old life if they should not have success in the new. But this is not the way Christian faith is meant to act. We should burn the bridges behind us—that we may not possibly retreat to the country out of which we have come. We should put away the implements of our wickedness, our crutches, our staves and our beds, with no thought of ever returning again to them.

"Take up your mat, and walk." The word "walk" suggests that the man was not simply to rise up and stand where he was—he was to move out in the paths of duty and service. The invalid is restored, that he may take his place in society, and let his hand become busied among the activities of life. We are saved to serve.

Before the man could get far with his mat, he was challenged for breaking the Sabbath. There are people who spoil everything. They find fault with every beautiful thing anyone does. These men knew what had happened to this poor man. We would think they would have rejoiced in him in His restoration. But the fact that he seemed to them to be violating one of their Sabbath rules, bulked more largely in their eyes than all the blessings that had come to him. When they told the happy man that it was not lawful for him to be carrying his mat on the Sabbath, he answered that He who had cured him told him to take up his mat and walk. When they asked him who the man was, he said he did not know. He had been made so glad by his healing—that he gave no thought to the Healer. Jesus had slipped away in the crowd. Too often, however, men receive benefits—without showing gratitude to the person through whom the benefits are received. Many of those who are helped by Christ, have but little interest in Christ, and never think of Him, though they owe so much to Him.

But, although the man had shown no regard for his Healer, Christ was deeply interested in him, and followed him up. Finding him in the temple, He said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." Evidently the man’s thirty-eight years of illness had been brought about by some sin in his early life. There are many men who in a lifelong feebleness or infirmity, pay the penalty of sins of youth. Very pathetic is the cry of the Psalmist, "Remember not the sins of my youth" (Psalms 25:7). The man had been healed—but his continued health depended now upon his right living being continued. If he turned back again to the sins which had brought upon him his diseased condition through so many unhappy years, the evil would return in worse form than ever. There is something worse even than thirty-eight years of helplessness. These words have serious warning for everyone who has been forgiven. The condition of forgiveness is repentance, and repentance, if it would prove true—must be final, unconditional and unchanging.

Christ’s Divine Authority

John 5:17-27 The people were angry at Jesus because He had healed the helpless invalid on the Sabbath. They claimed that He had done wrong by the working on the seventh day. The answer of Jesus was, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." In the history of the creation, we read that God set the example of Sabbath-keeping. After six days of creating, He rested the seventh day. We are living now in God’s Sabbath. But the words of Jesus here show us that there is a sense in which God keeps no Sabbath. He never ceases to be active. The worlds do not stop in their orbits to rest, when the Holy Day begins. The sun does not veil His face and cease His shining that day. The grass does not stop growing, the flowers do not cease to bloom, and the wheat does not pause in its ripening, when the day of rest comes. There is no Sabbath-keeping in God’s providence. Nor does His care for His children pause, when the Sabbath dawns. It would be very sad for the world if it did. The people had found fault with Jesus for healing a man on the Sabbath. They said He had been working, and working was forbidden by the law. This was His answer, "My Father is always at his work to this very day"—has never ceased to work, is evermore blessing and helping His creatures. Then He added, "And I, too, am working." This was in answer to the charge that He had broken the Sabbath in healing the man. For one thing, He put Himself alongside the Father in power and authority. It was an assertion that He was divine. We get here a suggestion of the kind of works that are right for us to do on the Lord’s Day. There is not in these words a shadow of defense for ordinary secular work on the

Lord’s Day—but works of mercy, of religion, of obedience, we may do on the day of rest.

Jesus had claimed equality with His Father in the words, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." For Him as well as for His Father, there was no need of a Sabbath of rest. Rest is necessary for man. His strength has its limitations. He cannot go on forever—but must stop to renew His strength. Human energy flags and is exhausted, its source is finite and it must be continually renewed. But Christ was not like other men in this. He fainted not, neither was weary. Then He had coupled Himself with the Father in the words, "My Father is always at his work to this very day," through all the ages, "And I, too, am working." He and His Father work together. All divine power was in Him and had always been in Him. He could not grow weary.

Then He added, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." From beginning to the end of Christ’s life—we find the same oneness with the Father asserted. He did the Father’s will, never deviating from it in the smallest particular. We hear Him say continually such words as these: "I seek not my own will—but the will of him who sent Me." "I do always those things that please him." For one thing, these words show us the perfect oneness of the Father and Son. He took all His directions from His Father’s lips. He waited at every step for His Father’s bidding. The question with Him never was: "What would be pleasant for Me to do? What would further My own interests? How can I do the most good in the world? How can I win the greatest number of friends?" The one question always was, "What is My Father’s will for Me today?"

Jesus asserts the Father’s love for Him and His complete trust in Him. "For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these." Here we have a glimpse of true fatherhood. Love hides nothing. The Father’s love for the Son is so perfect, that He withholds nothing from Him, has no secrets which He does not reveal to Him. The words tell of the most perfect oneness and unity, life flowing into life, heart opening into heart. It is a oneness of love. There are none of the "sons of God" who are so glorious in their privileges as the "only begotten Son." Yet there is a verse in one of the Psalms (Psalms 25:14) which says, "The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him; and he will show them His covenant." This would seem to mean that in proportion to our love for God and our trust in Him—He reveals His inner thoughts, the secrets of His love and favor to us. Then Jesus said to His disciples, "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15). Thus Jesus reveals the secret things of His love—to those who trust Him. The works which only the Father can do, Jesus says He also does. "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life—even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it." To Nicodemus, Jesus spoke of becoming a Christian as being born again—beginning life as if one had never lived before. Here Jesus represents the natural world as a great cemetery in which all men sleep in graves of death. The beginning of Christian life is spiritual resurrection—those who believe on Christ burst their graves and come into life. The picture is very striking. The natural man is really dead to God and to the things of God. He hears not the voice of the Spirit. He knows nothing of what is going on about him in the spiritual realm. It is just as when Jesus stood before the grave of Lazarus and called the young man’s name. The dead heard His voice—and came out and began to live. So the spiritually dead who hear the voice of Christ and

believe on Him are quickened into a new life.

There is another strong assertion of divinity here, showing that Christ was conscious of being equal with the Father. To God alone belongs the prerogative of judgment. "Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son." If this power of judgment is given to Christ—He must be divine. It is a precious comfort to us, as we think of the judgment day, to know that the Judge on the throne will be Jesus—the same Jesus who died for us, who wears still and shall then wear our nature, and who therefore will understand us. We need not fear Him—who once died for love of us. If we are His friends now and here, confessing Him before all men, He will be our friend then, and will confess us before His Father and the angels. But we must not forget the other side of this truth. If we are ashamed of Him and do not confess Him here by love and obedience, we are assured that He will be ashamed of us and will deny us before His Father and the angels.

We must remember, too, that He who is to be our Judge makes common cause with the lowliest of His people, and will say to them, "For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you took care of Me; I was in prison and you visited Me." OR "I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in; I was naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not take care of Me" (Matthew 25:35-40). We are continually on trial, and the Judge Himself is continually before us. We need to watch how we treat the lowliest of our fellow men.

Hush! What if this friend should happen to be—God?

Jesus tells us here how to be saved. "He who hears my word, and believes on him who sent me, has everlasting life." There are but two steps from the darkness of eternal death—into the brightness and blessedness of eternal life. The first thing is to hear Christ’s word. The Bible says a great deal about hearing. "Hear, and your soul shall live" (Isaiah 55:3). But mere hearing is not enough. One may hear the gospel over and over—and yet be lost. Therefore Jesus said, "Take heed how you hear." We must hear with a willing spirit, a spirit of obedience. The second step is believing, "he who hears my word, and believes on him who sent me." Hearing must be followed by believing. What is it to believe? It is not merely the assent of the mind to the truth. It is believing with the heart, trusting, committing oneself to God. The Revised Version takes out the "on" between "believes" and "him"—there is not to be even a little preposition between the soul and God.

These are the two steps from death’s darkness into life’s brightness—hearing, and believing. Then comes the blessing, "has eternal life." Each word burns with light. "Life"—-not merely physical life—but life in its largest, fullest, richest, truest sense—the life of Christ in the soul. We are made partakers of the divine nature, and the new life which enters into us makes us children of God, changes us into the image of Christ. "Everlasting life"—not this world’s life only—but life in heaven and forever. "Has everlasting life." I like the present tenses of the Bible. The good things of God’s love and grace—are not pushed off into the future—but are present possessions. Eternal life begins the moment one hears and believes! The Miracle of the Loaves and Fish

John 6:1-14 The importance of the miracle of the loaves and fish is shown in the fact that it is the only one of the miracles which all the four evangelists record. Jesus sought rest for His disciples, who were very weary, thus showing His thoughtfulness for them, and took them away. But the looked-for rest was not realized, for the people flocked after Him and a great multitude thronged about Him in a little while, interrupting His rest and calling Him to minister again to the people. A picture in the Dore gallery represents a great throng of people, rich and poor, young and old, kings and peasants, all turning beseeching looks toward a far-away Figure. It is the Christ, clothed in robes of dazzling whiteness, bearing a cross, beckoning with uplifted hand to these broken-hearted ones and sorrow-laden ones—to come to Him for rest. This is always a true picture of Jesus. He invites all the weary and the needy to Him. Wherever He is, those who are hungry-hearted or in distress—are drawn to Him. It was so in the old Galilean days. He could scarcely get a moment's rest or quiet. The people would follow Him to His retreats—when He sought to be alone. They would break in upon Him—even when he was at His prayers. It still remains true that there is something in Christ which draws all men to Him. He had something to give to men which they needed and which no other could give to them.

Jesus cares for our physical needs as well as our spiritual needs. When He saw the multitude about Him in the wilderness, His heart was moved with compassion for them. We sometimes forget this part of Christ's thought for us. We know that He cares for our spiritual needs, and has grace ready for every need; but we too often fail to remember that our bodily needs are also in His thoughts. Many people do not even pray to God about their secular affairs; they do not ask Him for help in their business or in their household matters. But really nothing which concerns us, is a matter of indifference to Him. He who feeds the hungry birds—will care for His children.

Jesus spoke of the matter of the feeding of these people to Philip, asking him what they should do. The record says that He did this to test Philip. Jesus is continually proving His disciples, putting them to the test, to bring out their faith, and to train them in serving. He is constantly sending to us cases of need—to see if we will help them, and that we may learn how to help them. He wishes to draw out our interest, our love, our sympathy, our tenderness, our thoughtfulness, and to teach us to do the works of mercy, which He leaves us in this world to do. The disciples could not see any possible way of feeding the multitude in the wilderness, and yet the Master meant that they should feed them. Their little blessed and used, proved enough. We think we cannot meet the needs and the hungers which appeal to us—but we can, if we will. We do not seem able to do much—but even our few words spoken kindly, our tears of sympathy, our expression of love—He can use to do great good to the faint and weary before us. In answer to our Lord's question, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." Andrew found a boy in the company who had five barley loaves and two little fish. Happy boy—to be in that crowd that day with His basket of provisions. Just why he had the provisions with him, we are not told. His small supply was accepted and used by Christ in the working of a great work of kindness. This incident shows what good even a child with Christ can do. It was a young girl who carried to Syria the news of the prophet's power which led to the healing of the proud general's leprosy (see 2 Kings 5). Every child who studies the story, should be impressed by the fact that even with His small possessions, he can do great things when Christ works with him and uses him.

We should carefully study the method of this miracle. There were several steps. To begin with, the disciples brought the loaves to Jesus. If they had not done this, if they had begun feeding the

people with what they had, without first bringing it to the Master for His blessing—it would not have gone far. We must bring our small resources to Christ and put them into His hands, that He may use them. When we have done this, no one can tell the measure of good that may be wrought, even by the smallest abilities. Whatever it is you have in your hand, you can use for God, and He will put His power into it. Then it will accomplish God's will. We need never say we can do nothing with our small ability or resources. God is not dependent on human power.

Notice what Jesus did in working this sign. First, He made the people sit down, that they might be quiet. They could not have been fed while moving about in a crowd. We must do our work in an orderly way. We must get quiet and still—if we would have Christ feed us. Then, when the multitude was still, Jesus gave thanks and blessed the loaves before He gave them to the disciples. The blessing of God makes rich. We ought to pray continually that Christ's touch may be upon us and upon the things we are doing. The letter you write to a discouraged friend—lay first before Christ for His blessing, and then it will carry comfort and cheer. The flowers you will carry to a sick room—make a little prayer first that Christ's blessing may be upon them, that they may go laden with the fragrance of His love. Then their power to do good will be increased.

We are told in the other gospel records, that Jesus broke the bread before giving food to the disciples. Bread must be broken before it can be eaten. The body of Jesus must be broken, before it could become bread for the world. Often Jesus must break us and our gifts, before He can make us food for others. We should think also of the responsibility of the disciples that day. Jesus passed the bread through their hands to the hungry multitude beyond them. If they had merely fed themselves with what Jesus gave them, not passing it on, there would have been no miracle and the hungry thousands sitting on the hillside would not have been fed.

We are now the disciples, standing between the Master and the hungry people. Into our hands come the blessings of the gospel, and we must pass them to those about us and beyond us. If we feed only ourselves, take the comfort and the grace for our own lives, and do not pass on the broken bread, we have disappointed our master and have failed in our duty as His helpers and co-workers, also leaving the waiting people unfed.

After the miracle, we have a lesson on frugality and carefulness. The disciples were bidden to gather up the broken pieces that were left over, that nothing might be wasted. "Waste not; want not," says the proverb. It seems remarkable that He would could so easily multiply the few loaves into a meal for thousands, should be so particular about saving the fragments that remained. But He would teach us economy by His own example. No matter how great our abundance may be—we never should waste anything. After we have fed at our tables, there always are hungry people who would be glad for the pieces that are left.

One day Thomas Carlyle stopped suddenly at a street crossing and stooping, picked up something out of the mud, even at the risk of being knocked down and run over by passing vehicles. With his bare hands he gently rubbed the mud from it. He then almost reverently carried it to the pavement and laid it down on a clean spot on the curbstone. "That," said the old man in a tone of tenderness he rarely used, "is only a crust of bread. Yet I was taught by my mother never to waste anything; above all, bread, more precious than gold. I am sure the little sparrows or a hungry dog will get nourishment from this bit of bread." The lesson on the sin of wastefulness applies to other things besides bread—to fragments of time, of energy, of influence, of affection.

Many people waste whole years in the course of their lives—in the little fragments which they lose every day—one minute here, five minutes there, and ten minutes later. If, at the end of a year, they could gather up all these fragments which they have wasted, they would have many basketfuls of golden time in which they might do much good. In the mint, where gold and silver coins are made, the sweeping of the floors are all carefully searched through for fine particles of precious metals; and it is said that during a year large sums are recovered in this way. If only we would learn to waste nothing which passes through our hands—we would be far richer at the end of our life, and the world would be richer for our living. We should gather up the fragments, the finest golden dust, that nothing may be lost!

Jesus, the Bread of Life

John 6:22-40

It was the day after the multitude had been fed so marvelously on the five loaves and the two fishes. So great was the impression made by the miracle, that the people were about to take Jesus by force and make Him king. He first sent the disciples away, constraining them to enter the boat and go before Him, unto the other side. Then He sent the multitudes away—and when they were gone He went quietly, unobserved, unto the mountain to pray. The people had been foiled of their purpose to make Jesus king, and were disappointed. They sought Him—but could not find Him. It is a sad thing to lose Jesus. There is an incident in the days of our Lord’s boyhood which tells of His mother losing Him. The family had been to Jerusalem, on the occasion of the boy’s first Passover, and when they started homeward, Jesus was unawares left behind, and they had gone a whole day’s journey before they missed Him. Great was the anxiety and the distress. Not until they had retraced their steps and sought painfully, did they find Him. Many people lose Jesus, some in play, some in pleasure, some in business, some in sorrow, and some in sin.

These men, who had lost Jesus in the desert, after vainly searching for Him far and near, crossed the sea and found Him on the other side. Then, when they found Him, they seemed almost to blame Him for disappearing, asking Him, "When did you get here?" Jesus answered, revealing to them their real motive in seeking Him, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill." That is, they sought Jesus, not to honor Him—but only for what they thought He would do for them. We are in danger of thinking of religion only or chiefly from the side of its earthly benefits, for it has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come. But the higher blessings should be dearer to us than the lower. We should seek Christ for His own sake, and for the sake of the honor we may do to Him. The lesson which Jesus taught the people that day, we should consider well for ourselves. He said, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." We live in a materialistic age, when the quest of the world is for money, for power, for things of the earth, and not for the things that are spiritual and enduring. Men are toiling and wearing out their life in gathering rubbish out of the dust, not thinking of the heavenly treasures, the spiritual things that are in Christ, and which they might have with half the toil and care. We ought not to spend our life in picking up things which we cannot carry through the grave. If we are wise, we will seek rather to gather treasures which we can take with us into eternity. Really, all we can carry out of this world, is whatever we may have of character when we are through with living. The Beatitudes tell us what are the things that will abide. The fruits of the

Spirit, of which Paul tells us, are the only qualities which will endure to eternal life. The people seem to have caught at last from the words of Jesus a glimmering of the truth that there were better things to live for than they were yet striving after, and they asked Him, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" Jesus had said He would "give" them eternal life—but they wanted to "work" for it. People are always making this mistake—instead of accepting eternal life as God's gift—they want to earn it. Jesus corrected their mistaken notion in His answer, "This is the work of God—that you believe on him whom he has sent." There is abundant opportunity for working for Christ—but working does not come first. Having received eternal life through Christ as a gift—we are then to work, presenting our body as a living sacrifice unto God. The first thing in the true life, is to believe on Christ, to receive Him as the revealing of God to us, to commit ourselves to Him, and to let Him live in us. Then Christ becomes the inspiration of our life. He lives in us, and our life is just the working out of His life in us. The people had another question. Jesus had claimed to be the Messiah. What proof could He give? "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?" They remembered that Moses had given their fathers manna, which proved that He was God's prophet, and they wanted Jesus to do something great, which would prove that He was one sent of God. They were thinking all the time—of common food, daily bread, for they were poor and life was hard for them. It is not uncommon in our own times to hear practically the same demand for a sign. People want prosperity as a mark of divine favor. They want to find some reward for following Christ. If their religion does not bring them bread and earthly comforts, they think it is not measuring up to its promises. Yet it is not in this way that Christ is to reward those who follow Him. He gives spiritual life, with inward joy and peace—and not ease and luxury and wealth.

Jesus answered their demand, by telling them that He was doing for them a far greater work than Moses had done. Moses gave only bread for the body. It was not the true, the real bread—bread which answered life's deepest needs. Now God was giving them through Him—true bread from heaven. It was not manna—but a person, a life, "For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Nothing that grows out of the soil of earth—will feed a human soul. We were made for God and for heaven, and must feed our immortal nature upon heavenly bread. Nothing but bread will satisfy hunger; nothing but Christ will meet the cravings of a life. The people begin now to have a true thought of Christ's meaning, although it is still only a glimmering. Instead of asking further questions, however, they make a prayer, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." It was a good prayer—but when they made it—they did not know what they were asking. They wanted the bread that had in it the power to bless, and yet they did not know what that bread was. It is often so in our praying—we have a dim vision of something very beautiful, very good but it is only a shadowy vision to us. It is well that we have an Intercessor to take our poor, ignorant, mistaken prayers and interpret them aright for us, securing for us not what we thought we would get, nor what we would like to receive—but something better, richer, and more divine.

Jesus then told them what the bread is, which gives life—and how they could get it. "I am the bread of life! He who comes to me shall never hunger." Christ will satisfy all our desires. Some people imagine that the desires of the heart are sinful things, which must be torn out and destroyed. But that is not what Christ purposes to do. He says that our thirsts shall all be satisfied. He does not mean our sinful and selfish desires, the things of our lusts which we think would satisfy us—but our desires purified, such as Christ meant when He said, "Blessed are those who

hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

Jesus reminded the people that they had not received Him as the one sent from God. "You also have seen Me, and believe not." That is, they had not eaten the bread of God of which He had been speaking to them. The assurance that follows is one of the most precious words of all the Bible, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." No penitent who ever really comes to Christ, shall be turned away. The closing words of the passage are rich in their revealing of the purpose of Christ's coming into the world. He came to do His Father's will. His will was that of all whom the Father had given the Son, the Son should lose none. Our part in His great purpose is also made very clear, "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him—shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles

John 7:37-46 In the chapter from which our passage is taken, we find much about how different people regarded Jesus. His brothers did not believe on Him, and yet they urged Him to put on a bold face and go up to the feast. Just what their motive was, we are not told. They seem to have wanted him to make a display of His power at Jerusalem, to show the people there what He was, and what He could do. Or perhaps they only taunted Him, professing to believe in His power. Jesus knew that the Jews at Jerusalem were plotting to kill Him, and as His "hour" was not yet come, He declined to go to the feast—but said to His brothers that they should go up. The world did not hate them—no one was plotting for their lives. They would not be molested if they went.

Later, however, Jesus did go up to the feast and taught in the temple. There was a great deal of discussion about Him then, and all sorts of opinions were expressed. The Jews wondered at the wisdom of His teaching, since He had not been trained in their schools, had not sat at the feet of their great rabbis, nor learned wisdom from them. Jesus gave the honor to His Father, saying, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me." (v.16). The people wondered who He could be. They sought to take Him, to arrest Him—but no one laid His hand upon Him. There was a divine protection about Him, "because His hour was not yet come" (v.30). God watches over the lives of His servants who trust Him, who are doing His work in the world, and lets no evil touch them. "Every man is immortal, until His work is done." On the last day of the feast, Jesus uttered one of His most wonderful statements. The temple was thronged, and He spoke, no doubt, in a loud voice that all might hear what He said. He made a great proclamation of His mission, as it were, offering life to all who would accept it. This is one of the great invitations of the gospel. Every word is full of meaning. "If anyone is thirsty—let him come to me and drink."

"If anyone is thirsty" marks the one and only condition to which the invitation is addressed. Of course, if we do not thirst—we will not care to come to the will to drink. Souls are dying all around us, not because there is no water near—but because they are not thirsty. The words "anyone" show us how universal the invitation is. It was not for "any Jew," nor "any intelligent man," nor "any man of good character," but for "anyone." No one is left out or overlooked. All the invitations of the gospel are universal in their offer and in their adaptation. "All who are weary" receive the invitation to rest which Christ gives. All that are thirsty are invited to come and drink. All who hunger are bidden to eat the bread of life. There is not a person in the world who can say he is not invited to receive the salvation of Christ. The word "thirsty" describes the need which Christ is ready to

supply. It is not bodily thirst—but thirst of the soul which He offers to quench. For the soul has its thirsts as well as the body, and there is no spring of water on earth at which these thirsts can be satisfied. The words "let him come" show us the gate to the fountain flung wide open. There is no barrier or hindrance in the way. No person is shut out. The words remind us, however, that if we would have our thirst quenched by Christ—we must come to Him. We must leave our dry, burning wilderness where no water is found, and come away to Christ. We cannot find Christ—in our sins. Our thirsts will never be satisfied unless we bring them to the fountain. The fact that we are dying of thirst, is not alone sufficient to insure us of the quenching of the thirst. There must be a movement made by us, a movement toward Christ, a believing on Him, and acceptance of Him. The word "drink" tells us we must receive Christ Himself into our own hearts, if we would have our thirst satisfied in Him. Merely going to the spring and looking at its sparkling waters will never quench anyone's thirst; he who would be satisfied, must drink. This implies a voluntary act on the part of each individual. So, looking at Christ in all His beauty and power to help—is not enough to bless us—we must take Him into our life by an act of our own, as one takes water in drinking from the fountain, or from a cup, and let His Spirit fill our hearts.

Jesus next proceeded to tell of the result of coming to him. "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." Believing is coming to Christ. To come is to believe, and then to trust oneself to Him. Believing is putting oneself into such personal relations with Christ, that His life becomes ours. Every thirsty one who drinks of Christ has thenceforward in himself a fountain of life, a well of water—at which other thirsty ones may drink. This is a beautiful picture of a Christian life. We in turn become little wells of the water of life, filled by Christ Himself, from which the water flows that others may drink. Christ wants every one of us to repeat in our own little measure, His great life of love. A spring of water, especially in a hot, oriental country, is invaluable. It is a center of great blessing. Weary ones come to it, and go on their way refreshed.

Someone describes an old homestead, deserted now, with its empty dwelling and unused porches and grass-grown walks. But there is one path on which no grass grows, which is trodden daily by many feet. It is the path to the spring. Nearly every passer-by turns aside to drink of the clear, sweet water of the spring. If we can be like such a spring of water by life's wayside, we shall be an untold blessing in the world. People who are weary, those who have troubled hearts, and those who are in sorrow, those who are weak and faint in their journey—all may come and drink of the water of life in us, and go on their way stronger and happier. It is a great thing to be a well of water by the wayside—but if we cannot be a well, we can at least be a little spring, giving out its little stream to quench the thirst of some who are weary. The writer of this Gospel explains further Jesus' words about the fountain within the heart. He says that Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit which those who believed on Him would receive. In talking with the woman at the well, Jesus told her that the water He would give those who would drink—would become a well of water in them, springing up into eternal life. The Spirit is God Himself. Hence those who receive the Spirit receive God Himself into their hearts. The new life in a believer is the divine life. It is Christ Himself.

We may notice here, too, the two words that are used in the two passages, showing the growth of life in those who receive Christ. Jesus said to the woman, that the water would become a well in the heart of the believer. Here He says that from within him who receive the divine Spirit—shall flow rivers of living water. The word "rivers" suggests the possibilities of Christian life and

influence. When the apostles first came to Christ, the beginning of life in them was very small. But when they went forth, after the day of Pentecost, full of the Holy Spirit, rivers of influence and blessing flowed from them. Our lives should increase in power as we become filled with Christ, and our reach of blessing should grow wider and wider. A question of origin hindered the faith of some of those to whom Christ spoke that day. They thought that nothing good could come out of the despised province of Galilee. We are familiar already with this argument against the Messiahship of Jesus. Nathanael could not believe that any good thing could come out of Nazareth (see John 1:46). In His case, however, a personal knowledge of Christ instantly swept away his prejudices. A like prejudice applies in many other cases. Lowly circumstances bury much that is good, and hinder its recognition among men. Yet we know that the power of the Christ who slept His first sleep in a manger, was the Son of God, and His power and glory have filed all earth and heaven. The unconscious testimony of the officers to the power of Jesus is very remarkable. Sent by the rulers to arrest Him, they came under the influence of His words as He spoke to the people. The spell was so strong that the officers returned without arresting Jesus, awed and unable to do anything, and when asked why they had not brought Him as a prisoner they replied, "No one ever spoke the way this man does!"

Those who come under the influence of Jesus, are always impressed by the power of His presence. It is indeed true that "No one ever spoke the way this man does!" His words are the words of God. If we let them into our hearts, they search us and find us. They are convicting words, showing us our sins and faults. They are upbuilding words, kindling and stimulating in us holy desires and aspirations, holding before us divine ideals of life and inspiring us to all heavenly attainments. They are transforming words, imprinting upon our lives the beauty of Christ and sending us to ministry of love. They are words of hope, revealing the true honor and blessedness of those who faithfully follow Christ. The most wonderful things in all this world are the words of Christ. "No one ever spoke the way this man does!" The Slavery of Sin

John 8:31-40 The title of this passage is suggestive. People who live in sin—do not think that they are slaves—they often think they are the only free men, and that Christians are the slaves. But in all this world, there is no bondage so terrible as the bondage of sin. The salvation of Christ is not merely the taking away of sin’s penalty—if this were all, it would be very incomplete. This would leave us unchanged in heart and life, loving still the old things and the old ways, not disposed to live the beautiful life of holiness, not having the love of Christ in our hearts. The salvation of Christ not only changes our relation to sin’s penalty, setting us free—but brings us into God’s family, making us God’s children. It includes also the breaking of the power of sin over the life and the exaltation of the believer into the full liberty of Christ. The passage begins by telling how we may be Christ’s disciples. "If you continue in My Word—then you are really my disciples." It is not enough to begin; abiding, persevering, is the test. A disciple is a learner, a pupil. It is not enough for one to enter a school. Mere enrollment will not make anyone a pupil. The pupil must continue in the school all through the long course, studying subject after subject, until he has mastered the whole curriculum. The same is true in business and in all callings. Life is a school. The course is a long one. It is not finished in a day—but fills all the days of one’s life. The lessons, too, are long ones. The man who is faithful, who persists and perseveres unto the end, is the only one who succeeds. Missing lessons anywhere in the course leaves a blank. Many begin well, with diligence and earnestness—but lose interest in a little while, let their courage falter, and fail in their course.

They grow weary and give up. This is true of many in all lines of work. A writer, speaking of the failure of some ministers to succeed, says that they enter the ministry with great enthusiasm and promise—but after a little while settle down into apathy, lose their enthusiasm, and soon are heard of no more. It is true also in Christian life. There are thousands who begin to follow Christ—but who, when discouragement comes, give up and sink back again into the world. Jesus told His enthusiastic followers that an ardent beginning was not enough—they must continue unto the end.

Abiding in the Word of Christ is given as the essential thing in discipleship. To abide in Christ's Word—is to obey Him, to do His commandments, not for a day or two only—but faithfully, all through life. It is not enough to know the will of Christ—we must do it. He said that if we are His friends, we will do whatever He commands us. Obedience, therefore, is a test of discipleship, and obedience must be patient and continuous. It must be without break. It must look to the little things of duty. Dropped stitches in the web make breaks, and then the garment unravels.

There is another way in which we may abide in the Word of Christ. Many of His Words are promises. The forests in summer days are full of bird's nests. They are hidden in the trees, in among the leaves. The little birds know where they are, and when danger comes, when a storm arises, or when night draws on; they fly at once each to its own nest and hide away there in safety. So the promises of Christ are hidden in the Bible like nests in the trees, and there we may fly in any danger or alarm, hiding there until the storm is past. There are no castles in this world so strong, so impregnable, so safe—as the words of Christ. "Heaven and earth shall pass away," said the Master, "But My words shall never pass away" (Matthew 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33).

Jesus then told His disciples how they could be made free from sin's bondage. "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Chris is a deliverer. He came to open prisons and lead captives out to liberty. There is a story of a stranger who entered an oriental city, and as he walked through the marketplace he saw many birds in cages. His face grew sad, and by and by he asked the price of one of the birds, and paying for it, opened the cage door. The bird flew out and, rising a little way in the air, caught a glimpse of its native mountains far away, and then flew swiftly toward them. The traveler then bought the other cages, one by one, and set the birds free, until all of them had been liberated. That is what Christ, our Liberator does for His people in their captivity. He sets them free, breaking their chains, opening their prison doors, that they may fly away toward home and safety.

It is the truth, Jesus says, that make men free. So long as they are ignorant of Christ and of His power to liberate them—they remain in bondage. But when His emancipating Word comes to them, they are free! The Jews resented the suggestion that they were in any sense slaves. "They answered him, We are Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man." How deceived they were—they imagined themselves free, when at that very hour Roman soldiers stood guard about their city! But it is the same with spiritual slaves. It is a great privilege to have good ancestry; it is good capital with which to start in life; but beyond a certain point it does not count for anything. Every man must bear His own burden. In the end, everyone must stand for himself. These people were depending upon their fine ancestry. Sin plays strange tricks with men. Insane people sometimes deck themselves out with tinsel, and imagine that they are some great personages. The devil puts similar notions into the heads of His deluded followers, making them think they are free—when in reality they are pitiful slaves.

Jesus very promptly assured the rulers of the people that they were not free men. He said to them, "Whoever commits sin, is the slave of sin." Sin makes slaves of those who follow it. Everyone is the servant of some master, the only question being who the master is. Christ asks His disciples to take His yoke and to come under bondage to Him. His is not the bondage of compulsion—but of love and joy. Christ is a blessed Master. His yoke is easy; serving Him lifts one up to eternal glory. What sort of master is sin? What does sin do for its slaves? What life did it ever ennoble, lift up, or bless?

There is a fable of man to whom the devil came, ordering a chain of a certain length. Coming for the chain at the appointed time, he ordered it made longer, and went away. When at last it was finished, he came again, and with it bound the poor man who had fashioned its links at his bidding. So sinners are everywhere building their own prison walls and with their own hands fashioning chains to bind them forever. There is only One in all the world who can set men free from the bondage of sin—Christ Himself. "If the Son therefore shall make you free—you shall be free indeed." There is not another one who can do this for us. He breaks the chains of personal enslavement on all who follow Him, putting His grace into their hearts and enabling them to overcome evil habits and conquer their evil nature. Sin begins with threads, and weaves ropes and cables around its slaves—until they are bound hand and foot in chains they have no power to break. But even those who are thus bound, Christ can set free. We all need Christ as liberator, emancipator, for we all have chains of some kind forming about us, chains of habit, of desire, of passion, of disposition, which will bind us and drag us down as slaves, unless we come to Christ and have Him free us from our bondage and make us free indeed!

Jesus told the people further that day that, while they were genealogically Abraham’s seed, yet they were continually doing inappropriate things, things which the children of Abraham should not do. They were seeking to kill Him, because His Word was not allowed to have free course in them. This was not the work of free men. Love is the law of freedom, and love was not in their hearts while they were so bitter against Him. He told them that if they were really Abraham’s children they would do the works of Abraham. Their doing the works of the devil—proved that they were the devil’s children, and not God’s.

It was not complimentary to these rulers, church dignitaries, to be called children of the devil—but Jesus read their hearts and saw murder and falsehood there under all their religious appearances and their boasted godly ancestry. Wherever these feeling and intentions are found—they indicate the devil’s work. As the fruit of the Spirit in the heart is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, meekness, gentleness and kindness; so the fruit of the devil’s indwelling are hatred, malice, envy, jealousy, and bitterness. If our lives have only the devil’s characteristics, we cannot make claim to being God’s children.

Healing the Man Born Blind

John 9:1-11 The narrative of the opening of this blind man’s eyes is given only in John’s gospel. It is recorded with much minuteness, not merely because of the greatness of the miracle—but also because it was a sign of the spiritual enlightening which Jesus came to give to men. The cure seems to have been performed without request, either from the blind man himself or from any of his friends. The thought of it arose in the compassionate heart of Jesus. The case was pitiable enough. No other physical calamity is sorer than blindness. It shuts a man away in the darkness

so that he cannot see anything of the beauty of God's world about him. Besides, blindness made this man helpless. He had to depend on others for everything. Another's hand must lead him wherever he went, another's eyes must see for him, and he must get through another's mind—only dim ideas of form, color and beauty. The case was still sadder, because this man was born blind—and never had seen. Those who have their eyes for a time and then lose them, may cherish the memories of the beautiful things they once looked upon. But this man never had seen. He could form no conception of colors, nor could he understand anything about the appearance of objects. The world was a great dark blank to him. The blindness of this man was incurable. He was absolutely hopeless in the darkness. His poverty was an added element of distress in his condition. He sat and begged for alms, receiving only such pittances as passers-by grudgingly gave him. No wonder that when Jesus saw him sitting there with his blank, sad face, knowing all that lay behind it, and beheld his hand outstretched, He pitied him.

There is another blindness, which is still worse than natural blindness. It is the blindness of the soul's eyes. There are those who see well the beautiful things of nature—but who see nothing of the still more beautiful things of God's love and grace. They have no eyes for the loveliness of righteousness and truth. They do not see the divine Hand that moves everywhere in providence. They never behold the face of Jesus Christ, in which shines all the glory of God. There is a whole world of spiritual beauty lying around them, of which they see nothing—the love of God, the divine promises, the hopes of heaven, and all the joys of salvation. Men of the world hear devout Christians speak with rapture of the joys of Christian faith and of Christian experience, and say, "I cannot see any such joys in Christ." It is because they are blind. In those days the belief was almost universal, that every trouble was due to special sin in the person. The friends of Job insisted that the patriarch must have been a great sinner, to bring upon himself so much of the disfavor of God. There is much of the same feeling found yet in the world, even among Christian people. Misfortune is associated in many men's minds with sin. We often hear it said by those who have had some trouble, "I wonder what sins God is punishing me for now." The disciples, when they saw this poor man sitting in his blindness, imagined that sin either in him or in some ancestor, was the cause of his calamity.

It was a very instructive word that Jesus spoke in reply to the question, "Master, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" He said, "neither has this man sinned, nor his parents." He did not mean that the man was sinless—but that his trouble had not been produced by sin. Of course, suffering may sometimes be traced to sin. Sometimes the connection is so obvious, that no one can doubt it; but sometimes it is so obscure that no one may certainly seek to trace it. But in the case of this man's blindness, there was no such cause, and our Lord meant to warn the man's neighbors against the tendency in their minds to look into his life suspiciously and uncharitably seeking some sinful cause in himself of his ancestors, for his misfortune.

We never should ask, in any case of suffering, "Whose sin is the blame?" Rather, we should set about giving what help it may be in our power to give. Jesus said that the blindness came upon this man "that the work of God might be displayed in his life." His misfortune now became an occasion for the display of divine mercy. Whatever the cause of the man's blindness, it called now for human sympathy and every possible effort to relive the trouble and do good to the sufferer. It is interesting also to notice, that the man's blindness became a blessing to him in the end—in that it brought him to Christ and resulted in his spiritual awakening, as well as in giving of sight. A case of

trouble of any kind should not set us to gossiping about who is to blame—but rather should call us to prompt efforts to give help or relief.

Before curing the man, Jesus spoke of the necessity of promptness in doing God's work. He said, "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work." There is no time to lose. Even Jesus felt the pressure of the shortness of the opportunity and the need for doing promptly what had been given Him to do.

There are two suggestions in the words: The first is that every one of us has a task to do, and it must be done in our brief day—or it never can be done at all. The other thought is that there is a certain time during which our deeds must be done—or they never can be done at all. We must sow in the seedtime—for when this is past, there will be no use in our scattering the grain upon the fields. We must teach the child while he is young, for when he is grown up there will be no opportunity to put the lessons into its heart. It will then be too late. We must visit our sick friend while he is sick—there will be no use in coming with our kindness when he is well—or when he is dead. We must show sympathy to those who are in trouble, while the trouble is upon them—it will not be worthwhile to try to help when they lie defeated in the dust. The disciples slept in the Garden during the hour when they should have been watching, and then Jesus said to them, with infinite pathos, "Sleep on now, and take your rest." There was no use in waiting and watching now—for the traitor was already at the gate! A strange thing in this miracle, was the use of the means to which Jesus resorted. "He spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes." Jesus did not need the help of any means in working His healings, as human physicians do—for He had all power. Evidently the means were used for the effect their use would produce upon the man's own mind. The blind man had not thought of the possibility of receiving his sight. He seems never to have heard of Jesus as one who could open his eyes. There was in him, therefore, no expectation that he might be cured. Hence the first thing to be done was to arouse his hope and start faith in him. This Jesus did by beginning the process of healing, spitting on the ground, making paste, and putting it on the sightless eyes. This must have started expectation of cure and faith. Then the man was bidden to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam. This seems strange, too. Jesus by a word could have healed him, not requiring of him the long walk across the city. Why did He require him to go away and wash? The answer is that the act still further encouraged faith and obedience in the man. We have a similar instance in the case of Naaman. Elisha bade him go and wash seven times in the Jordan (see 2 Kings 5:10). There was no specific virtue in Jordan water—it never had been known to be a cure for leprosy. But the man must obey, thus showing his faith and his submission to the will of God. If he had not washed in Jordan—he would not have been cleansed. A similar test of faith was required in the ten lepers whom Jesus sent to the priests (Luke 17:12-19). The journey itself would not cleanse them. Yet, if they had not gone—they would not have been cured. "As they went—they were cleansed." This blind man would not have been cured of his blindness that day—if he had not obeyed and taken the journey to the Pool of Siloam. He must cooperate with Christ in his healing. Some people wait for the evidences of salvation, before they will fully accept Christ. But the salvation will not come—until they take the step which proves their faith. The blind man obeyed promptly and eagerly. It was not easy for him to take this long walk through the town. On his eyes were the unsightly patches of clay, and people would laugh at him as they saw him groping along the street. But he did not mind this—he would not be laughed out of the cure which was now so near at hand.

Perhaps his friends told him it was all foolishness—that mud never yet had been known to cure anyone's blindness, and that Siloam water had no power to open sightless eyes. Still the man pressed on, amid the laughing people, until he came to the pool. There he washed, and behold—his eyes, which never had seen before, were instantly opened. When the man's old neighbors saw him going about with his eyes opened, they asked him how the wonderful transformation had come to him. They could scarcely believe that it was the same man they used to know. When a man's life is changed from evil ways to good, people are amazed. In every life conversion works a change. If a man is not in some way better, sweeter in spirit, kindlier, truer, with a more radiant face, and new light in his eyes—his conversion has not made much impression. The man's prompt and simple confession of Christ as his Healer, shows his sincerity and earnestness. When the people asked the man how his eyes were opened, he answered, "A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes." He was not afraid to tell how he had been cured. When Jesus has saved us—we should never hesitate to confess Him before the world.

Jesus the Good Shepherd

John 10:1-18

SHEPHERD is a very rustic name for Christ, and yet as used in the Scriptures, it is wonderfully rich in its suggestiveness. In the Old Testament there are many allusions to God under this figure of a shepherd. The twenty-third psalm is a Bible classic. Perhaps no other portion of the Scriptures is so widely known, or had had such a ministry of blessing in the world, as this rustic little psalm. The ancient Christians found in the name "shepherd" a beautiful interpretation of the character and word of Christ. In the catacombs at Rome no other picture is so common, as that of the Good Shepherd. The tenth chapter of John's gospel is so full of great teachings, that only a few leading suggestions can be pointed out. At the beginning of the chapter attention is called to the sheepfold. Applied in a spiritual sense, the fold is the shelter which our Good Shepherd provides for His sheep. The sheepfold is an enclosure surrounded by a wall into which in the evening, the shepherds lead their flocks, committing them for the night to the care of the under shepherd, who guards the door. In the morning the several shepherds come and knock, and the porter opens the door, and each shepherd calls his own sheep, which know his voice and come out to him. He then leads them out to the pasture for the day. The fold is enclosed by a wall. A wall means defense and shelter. The Bible says much about God's keeping of His people. We are not told, however, that the Lord builds a refuge for them—but that He Himself is the refuge—the divine love and power being a wall of protection between His people and all danger. The safest place in all the world for the sheep of Christ—is in the place of confidence and obedience. We have but to obey our Shepherd, staying within the fold, to have His protection. We have only to do God's will, to go where the Good Shepherd leads, to abide where He puts us, in order to be sure of divine defense. The shepherd's love and care are individual and personal. "He calls His own sheep by name." It is easy enough for us to understand how an Eastern shepherd may know each of his sheep by name. His flock is small, and he can readily know each one. But when we think of the millions who are in Christ's flock, it seems strange to us that He should know and call each one of all His by name. Yet the truth is made very clear in the Scriptures. It is as easy for our Good Shepherd to know each of His millions personally, as for any human mother to know the name of each one of her little family of children. There is great comfort in this teaching. We are not lost in the crowd.

Love always individualizes its object. We cannot love a crowd—we may pity a city in distress, as after the horrors of an earthquake, and yet not know one person in it. But if we have a brother, a child, or a friend among the sufferers—we know the one. Our Good Shepherd loves each one of His own. A little child of poverty, who had been adopted by a kind man, said he was glad to belong to somebody. It is pleasant for us to know that we belong to Christ. He speaks of His sheep as "His own." They are His own, because the Father gave them to Him. "Yours they were, and you gave them to me" (John 17:6). They are his own because He gave Himself for them. "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). They are His own, further, because they have voluntarily given themselves to Him. It is very sweet to think of ourselves in this way belonging to Christ. The words suggest love, closeness of relation, tenderness of affection. The Good Shepherd presents Himself also as the Guide of His flock. He "leads them out." "He goes before them, and the sheep follow him." He does not drive them—He leads them, and they follow Him. They love Him and also trust His guidance. They know that they are safe wherever He takes them. Sheep need to be led; they have no such instinct for finding their own way, as most other animals have. Set certain kinds of dogs down anywhere, miles from where they have been staying before, and they will find the way home by instinct. You cannot lose a dog. But a sheep cannot find its way anywhere. The same is true of human souls. They get lost very easily, and are willful and wayward. They need to be led, and without the divine guidance never could get home. But if Christ leads, we who are His sheep must obediently and cheerfully follow Him. The reason we have so many troubles in life, and get so often into difficulty and danger—is because we do not follow Him as we should. Not only are we to follow Christ—but we are to follow Him only. "A stranger will they not follow—but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers." This is always true of sheep. A stranger's voice frightens them, and even when he calls them by their right names, in imitation of their shepherd's voice; and they will flee from him, rather than come to him. They know His voice to be strange, and will not answer His calls. It ought to be so with Christ's sheep, too. They should know when the voice they hear—is not really their Shepherd's, and should not give heed to it.

Voices of strangers continually fall upon the ears of young Christians, especially of inexperienced Christians. There are many temptations which would lure them away from the fold, into paths of wandering, ending in ruin. There are false teachings which seek to dishonor Christ and make His believing ones love Him less and trust Him less confidently. There are solicitations of pleasure which lack the note of purity and truth—voices of the stranger. There are invitations to things that appear to offer gain, to promise reward—but which, in reality, have only loss and hurt and ruin to give. Everywhere the voices of strangers are heard, and, unfortunately, too many are willing to listen to these voices. Those who do—are lured away, often into peril and destruction. We need to be sure that the voices we hear are of the Shepherd, calling us only and always to things that are beautiful and true and good. Not only is Jesus the Good Shepherd—but He is also the DOOR. "I am the door of the sheep." A door is a way of entrance—those who come though Christ are admitted into the blessedness of God. As many as receive Him, become children of God (see John 1:12). This is a Door that is always open. We need never fear coming to it and fining it shut. In the representation of heaven as a city, in Revelation, there are twelve gates, three on each of the four sides. No matter from which way we approach, we shall always find a door of entrance. When we enter the fold through Christ as the Door, we find provision with Him. "By me if any man enters in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." The shepherd looks well to

the feeding of his flock. He leads the sheep into green pastures. He searches everywhere to find food for them. When one spot is burnt up with the summer heat and has no more provision for his flock—the shepherd takes them elsewhere. So does Christ. Wherever He leads us, we may always be sure that He is taking us to some good, some provision, some blessing. The Bible is Christ's pastureland, and the pasture there is always good. Wherever we open it, we find something to feed our hunger. Other books may have poisonous teachings—but every word in the Bible is wholesome food for our lives. The fields of providence are also Christ's fields. In all the common ways of life—we find food waiting for us. We may trust Christ absolutely, because we know that wherever He leads us, He is always taking care of us in the right way. When the shepherd led his flock through the dark valley, it was not to terrify them—but to get them to a place where they would find pasture. Sometimes Christ leads His people through dark ways of struggle, trial, loss—but it is always because these are the ways to some good which He has in waiting for them. The Good Shepherd loves His sheep, loves them so much that He stops at no sacrifice in protecting them and saving them. "The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep." The Eastern shepherd often has to fight battles for His flock. David tells of killing a lion and a bear in defense of his sheep. Sometimes the shepherd in defending his flock against wild animals—is himself wounded; sometimes he even loses his life in protecting them. Our Good Shepherd has wounds upon Him, and if we ask when He received them, His answer is, "In defending My sheep!" At present Christ's sheep are widely dispersed. They are scattered over all the world. But at last there will be a great home-gathering, when all the flocks shall be brought together. "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring… and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd." One of the saddest things about the church as it is in the world today—is the separation of believers into different denominations. In heaven all shall be brought together, from the north, the south, the east and west—and all shall be found at last in the one flock with the one Shepherd. The Abundant Life

John 10:10

Christ always wants abundant life. He is infinitely patient with the weak—but He wishes that we be strong. He accepts the feeblest service—but He desires us to serve Him with the whole heart. The smallest faith, even like a grain of mustard seed, has power with God and can remove mountains—but God is best pleased when we have a faith that quails at no difficulties, and accomplishes impossibilities. A believer may have but the smallest flame of life, and yet Christ will not despise it. "Smoking flax, shall He not quench."

There is a picture of one bending over a handful of cold embers on the hearth, as if he would get them to glow again. Underneath the picture are the words, "It may be there is a spark left yet." This is a picture of the infinite patience of Christ with those who are almost dead spiritually. So long as there is even a spark left—He will seek in every way to make it thrive. But with all His gentleness toward the barely living, He wants abundance of life in all His followers. "I am come that they might have life—and that they might have it more abundantly."

Every picture of Christian life which our Lord uses, suggests fullness and richness of life. Fruit is the test and measure of it. The fruitless branch is taken away, and the fruitful branch is pruned that it may bring forth more fruit. "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit—showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:8). To the woman at the well Jesus spoke of spiritual life

beginning in the heart as a well or spring of water. When we receive Christ, a fountain of divine life is opened in our hearts. At first, however it is only a little spring, a mere beginning of the life of God and heaven in us. Then, later, Jesus said, "He who believes on me… out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). The little spring, by and by becomes rivers. Christ came to give life and to give it abundantly.

There have been those in all ages, whose lives became like rivers in the fullness and richness of their flow. This was true of John and Peter and Paul. Streams of blessing and good poured out from them, which reached many lands and thousands of people, and which are still flowing today, wherever the gospel is known. There are those whose influence for good touches countless lives.

What is an abundant life? It does not need to be a conspicuous life, one which makes itself heard on the streets. There are some good people who seem to suppose that they are living for a purpose—only when they are making themselves seen and heard. Yet there are those who are rich in outward show—but poor in inward experience. One may have abundant life—and yet move among men so quietly as almost to be unheard and unknown. Of our Lord Himself it was written, "He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets" (Matthew 12:19). No other ever had such fullness and abundance of life as He had, and yet no other ever lived and worked so quietly as He did. Noise is not true spiritual power. The real power in life is in its influence, in its character and personality. Our Lord puts first in the Beatitudes—humility. "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3). It is the lowly ones who live nearest to the heart of Christ, and have most of His life in them. Not those who fill the largest places in the eyes of men, even in the church; nor those whose works attract the most attention, have most of God in the—but those who live humbly, with no thought of human recognition or praise. The abundant life need not be known by its large financial gifts. The tendency in these days is to measure every man's value to the world, by charities. Money has its value. Those who contribute to charity, to education, to religion, if their gifts are wisely bestowed, are blessings in the world. It is the bounden duty of all who possess wealth—to use it in doing good. But money is never the best gift we can bestow on others; and those who cannot give money—may yet be really generous givers. A man's money is not the only thing a man has to give. He can give love, sympathy, encouragement, hope, or cheer—and these gifts will help where money would be only a mockery. There are great needs which money has no power to satisfy. There are sorrows which money cannot alleviate.

It was an ancient fable, that an angel was permitted once to visit this world, and from the mountaintop to look down upon the cities and palaces and works of men. As he went away he said: "Why, all these people are spending their time building birds' nests. They are building birds' nests to be swept away in the floods, when they might be building palaces of beauty to abide forever!" If all Christians would put the same earnestness into their Christian life which they put into their bird-nest building, what victories would they accomplish for the kingdom of Christ!

Jesus never gave money. Yet the world has never known such a lavish giver as He was. Imagine Jesus going about with His hands full of coins and dispensing them wherever He went among the poor, the lame, the blind, the beggars, the lepers, the sick—money, and nothing else. What a poor, paltry service His would have been, in comparison with the wonderful ministry of kindness and love He performed in His journeyings through the land! Suppose He had given a coin to the woman who lay at His feet crying for her poor daughter's deliverance. Would that have comforted

her? Suppose He had put a handful of money in the hands of the blind beggar at Jericho, instead of opening His eyes—would the generous gift have meant as much to the poor man?

"Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I you" (Acts 3:6), said Peter at the Beautiful Gate to the lame man. Then the man was lame no more. Was not the healing a better gift to the poor man than if he had filled His hands with coins? Was it not better that the man should be made strong, so that he would not need to beg anymore, than that he should have been supported a day or two longer in poverty and mendicancy? The abundant life may not have money to give—and yet it may fill a whole community with blessings through its gifts. It may go out with its sympathy, its words of comfort, its inspirations of cheer and hope, and may make countless hearts braver and stronger. Let the well of love in your heart spring up and pour out rivers. That is what it means to have life abundantly. To others who turn to us with their needs, their heart-hungers, and their sorrows—we should be their comfort, strength and help. They should go away helped. We should always have bread in our hands to give to those who are hungry. We should always have cheer for those who come to us disheartened and discouraged. "How can I help you?" should be our heart's question, whoever it is that stands before us. The life Christ came to give is only love—God's love poured into veins and through us to those who lack. It is more love we need—when we cry out for more life and more power to do good. It is love that the world needs. Nothing else will make people happier or better. Ethics will not heal broken hearts, nor comfort those who are in sorrow, nor quiet a guilty conscience. The only abundant life is the life that is abundant in love.

How can we get this abundant life? Most of us are conscious of the poverty and thinness of our spiritual life. We faint easily under our burdens or in our struggles. We are not living victoriously. We are not filled with the spirit of Christ. We may have other things—we may have plenty of money; we may have pleasure, power, honor; our hands may be full of tasks. But there is only a little of God in us, only a little of heaven. Our brains may be teeming with plans, projects and dreams of success—but of spiritual life, our veins are scant.

Christ came to give us just what we need—life. We can get it only from Him, and we can take it only as His gift. We have no conception, we who are merely living, with no great, strong, victorious life, what it is possible for us to become as Christians in this world—if only Christ would possess us fully, wholly.

Henry van Dyke tells of two streams that emptied into the sea:

One was a sluggish rivulet, in a wide, fat, muddy bed; and every day the tide came in and drowned out the poor little stream, and filled it with bitter brine. The other was a vigorous, joyful, brimming mountain river, fed from the unfailing spring among the hills; and all the time it swept the salt water back before it, and kept itself pure and sweet; and when the tide came, it only made the fresh water rise higher and gather new strength by the delay; and ever the living stream poured forth into the ocean, its tribute of living water—the symbol of that influence which keeps the ocean of life from turning into a Dead Sea of wickedness. But there is no way to save our lives from being swallowed up in the bitter floods of sin in this world—but by having them full of divine life. A feeble stream of spiritual life has no power to resist the evil of the world. Only the abundant life can keep itself pure and sweet. A wild gypsy girl was sitting for her picture, in an artist's studio in Germany. Opposite to her as she sat, hung an unfinished picture of the crucifixion. One day the girl asked, "Master, who is that?"

"That is Jesus Christ," replied the painter.

"Was He a very bad man, that they treated Him so cruelly?"

"On, no! He was the best Man that ever lived," said the artist, carelessly.

"Tell me more about Him," pleaded the girl, who had never heard of Jesus before.

Day after day as the girl came to the studio—her eyes remained fixed upon the picture of the Christ on His cross. When her sittings were ended and she was going away, she whispered: "Master, how can you help loving Him who, you say, died for you? If anybody had loved me like that—oh, I'd like to die for him!" Has not the love of Christ for you—power to win you to love Him?
The Raising of Lazarus

John 11:32-45 The eleventh chapter of John's gospel introduces us to an experience of our Lord's life which will ever be unspeakably precious to His friends. Here we enter a home which was in a very real way, our Lord's own home. Here He found love which was unspeakably rich and dear to His heart in its comforts and blessings. The house in which Martha and Mary and Lazarus lived—was one place in which Jesus was always sure of welcome when He came to their door weary—and always sure of refuge when He came from the strifes and enmities of the world.

Into this home, there came sore and fatal sickness. Jesus was absent. When Lazarus was stricken, a messenger was sent to Jesus bearing the simple message from the burdened hearts, "He whom you love is sick!" (John 11:3). We would think that such a message would have brought the Master at once. We think at least, that if we had been in His place, we would have made all haste, traveling by night and day, to get to our dying friend. But, strange to say, Jesus, after receiving the message, lingered two days longer where He was. Evidently He was not alarmed, although He knew all the circumstances. Explaining His delay in starting to the home of His friends, we have this remarkable statement: "Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. So when He heard that he was sick—He stayed two more days in the place where He was." That is, it was just because He loved the sisters and Lazarus, that He abode two days longer before He sent out to minister to them. When He reached Bethany at length, Lazarus had been dead four days. In the narrative we have our Lord's conversation with the sisters. Then we have the exquisite picture of the wary and way worn Christ, standing beside His friends in their grief, weeping with them. But we have more than tears—the same One who weeps—calls the dead from the grave, and gives back to the darkened home, its light and joy.

Martha was the first to meet Jesus when He reached the village. It was outside the home, in some quiet place. Presently He sent her to call Mary. The message was, "The Master has come—and is calling for you." John 11:28. Mary was sitting in the house in deep grief. Evidently the sisters and brother were bound together in very warm ties of affection. Probably they were orphans, keeping up the old home after father and mother were gone. A good brother is a great comfort and blessing to His sister, especially when they have neither parent to lean on. Great, therefore, was the grief when Lazarus died. Jesus had been a friend to them all, and when Mary had learned that He had come and that He wished to see her, she rose up quickly and hastened to Him. Jesus sends the same message to everyone who is in sorrow, "The Master has come—and is calling for you." He wants to comfort His friends who are in sorrow. He bids them come to Him with their trouble. No matter how deep the grief is, we should always do as Mary did—hasten to Jesus. He is the only

true Comforter. When Mary came to Jesus—she fell down at His feet. A true picture of Mary should always show her there. Mary seems to be grieving, almost complaining, at the Master's long delay in coming to the sad home. She told Jesus that if He had been there, her brother would not have died. Perhaps that was true. So far as we are told—no one ever died ever in the presence of Jesus. But the saving of Lazarus from dying was not the best thing for even divine power and love to do that day. When the word came that Lazarus was sick, Jesus said to His disciples that the sickness was "for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby." Curing His friend's fever would have glorified God and His Son—but raising him from the dead was a far greater glory! When a friend of ours is sick, it is right for us to pray for His restoration to health—but we do not know that this is the best thing. Perhaps the death of our loved one may be a better thing and more for God's glory than His living longer would be.

We do not know where God wants us to serve Him, nor how He would have us honor Him. It is better that we leave it all with our great Intercessor. The "if" was not a word of faith—but it is a word we are all too apt to use in like cases. "If we had sent for another physician," we say, or, "If we had tried some other remedies, our friend would not have died." But such words are not the language of the quietest trust in God. We are to do what seems to be wisest at the moment, with all the light we have, and then have no regrets or doubts afterwards. The shortest verse in the Bible is that which contains only the two words, "Jesus wept." This was His first way of comforting Mary. He entered into full and deep sympathy with her. This little verse is a great window into Christ's heart, showing us the depths of His very heart. It tells us that our blessed Lord, though so glorious, has a tender love for us and is touched by all our griefs. This alone is a wonderful comfort to those who are in trouble. A little child visited a neighbor who had lost her baby, and came home and told her mother that she had been comforting the sorrowing one. Her mother asked her how, and she said, "I cried with her." It does us good when we are in trouble to know that some other one cares, feels with us. It brings a sense of companionship into our loneliness. It puts another shoulder under our load. Sympathy halves our sorrows. But when it is Jesus who cares and is touched, weeps with us, and comes up close beside us in gentle companionship, it is wondrous comfort indeed. When Jesus came to the grave, He gave a command that the stone should be taken away. Could He not have taken it away Himself by a word, without any human help? Certainly He could. The power that called the dead back to life—could easily have lifted back the piece of rock from the door of the tomb to let the risen man out of His prison. But there is always something left for human hands to do. Christ honors us by making us coworkers with Himself, both in providence and in grace. He makes His word dependent, too, upon our fidelity in doing our little part. He still wants us to take away the stones that shut our friends in their prison. The manner of the raising of Lazarus is suggestive. We may place together all Christ's calls to the dead He raised. To the daughter of Jairus, His words were, "Maiden, arise!" To the young man of Nain, He said, "Young man, I say unto you, Arise!" He calls neither of these by name. Neither of them had been personally known to Him. But Lazarus was His own familiar friend; and therefore, He called him by his dear household name. Death does not destroy personality. Lazarus, in the region of the dead, knew His name, heard it called, and answered to it. In the coming of Lazarus from the grave at the call of Christ—we have a glimpse of what will take place at the final resurrection, when the same voice will be heard by all the dead. When Lazarus came forth at Christ's call, his friends had something to do in assisting him. Jesus bade them, "Loose him, and let him go." His limbs were bound so that he could not walk freely. It was necessary that these wrappings should be removed

in order that he might be free in his movements. Note Christ's economy in miracle. He did not by supernatural power take off these bandages, though He could have done so. Nor did He with His own hands unwrap the clothes and remove them. He bade His friends to do this, thus making them coworkers with Himself.

There is here a parable of spiritual things. When a soul hears Christ's voice and comes from its grave of death, there are still many old wrappings of sin, the grave clothes of an old life, chains of bad habits, the bonds of evil companionships and friendships. Lazarus walking forth from his grave with his limbs bound about and his freedom hindered, is a picture of every saved life at the first. The removing of these chains and hindrances, is work which Christ gives us to do for our friends who are beginning their new life. We are to set our friends free. We are to help them overcome their old habits and break off their sinful associations, and in all ways to seek to set them free for loving service. The Supper at Bethany

John 12:1-11

"Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor." The feast was in recognition of the great blessing Jesus had brought to the home in Bethany, in the calling back of Lazarus from death. He had turned their sorrow into joy, and the sisters' hearts were full of gratitude. No wonder they were grateful. There are many homes in which this story is read where there is even greater reason for gratitude than there was in this Bethany household. The dead have been brought back from the graves of spiritual death—and live in joy and beauty. Should not Christ be honored in all such households? There, too, should feasts be made for Him, feasts of love and thanksgiving. In every home, also, in which sorrow has been a guest and where Christ has come bringing comfort, there is reason for gratitude.

There are some people who are well-known in the Gospels by certain features which always appear in them. Wherever she is seen, Martha is known by her serving. Some people criticize her for this feature of life and speak as if she were to blame for the way she took of honoring her Master. It was too material. But Jesus did not say so. He did not reprove Martha for her careful housekeeping, nor for her hearty hospitality, nor for the pains she took to provide well for Him and His disciples. What He reproved in her, was not the serving—but her fretfulness, her worry, and her nervous impatience with her sister Mary, because she did not choose to honor the Master in the same way. While Martha was busy serving, eagerly preparing for a meal for her guests who had come in from their journey, Mary slipped away and sat down at her Guest's feet—to listen to His wonderful words. When Martha saw her there, she was vexed, and giving way to her feeling, chided her, almost petulantly, and spoke almost bitterly to Jesus, as if He ought to send Mary back to her tasks in the household.

It was this that Jesus did not like in Martha—not her serving—but her hurt feeling toward her sister, and her impatient complaint of her to the Master. There is great need for Marthas in the world. Beautiful as is the Mary-spirit, it would not do if all women were Marys, for whom then would do the work which needs so much to be done in countless households? For instance, a wife and mother who would spend all her time in Bible-reading, giving no thought to the domestic duties, would not make a very happy home for her family, and certainly would not bless the Master. There is need for service.

While we recognize Martha by her serving—we recognize Mary also by her place at the Master's feet. We see her always there, and she is always beautiful there. First, she sat there as a learner, drinking in the Teacher's words. Then she came to Him by and by in her great grief, and found comfort. We see her here again in this incident, in the same posture. Now, however, it is at the feast made in Christ's honor. "Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." Another Gospel tells us that she first poured the ointment on His head. Her act was an expression of the tenderest, most humble, most reverent love. We should bring Christ—the best we have to bring. The fragrant ointment was a beautiful symbol of the love of a thankful and gentle heart. We should bring Christ our deepest gratitude and purest affection. No words could express the love Mary bore to her Master, so she put it into an act. The record says "And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." Indeed, the whole world has been filled ever since that day, with the fragrance of Mary's deed of love. We all should seek to fill our homes with the fragrance of love. While we have our own loved ones about us, we should seek every opportunity to give them the comfort and the joy of love. A home is not made beautiful by expensive pictures on the walls, by rich carpets on the floors, by costly furniture in the rooms, or by beautiful flowers in every corner—but by love which sheds itself abroad in all gentleness, kindness, patience, thoughtfulness, and tenderness.

There always are some to criticize even the beautiful and sacred things which love does. It is said here that even one of the Lord's disciples, found fault with Mary's pure deed. "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages!" We are not surprised to read in the record that it was Judas Iscariot who began the criticism of Mary's act. He spoke of the pouring out of the nard, as waste. It had been noted that the word "waste" here used by Judas means literally perdition, and we remember that Jesus called Judas the son of perdition; that is, a man who utterly wasted His life. There still are people who think everything wasted, that cannot be coined into dollars or that does not result in immediate or direct practical usefulness. But the truth is, that much of the sweetest blessing scattered in this world, is the fragrance from the breaking of love's alabaster boxes. It does not coin into money. It is well to give food and clothing to the poor—but sometimes love and sympathy are better. In some places, groups of Christian young people, are in the habit of carrying flowers to sick rooms or to homes of pain and sorrow. These flowers are much like Mary's ointment. They do not feed anyone's hunger, nor put clothing on the backs of children, nor put coal into the stove. But the fragrance of love often carries more real comfort and cheer into homes—than would the largest gifts of charity. Besides, Christ looks into the heart, and He is pleased with love there, whether the expression of the emotion takes the form of garments for the poor—or flowers for the sick room. The life that is given to Christ and spent in the service of love—is not lost, not wasted. Love is never lost, even though nothing practical or utilitarian should seem to come of its outpouring. That life alone is wasted—which is emptied out in sin or spent in idleness, selfishness, or self-indulgence. The keen criticism of the disciples must have pained the heart of Mary beyond measure. But the gracious commendation of her deed which Jesus promptly gave, proved a comfort and brought back the joy. "Leave her alone! Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me!" We cannot know how her loving thought of Him and her sweet honoring of Him, strengthened Jesus for His sorrowful way, how He was helped in His struggle in Gethsemane and in the darkness of His cross by the love that Mary lavished upon Him in her anointing. He said also, "She did what she could. She

poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial!" We do not know that Mary understood that Christ must die—and that she planned her anointing of Him with distinct reference to that event. But even if she did not, her anointing was most timely. It fit into the need of that hour. It brought great joy to the Master, and the joy came to Him at the time when He craved sympathy and love, and when His burdened heart could appreciate the experience. In Mark's gospel we have the words, "She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial." Many people would have kept that vase sealed up until after Jesus was dead, and then have brought it out and emptied it on His body. After a man dies, there is never any lack of kind words about him, or of flowers for His coffin. But Mary's way was better. Let us bring our alabaster boxes and break them while our friends are alive to enjoy and be refreshed by the perfume. Let us fill the lives of those who are dear to us with sweetness; speaking approving, cheering, heartening words while their hearts can be warmed and blessed by them. The flowers you mean to send for your friends' coffins—send to brighten and sweeten their homes before they die. Do not keep the alabaster boxes of your love and tenderness sealed up—until they are gone. Speak approving, encouraging words—while their ears can hear them.

Jesus Entering into Jerusalem

John 12:12-26 The time of the triumphal entry was five days before the crucifixion. There was an immense contrast between the two events. Here we see Jesus riding as a King into the holy city, followed by a great multitude of wildly enthusiastic people. It is a glimpse in earthly expression of the Messianic glory of Jesus. His reign was to be spiritual—but here once, it took on a form which made its appeal to the senses of mankind. The other evangelists tell us that disciples had a part in preparing for the great pageant. We learn also that it was Jesus Himself who gave the command for this display. Once before when the enthusiastic multitude would have taken Him by force to make Him a king—He resisted and rejected the honor, sent His disciples away, dispersed the crowd, and fled to the mountains, taking refuge in prayer. Now, however, it is at His own command that this procession is undertaken. He would proclaim His Messiahship in a way that would make appeal to the rejecters. Or we may say that this really was the ride of the King to His coronation, for was not the cross the stairway to the Messiah's throne? The events of this day fulfilled an ancient prophecy. The song that was sung, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" was a joyous outburst from the hearts of the people. Yet we know how soon that "Hosanna!" was changed to "Crucify him!" A picture of the cross by Tintoretto represents the scene of the Crucifixion after it was over. It is late in the evening. The cross is empty. The multitude has scattered, and all is quiet. The crown of thorns is lying on a rock near by. Then, in the background, a donkey is seen feeding on withered palm leaves. This suggests how short-lived was the enthusiasm of which the palm branches were the emblem, and marks the contrast between the shouts on this Palm Sunday—and the angry cries on the following Friday! The effect of this day's events on different people, is indicated in the passage. The disciples did not then understand what it all meant. Afterwards, however, they remembered that the things which happened that day had been foretold of Jesus in prophecy. We need the "afterwards" to explain many perplexities in our lives. In the light of future events—present mysteries become clear. The effect on the multitude was probably transient, and yet we are told that they remembered the raising of Lazarus when they beheld the scenes of triumphal entry. The effect of the strange events of that day on the Pharisees was still further to embitter them. They said, "See, this is

getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!" The incident of the coming of the Greeks occurred two days after the triumphal entry. These Greeks were Gentiles. They had learned the Jewish religion and were worshipers in the temple. They had come up from their own country to attend the feast of the Passover. They wished to see Jesus. Why they wished to see Him, we are not told. Whatever their definite desire may have been, their prayer is one which should be on the lips of every one of us, "We would like to see Jesus!" This should be the deepest wish and prayer of every heart. The great business of life—should be to know Jesus Christ, to get intimately acquainted with Him. It was not enough to know about Him—we should be content with nothing less than personal knowledge of Him as a friend. We cannot see Jesus now in the flesh—but we can see Him by faith as our Savior—and take Him into our lives in the most real sense—as our intimate companion.

These Greeks came to two of Christ's disciples and asked them to introduce them to their Master. A little child was dying, and she said she was not afraid to die, for she was going to be with Jesus. But she wished so much that her mother would come with her to introduce her. "For you know, mother," said the little one, "that I was always afraid of strangers." But no one will find Jesus a stranger. He loves to be sought and to have people want to see Him. Yet it is always a precious privilege, to be permitted to introduce another person to Him. The reply of Jesus to the request of these Greek visitors was, "The hour has come, that the Son of man should be glorified." By the "hour" He referred to the time of His death, the hour toward which He had been moving through all the years of His life. Every one of us is moving toward our "hour." It is not marked on any earthy calendar; we do not know in what year, or in what month, or day, it lies—but it is fixed in the plan of God, and we shall come to it at the appointed time.

It seems strange to us to have Jesus speak of His death as His being glorified. He died on a cross of shame. It seemed to the world, as the extinction of all glory for Him. He Himself, however, explained the meaning in the words, "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." A grain of wheat laid away carefully in a dry place, remains simply a grain of wheat, with no increase. It cannot thus reach its best. It is only when it is cast away, as it seems, and falls into the ground and perishes as to it's form—that it is really glorified, springing up into a harvest of golden wheat.

Jesus might have saved Himself from the sacrifice and death—if He had sought to do so. He might have turned away from His enemies and have found an asylum among the Gentiles. He might have lived to old age, teaching, healing and blessing the world. Yet, He would not in His years of comfort and quiet usefulness, have done the work He had been sent into the world to do. Life is not measured by the number and length of its years—but by the completeness of its devotion to the will of God. Jesus never would have glorified God by fleeing from the sacrifice of the cross, to an asylum which would have given Him continued years of comfort and ease. By giving Himself up to death on the cross—He became the world's Redeemer! Christianity, with all its marvelous fruits and blessings, is the real glorifying of Christ. If He had not gone to His cross, this glorifying would never have been attained.

Jesus taught His disciples further, that not only must He Himself reach His glory by way of His cross—but that those who would follow Him must also walk in the same way. "The man who loves his life—will lose it; while the man who hates his life in this world—will keep it for eternal life."

There are two ways of living. We may live for self, taking good care of our lives, not exposing them to danger, not making any sacrifices, caring only for our own interests. We may then prosper in this world, and people will commend our prudence. We may reach old age robust and well-preserved, and may greatly enjoy our accumulated honors and possessions. That is one way of living—loving our life and saving it from the costly service to which we were called—but in the end it is only that wheat kept from falling into the ground to die. There will be no harvest. That is the outcome of selfishness. Its end is death. "He who loves his life—loses it." The other way of living is to forget SELF—not to care for one's own life or to try to preserve it—but to give it out at God's call, to throw it away in unselfish service. People will say you are foolish thus to waste your golden life, thus to sacrifice yourself for the sake of others, or in the cause of Christ. But was Christ foolish when He chose to go to His cross? The redeemed Church is the answer. Ignatius said, when facing the fierce lions in the arena: "I am grain of God. Let me be ground between the teeth of lions—if thus I may become bread to feed God's people." Was the martyr foolish? Did he really waste His witnessing for His Lord? The way to make nothing of one's life—is to take too good care of it. The way to make one's life an eternal success—is to do with it as Jesus did with His.

Serving, Following, Sharing

John 12:26

"Whoever serves me—must follow me." If he would be My servant; if he would belong to Me—let him follow me. Let him live as I live, come close after Me in spirit, in manner of life, walk in My steps. "Where I am—there shall also my servant be." To follow Christ here, in this world, in the way He marks out, is to follow Him also in His exaltation, to reward, to heavenly honor. To share His cross—is also to share His glory.

If Jesus had taken care of His life, if, for instance, He had gone with these Greeks to their country, He might have been welcomed and have received homage, honor, and love; and have lived many years to teach and heal and do good; but there would have been no Gethsemane, with its tears; no Calvary, with its cross of redemption; no grave of Arimathea, with its resurrection. "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."

We admit the truth of this in Christ's own life. We understand that He accomplished infinitely more by giving His life in service and sacrifice at an early age—than He would have done if He had saved it from suffering and death and devoted it for long years to good deeds. But the same is true of all lives. Christ by His example taught all of us the true way to live. "If any man serves me." That was what Christ's disciples wished to do. They had listened to His call and had joined His company. This meant to serve Him. They believed in Him. They were sure that no one like Him had ever come among men as teacher, helper and leader. They wanted to serve Him.

What is it to serve Christ? There is a common form of religious speech which is misleading. We call church worship "divine service." We say our morning service is at ten forty-five, our evening service at seven forty-five. Service in this use of the word means singing hymns, reading the Scriptures, praying, and meditating on some devotional theme. But this is not service at all, in the higher sense. "If a child finds itself in need of anything, it runs and asks the father for it. Does it call that doing its father a service? When a child loves its father very much, and is very happy, it may

sing little songs about him; but it doesn't call that serving its father. Neither is singing hymns to God, serving God. Of course, in a sense we are serving Christ when we worship Him in a meeting. But this is not all that such service means.

What is it to serve Christ? How are we to serve Him? The answer is here. "Whoever serves me—must follow me." Follow me? What does that mean? It was sometimes literal following with the first disciples. Andrew and Simon and John and James were fishermen. Jesus bade them follow Him, and they left their boats and nets and fishing tackle, gave up their business—and went with Jesus. Matthew was sitting in a little booth, collecting taxes from people who went by, and Jesus said, "Follow me." Matthew left His business and went with the Master. Following Christ may mean the same in our day. If you are in a sinful business and hear the call of Christ—you are to leave the bad business. There are men and women whom Christ wants to follow Him away from home and country, to be missionaries in foreign lands. But the literal following is not always the meaning of the call.

We are to follow Christ—in the way of sacrifice. That was the way Jesus lived. He hated His life. This does not mean that He despised life, that He regarded His life as of no account. Sometimes you hear a discouraged man say: "My life is of no value. I cannot be of any use. I can never do anything worthwhile. I may as well die." Jesus did not mean that we are to hate our life in that way. God never made a life to be useless. Jesus said no one shall accept even the whole world—in exchange for His life. Think what Jesus must have thought, of the value of human lives when he laid down His own life to redeem men. It is a sin—to hate your life, to despise it, to regard it as of no value, to throw it away. Love your life, prize it, for it is worth more than worlds! Keep it, cherish it, and guard it. Never say that you can be of no use.

What, then, does Jesus mean when He says, "He who loves His life—shall lose it?" He means loving life more than duty, more than obedience. To hate one's life in this world—is to give it up gladly in service of others, to lose it in saving others.

Recently an English medical journal reported that Dr. Waddell was attending a poor man's child with diphtheria, when the operation of a tracheotomy became necessary. The instant clearing of the trachea became a matter of life and death, and at the risk of his life, the doctor sucked the tube free of the diphtheritic membrane. The child recovered—but the doctor contracted the disease. He hated his life; that is, he thought it not too valuable to sacrifice in the doing of his duty as a physician. The records of every day are full of instances when in hospitals, in private sick rooms, on railway trains, in mines, and in all kinds of service—men and women are illustrating the lesson. The highest example the world ever saw, was in Christ's own case, when He gave His life to save the world.

It is easy enough to think of this law of life—as a mere theory. Now and then there comes an opportunity also to illustrate it in some grand way, as some nurse does it, as some true doctor does it, as another does it. But how are we going to live this way in the common experience of everyday life? "If any man serves me—let him follow me." "He who hates His life—shall keep it unto life eternal." We may interpret this law of the cross so as to make it apply to the experiences of the home, the neighborhood, the school, the business office. The keynote of the lesson we are trying to learn, is self-denial, which is not merely doing without meat during Lent, giving up some customary indulgences for a few weeks, sacrificing a few things you do not much care for. There

are few farces enacted in the world, equal in emptiness to the farce of pious self-denial, as it is played by a good many people, for example, in the Lenten days, meanwhile living selfishly in all the relations of the common days. Self-denial as Christ practice it and teaches it—is denying yourself—hating your own life, laying it on the altar, that some other one may be helped.

Hating your life, means stooping down and considering the needs of little children, the loneliness and wariness of old people; it means thinking of people no one else is likely to think of or care for; being patient with disagreeable people, cranky people, and kind to them; going far out of your way to be obliging to one who would not go out of his way an inch to do a good turn to you; not noticing slights and inattentions, or even slurs and offensive things—except to be all the more Christlike to those who so ungraciously treat you; saying especially kind things of anyone who had been saying unusually unkind things of you. That is what Christ did. The papers recently told the story of the way a young man gave himself. He was poor—but had a great desire to be a gentleman, then to become a lawyer. He saved enough money from his earnings and his economy—to carry him through college. His first year he made a friend, a young man, brilliant, and noble as well. The two were roommates and became devoted to each other, in spite of their differences. During the first summer vacation the father of the well-to-do boy died and he then had no money to continue his course. He wrote to his friend and told him he could not return to college, that he must abandon his dream of education and go to work. The poor friend, after a short time wrote to him in this way:

You have a fine capacity and will make a useful man if you have education. I have found out that I would be only a fourth-rate lawyer at best. It will be far better for you to be educated, than for me. I have money enough saved to carry me through college. You must take my money and complete your course. I enclose a draft for the amount. I will drop out of sight altogether and lose myself. Do not try to find me—it will be of no use. Do not refuse the money—you never can return it to me." This is what Christ spoke of when he advocated the "hating" of one’s life. This is self-denial of the noblest kind.

You do not begin to know how many opportunities you have every day, of hating your life in this world, giving yourself to help some other one upward. In the home life, the opportunity comes continually, the opportunity of giving up your own way to make another happier; to put another upward; of keeping gentle and sweet, instead of becoming irritated and provoked; of speaking a soft answer instead of a cutting one; of taking the heavy end of some burden, that a more frail one may not be crushed; of giving cheer to one who is discouraged. There are a hundred opportunities every day—of dropping yourself out—and putting another in the way of receiving the favor; of laying selfishness on the cross and nailing it there—and showing love instead. How do the boys treat their sisters? How do people in comfortable homes, with plenty, regard and treat the neighbor who is having pinching times, or has a sick child? Do you hate your life, your comfort, your luxury, in the sense of doing without some of it—to show kindness and give help? There is an almost infinite field of opportunities for denying self, sacrificing one’s own feelings, desires, preferences, to make life easier, happier, and more joyous to others.

There is another sphere of opportunities for living out the doctrine of the cross in every day life. "Do justice and judgment" (Genesis 18:19; Proverbs 21:3), runs the Bible teaching. Have you ever thought how grievously many of us fail in being just to others? We are unreasonable; we are exacting; we are unfair; we are partial. We criticize others unmercifully. We commend very few

people; we condemn almost everybody for something. Oh, what ungodly judges of the acts of others we are!

Then, do you ever think how little of real forgiveness there is among us, even among Christian people? We talk a great deal about forgiveness, ad we pray it every time we say the Lord's Prayer; but how much Christian forgiveness do we practice? "How often must I forgive?" asked Peter. He thought seven times would be enough. "Seventy-seven times," said Jesus—that is, without counting. It is hard to forgive an enemy—it is not a natural disposition or act—it is divine—it is Christ in us. But do not forget it is Christian, and you cannot be a Christian yourself in anything; You need Christ living in you. You need Christ in you—to forgive as He forgives. But this is part of our lesson—the cross in daily life. Not to forgive—is to love your own life, and that is to lose it in the end. To forgive—is to hate your own life, not to insist on having your own way, in demanding your rights—but to bear the wrong, the insult, the injustice, to return good for evil, kindness for unkindness, to turn the other cheek when one cheek is already smarting with the smiting.

Oh, what a new world we Christians would soon make—if this old earth would only get the law of the cross into our conduct and spirit for a time! What heart-burnings we would cure! What hurts of love we would heal! One of the fine sayings of Lincoln quoted before the recent centenary of His birth was this, "Die when I may, I want it said by those who know me best—that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower—where I though a flower would grow." That is one of the ways of hating one's own life in this world—as Christ spoke about.

It is so easy to plant thistles—instead of plucking them up! It is so easy to pluck up roses—instead of planting them! It is so easy not to deny ourselves, just to let the old unregenerate self rule our spirit and go on with its bitter jealousies, envyings, resentments, injustices, believing evil of others, judging others. Do you know what such life will come to in the end? "He who loves his life"—that is, cherishes all these evil things, thinks only of his own wishes, demands always his own way, no matter who is crushed or hurt, "He who loves his life—shall lose it."

"If any man serves me—let him follow me." That is our lesson. It is not easy—it is very hard. Nature never can learn it. When we no longer love our own life, and instead instantly give it up to do a kindness to another, to give help, whatever the cost; when we forget our own interest and put another forward instead of ourselves—then we are following Christ. "He that hates his life in this world—shall keep it unto life eternal."

There is still another thing to learn—sharing. "If any man serves me—let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be." perhaps in this age of materialism we do not look on enough to think what will come after this life is over. "He who loves his life—shall lose it." Look ahead and think what that means—loving self, loving life, losing it, having nothing out of it but death. That is the end of selfishness, living for self, having one's own way. "He that hates his life in this world—shall keep it unto life eternal." That is what came out of Christ's life of self-denial here, His hating His own life. You will reach the same glory: "Where I am, there shall also my servant be." Where is Christ today? Think of being with Him when you have finished your life of serving and following Him here. Did you ever sit down quietly and seriously consider where you will be, and what you will be—after you are dead?

Think what it will be to be where Christ is. "Where I am—there shall also my servant be." Think of reward. People sometimes call it sacrifice now, talking dolefully of how much they have given up in their life of self-denial. Call it not sacrifice to give up your own way to give others joy and do them good, even to give up your life that others may be saved. Sacrifice! "Where I am—there shall also my servant be!" Oh, no, not sacrifice—but glory.

"Where I am—there shall also my servant be."

Washing the Disciples' Feet

John 13:1-14

It is supposed that the strife among the disciples as to which was the greatest, led to the incident of the washing of the feet. None of the disciples was willing to perform the lowly duty of washing the feet of others. The service belonged to the youngest, or the one of lowest rank. Then Jesus quietly did it Himself. It was not in a moment of depression that He performed this deed of lowly humility. He was fully conscious of His divine character while He knelt before His disciples washing their feet. It was this consciousness of His glory that made the condescension so stupendous. It would have been no condescension for John or Peter to have washed the feet of the others. The story of Christ's act of humility is told in very beautiful words. Jesus did not consider His holy hands, too fine for the washing of the feet of the twelve men who sat around the table. Some of us think we are too great or too high in rank among men—to stoop to any lowly service like this. Our thought of our greatness and our dignity prevents us from doing the beautiful things of love. That was the way the disciples thought of themselves. Christ's act of humility is an answer to all such pride and pretension. Never was there any other being of such glorious nobility as Jesus; yet He did not hesitate to perform this lowliest of all service. Some us like to do all our serving by proxy. We will pay a deaconess or a city missionary for relieving the poor or ministering to the sick—but will not do the work with our own hands. We do not know what blessing we miss, in declining to accept such blessed service, nor how much more the service means—when we do it with our own hands. "The gift without the giver—is bare."

Peter shrank from having his Master perform such menial service for him. It was natural for him to feel thus. It was his deep sense of personal unworthiness that led him to exclaim as he saw his master about to perform the lowly service, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" The answer Jesus gave bade him submit, though he could not understand what was being done. Someday it would all be clear to him.

"You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." There are many things which Christ does which at the time we cannot understand. They seem mysterious to us. Yet afterwards we shall see the reason for them and find beauty in them. This is true of many of the providences of our lives. At one time Jacob said, "All these things are against me" (Genesis 42:36). But he lived to see that the very things which he thought were against him—were really working for His good. So it always is in the dealings of God with His people. We cannot understand now—but someday we shall know. "The tapestry weavers do their work on the reverse side, looking at the ends and threads, a mystery of tangle and confusion—but not seeing the beautiful picture they are making on the other side. So we are weaving our lives largely on the reverse side." Some day we shall look on the beauty we are unconsciously making in our life

today.

There was something generous in Peter's outspoken feeling that he could not allow the holy hands of Christ to wash his feet. It showed his thought of the glory of Christ—and his sense of his own unworthiness. But the answer of Jesus was startling. "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." It was not merely the washing of the feet to which Jesus referred. Cleanliness is a virtue, no doubt, and a duty as well; but Christian discipleship could not be made to turn on anything so incidental. This word of Christ implies among other things—that no one can be a disciple who insists upon having his own way. Utter self-surrender is the essential condition.

We must put ourselves wholly in Christ's hands, and must do just as He bids us—or we can have no part with Him. It is not ours to reason why, or to make any reply—it is ours only to obey.

Especially must this word of Christ be considered in its reference to spiritual cleansing. Unless Christ washes us—we can have no part with Him. No one can be a disciple, until he has been cleansed, and only Christ can cleanse us. Some people profess to take Christ as a teacher, who yet feel no need of being washed by Him. We must understand that this word is final—that Jesus will receive no disciples who do not submit to Him first to be cleansed by Him. The picture of Jesus with the basin is one of wonderful suggestiveness. He must come to all of us first in this way—that He may wash us.

Peter went then to the other extreme, as his impulsive nature always did. He was wiling to submit not only his feet—but his hands and his head. Then Jesus told him that "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean." Bathing is the cleansing of the whole body; and washing is the rinsing off of the dust that gathers on the feet in walking from the bath to the table. There was no necessity for washing Peter's hands and head—he had just come from the bath, and was clean except that his feet had become soiled with the dust as he walked. But there is a spiritual meaning too. Peter was a justified and regenerated man—he was "clean." All he needed, therefore, now was that the stains of his daily sinning and from his contacts with the world, should be removed. The lesson here is important. Bathing must come before washing. That is, the mere cleansing of daily sins amounts to nothing—unless we have first been received by Christ and justified and saved by Him. The acceptance of Christ as our Savior lifts the guilt from our souls and leaves us free from condemnation. Yet after that, even the holiest need daily forgiveness for daily sins.

Jesus taught the disciples the meaning of what He had done. "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet—you also should wash one another's feet." We must do all lowly service for each other. We should have in our hearts that love which will lead us into the lowliest service for even the lowliest people.

Then Christ's act was more than one of service—it meant the cleansing of faults, the removing of blemishes of character, the washing of stains gathered in passing through the world. We should seek to rend this service also to each other. We are to help each other to become Christians. We are to seek sanctification, purification, and upbuilding in character of our fellow disciples. Of course, we cannot wash away sins—Christ alone can do that. But we can do something toward making others purer, better and holier. This part of Christian friendship requires great wisdom. It is not easy to reprove the faults of others. We must be careful, first of all, that our own hands are

clean—before we attempt to cleanse the stains on the lives of others. We must cast out the beam from our own eye—before we can attempt to remove the mote from our brother's eye. The New Commandment

John 13:34-35

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples—if you love one another."

Jesus was about to leave His disciples. "Yet a little while I am with you." He wanted them to stand together when he was gone. He knew, too, how great a danger there was, that they would fall apart. His church which He had come to establish depended on these men. If they were not true and loyal to each other, His work would fail. So, with all earnestness, He pleaded with them to love one another. This would be their safeguard and the secret of their power after He had left them. Nothing but love would hold them together.

Jesus spoke of this last exhortation to them as a new commandment. Why new? Really it was new. There was an old commandment which ran, "Love your neighbor—as yourself." The new commandment is, "Love one another—as I have loved you." Love is the distinct mark of discipleship. "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples—if you have love one to another." Christians are to be known in the world, not by the creed they profess, nor by their church membership—but by their love for each other. Love puts a brand on them. Sometimes we hear of a church with strifes and quarrels among its members. What kind of witness is such a church giving to the world for its Master? "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another." The church which has a right to call itself a church of Christ—is one in which the members love one another—as Christ loves them. This puts upon us a serious responsibility as churches and as individual Christians. We dare not be contentious, quarrelsome, biting and devouring one another. The world would then laugh at our profession that we are a company of the friends of Christ. When a man joins a church he assumes the obligation of love. He says, "I will love my fellow Christians—as Christ loves me." What does he mean? Does he mean that he will love only the gentle, agreeable, congenial, refined members; those who show him a great deal of honor, those who are kind to him, sympathetic, eager to favor and help him? He must love these. But suppose there are among the members—some who are not congenial, not obliging, who do not show him deference, whose lives are not lovely—does he have to love these? "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples—if you have love one to another." There do not seem to be any exceptions. How was it with the first disciples? Were they all of the loveable kind? John was. He must have been sweet-spirited, good-tempered, and affectionate. But how about Peter, Matthew, Andrew, Thomas? Were they all loveable? One of them had treason in his heart. Another denied Jesus. All of them forsook Him in the hour of His great need and sorrow. Yet, how did Jesus love these? He loved on—He loved to the end. How are we to love our fellow Christians? As Christ loves us.

What would be the effect if all Christian people, all who belong to Christian churches, would begin to love one another—as Christ loved His first disciples, as He loves every one of His people now? Paul tells us how true Christian love acts, how it shows itself. It is in personal contacts and association. "Love is patient" (see 1 Corinthians 13:4). That is, it bears patiently with others faults, unkindnesses, ill-treatment, and ingratitude. "Love is kind." It keeps on being kind, in spite of all

the unkindness it receives. It is kindness that we need always to show—just the art of being kind is all this old world needs—and it must always be kept in our lives. The trouble is, however, that with too many of us our kindness is spasmodic, is shown only when we feel like it—and is checked continually by things that happen. Nothing ever stopped Christ's kindness—nothing ever should stop a Christian's kindness. Love in the heart—should flow out in the life, as an unintermittent stream.

Take another line from the picture. "Love does not behave rudely." That is, it never forgets itself, is never ill-mannered, is not prideful. Bad temper is rude. Did you ever notice in the story of the life of Jesus—how He always respected people? He seemed to have reverence for almost every person who came before Him, even the worst? The reasons were—that He loved everyone, that He saw in each the glorious possibilities of heavenly sonship. If we had our Master's regard for and His deep interest in the lives of men—we would never act rudely toward even the unworthiest. A newspaper gives an account of a new society which has been organized by a company of people. It is called "The Take Heed Society." It seems that a member of the company boarded once in a rather sleepy New England town with a prim spinster who was a wonderfully charitable woman. She was never heard to say an unkind word to anybody. Further acquaintance showed that charity and brotherly feeling were almost universally practiced by the people of the village. The good woman made inquiry and learned that they all belonged to this organization, never met in a body as other societies do. They had no officers, paid no dues, and assessed no fines except individually upon themselves. There was a fine mentioned in the pledge—but this was to be imposed by the offending person upon himself if he ever violated the fundamental rules of the organization. He was to fix his own fine, making it as large as he was able to pay, and it was to be paid, not to the treasurer—but to the first poor and needy person he met. It is said that every member of the company had eagerly joined this Take Heed Society when it was proposed to organize it. It may be worthwhile to start such societies in families, in boarding houses, in Sunday-school classes, in circles of friends. It might help much in getting this law of love—not to behave ourselves rudely—into every day of life.

"Love is not easily provoked" (see 1 Corinthians 13:5). That is, it does not become vexed or irritated at what another may say or do. It may be noticed, too, that some people even get provoked at inanimate things! A man awkwardly stumbled against a chair, flew into a violent passion, and kicked the chair with great energy. Bad temper is said to be one of the most common of the vices. No other infirmity is so often confessed. A great many people will tell you that they find no other fault so hard to overcome, as that of bad temper. They do not seem, either, ashamed to make the confession, and apparently do not consider the fault a serious one. Sometimes it is spoken of apologetically as an infirmity of nature, a family failing, a matter of temperament, certainly not a fault to be taken very seriously, or anything more than a matter of regret. It has been said that bad temper is the vice of the virtuous. Men and women whose characters are noble, whose lives are beautiful in every other way, have this one blot. They are sensitive, touchy, easily ruffled, easily hurt! But we make a grave mistake when we let ourselves think that bad temper is a mere trifling weakness. It is almost disfiguring blemish. We know that Jesus set for us a perfect model of living. He came to show us in a simple human life—how we ought to live, and then how, through His grace and help, we may live; and He was never provoked. You cannot point to a single instance of His becoming even ruffled in temper. He never lost His calmness, His

repose of mind, His peace. He was reviled—but reviled not in return. He was insulted—but showed no sign. In all His quiet, restrained, and loving life—He never once was provoked. When he bids us to love one another as He has loved us—this is certainly part of what He means.

Another part of our lesson concerns life with others in personal contact and association. Paul, in a letter, named several people who, he said, had been a comfort to him. It is a fine thing to have one say of us that we have been a comfort to him. There are people who have been a comfort to you. You are glad they live. Then there are other people who have not been a comfort to you, who have not made life happier and easier for you.

Sometimes you hear one say that a certain person has been a thorn in his side. In a conversation on a railway train, one reports catching this bit of a sentence: "Yes, I suppose she's good—I know she is. But she isn't pleasant to live with!" A goodness that isn't pleasant to live with—is not the kind that Jesus had in mind when He said we should love one another as He loves us. Indeed, being "pleasant to live with" is one of the final tests of Christlikness in life. Christ, Himself, was pleasant to live with. He never made anybody uncomfortable by His lack of lovingness, by selfishness, by censoriousness, by unsympathetic moods or words or looks. Whatever else you may fail to strive to be at home, among your friends, in your church life and fellowship, do not fail to seek and pray to be pleasant to live with.

You are careful never to fail to do the little things of duty. Your friends cannot say that you are inattentive to them, that you leave undone any of the kindly deeds of neighborliness or even of brotherliness which you ought to have done. But if, meanwhile, you are not pleasant to live with—is there not something greatly lacking? The ideal Christian life is one that gives comfort to others as well as help. It is gracious and winning in spirit—and also in manner. It is a blessing to everyone it touches.

Loving one another as Christ loves us—must make it easier for others to work with us. A minister was telling me of a couple people in his church who are excellent workers, full of zeal and energy, always doing things—but he said they had always to work alone—they could not work with others. There are horses that will not pull in a team—they are to be driven single. There are people who have the same weakness. They want to do good—but they must do it by themselves. They will not work with another person. Then, soon it is true the other way—nobody else will work with them!

There is a kind of buggy with only two wheels and a seat for one. It is called a sulky, because it obliges the rider to be alone. Some people are happiest when they ride alone, when they work alone. But the love of Christ teaches us a better way. We need to learn to think of others, those with whom we are associated in Christian life and work. It is so in all associated life.

It is so in marriage when two lives are brought together in close relations. It is evident that both cannot have their own way in everything. There is not room for any two people to have their own way in the marriage relation. They are one now, occupying one the place of one, and they must live as one. There must either be the giving up of all by the one to the other—or else there must be the blending of the two lives in one. The latter is the true marriage. Each dies the one for the other. Love unites them and they are no longer two—but now one—two souls with but a common thought, two hearts that beat as one. The same process should prevail in Christian life and work. Headstrong individualism should be softened and modified by love. Jesus sent forth His disciples

in pairs. Two working together—are better than two working separately. One is strong in one point—and weak in another. The second is strong where the first is weak, and thus the two supplement each other. Paul speaks of certain people as yoke-fellows (see Php 4:3). Yoke-fellows draw together patiently and steadily, two necks under the same yoke, two hearts pouring their love into one holy fellowship of service. It is very important that Christian people should love one another as Christ loves them—when they are called to work together for their Master. None of us should insist on always having his own way. In community of counsel there is wisdom. Jesus says distinctly, that when two agree in prayer there is more power in the pleading, and the prayer will be surer of answer. In our Master's service we should work together in love. It never should have to be said of us—that other people cannot work with us. The secret of being agreeable work-fellows is love. The Christian who is always wanting to be an officer, to have positions of prominence, to be chairman or president, first in everything, has not caught the spirit of the love of Christ, who came not to be ministered unto—but to minister. Love never demands the first place. It works just as enthusiastically and faithfully at the foot of a committee, as at the head of it. It works humbly, seeking counsel of the other members, and not asserting its own opinion as the only wise one. It seeks in honor to prefer the other rather than self. It is content to be overlooked, set aside—if only Christ is held up. It is patient with the faults of fellow workers. It strives in all ways to have the Master the real leader in all work. "Love one another; as I have loved you," is the command of Christ. Hold together, stand together. Be as one in love for others which will sacrifice anything, everything, that the Master's name may never suffer any dishonor. This counsel of Christ calls us to a love like His—in building up His kingdom. "As I have loved you." How as that? He loved and gave Himself. We must love and give ourselves. Some people are leaving out the cross these days—in their thought of Christ. They preach about His wonderful teaching, His marvelous character, His sublime works—but say nothing about His death. But we need the cross. We can be saved only by His sacrificial sin-atoning love. Then, the service of ours which will really bless others—must also be a sacrificial service. "As I have loved you" means loving unto the end. We must give our lives for the brethren—as He gave His life for us.

It is not easy—but it was not easy for Christ to love us as He did. To love as He did—is to let our lives be consumed as in a flame, to let them be burned as on an altar. The trouble with too much of what we call love—is that it costs nothing, is only a sort of gilded selfishness, is not ready to give up anything, to suffer, to endure. Oh, profane not the holy name of love, by calling such life as that love! To love as Christ loves—is to repeat Christ's sacrifice continually in serving, bearing, enduring—that others may be helped, blessed, saved. Christ's love laid itself across the chasm of eternal death—to make a bridge for us to pass over, from death to life!

"Love one another, as I have loved you." Let us try to know what the words mean, and then let the love of Christ itself into our heart. Then it will not be we that love—but Christ loving in us.

How Christ Comforts

John 14:1-2 The words of the fourteenth chapter of John were spoken by the Master to His friends in a time of deep grief which seemed inconsolable. Yet He said, "Let not your heart be troubled." This seemed a strange thing to say to those men that night. How could they keep their hearts from being troubled in such circumstances? To think of all that Jesus had grown to be to them! For three years they had been members of His personal family, enjoying the most intimate relations

with Him.

How much a friend can be to us, depends on the friend. If he has a rich character, a noble personality, power to love deeply, capacity for friendship, the spirit of pure unselfishness; if he is able to inspire us to heroism and to worthy living—what he can be to us is immeasurable. Think what Jesus Christ, with His marvelous manhood, must have been as a friend to His disciples, and you can understand something of what His going from them meant to them.

Then He was more than a friend to them. They had believed in Him as the Messiah, who was to redeem them and lead them to honor and glory. Great hope rested in Him. His death was, as it seemed to them—the defeat and failure of all their hopes. The announcement that He was to leave them, swept away, as they thought, all that made life worthwhile. There are human friends whose death seems to leave only desolation in the hearts and lives of those who have loved them and leaned on them. But the death of Christ was to His personal friends and followers—the blotting out of every star of hope and promise. Their sorrow was overwhelming.

Yet Jesus looked into their faces and said, "Let not your heart be troubled." It is worth our while to think of the grounds on which Jesus could reasonably say this to His disciples, when they were entering into such great and real sorrow. The first thing He bade them do, was to believe. "Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in Me." Thus far they had believed in God. Jesus had taught them a new name for God. They were to call Him Father. He had not been known by this name before—but Jesus used no other name for Him. The word Father is a great treasure-house of love-thoughts. It told the disciples of personal thought, love and care, extending to all the events of their lives. The very hairs of their heads were all numbered. It told them of goodness which never failed. It was a great lesson they had been learning, as they came to think of God as their Father. In the shock of the last terrible days; however, the danger was that they would lose their faith in God. But Jesus said to them: "Believe in God. Let nothing take this faith out of your heart. Let nothing take from you what you have been learning from Me about God."

"Believe also in Me." They had accepted Jesus as the Messiah. You remember the splendid confession made by Peter, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God." In this confession, all the disciples had joined. They believed that He had come to be the world’s Savior. Now, in the announcement that Jesus was to die at the hands of wicked men, there was danger that they should lose their faith in Him. But to save them from their loss of faith He exhorted them to continue to believe. Not one of their hopes had perished. "You believe in God, believe also in Me."

We are always in danger of losing faith in time of sorrow or any sore trouble. Many times people are heard asking such questions as, "How can God be a God of love, and allow me to be so bereft, so stripped of good things? Where are now the promises of blessing which are made in the Scriptures over and over again? Has God forgotten to be gracious?" To those questions of doubt and fear the answer is, "Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in Me." Let nothing disturb your faith. Though it seems that God’s love has failed, that God has not forgotten you, that Christ is no longer your friend—still continue to believe; believe in God, believe also in Christ.

Sorrow is full of mystery. We go everywhere asking, "Why?" "This is not love," we say. "This is not goodness. This is not salvation." We cannot answer the WHY. Should we expect to know why God

does this or that? How could we, with our narrow vision and our small knowledge, understand the plans and purpose of God? God does not plan to give us an easy time in this world—He wants to make something of us, and often the way to do this—is to give us pain, loss, and suffering. A German writer speaks of the "hardness of God's love." Love must be hard sometimes. A writer tells of keeping the cocoon of an emperor moth for nearly a year, to watch the process of development. A narrow opening is left in the neck of the flask, through which the insect forces its way. The opening is so small that it seems impossible for the moth to pass through it. This writer watched the efforts of the imprisoned moth to escape. It did not appear to make any progress. At last he grew impatient. He pitied the little creature and, in a weak kindness to it, decided to help it. Taking his scissors, he snipped the confining threads to make the struggle easier. In a moment the moth was free, dragging out a great swollen body and little shriveled wings. He watched to see the beauty unfold—but he watched in vain. "It never was anything but a stunted abortion, crawling painfully about, instead of flying through the air on rainbow wings." Nature's way—that is, God's way—with moths is the only true way, although it is a way of pain, struggle, and suffering. Human pity may make an easier way—but the end will be destructive.

God's love never makes this mistake, either in nature or in dealing with human lives. God lets us suffer—if by suffering we will best grow into perfect beauty. When the mystery of pain or hardness comes into our life—let us not doubt. Let us suffer and wait. The disciples thought all their hopes were gone—but in the end they learned that no hope had perished or failed. Blessing and good came out of what seemed irretrievable disaster. "You believe in God, believe also in me," is always the word of faith and comfort. Trust God. Nothing is going wrong. You cannot understand—but He understands. The disciples were in great distress because their Master was going away from them. They were dismayed as they thought of their loss. They thought they could not live without Him. But He explained that He was going away—for their sake. They thought they would not have His help anymore, and He explained that He would still be active in their behalf. "In my Father's house are many mansions… I am going to prepare a place for you."

He told them where He was going—to His Father's house. These are precious words. They tell us that heaven is home. On this earth there is no place so sweet, so sacred, so heart-satisfying as the true home. It is a place of love, purest, gentlest, most unselfish love. It is a place of confidence. We are always sure of home's loved ones. We do not have to be on our guard when we enter our home doors. We do not have to wear masks there, hiding or disguising our real selves. Home is a refuge into which we flee from the danger, the enmity, the suspicion, the unkindness, the injustice of the world. Home is the place where hungry hearts feed on love's bread.

Mrs. Craik in one of her books had this fine picture:

Oh, conceive the happiness to know that some one person dearer to you than your own self, some one heart into which you can pour every thought, every grief, every joy; one person who, if all the rest of the world were to calumniate or forsake you—would never wrong you by a harsh thought or an unjust word; who would cling to you the closer in sickness, in poverty, in care; who would sacrifice all things to you, and for whom you would sacrifice all; from whom, except by death, night or day, you never can be divided; whose smile is ever at your hearth. Such is marriage, if they who marry have hearts and souls to feel that there is no bond on earth so tender and so sublime. This is a glimpse of what a true home is. The picture is sometimes realized on the earth. There are

homes which are well-near perfect. But the home sought, will be realized full in heaven. The Bible paints heaven in colors of dazzling splendor, its gates and streets and gardens and streams and fruits, all of the utmost brilliance; but no other description means so much to our hearts as that which the Master gives in these three words, "My Father's house"—home!

"My Father's house." That is the place to which we are going! That is the place where those we have lost awhile from our earthly homes, falling asleep in Jesus, are gathering. That is the place to which the angels have carried the godly dead. What a vision will burst upon our eyes when, some quiet day or night, we shall fall asleep—to awake no more on earth—but to awake in heaven, in our Father's house! You have read of men coming over the sea as immigrants, and landing in a strange city as utter strangers—throngs all about them—but not one familiar face, no welcome in any eye, no greeting. But it will not be this way with you when you leave this world and enter heaven. Loved ones will meet you and receive you with joy.

Jesus said also to His disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you." They thought His dying was an interruption of His work. The Messiah they had conceived of was to live and be a glorious King, conquering the world. Suddenly they were told that soon they should not see Him—He would be gone. They were bitterly disappointed. All their homes were now to perish. Jesus comforts them by telling them that the reason He was going away—was to prepare a place for them. Nothing was going wrong with His Messiahship. They had misunderstood it—that was all. He could easily have escaped from the plots of the rulers, the betrayal of Judas, the arrest by the temple officers. But hat would have been to fail in part of His work. The reason He was going away—was that He might continue and complete His work in heaven. "I go to prepare a place for you." The thought is very beautiful. How does Christ prepare places for us? We need not understand—but it is a sweet thought to know that He thinks of us—as you think of a dear guest who is coming to visit you—lovingly, and prepares for your coming. You good women, when you are expecting a friend you love very much, make the guest room just as tidy and beautiful as you can. You think of the friend's tastes, and prepare the room with this in mind. You put up a picture you think will please him. You lay on the table the books you know he will like. You gather his favorite flowers and place them on the dressing bureau. You do everything you can to make the room beautiful, so that he will feel at home in it the moment he enters it. Christ is preparing a room for you!

There is something else here. "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also." This is more of the work Jesus went away to do for His friends. First, He would make ready for them, build a home for the, prepare a place. Then, when all things were ready, He would come for them and take them home. That is what He does when we leave this world. Men call it dying—but dying is a gloomy, forbidding word. Jesus said, "Whoever lives and believes on Me—shall never die." What we call dying—is really only Jesus coming to receive us unto Himself. Why, then, should anyone dread to leave this world? It is the Master coming to tell you that your place in the Father's house is ready for you—and that He has come to take you to it! When Stephen was being stoned to death—he had a beautiful vision. He saw the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. As the mob stoned him, Stephen was calling upon Jesus Christ and praying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" (see Acts 7:58-60). It was the Savior coming for His servant. The place was ready for him. His work here had been short—but it was all that had been allotted to him. His departure was tragic—he died at the hands of a religious mob; but it mattered not how he was

taken away—really it was Jesus who took him away—receiving His spirit into strong, gentle and secure hands. The comfort to us in our sorrows and bereavements, is that nothing has gone wrong, that God's purpose is going on in all the wrecks of human hopes. Your friend passed away the other night. You thought he would have been with you for many years. You had plans covering a long future of happiness. You were appalled when the doctor said that your friend could not live. Life to you would be dreary, lonely and empty without this one who had become so dear to you. You say: "My friend stayed so brief a time! I could almost wish that I had not let my heart fasten its tendrils about this dear life, since so soon it was torn away from me!" Say it not! It is worthwhile to love—and to let your heart pour out all its sweetness in loving, though it be for but a day—and then to have the bliss give way to grief.

Why Does No One See God?

John 14:8-9

"Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me—has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Christ had just told His disciples that they had seen the Father. Philip was bewildered. What did the Master mean? That was just what the disciples were longing for—to see the Father. "Lord, show us the Father," said Philip, "and that will be enough for us."

There are many sincere Christians today who are longing for fuller, clearer revealings of God. They wish they might see Him. God seems unreal to them. An earnest young Christian wrote: "For some time I have been drifting away from God and have not been able to drop anchor. The more I read and study the life of Jesus, the farther I drift. I find myself ever asking, 'Are these things true? They certainly are very beautiful to read about; but are they true? How do we know they are true?'"

Human hearts are alike in their feelings, their longings, and their perplexities of faith; and, no doubt, there are many who sometimes ask the same questions as they read the wonderful story of Christ. "Are these things true? How do we know they are true?"

There is nothing wrong in such questionings. Philip had the same longing. Spiritual things seemed unreal to him. Many of the best people who ever lived, have had similar difficulty. There come times in the life of almost every Christian, when such questions as these arise.

Two girls were overheard one evening by a gentleman, talking with unusual earnestness, as if in perplexity, and one of them said, "Yes—but why has no one ever seen God?" This was all the gentleman heard of the conversation, as he stood near them, waiting for his car; but this single sentence showed their state of mind. Evidently they had been talking about the apparent unreality of spiritual things. Why had nobody ever seen God? They had heard a great deal about God, about His love, His care, His interest in human lives, His kindness. But they had never had a glimpse of Him. How could they know that all they had heard about Him was true? How could they be sure that there is a God? How could they know that the things of Christian faith and hope are real?

Questions will arise with all who think. Does God indeed love me? If He does—why must I suffer so? If He does—how can I explain all the accidents, calamities, and troubles of my life? There is

nothing wrong in such questions. God is not grieved with us if we ask them, desiring light. Christ is always patient with the questions of honest doubt.

It is not surprising if sometimes we cannot understand the mysteries of Christian faith. All life is full of things we cannot comprehend. Can you explain how on the bushes in your garden, which in March were bare and briery, there were in June masses of glorious roses? In the most common things there is mystery. Linnaeus, the great botanist, said there was enough mystery in a handful of moss—to give one a lifetime's study. There really are few things which you can actually understand and explain. How do your eyes see? How do your ears hear? Shall we refuse to believe these things—because we cannot explain them?

We have read how the cry of the wireless went out from the wrecked ship and was heard far and wide over the sea—a prayer of distress—and how help came swiftly. No one doubts this pathetic experience of the sea. Why, then, should we doubt or question that when a mother sat by her sick child the other night, while the little one hovered between life and death, and pleaded with God, her prayer reached the ears of her heavenly Father? Why shall we doubt or question that God loves us—when we believe that our human friends love us? You cannot see the love in the friend's heart—any more than you can see the love for you in God's heart. You tell me that your friend is true, is patient, and is kind; that he is a refuge, a tower of strength, to you. But you cannot see these qualities in him. Your friend is much away, out of your sight, and you cannot set spies on him to know that he is always faithful. Yet you never doubt him. Evil tongues whisper false things about him—but you refuse to believe them. How do you know that your beliefs in him are true? Why can you not, then, in the like manner believe in the love of God, who you cannot see? A sorrow breaks in upon the joy of your home. You cannot understand it. By why must you understand? We would be far happier sometimes if we did not try to understand things. Robertson Nicoll says: "There are some very devout people who know far too much. They can explain the whole secret and purpose of pain, evil, and death in the world. They prate about the mystery of things—as if they were God's spies. It is far humbler and more Christian to admit that we do not fully discern a reason and method in this long, slow tragedy of human existence." You remember that Jesus Himself said, "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear" (John 16:12). Why should we expect to understand God and His ways?

God does show Himself to us, and we do see Him more often than we think. There is a picture of Augustine and his mother which represents them looking up to heaven with deep earnestness, great eagerness, and longing. One is saying, "If God would only speak to us!" The other replies, "Perhaps He is speaking to us—and we do not hear His voice!" Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father." And did you notice what Jesus said to him? "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me—has seen the Father!" Jesus told him that he had been seeing Him all the time He had been with the disciples. What Philip had in mind when he said, "Show us the Father," was some revealing of glory, some outshining of majesty and splendor, a theophany, a transfiguration. That was the way he thought God must appear. When Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me—has seen the Father," He referred to His common daily life with His disciples, not to His miracles. Only a small proportion of the things Jesus did were miraculous, supernatural. Ninety-nine percent of His acts were simple, common things that did not need Deity to perform. He performed only one miracle in the Bethany home—but in His frequent visits—sitting with the family by the open hearth or at the table, talking

with them in the quiet evening, walking with them in the garden, sharing with them the gentle things of friendship—there were a thousand kindnesses which made His name sacred to them.

It was so in all Christ's life. There were a few miracles, showing divine power. But there were countless revealings of gentleness, sympathy, thoughtfulness, cheer, encouragement, which were as full of God, as the miracles. It was to this part of His life that Jesus referred when He said to Philip, "Anyone who has seen me—has seen the Father." It was in Christ's most human ways, that the disciples saw most of God. His miracles dazzled their eyes and awed them. Many could not have sat at His feet and listened calmly—if He had appeared transfigured. John could not have leaned on His bosom at supper restfully and quietly—if glory had been shining in His face. God is love. Wherever there is love, God is revealing Himself.

Jesus showed the disciples the Father—in all the love and sweetness and compassion they saw in Him continually. Do we not see God in similar ways? Does not God reveal Himself to us in a thousand familiar things that we do not think of at all as divine revealing? A writer says that most men are religious when they look upon the faces of their dead babies. The materialism which at other times infects them with doubts of God and immortality, drops away from them in this hushed hour.

People see God only in the unusual, the supernatural. "If we could see miracles," they say, "we would believe." But the common things are full of God. Moses saw God in one bush that burned and was not consumed. Yet God is as real in every bush in the woods, for those who have eyes to see, as He was in that little tree in Horeb. Have you never seen God? If you think of God as only burning majesty, shining glory, you will answer, "No—I never saw God." But splendor, Sinai clouds, and flaming fires are not God. God is love. You remember Elijah's vision. A great wind swept through the mountains—but God was not in the wind. An earthquake made the hills tremble—but God was not in the earthquake. A fire swept down over the crags—but God was not in the fire. Then came a still small voice, a sound of gentle stillness—and that was God (see 1 Kings 19:11-13).

You have seen God a thousand times—in love, in peace, in goodness, and in comfort. You see Him daily—in providential care, in the sweet things of your home, in friendships, in the beauty of little children. Do not forget that you have been receiving blessings all your life in manifold ways. Do not call it chance, or luck, or good fortune. The heart-hungry girl asked, "Why has no one ever seen God?" Yet she had seen God herself every day, every hour of her life, in the goodness and mercy which had followed her from her infancy.

You were in danger, and there came a mysterious protection which sheltered you from all harm. You called it chance. It was God. You had a great sorrow which you thought you could not possibly endure, and you felt strange, sweet comfort which filled your heart with peace. You thought it came through a friend's gentle kindness. Yes—but it was the loving-kindness of God that brought it. There was a tangle in your affairs which seemed about to wreck everything, and in an inexplicable way it was all straightened out as by invisible hands. You had a crushing loss which threatened to overwhelm you, and suddenly—the loss proved a gain! You were wronged by a professed friend, and the stars in your sky all seemed to go out. That was some while ago, and today you are quietly praising God for the event which was a deliverance from a real misfortune, for there came instead—a blessed friendship which fills all your life. Your years have been full of

great providences, wondrous guidances, gentle comforts, answered prayers, sweet friendships, happy surprises of goodness, divine love and help and care. Yet you say you never have seen God, and ask, "How may I know that the beautiful things the New Testament tells me about Christ are true?"

Think of some definite ways in which we may learn that the things of Christian faith and hope are true, and how we have them become more real to us.

First, by experience. In one of Psalms we read, "those who know your name—will put their trust in you" (Psalms 9:10.) It is sometimes said of a man that none know him—but also love him. They who truly know God—both love Him and trust Him. We have to learn by experience to love our human friends. One was telling how he found a particular friend. He had heard much about him. His neighbors spoke well of him, praised him—his unselfishness, his kindness, his sincerity, his helpfulness, his readiness to give time and thought and money in assisting others. But this man never had met him. Some months since, circumstances led him to seek his kindly interest. Then he found that all the good he had heard about him was true, and that the half had not been told. Now he believes in him. In the same way we can only learn to know God. We read in the Bible of His goodness, His justice, His truth, His kindness, His faithfulness. But we must come into personal relationship with Him—before we can surely know that these qualities are really in Him. When Philip said to Nathanael, "I have found the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth" (see John 1:45-46), Nathanael sneered at the suggestion that the Messiah could come from so lowly a place as Nazareth. Philip did not argue. He said only, "Come and see!" He knew that if His friend would only meet Jesus, he would believe. If we can only get people to come to see Jesus, to get to know Him, to experience His love—they will soon believe in Him and follow Him. The story of the conversion of Lady Aberdeen is well known. She had been long in doubt, wavering, indecisive. In her time of perplexity she sat one day under a tree in her garden, in deep thought. Out of the silence she heard a mystic voice speaking as clearly to her consciousness as if a friend had uttered the words, "Act as if I were—and you will find that I am." She had been asking the very question of my friend's letter, "How can I learn that these things are true?" Was Christ real? She could not be sure. Would He be her friend? Would He bless her as the New Testament says He would? "Act as if I were," said the voice, "and you will learn that I am, and that all these things are true." There is no other way to find out that Christ is, and that the things the Scriptures tell us about Him are true.

Again, if we begin to do the will of God, we shall learn the reality of the spiritual life. Jesus said, "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the teaching" (John 7:17). You are to will to do God's will. This means the most earnest determination, the most unfaltering obedience. As we do the things of God's will, as they are made known to us—we shall learn the reality of God and the beauty and blessedness of His love. One who tried to believe there is no God, confessed that it was never in His best moments that he felt himself an atheist. Jesus said the pure in heart shall see God. He did not mean only that we shall see God when we get to heaven, and look upon God in His glory. He meant also that those whose hearts are pure—shall see God on the earth. They will not be troubled about the reality of the things of faith. They well not ask, "Why has no one ever seen God?" They will see Him themselves! No cloud will ever dim for them the radiance of His face.

Then it is only in Christ that we can see God. Notice the precise words in which Jesus answered Philip's request, "Show us the Father." "Anyone who has seen me—has seen the Father." In

Jesus Christ, therefore, and only in Jesus Christ, can we see God. The Incarnation was God coming to the earth in human life—that men could understand Him. Those who saw Jesus—looked upon the face of God. Those who knew Him—knew God. Those who became His friends—became God's friends. This privilege is ours. Friendship is the holiest and most sacred of all human relations. Think of all that is possible in ideal human friendship. Then think of all that is possible in friendship with Jesus Christ. There never was another friend like Jesus. Think of what His friendship may be to you, if you will let it into your life in all its sweetness, its divineness, its power to transform and bless. But the girl asks: "Are these things true? How do we know they are? They are very beautiful. They were true of the people who knew Jesus personally; but may I have a share in them?" The friendship of Christ is the most real and the most wonderful thing in this world. To very many people there does seem to be an unreality in the things of spiritual life. God seems far away. We cannot see Him. We cannot feel His touch. But this need not be so. Christ wants to reveal the Father to us. He wants His friendship with you to be as real and as close as your friendship with your closest earthly friend. Get acquainted with Christ. Act as if He were what He says He is. Trust His promises—not one of them shall fail. Let His love into your heart—it will fill you with joy and peace; it will transform your life into love and beauty and radiance. The Way, the Truth, and the Life

John 14:1-14 The fourteenth chapter of John's gospel is the most familiar chapter of the New Testament. Its words are sweet music. As spoken first, it was the little company of the disciples sitting at the Last Supper who heard them. They were in great sorrow. They were about to lose their Master, their best friend. They had hoped that He was the Messiah and were expecting some special manifestation of His power. Now all their hopes seemed to be swept away. Jesus speaks to them as they sit around the table. He seeks to comfort them. He says to them, "Let not your heart be troubled." This seems a strange word to say to them at this particular hour. How was it possible that they should not be troubled when He, their Master—was about to leave them?

We may be sure, however, that the words He spoke were not empty or formal. Many things that earthly comforters say to their friends in their times of trouble mean but little. They say, "Weep not. Dry your tears. All will come out right," but they have no real comfort to offer. They can give no reason why their friends should not weep, or why all will come out right. Their optimism is without foundation. But when Christ said, "Let not your heart be troubled," He knew what He was saying, and there were in His mind clear reasons why He spoke in this strong, confident way. The same is true of the comfort Christ speaks now to us. No matter what the sorrow, how great the loss, how deep the darkness, if we are Christians, the same voice always speaks to us in the same words.

Christ tells the disciples what they should do, how they might cease to be troubled. "You believe in God." This was the way their trouble could be comforted. There was no need to ask questions, for their questions could not be answered, or at least they could not understand the answers. But they were to keep their faith in God and in Jesus Christ unshaken, undisturbed, in the midst of all the sorrow. They thought everything was gone, that they did not have God anymore that all their hopes about Jesus Christ had failed, were only dreams. He tells them that nothing they had believed about God or about Jesus, was gone. Their faith in God was to abide. What they had hoped about Jesus Christ was true. They had lost nothing. This is the foundation of all true comfort. We cannot understand the mystery of sorrow—but if we believe in God and in Jesus Christ, we need not lose our confidence or our peace, whatever the distress may be. A word of an

old prophet (Isaiah 26:4) says, "Trust you in the Lord forever, for in the LORD JEHOVAH is the everlasting strength." If we are hidden in the cleft of the Rock of Ages, we need not fear any seeming disaster. Another word says, "you will keep him in perfect peace—whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3). We may always be sure of God's eternal faithfulness and of Christ's unchanging love—and believing these great truths, we may be quiet and confident in the worst calamities. The first thought Jesus gave His disciples, was that all the world is the Father's house. They were greatly distressed by what was transpiring in a little corner of the world. He assures them that the stage of action reached out far beyond the city and the country in which they lived. There are many mansions in the Father's house. They were distressed that He was leaving them—but He was leaving only one of the mansions—and going to another. They would not lose Him by His departure, for He would continue to be their friend, and would still be interested in their welfare. "I go to prepare a place for you."

Dr. David Smith thus explains the words of Jesus:

The disciples were like travelers, and His companionship had hitherto cheered them on their journey. And now He must leave them. But He was not forsaking them. He was only hastening on in advance to make ready for them. And when they arrived He would be waiting for them and would bid them welcome. His going away was not a desertion of His friends. He was going on their account, to prepare a place for them. The thought of mansions prepared for us beforehand, is a very beautiful one. We need not fear that when our time comes to go home there will be no place ready for us. We shall not go to the gate as strangers or aliens—but as those who are expected, those who indeed have been sent for. Jesus assured His disciples not only that He was going on to prepare a lodging place for them—but that when the place was ready—He would come again, to receive them unto Himself, that where He would be, they might be too. The separation was only apparent, not real, and certainly not final. The relation between them would not be broken by His going away. The ministry of His love which had come to mean so much to them, would not be interrupted by His departure. He was going to leave them in their present lodging place—but it would be only to prepare another lodging place for them in another part of His Father's house.

"I am the WAY." Christ is the way from earth to heaven, and from heaven to earth. Through Him God comes to us with love and blessing, and through Him we go to God. He is the Mediator between God and man. He is the one ladder down which angels come on their ministries; and up which they can ascend to the gates of glory. Christ is the way, and the only way. If we reject Him we can never get to God and heaven. But if we believe on Him, and love Him, and abide in Him, there never can be any confusion, any mystery, any need unmet, any yearning unfulfilled.

Even now, with all our knowledge of spiritual things, the other life is still full of mystery. When our loved ones leave us, we cannot understand where they have gone; and when we think of going ourselves, we cannot realize anything of the way. So it was with the first disciples. Thomas was perplexed about the way of their going where Jesus was going. "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus sought to relieve the mystery. "I am the way," He said. This is the answer to all our longings. Philip thought he knew Christ well. He had been in His family for more than three years. It is possible for us to be with Christ a long time, in His Church, among His people, familiar with the story in the Gospels—and yet not really know Him. There is a great difference between knowing about Christ and knowing Him.

Jesus went on to explain to Philip, the meaning of the blessed, beautiful life He had been living with them. "He who has seen me—has seen the Father." If John had said this about himself we would have called it blasphemy. When Christ said it about Himself—He very clearly claimed to be divine. He was the revealer of God. What men saw in His life—was an interpretation of God's own life. When we see Him taking little children in His arms, laying His hands on their heads and blessing them—we see how God feels toward children. When we see the compassion of Jesus stirred by human suffering and sorrow—we learn how our Father is touched by the sight of earthly suffering. When we see Jesus receiving sinners and eating with them, speaking forgiveness to penitents who crept to His feet, and making stained lives white and clean—we learn the mercy of God. When we follow Christ to His cross and see Him giving His life a willing sacrifice in redemption for lost men—we see how God loves this world. So the holiness of Christ—was the Father's holiness; His meekness, patience, gentleness and compassion—were mirrorings of the same qualities in the Father. If we would see what God is like, we have but to turn to the gospel story. To know Christ—is to know the Father.

Now we have another phase of the marvelous teaching. Christ and the Father were one. He who saw the life of Christ, saw God. Still more, Christ and His followers were one. His life was in them. "He who believes on me, the works that I do shall he also do." Christ Himself was going away, and would be missed from the earth. Those He had comforted and helped, would long for His visits when He would come no more.

There are some good men and women who leave a great emptiness in the world when they go away. The departure of Christ left a great blank in the homes He had been used to visiting. But it was the plan of Christ, that His disciples should take His place and go on with the ministry which He had begun. His life was to be taken away—but He would live on in His disciples. If we take off slips from a geranium and put them into the ground anywhere, they will grow and have the same beauty and fragrance as the original plant. All true Christians are parts of Christ, branches of Christ, so to speak; and wherever they may be—they will have His likeness and His spirit, His love and gentleness, and will do the same woks that He produced. Are we fulfilling our mission as Christians? If not, why not?

There was another link in the chain. Christ was going away—but He would not be out of reach. "Whatever you shall ask in my name, that will I do." They could not see Him face to face in human life and get the things they needed—but they could speak to Him and ask Him for blessings and get them. While Jesus was going away and would be out of sight—He would not be beyond call. His people on earth could speak to Him and, although they saw Him not, He would hear them. The way of communication with Christ has never been broken. We are to pray always in the name of Christ—that is we are to ask things for His sake, because He is our Savior. The Comforter Promised

John 14:15-27

Everything in Christian life is love. "The fruit of the Spirit is love." There are other things that are mentioned as fruit—but love is named first, and all the others are only parts or qualities of love. The one white ray of light is resolved into the seven colors of the rainbow. Just so does love, the white ray that shines from the face of God, separate itself into all the heavenly graces. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and

temperance" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Love is the one essential in the life which the Holy Spirit produces. Paul tells us we may have great eloquence, tongues of angels, the gift of prophecy, faith that can move mountains, generosity that will give all we possess, the martyr's spirit; and yet, if we have not love—we are nothing. Men have been champions of orthodoxy, and yet, lacking love—are given to anger, evil temper, and resentment. There are those who are devoted to the institutions of religion and who yet fail to show love at home. These do not meet the highest requirement of the gospel. Nothing but love can satisfy the demands of the Holy Spirit.

We must prove our love—by our life. "If you love me—you will keep my commandments." We cannot live truly, except by loving—but we cannot love and not live worthily. It is very easy to say we love a person—but our conduct is the only true index. In one of his epistles John, the disciple of love writes: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue—but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:16-18). John is speaking of the proof of love to our fellow men—but the same principle applies to our profession of love to Christ. It is not enough that we sing it in our hymns and say it in our prayers and recite it in our creeds; we must show it in our life by obedience to His commandments. A fruit tree proves its usefulness, by bearing fruit. If there is "nothing but leaves," the tree's profession is empty. The rosebush must prove its right to the distinction, by putting forth beautiful roses in the season for roses. When we claim to be Christ's friends, we must show it by doing what Christ bids us do.

"If you love me—you will obey what I command." Promise follows requirement. Then he says, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Comforter to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth." The "and" is important. It links the promise back to the previous verse. There are four links in the chain. If we love Christ, we will keep His commandments; then He will ask the Father, and the Father will give us another Comforter. The disciples thought they would be sore losers by Christ's leaving them, and so they were, in a sense. It broke their hearts to part from Him. But He assures them that instead of His personal presence, another heavenly Friend would be sent to them. The name "Comforter" is a very precious one. Even in the common usage of the English word it is sacred. One who is a comforter to us, ministers to us in our sorrows, consoles us when we are in grief. Then the word "another" shows what kind of comforter the Spirit would be—Jesus had been a comforter, and the Spirit would be one just like Him. We sometimes wish we had lived when Jesus was on earth, and feel that those who knew Him in the flesh had a privilege no other believers ever again can have. But this word tells us that the Holy Spirit, who came in Christ's place—is all to us that Jesus was to His friends. He may not take away our sorrows from us—but if not, He gives us strength so that we can bear them. That is part of what the Holy Spirit does for us. He is not, however, merely a comforter in the sense that the word is now used. The word is "Paraclete," which has not precise equivalent in English. The same word is translated "Advocate" in one of John's epistles, which means one who stands by or stands for one. We may put all our affairs into the hands of this Advocate. He will defend us, intercede for us, and be our comrade and friend. The world does not want to receive the Holy Spirit—"Whom the world cannot receive." It has no love for Him, no eyes to behold His beauty, no ears to hear His words. The world does not want the Holy Spirit as guest. Only those who desire to be holy, have any yearning for Him. It

is one of the most wonderful proofs of the love of God, that the Holy Spirit is wiling to live in a corrupt, defiled, loathsome human heart, amid all its sin and impurity, for the purpose of cleansing it and making it holy and fit for heaven! It was one of the qualities of the love of Christ, that it went out in compassion and longing to the most unworthy. Someone defined the love of God as "loving people He did not like." The Spirit of God takes up His abode in the worst heart—that He may make it clean and holy.

It is wonderful how gently Christ dealt with His disciples that night. He talked with them as a mother about to leave her children would talk to them—mingled counsel, with words of love. He knew how lonely they would be when He was gone away from them. They would indeed be desolate in their sorrow and bereavement. We remember how it was with them those days that He lay in the grave. Then for forty days they saw Him occasionally, receiving sweet consolation from Him. After this He went away—but soon He came again in the Holy Spirit, and after that the disciples were never lonely anymore, for they had their Master's presence with them in close and loving tenderness all the while. We ought never to feel desolate if we have Christ. Everything else may be stripped off, and we may be driven out into the world, orphans, and homeless; but if we have Christ, we are rich in love and in all heavenly blessing. The proof of love for God—is obedience to His commandment. Then, when love for God is in our lives, God Himself is with us. "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." It is a wonderful truth that is declared to us here—that God actually desires to have our love and longs to make His home in our hearts.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." One of the great words of the Bible is peace. Our heart hungers for it. Everywhere men search for it—in paths of pleasure, in the avenues of fame. But peace does not come by finding a quiet place to hide in, away from the world's storms. It must begin in the heart. Indeed, the peace a Christian has—must be a peace that will hold the heart quiet in spite of the world's storms.

Two artists went out to paint each a picture of peace. One painted a silvery lake embosomed deep amid the hills, where no storm ever could touch it. The other painted a wild sea, swept by tempests, strewn with wrecks—but rising up out of it a great rock—and in the rock, high up, a cleft with herbage and flowers, amid which, on her nest, a dove was sitting. The latter is the true picture of Christian peace. "In the word you shall have tribulation," but "In me you shall have peace" (see John 16:33). The peace of Christ is a peace that holds the heart quiet—in the very heart of the world's trials. This peace is offered to us here as a gift, as Christ's legacy to us. We can get it only by taking Christ Himself into our heart. The Vine and the Branches

John 15:1-12 When Jesus says, "I am the true vine," He means that He is the source of the spiritual life of His people, who are compared to branches. What the vine is to its branches, Christ is to all who believe on Him. The branches, down to the smallest twigs, are dependent on the vine. So every believer is dependent on Christ. He is the source of the spiritual life of every Christian. A traveler in Kamchatka who spent many nights in the poor huts of the people, tells of His experience. The hut in which he was entertained was dirty, and the people were in every way repulsive. But their kindness was beautiful. They were most attentive to the traveler's needs. The best morsels were put upon His plate. The best bed was given to him. When bedtime came there

was family prayer, closing with these words, "Lord, bless our home and bless and prosper our guest." There was something almost heavenly in the spirit of the home, which deeply impressed the visitor. He had found a branch of the true Vine. The life of Christ was flowing in it. There was a vital connection between these kinds of hearts in Kamchatka, and Christ.

Wherever a real Christian life is found, there is a little branch of the great Vine. There is no other vine to which any soul can be joined and from which it can be nourished. Other religions may present their legends, their ceremonies, and their rules of conduct; but there is no life in any of them. The religion of Christ is more than a creed or a system of beliefs, more than a set of moral precepts. It has a great stream of heavenly life flowing from it. All the fullness of God is in it, and of this fullness—we all receive.

Another truth suggested in this figure, is the dependence of the vine upon the branches. It is easy to see how the branches depend upon the vine—but the only way a vine can bear fruit—is on its branches. So the only way Christ can feed the world's hunger—is through His disciples. We ought to think of the responsibility of being a branch. The only way to be a good branch—is to be full of fruit, the same kind of fruit that Christ bore on His life. The culture of the plant is also important. Jesus says that the Father is the Gardener. The care of the branches is in His hands. It ought to be a great comfort to us, to know that our life's training and discipline are under the Father's care. If an ignorant, inexperienced, unskillful man were to enter a beautiful vineyard and begin cutting the vines, he would soon destroy them. He does not know what he ought to cut off. But if the man who comes to prune knows about vines, and has had experience and is skilled, though he may sometimes seem to be destroying a vine, yet we know that he is not making any mistakes and that His most severe and painful prunings are for the good of the vine. We have similar confidence when God seems to be dealing sorely or even harshly with us. The Gardener is our Father; He has all wisdom and love, and never gives us pain, nor cuts away any of our joys—except when such pruning is for our good. The Gardener does not trouble to prune the fruitless branches—but only cuts them off and casts them away. "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit." All through the Bible uselessness meets God's disfavor and condemnation. The wicked are compared to the chaff which the wind drives away. Chaff is of no use; it feeds no hunger; it has no value and no beauty; it is fit only to be burned. The fruitless branch stands for the formal profession of religion. Merely nominal church members without spiritual life—are not of any benefit to the church. For a time the Gardener may be patient with them, waiting while He tried in all ways to bring them into real union with Himself, and to make the fruitful; but when due efforts have been made and there is still no fruitfulness, they are cut away.

It is the fruitful branches, which the Gardener prunes and tends. The motive of His care—is that in this way these branches may become more fruitful. "Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, so that it will be even more fruitful." The pruning process is a very important one. Dead twigs must be cut away. Sometime there is too much foliage. There is not life enough to nourish all the branches. Some of them, therefore, must be cut off, that what remains may receive full nourishment. There may then be less fruit for the present—but it will be better, richer fruit. The Gardener does not prune the unfruitful branches—pruning would do them no good. It is the Christian that the Father chastens and causes sometimes to suffer under sore discipline. Mere formal professors of religion are left alone, and often they grow very luxuriant, like unpruned vines. But in their luxuriance there is no spiritual fruit.

Notice also that the object of the Father's pruning, is that the branch may be made to bear more fruit. It sometimes seems that the pruning is destructive. Great branches are cut off, and it seems as if the very life of the vine is endangered. But He who holds the knife, knows that what He is doing will make the vine in time more luxuriant and its fruit sweeter and more luscious. If only we would bear this in mind—when we find ourselves under God's chastening, it would help us to bear the pain in patience, and also to cooperate with God in His design to make us more fruitful. Earthly prosperity is often to a Christian like the excessive luxuriance of a vine, which the vine-dresser must cut away with his merciless hand, in order to save the vine's life.

Jesus reminded His disciples that He had been acting as their Gardener and Caretaker. "Now you are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you." For three years He had been teaching them, speaking to them words of correction, of counsel, of exhortation, and these words had trimmed off the faults, the evil habits, and the sinful things from their lives, leaving them now clean. The Word of God is the knife which is used in pruning the branches. This word, Paul says, is profitable for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Every time we read the Bible as we should, thoughtfully, yielding our life to its sway—the knife cuts off some twig or branch which is marring our life or hindering its usefulness. We never should shrink from the impact of the Words of God—but should let them cut deep as they will into our life, exposing hidden faults, secret sins, and unlovely dispositions.

Since the branches draw life from the vine, it is essential that their attachment shall always be complete. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit itself, except in abides in the vine; no more can you, except you abide in me." We might as well try to grow plants without roots—as to have a Christian life without attachment to Christ. The kinds of fruits Christian lives should bear, are indicated by Paul as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and temperance. These fruits can grow only when the life of Christ is in the heart. A branch torn from a vine—at once withers and dies.

Two trees grew in the same yard. One spring, when the time for leaves came, it was noticed that while one of the trees put forth its foliage as usual, the other stood dark and bare, with neither bud nor leaf nor any life. The same warm sunshine fell upon both, and the same spring rains watered the roots of both—but in one there was life, while in the other there was no life. There are men and women, too, who have spiritual privileges in home and church and Christian friendship—but who bear no fruit. It is because they are not really attached to Christ, not rooted in Him, and therefore they have no life in them.

Many are the blessings of abiding in Christ. One is answer to prayer, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you." This promise is a great key with which we may open the door of the divine treasury and take from it whatever we need. But we must not overlook the condition—the twofold condition on which the promise depends. First, we must abide in Christ—in close, intimate union and communion with Him. Secondly, Christ's Words must abide in us. This means that His words must be received by us into our hearts, that we must love them, meditate upon the, allow them to rule our actions and words, to color our thoughts and feelings, and to inspire our dispositions. Only when these conditions are fulfilled, can we claim the promise.

It is very important that we should clearly understand how we may abide in Christ. Jesus tells us plainly, "If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love." Jesus Himself, in His incarnation, was under the same law of obedience. He says, "Even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love." Nothing can take the place of obedience in Christian life. In absolutely no other way, can we abide in Jesus Christ's love.

One of the great privileges of Christian life is friendship with Christ. Those who abide in Him and do His will—shall become His friends. "You are my friends—if you do whatever I command you." That is the way we are to show our love for Christ. It is not enough to say we love Him. That is well so far as it goes, and if we prove it by our deeds, it is all right. The Spirit's Work

John 16:1-15

"Now I am going to him who sent me—yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief." The disciples were in great sorrow. Jesus had told them that He was going to leave them, and they were so absorbed in thoughts of their loss and so overwhelmed that they had not even thought to ask Him where He was going or why He was going away. He seems here to complain of them for this. Their conduct showed selfishness; they were nor interested in His glory, but were absorbed in their own grief and loss. It showed also lack of faith, for they were in danger of losing their hope in Him as the Messiah.

We may get a lesson here for ourselves when called to endure bereavement. We are in danger of making the same mistake. When God takes away from us our beloved friends, we are apt to think only of ourselves and our own earthly loss—and not of the joy and glory into which our Christian friends have gone. Is there not in this an element of selfishness? Is it right that we should think only of what we have lost in their departure, and not of what they have gained? Is it not unbelief that sees only the sorrow and the gloom—and not the light that is behind the gloom? Should we not be willing to stiffer loss to ourselves, when what is loss to us is eternal gain to those we love? We train ourselves in the fellowships and experiences of life to endure cost and hardship, that our friends may be helped, benefited, or made happier. Shall we not exercise the same spirit of unselfish affection toward our loved ones who have gone from us into glory, when we suffer loneliness and must bear the double burdens which are ours because they are not with us? The disciples thought that Christ's going away would be an irretrievable loss for them. It seemed the crushing of all their hopes. They saw no silver lining whatever in the dark cloud that was gathering. But now Jesus says to them, "It is for your good that I am going away." There was a silver lining after all in that black cloud. What seemed an irreparable loss, would prove in the end a gain. They did not understand it now—but here were the Master's words assuring them of it. The same is true in the case of Christ's disciples now when He calls away their human friends. We can readily see how it is well for our believing friends, when Christ takes them home. They exchange earth—for heaven, sin-for holiness, and pain—for eternal joy. But how about the friends who are left with bleeding hearts to walk on, lonely and sad over earth's ways? This word of Christ replies, "It is for your good that I am going away." The young wife whose husband is called from her may believe that it is better for him to be with Christ. He is doing more exalted service. He sees His Lord's face. His wife, who stays behind, has to meet life's tasks and responsibilities alone, and misses the joy of companionship. But she, too, has her gain. She learns lessons in the hardness of her loneliness, which she never would have learned in the sheltered and pampered care of love. The

finer possibilities of life are brought out in her. Burden-bearing develops her womanly strength. She grows into a strength and a beauty of character which she never would have attained, if she had not lost the companionship which made life so restful and quiet. We cannot understand now, and neither could the disciples understand how Christ's departure could be better for them, than His staying with them would have been. Afterwards they knew; and afterwards we shall know, too, how even for us the going away of our Christian friends will become a blessing, if we in faith submit ourselves to God. The disciples had no thought that when Jesus was gone from them, He would be more to them than He ever had been in His bodily presence. "Unless I go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." Many people wish they could have known Christ as His personal disciples and other friends knew Him. They think it would have been so much easier to have loved and trusted Him if they could have seen His face, and heard His words, and felt His touch—if they could have gone to Him with all their questions and perplexities and could have had His help in every experience of need. But Christ Himself says that His staying with His disciples would have been a loss to them, and that His going away would be a gain.

Christ has not left the world; He was never so really present with His own disciples when they could see Him—as He afterward was, when they could not see Him. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the world, is a greater blessing than Christ's continued bodily presence would have been. It is the same presence in a form that can do infinitely more for us. There are limitations to physical presence—but there are no limitations to the divine Spirit. We have lost none of the blessing which those who knew Christ in the flesh enjoyed; on the other hand, He is far more to us now than He was to the first disciples. In the body He could not be present in even two places at the same time; in the Spirit He can be with millions of people in different lands at the same moment!

Jesus tells His disciples of the work the Spirit will do, when He comes. "When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment." The first work of the Spirit is not pleasant work—but painful. He crushes—before He heals. He brings terror—before He brings joy. He comes first of all—to show us our sins. As His light shines upon us—we see the stains in our hearts. As His holiness is revealed—it shows us how unholy we are.

Then, as He lifts the veil, we have a glimpse of the judgment when we must stand before God's bar. Yet this is not unkind work; He shows us our guilt and peril, not to trouble us—but to save us, and then, when we have seen our need and danger—He points us to Jesus Christ the Savior!

Some tourists once lost their way in the Alps as night came on. They groped about for a time, not knowing where they were, and at length a terribly violent storm burst upon them, and a lightning flash showed them that they were standing on the very edge of a fearful precipice; a few steps more, and they would have been hurled to death. It was a kind storm that by its lurid flash revealed to them their peril, because thereby it saved them. Terrible are the convicting flashes of the Spirit, sometimes striking terror into the soul; but they are merciful flashes, for they are meant to save.

"In regard to sin, because men do not believe in me." The sin of which the Holy Spirit convicts—is the sin of unbelief. So the worst of sins—is the rejection of Christ. He is the Son of God who came to the world to prepare and bring salvation. People think that murder is the worst sin, and they think that stealing and lying are terrible sins—and so they are. But do we ever think that no other sin we can possibly commit is so base and so soul-destroying, as the sin of unbelief in Christ? We

should think of this. Unbelievers are very ready to pick flaws in the conduct of professing Christians, and they congratulate themselves that, while they do not believe in Christ, they are better than those who do. They do not remember that, as evil as their other sins are, their unbelief is the blackest of them all in God's sight! No moral goodness, however beautiful it may be, makes one acceptable in God's sight—while Jesus Christ is rejected in the heart and shut away from the life. It is a terrible thing to reject the Son of God, who comes to us to be our Savior.

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth." Part of the work of the Spirit, is to lead us into ever fuller and deeper knowledge. We never can know the truth, if the Spirit is not our teacher. We cannot understand the Bible, unless the Spirit makes it plain. Men of great intellectual powers have listened to sermons of which they could understand scarcely a word; while some plain, unlettered woman, with threadbare garments, sitting in some back gallery seat, understood every word, her heart being enlightened and thrilled by the blessed truths. She was taught by the Spirit. There are devout men who never open the Bible without a prayer that God would show them its meaning.

We must remember also that it is as a guide that the Spirit comes to us. He does not promise to teach us Himself; He will not make any new revelation to us; He teaches through Biblical truth. He comes to guide us to the understanding of the truths already revealed in Scripture. He honors God's Word, and comes not as a teacher of new truth—but as an interpreter of Scripture truth. There is no doubt about the Spirit's readiness to help us into the deepest things of the Scriptures, if we are truly ready to follow His guidance. But we must be willing to receive the truth without question, though it sweeps away all our own opinions; and to accept it as a rule of our life, though it revolutionizes all our conduct. The great work of the Spirit, is to make Christ known. "He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." Even the divine Spirit does not preach Himself—but, remaining unseen, points men to Christ. The Spirit glorifies Christ; that is, makes Him glorious in the eyes of men. As the world saw Jesus, He was far from lovely. His visage was marred; He was despised; He died on a cross of shame; His name was hated and covered with defamation. But the Spirit came and poured such light upon Him, that He appears all glorious in His beauty! In all the world there is no other face so lovely, so radiant—as the face of Jesus Christ. Men who have hated Him, seeing Him only dimly—when the Spirit reveals Him to them as He really is—see Him as the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely one.

Alone—yet Not Alone

John 16:32

"But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me." The loneliness of Jesus while in this world was one of the most pathetic elements of His experience. There are two kinds of loneliness.

One is, when a person is away from all human presences. A man who had been shipwrecked and had drifted for many hours on a piece of wreckage, spoke of the terrible feeling of desolation he experienced when on all alone on the waters, he could see no sign of human life, hear no voice, get no ear to listen to his calls of distress. But there is another loneliness. One may be in the midst of people—and yet be utterly without companionship. Were you never oppressed with a sense of

loneliness in a crowd that surged all about you and pressed close to you on every side? Think of the loneliness of one who lands from a foreign country and enters the throngs on the streets of a strange city—but sees no face he ever has seen before, catches no glance of recognition from any eye. In a surging multitude of human beings—he is utterly alone. It takes more than human presence to make companionships; hearts must touch; there must be love and sympathy. In a sense, Christ was always alone in this world. His very greatness of character, made it impossible for Him to find real, deep, and full companionship. All great men are in a sense, solitary men. Their exalted life lifts them above the plane in which other people live. They are like the few tall mountain peaks of the earth that lift their heads far above the clouds, and wear their crowns of unmelting snows. The little hills are not lonesome, for there are so many of them—but the giant mountains are lonely in their solitariness because there are so few of them. The world's few great men are solitary, because common people cannot rise into companionship with them in thought, in feeling, in purpose. Christ found no fellow, no equal, no real companion, among men.

Then, in His work as Redeemer, Christ was alone. He had few friends. There is infinite pathos in such words as these, which describe His personal loneliness: "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him—and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own—and His own received him not" (John 1:10-11). He revealed His feeling of aloneness and sense of homelessness when He said, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay His head." (Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58). Thus in the midst of multitudes, His own people, too, not foreigners, those also He had come to deliver and save—He was alone because hearts and homes were shut against Him.

Then, too, Jesus had a gentle heart, which craved affection and companionship. There are some men with cold, stern natures, who are indifferent to the coldness they meet in the world. They desire no sympathy. They are not pained by men's rejection. Opposition acts as stimulus to them. They almost court unpopularity. But Jesus craved affection and sympathy. We remember how He welcomed love whenever it came to Him; what a strength the beloved disciple was to Him; what a shelter and comfort the Bethany home, with its love, was to Him; how even the slightest tokens of kindness comforted and cheered His heart. We see also His deep craving for companionship in the Garden, when He wanted His closest friends near Him in His bitter agony and so deeply felt the disappointment when they slept and did not watch with Him. Jesus was not, then, a cold, iron man, who was unaffected by the indifferences and rejection of the people. He suffered keenly from every unloving act and touch. This intensified His loneliness.

Here we have another phase of Christ's loneliness. "You will be scattered, each to his own home." The only human relief to His loneliness, along the years of His public ministry, was in the love of His friends; and this love, we know, was very imperfect. These friends, though loyal and devoted, never fully understood their Master. They had an earthly conception of His Messiahship, yet they were very unspiritual. They hurt Him continually by their lack of gentleness, thoughtfulness, and perfect trust. They grieved Him unintentionally, of course, ignorantly, loving Him still—but giving Him pain every day by the rudeness and harshness of their contacts with His sensitive heart. Very poor and imperfect, indeed, was the companionship which He found even with the gentlest and truest of His human friends. But now He looks forward to the losing of even this solace and support, "You will be scattered, each to his own home, and shall leave me alone." Even the little company of friends, who had walked with Him along the way, would desert Him in the hour of His

supreme trial. We remember how it was. One of those who had eaten bread with Him, dipping His hand in the same dish, betrayed Him! Another, until then His bravest confessor, denied even knowing Him! They all forsook Him and fled. Alone, He was led away to His trial. Alone, He was left to stand before the court and before the governor. Loving and craving love as no other ever loved and craved love, He was left alone—with no pitying eye, with not one friendly voice raised in His behalf. At the close of a life given to love of men and to efforts to save men—He was left with no one confessing to have been helped or saved by Him, no friend, no follower; abandoned to the cruelty of brutal men. Even Barabbas, a notorious criminal, found friends that day, while Jesus, who had given His life to gentle deeds and kind ministries, was dragged away by His enemies through the streets, as if He had been a murderer, with no one to speak a word for Him. But read what He says of this hour of abandonment: "You will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me." There was One whose companionship never failed Him for a moment. Through the years when His infinite divine nature found such meager, imperfect fellowship even in the best love of human friends—He had but to turn His face toward His Father to have His hungry heart filled. When His affectionate nature met only misunderstanding, coldness, rejection, and antagonism among the people for whose love and trust He so hungered, He would go away at nightfall, apart from men, and on some mountaintop or in some deep garden shade, He would commune with One who was all love, who never misunderstood Him, and in whose blessed companionship all of the hungers of His heart were satisfied, and all the hurts of love were healed.

One of the most touching incidents in the Gospels, described what occurred at the close of one day in the temple. "Every man went unto His own house; but Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives" (see John 7:53; John 8:1). It was evening night was gathering. It was time for all to go away. But nobody asked Jesus home with him. They went to their own fine houses on the great streets, leaving Him there. Then He, homeless, with no place to go, no place to lay His head that night, climbed the Mount of Olives, and there stayed alone—alone, but not alone, because the Father was with Him.

We may apply the words to experiences in our own lives. We, too, have our times of loneliness. In a certain sense, all life is lonely. Even with sympathetic friends all about us, there is an inner life which one of us lives, in which we are solitary. We must make our own decisions and choices. We must meet our own questions and answer them ourselves. We must fight our own battles, endure our own sorrows, carry our own burdens. Friendship may be very close, so close that it seems to us there is no part of our deepest life, which our friend does not share with us; yet there is an inner sanctuary of each human life, into which even the most perfect friendship may not enter.

Blessed are those who in this aloneness can say, "Yet I am not alone, because my Father is with me!" God is the only friend who can really enter into the inner sanctuary of our life. God’s is the only companionship we can really have in the inner experiences of our hearts. God’s is the only friendship that can really meet all our soul’s deep needs and cravings. Human love is only a little trickling stream; God’s love is a great river, broadening into a shoreless ocean! Human companionship helps us at a few points; the divine fellowship flows all about us and enters into every experience of ours. We never can be left alone—if we still have Christ. When other helpers and comforts flee—He will abide with us. When other faces fade out of view—His face will appear, shining out with perfect love, pouring its holy light upon us. "I am not alone, because the Father is

with me.

There are special times when we are alone. Pain sets us apart. We have to endure it alone. In any pain or grief of yours, you may have truest friends surrounding you—but none of them can bear one pang for you. Sometimes we almost blame our friends because they do not come near to us in our trouble, because they do not appear to feel for us or sympathize with us. We say they do not understand us. We think they ought to help us more. But the truth is—we have to live all our inner lives alone. Our friends love us and want to help us, but they cannot. None can fully understand us. None can really help us in any deep and efficient way. Those about us, even those who are our truest friends, who sympathize with us most fully, leave us alone because they cannot share our suffering. But we can always say, "I am not alone—because the Father is with me!"

There is a loneliness which is made by the breaking up of homes. A true home is an incalculable blessing to the young lives that nestle in it. It is a shelter where they find protection. It is a school where they are educated, where they learn life's lessons. There is guidance also in a true home. Many of life's hardest questions, are answered by wise parents. Blessed is that young man or young woman who takes every perplexity, every mystery, every fear and doubt, every heart-hunger, to the sacredness of love's sanctuary at home and gets wise counsel and guidance!

Home has also its blessed companionships. It is one place where we are absolutely sure of each other, where we need never suspect anyone, where we do not need to be on our guard. Youth has its unexpected longings, its deep cravings, its hunger for affection, its inexperience needing direction. A true home is the very shadow of Gods wings, the very cleft of the Rock of Ages, to those who abide in its love. But sometimes the home is torn down and its shelter broken up. Sore indeed is the loss when a young person, used to all that is gentle and satisfying in home tenderness, is driven out to homelessness. Other human friendships are very sweet—but they never can give back home with its rest and comfort. But blessed is he who in earthly homelessness can say, "Yet I am not alone!" Who can look into the face of Christ and breathe out the psalm of peace, "Lord, You are my dwelling place; You are home to my heart!"

Another time of special loneliness is that of old age. Old people often grow very lonely. Once they were the center of large groups of friends and companions. One by one the beloved associates slipped away. Now the old man or the old woman stands almost entirely alone. The streets are full, the church is full; but where are the faces of forty or fifty years ago? There is a memory of empty cribs, of vacant chairs, of little graves, of marriage altars—and then the starting of new homes, perhaps far away. But the old faces are gone. It is young life that now fills the home, the street, the church. Only here and there perhaps, is a companion of forty, fifty years ago remains. The old people are lonely.

Yet Christian old age can say, "I am not alone!" No changes can take Christ away. Other companions scatter, leaving them humanly alone—but He never departs. Indeed, Christ becomes more and more real to aged Christians—as other friends drop off and become fewer and fewer. While human friendships filled the life, Christ was not turned to very often, though He was believed in and loved. The joys that were needed were found so easily in the human loves that were always at hand, that Christ did not seem so indispensable, so necessary. But as one by one the earthly loved ones dropped off and slipped away, and could not be turned to in the time of need, then Christ began to be more necessary and was turned to more frequently. As the years went on, and

more and more of the old friends were missing, Christ grew every day more precious, until now He is almost the only one left. Blessed is the aged Christian; he is now drawing near to glory. A little while longer—and he will enter heaven! Soon the old people will pass over, and find again, waiting for them, those who were once their friends here, companions once more, inseparable now, in heaven! But it is not old people only, who are left lonely by life's changes. Sorrow touches all ages. There is a continual breaking of human companionships. Blessed are those who can say with every bereavement, "Alone—yet not alone, because Christ is mine, and He never leaves me!" Then in Christ also, our human ties are made inseparable. We never really can lose each other if we are united in Christ. In Christ we never lose a friend. But this is not all, nor the best. Human loneliness here, is filled with the divine presence of Christ. "I am not alone, because the Father is with me!"

There is no other loneliness in all human experience, like that of dying. We cannot die in companies, or in groups, nor even two by two. We must die alone. Two may walk together for long years, never divided in joy or sorrow. But they cannot die together. Human hands, however long they have held each other, must unclasp as the friends enter the valley of shadows—one taken, the other left. Human faces that have looked into ours through the years, must fade from our vision—as we pass into the mists of the valley of death.

"I cannot see you," said a dying friend the other night, as the beloved ones stood about His bed. "I cannot see you." So will it be with each of us some night. Human friends cannot go beyond the edge of the valley. "You shall leave me alone." Yes, that will be true of each of us in our turn. But we need not be alone, even in that supreme moment. When the hand of human love unclasps—the hand of Christ will take your hand and lead you through the dark valley of death. When human faces fade out—Christ's face will be revealed, with its welcome of infinite love. When you must creep out of the bosom of human affection, and pass into the mystery of death—it will be into the clasp of the Everlasting Arms! So death's loneliness will be filled with divine companionship! "I am not alone, because the Father is with me!"

Thus the one great need of life—is Christ. If we do not have Christ—what will we do in life's crises? When human joy fades—what will be left? When human companionships are stripped off—who will walk with us the rest of the lonely way? When death comes, and we must drift out from all we ever have known, from earth's refuges and trusts and from earth's familiar places and friends—where shall we go? In whom shall we trust? Who will receive us and lead us home? If we have not Christ, life is hopeless and the universe is homeless for us. But if we have Christ, then, no matter what is taken, He will remain—and He will suffice!

Jesus Prays for His Friends

John 17:15-26 A writer tells of quietly opening the door of his mother's room one day in his boyhood, seeing her on her knees, and hearing her speak his own name in prayer. He quickly and quietly withdrew from the sacred place—but he never forgot that one glimpse of his mother at prayer, nor the prayer for himself, which he heard her speak to God. Well did he know that what he had seen that moment, was but a glimpse of what went on every day in that place of prayer. The consciousness of this fact, he says, strengthened him countless times in duty, in danger, in struggle. In this seventeenth chapter of John's gospel, we hear Christ praying just once, a few sentences—but we know that this is only a sample of what is going on forever in heaven, for the

Scriptures tell us that He ever lives—to make intercession for us!

Jesus knew that the end had come, the time for Him to make His great sacrifice, to offer Himself for the redemption of His people. He knew how much depended upon this hour. So He prayed that the Father would glorify Him in His sufferings, that in turn He might glorify His Father. When we are about entering any sore trial, or taking up any great duty on which much depends, it should be our prayer that God would so sustain us that we may honor Him in the experience and in the way we pass through it. We should dread nothing so much as the dishonoring of God in sorrow, in trial, or in pain—by losing faith, by complaining, or by murmuring. The deepest wish and prayer of our hearts always should be that we may be enabled to glorify God in every experience of our lives. "Love's secret," says Faber, "is to be always doing things for God, and not to mind because they are such very little things." This means that we do nothing, say no word, let no feeling enter our heart—that would in any way dishonor God. A great preacher who was subject at times to seasons of excruciating suffering would ask when the paroxysms were over, "Did I complain? I did not want to complain." He wished to endure His anguish without yielding to any expression of pain, and he feared that he had not honored God as he had wished to do. Too many fail in glorifying God in suffering. Allowing themselves to cry out, to fret, to chafe and repine, giving way to feelings of pain, to impatience, to envy or jealousy, to anger and bitterness, to discouragement or despair—is to fail in glorifying God.

Jesus looks back over His past, too, with comfort and satisfaction. He can say to the Father, "I have brought you glory on earth—by completing the work you gave me to do." (John 17:4). He is the only person that ever lived who could say this. The most faithful of us, have done but a little of what God meant for us to do when He made us. The best and most complete human lives, are but little fragments in which are left undone—many things which ought to have been done.

We may take a lesson, too, from Christ's way of accomplishing His work. He did it by simply doing each day, the will of His Father. He was only a young man, thirty-three years old when He died. We think of those dying early—as dying too soon, before their work is accomplished. Yet we learn from Jesus that even a young man may leave a finished work. Years enough are given to each one—in which to do the work allotted. And the young man who dies at thirty-three, with his hands full of tasks, whom his friends mourn as having died prematurely, if only he has lived faithfully while he lived—has accomplished the work that God gave him to do. It is not the amount of years we live—but our diligence and faithfulness which count with God.

Jesus makes an earnest prayer for His disciples before He leaves them. He knows what lies before them—the persecutions, the struggles, the temptations, and then their weakness, their ignorance, their inability in themselves to meet these perils and difficulties; so He commends them to His Father, "Holy Father, keep through your own name, those whom you have given me." While He was in this world, Jesus had kept them in the Father's name, guarding them so that not one of them had perished, but the son of perdition. Now, however, He was about to leave them in the world. He was going back to God, and they would not have His protection, the shelter of His love, His divine strength, to keep them. He knows that the world will hate them and persecute them—even as it had hated and persecuted Him. But He will not leave them alone. He will so keep them that they shall not be overwhelmed in the world's enmity. In great tenderness, He commends them to His Father's keeping.

"I am not praying that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil." John 17:15. Jesus does not pray that His disciples should be taken out of the world to escape the danger. This would have been the easier way for them, for with Him in heaven—they would have been safe from all persecution. But they had a work to do in this world, and therefore they must stay to do it. They were to represent their Master, carrying on His work among men. Hence, He must leave them behind Him. It was for this very work that He had called them and made them His followers.

It would be a great deal easier in one sense for Christian people, if they were taken to heaven as soon as they had become Christ's followers. Then they would have no cross-bearing, no giving of their lives for others, no struggles, no self-denials, no sacrifices. But who then would do Christ's work in the world? Who would look after the wandering ones, or rescue those who are tempted? Thus followers of Christ are left to the world after they become Christ's friends—both for their own sakes and for the sake of others. It seems hard to have to fight battles and endure trials—but these battles and trials are means of strengthening and growth. Not those who have the easiest life, are really the most favored ones—but those who endure life's trials victoriously.

They are not the most majestic trees that grow in the sheltered valley—but those that are found on hilltops and mountains, where they must encounter fierce storms. When armies return from victorious war, the loudest cheers are not for those who have fought the fewest battles and wear the fewest scars, nor for the flags that are cleanest—but for the regiments that are cut down to the fewest men, and for the colors that have been shot to tatters. So when the redeemed are welcomed home, those who have fought the hardest battles and who wear the most scars—will be received with the highest honor. The prayer that Jesus did make for His disciples, was that they should he kept from the evil of the world. There is but one evil in the world. It is not trouble, not persecution, not suffering nor sorrow. The one and only evil—is sin. No matter what comes to us, so long as we do not sin, we have not been really harmed. The Revised Version makes the evil personal "the evil one." We know who this "evil one" is. It is a great comfort also for us to know that Christ Our Master is stronger than Satan, and if we are faithful to Him, Satan will have no power to harm us.

"Sanctify them by the truth; Your Word is truth." Jesus prayed also for His disciples, that they might be sanctified in the truth. A man is sanctified, when he is given up to God to live for Him only, to think, to feel, to act, to do all things for the glory of God and in God's service of love for men. It means also the cleansing and purifying of the life and character.

Then the prayer of Christ reached out beyond the little group of men who stood about Him that night in the upper room—and took in all who ever would believe on Him. "I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in Me through their message." We can think of ourselves as remembered that night by the Master, before He set out for His cross. The special prayer that He made for all His disciples, was that they might be one. Anything that separated them in heart and life, the one from the other, would destroy their unity as believers.

"May they all be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You. May they also be one in Us, so the world may believe You sent Me." The great passion of the Redeemer's heart, was that His disciples might be one. The reason He so longed for their unity—was that the world might be impressed by their oneness, and might be led to believe in Christ. It was a unity of heart and spirit

which Christ had in mind—not a mere formal unity. He would have His people bound together in bonds of love. Denominationalism need not be wrong nor harmful, if the different churches live together in the spirit of love and unity. But controversy and strifes not only dishonor Christ—but greatly mar the influence of Christianity in the world! An old legend says that when Adam and Eve were turned out of Eden, an angel broke the gates to pieces, and the fragments flying over the earth are the precious stones which men now gather. A writer makes an application of the legend—he says that the precious stones were picked up by the various religions and philosophies, each claiming that His own fragment alone reflects the light of heaven, and is the material of which the gates of paradise were made. But as all these fragments had the same origin, it is the work of Christianity to gather them all back again into one unity, thus reconstructing the gates of paradise.

Every Christian represents Christ, and all Christians combined together should represent the spirit of Christ, the love of Christ, the compassion, the patience, the mercy of Christ. We all should seek to be one in spirit, to whatever particular branch of the Church we may happen to belong.

Christ Betrayed

John 18:1-13 It was after the great intercessory prayer. Jesus now set out on His journey to the cross. The Garden of Gethsemane was on the way. This was one of His familiar sacred resorts for prayer, and here He lingered for an hour. Leaving eight of His disciples at the outer edge of the Garden to watch, He took three, His closest friends, with Him a little farther. "Sit here," he said to them, "while I go over there and pray" (Matthew 26:36). He was drawing near to the terrible experience of the cross, and sought help. Before He passed into the darkness, He wanted the lamps of comfort lighted. Though He was the Son of God, He sought strength and help—in prayer and communion with His Father. We know that the praying in Gethsemane made the darkness of Calvary less dark, and the woe less bitter. Indeed, the battle was really fought under the olive trees, and when the next day came with its darkness and anguish—He was ready for it and met it all calmly. The great lesson for us, is that the way to prepare for coming perils and sorrows—is by prayer. A season spent with God, will make us strong for any experiences of struggle or duty. It is said that a young officer under Wellington, when ordered to perform some perilous duty, lingered a moment and then said to his commander, "Let me first have a grasp of your all-conquering hand—and then I can do it." We need to feel the grasp of the mighty hand of Christ—and then we can perform any duty, meet any peril, and endure any trouble. A mother whose life was very hard used often to go away upstairs to her room for a little while, when the burdens became unbearable, and she always would come back with a song and a shining face and a brave heart. We should always seek the Garden—before we have to take up the cross. This Garden meant a great deal to Jesus. Often He had come here with His disciples in the troublous times when His enemies were plotting His death. Here we have a glimpse of our Lords devotional habits. All through His life—He had His times for prayer. There were mountaintops where He spent whole nights communing with His Father. We are apt to wonder why He, the Son of God, needed so much to have His seasons of prayer. But the holiest need prayer the most. Some people manage to get along without much praying—but it is at the expense of their spiritual life. Not feeding their souls—they grow very lean. Luther used to say he had so much to do—that he could not get along with less than three hours of prayer each day. Some of us would put it the other way, and say that we have so much to do—that we have almost no time for praying. But Luther was wise. A great

deal of praying needs always to go—to a very little working. Then the habit of praying is important. Some people tell us that prayer should be spontaneous and that regular periods make it formal and take the life out of it; but if there are no regular seasons and places of prayer—there will soon be no prayer at all. Jesus had habits of prayer.

Jesus, as He was nearing His cross, sought strength in two ways. He craved human sympathy. He wanted His disciples to be near Him, and to wait and watch with Him. In this they failed Him. Then He craved His Father's help. In this longing, He was not disappointed. God never fails those who call upon Him in their distress. The cup did not pass from Him—but as He pleaded, His agony became less and less intense, until His cries were quieted into submissive peace. As Jesus came from the Garden, He saw the torches flashing in the near distance. Every new line in the story of the betrayal, shows new blackness in the heart of Judas. Going out from the supper table, he hastened to the priests, and quickly got under way with his band of soldiers and police. He knew very well where Jesus had gone. Then, when he had found Him, the manner in which he let the officers know which one of the company they were to arrest, shows the deepest blackness of all—he went up to Him as to a dear friend, eager and ardent, and kissed Him! And the words mean that he kissed Him repeatedly, over and over, and with pretended warmth and affection.

Let us remember how the treason grew in the heart of Judas, beginning in greed for money, growing into theft and falseness of life, ending at last in the blackest crime the world ever saw! We should watch the beginnings of evil in our hearts. A picture in the royal gallery of Brussels, represents Judas wandering about on the night after the betrayal. He comes by chance upon the workmen who have been making the cross on which Christ shall be crucified on the morrow. A fire nearby throws its light full on the faces of the men who are sleeping peacefully, while resting from their labor. Judas' face is somewhat in the shade—but it is wonderfully expressive of awful remorse and agony—as he catches sight of the cross and the tools used in making it—the cross which his treachery had made possible! But still, though in the very torments of hell, as it appears, he clutches his moneybag and seems to hurry on into the night. That picture tells the story of the fruit of Judas' sin—the moneybag with thirty pieces of silver in it (and even that, he could not keep long), carried off into the night of fiendish despair—that was all. The same terrible story of sin is repeated yet, whenever men sell their souls for money, or for any price this world pays.

Jesus was not taken by surprise. He knew what it all meant when He saw the soldiers and officers with lanterns and torches and weapons, coming toward Him. He knew the meaning of the kiss from Judas. But He was not startled. He met the betrayal calmly. He stepped forth, saying, "Whom do you seek?" When they told Him, "Jesus of Nazareth," He said, "I am He." They were panic-stricken and fell to the ground. Here we have a glimpse of the power of Jesus. Though He seemed to be ensnared and unable to escape—yet really He never was more free, than at that moment. He could have called legions of angels with a word, though even that would have been unnecessary, for He had almighty power in Himself, before which, had He put it forth, all His enemies would have been as nothing!

We must remember that Christ's death was voluntary. He gave Himself as a sacrifice. He laid down His life for the sheep. Here we see the love of Jesus in freely offering Himself as our Redeemer.

"When Jesus said, 'I am he,' they drew back and fell to the ground!" In this scene we have also a hint of the appalling effect which Christ's look will have upon His enemies on the judgment day. One glance of His holy eye, will send terror into all impenitent hearts and drive the ungodly forever away before the wind! They will call upon the hills and rocks to fill upon them, to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb—but in vain! In the time of His own great danger Jesus did not forget His disciples—but sought and secured their safety. "If therefore you seek me—then let these go their way," He said. Illustrating the picture He had drawn of the Good Shepherd, He did not flee when He saw the wolf coming, leaving the sheep to be scattered; but gave His own life for the sheep. The incident also illustrates the great work of redemption. Jesus procures the deliverance of His people—by surrendering Himself to shame and death, while they go their way in joy and safety. So watchful was He over His own people in their time of panic and fear, that as He had said, "Of those whom you have given me—I have not lost one." And that is just as true now, after nineteen centuries, as it was that day. He never has lost a single soul who trusted in Him. No one ever has perished, who took refuge in the love of Christ. His infinite power protects all who submit themselves to Him as Redeemer and Savior. At the day of judgment Christ will be able to say these same words, "Of those whom you have given me—I have not lost one." We need not be afraid to trust ourselves to the saving of Christ. No matter what our peril may be in any condition or circumstances, we need never be afraid, if we are doing our part faithfully and trusting Him. No power can snatch us out of the hands of Christ!

We are not surprised to find the disciples interfering in behalf of their Master. It broke their hearts to see Him handled so roughly. Peter was always brave. He could not restrain himself, and, after drawing his sword, which he carried, he struck at one of the guards and cut off his ear. But Jesus checked his assault and said, "Put your sword away! The cup which my Father has given me—shall I not drink it?" We ought to take this word of Jesus for our own. He meant that no resistance such as Peter had attempted, should be offered to His arrest; and the reason was that His betrayal, capture, and coming death belonged to "the cup" which the Father had given into His hands; and therefore must not be rejected. The lesson is, that there are some evils against which we should not lift a finger!

Just how far we ought to resist wrongs inflicted upon us by others—is often a difficult question to settle. We remember the words of Christ elsewhere: "But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well." (Matthew 5:39-40).

Possibly this doctrine of nonresistance may sometimes be carried too far; but there is no doubt that far more frequently the erring is on the other side. At least we are very sure that if the wrongs threatened belong to "the cup" which the Father has given us—we ought not to resist them.

Jesus Before Pilate

John 18:28-40

It was early in the morning. There was special hurry that day, for the rulers wanted to get their business out of the way, because of the approaching feast. The trials before the high priest and religious council, preceded that before the governor. The rulers, when they could find absolutely nothing against Jesus, had sought to make out their case by bringing in hired false witnesses. But

even this testimony fell to the ground—no two of the witnesses agreeing. The only hope was to compel Jesus to convict Himself by some word He might speak. He stood silent, however, before them, until the high priest adjured Him to answer whether He were the Christ or not. Then He could be silent no longer. On this admission, the sentence of condemnation was passed by the Sanhedrin. This was as far as the council could go. They must wait now for the approval of their sentence by the Roman governor.

Pilate was the one man in all the world who could give the final word with regard to the sentencing of Jesus. This put upon him a fearful responsibility. While Jesus was standing before Pilate, apparently to be tried by him, Pilate himself was really on trial before Jesus, and in the light of His holy face—the character of the Roman governor was plainly revealed.

Pilate was deeply impressed by his prisoner. He was convinced of His innocence. He wanted to set Him free. But he had not the courage to oppose the religious rulers, and so he let them have their way and sent Jesus to His cross, even against his own conscience, and in spite of the pathetic pleadings of his wife!

"To avoid ceremonial uncleanness, the Jews did not enter the palace." John 18:28. The religious rulers carried their pious scruples even to the palace of Pilate. Amazingly, they had no scruples about their wicked treatment of an innocent man—but they were scrupulously conscientious about matters of mere ceremonial requirement! They would not set their feet on the Gentile's floor—for that would have defiled them! Yet meanwhile their hearts were full of evil and murderous thoughts and resolves!

There will always be people who are most punctilious in their religious rituals—but who in practical life, are little better than heathen! We should learn well, that God is grieved more by our bitter feeling, our lack of love, our hate and envy—than He is with little omissions in religious ceremonies and formalities. When the rulers had presented Jesus to Pilate, he wanted to know what the charges against their prisoner were. He asked them, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" Jesus could not be put to death without Pilate's sentence. It was only fair, therefore, that he should ask His accusers what their charge against Him was. No man ever should be condemned without a trial. We have a right to ask the same question now, of those who reject Christ. What wrong has He done? What faults have you found in His character? Whom has He injured? The rulers attempted no answer to Pilate's question; indeed, no answer was possible, for no accusation could be brought against Him. It would have been easy to bring a thousand witnesses to testify to the good things Jesus had done—the works of mercy, the deeds of kindness, the miracles of compassion; but in all the country—not one person could have been found to testify to the smallest wrong thing that He had ever done to any being! His life had been a perpetual blessing wherever He had gone. His lips had ever been speaking words of comfort and love. He was hurried to death—by men's hate, without reason or charge of any kind. The rulers assumed an air of dignity, in answer to Pilate's demand to know what charge they brought against Jesus, saying that if He were not an evildoer, they would not have brought Him before Pilate. Their bearing was haughty, and Pilate was offended by it. "Take Him—and judge Him according to your law." As Pagan as Pilate was, and heartless—the presence of Jesus before him as prisoner, filled his heart with dread. There was something about this prisoner which awed him. Ordinarily he cared nothing for justice—but now he sought to evade the responsibility of sentencing this man.

Instead of refusing to have anything to do with the sentencing of an innocent man, Pilate sought all that morning by evasion, simply to get clear of the case. Each time, however, Jesus came back and stood before him, waiting for His decision. So the scene closed, and Jesus was sent to His cross. In a little while Pilate fell into disgrace and committed suicide in his exile. When he went into the eternal world and found himself before the throne of the judge—into whose eyes did the guilty Roman governor look? What a reversal there was! Once Pilate was judge—and Jesus stood at his bar; now Jesus is judge—and Pilate is before Him! In like manner, Jesus waits before every sinner, meek and lowly, with love and mercy, asking to be received. The scene will soon change, however, and those who reject Him here—will stand before Him as their omnipotent Judge!

If Jesus had been put to death under the Jewish law, it would have been by stoning. But again and again He had foretold that He would be lifted up, implying that He would die on a cross. Thus, unconsciously, the rulers were fulfilling our Lord’s own prophecy regarding Himself. God keeps His hand on all events. In all the surging waves of the sea—not one drop of water ever rushes beyond the leash of His control. In all the turmoil of human events—no one ever gets beyond God’s control. The whole fearful chapter of wickedness enacted around Christ’s cross, even the most minute particular, was the fulfillment of prophecies made long before. We need never fear that the affairs of this world—shall get beyond God’s control. We never can drift beyond His love and care. A little bird built its nest under the iron track of a railroad. Day and night the heavy trains thundered along, with their terrific noise—but the little bird was not disturbed, and sat there in quiet peace, rearing her little ones in safety. Just so, amid this world’s danger and rushing noise, a believer in God may rest in quiet confidence, undisturbed, undismayed.

There certainly seemed nothing kingly about Jesus at that time—at least in an earthly sense. He stood there, bound and suffering, with no followers, no friends, with neither throne nor scepter nor crown, with not even a place to lay His head. Little wonder is there that Pilate’s question was put in tones of such surprise, "Are You a king?" Yet Jesus was (and still is) King! He is King of all angels and of all men. Kingliness does not consist in purple robes, crowns of gold, and the pageantry of earthly honor. We have but to follow the account of this trial through to the end—to see in this lowly, despised Man—the highest type of kingliness. Study His bearing—His calm dignity, His gentle patience, His quiet self-control, His majestic silence under wrong and insult. While we look with love at Jesus so kingly amid all the scenes of His humiliation, let us take a lesson for ourselves. Let us learn to be patient under wrong and injury, to be gentle and uncomplaining in the rudest and most unjust treatment!

Pilate sought again to be rid of the responsibility of sentencing Jesus to the cross, by getting the people to choose Him as the one man to be set free at that feast. But in this, too, Pilate failed. "No, not Him! Give us Barabbas!" they shouted.

They had their choice between Jesus the holy, the pure, the sinless Son of God—and Barabbas, the bandit, robber, murderer. And they chose Barabbas for liberty and life—and sent Jesus to death on the cross! We all agree in our condemnation of the rulers. But let us not forget that to every one of us a like choice comes. There are but two masters in the world—Christ and Satan. Both ask our allegiance, our obedience. We must make a choice—we cannot be neutral, for no man can serve two masters. In choosing Barabbas the Jews sent Jesus to a cross! He who rejects Christ now—crucifies Him afresh and counts His blood an unholy thing!

Pilate Sentencing Jesus

John 19:1-16

Pilate’s portrait is hung up in the gallery of the world’s great criminals. His is one of the names which never will be forgotten. The incident of the scourging is one of the darkest blots in the story of that terrible Friday. Pilate claimed that he could find no fault in Jesus, and that He should be released—yet, hoping that it would satisfy the Jews, he ordered Him to be scourged. The scourging must be considered as a part of Christ’s sufferings as the world’s Redeemer. The shame and indignity of being tied like a slave to a whipping post and then beaten until He seemed dead, we never can realize, for, thanks to the softening influence of the religion of Christ, such treatment even of the worst criminals is now unknown in civilized lands. There is, however, a word in Isaiah which gives a fresh meaning to this part of Christ’s suffering. "With His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5), says the prophet. The peace we enjoy is ours, because the rod of chastisement fell upon Him—because He was smitten. Our soul’s diseases are healed, their wounds made whole, because the body of Jesus was gashed and lacerated by the horrible scourge!

After the cruel scourging came the crowning with thorns and the mockery of Jesus as a King. "The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head." We ought to look with great love and reverence at the picture—Jesus the Son of God, our Savior, standing there in the midst of heathen soldiers, mocked and insulted by them. We know how truly He is a King, and what a glorious King He is. When the crusaders had captured the Holy City, Palestine became an independent kingdom. Godfrey, of Bouillon, was made king of Jerusalem, and it was proposed that he be crowned with a golden crown. But Godfrey’s noble answer was, "I will not wear a crown of gold in the city where my Savior wore a crown of thorns."

It is a sweet thought, too, that because Jesus wore a crown of thorns in the day of His shame—His redeemed ones shall wear crowns of glory in the life to come. In one sense this mock coronation of Jesus was very significant. Was He really ever more a King than when He was enduring His cross? All through John’s gospel we have seen that Jesus spoke of His going to His cross—as His being glorified. His cross really was His throne. It was on the cross that He fought the great battle and won the great victory of redemption. The cross was the ladder that led up to His throne. His crown of thorns, too, was fitter for Him than a crown of gold would have been, for He was the King of sorrow; He reached His glory—by His sufferings; He saved His people—by dying for them. He is adored and worshiped now as the King who has lifted men up by His own sorrows and blood to eternal life and blessedness.

Pilate showed pitiful weakness at every step in his dealing with Jesus. He knew there was no sin in Him, and yet he brought Him out to the people and surrendered Him to them. "Behold the Man!" Our eyes should be fixed upon Jesus as He stands there in the presence of the multitude. On His head—is the crown of thorns, and around His torn and bleeding body—is a purple robe, mock emblems of royalty. Behold the Man! Behold the Man enduring shame and contempt, set forth as a spectacle of mockery, that He might be presented at last in glory, and honored before angels and the Father. Behold the Man, reviled—yet reviling not again; hated—but still loving on; cruelly wronged—but speaking no resentful word. Behold the Man, the God-Man, wearing humanity, the Son of God humbling Himself and becoming obedient unto shame and death—that He might save

our souls! Behold the Man, holy, sinless, undefiled, separate from sinners—yet bearing upon His own head as the Lamb of God, the sin of the world. The only righteous thing for a just judge to do when he finds his prisoner innocent—is to set him free. Pilate brought Jesus out to the people—but said plainly, "I find no fault in Him." Nobody could. Nobody ever did. The rulers tried zealously enough to find something that they use as a pretext—but they found nothing. They tried false witnesses—but even these could not agree in their witnessing. Now the keen Roman judge inquires into His character, into His life, into His motives—but finds nothing against Him. No other man has lived in whom no fault could be found. The holiest men have sinned. But Jesus was absolutely sinless. Why then did He suffer as a sinner? We know well the answer. They were our sins that they laid upon Him. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). Christ also has suffered once for sins, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." "Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree."

We never should forget this. In these days perhaps there is a tendency to forget the sacrifice of Christ, in thinking of His salvation. Between us in our curse and our blessing—stands the cross of our Savior. He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. Let us praise the grace that took our sins, that we may stand whiter than snow before the throne of judgment! The silences of Jesus are always as significant as His words. He was silent to Pilate. He understood Pilate's weak insincerity. Pilate had had opportunity enough to do the right thing for Jesus—but he had thrown away His opportunity. Now Jesus would answer no more of His questions. One lesson we must get from this silence—is that if we reject Christ's offer of mercy and grace over and over, the time may come, will come, when Christ will be silent to us. And of all calamities that can possibly ever come to any soul—none could be so great as that Christ should be silent to its prayers. "Then shall they call upon me—but I will not answer; they shall seek me early—but they shall not find me" (Proverbs 1:28).

Another lesson we may learn from Christ's example, is that there come times in all our lives, when silence is better than speech. Often to words of reviling or to insult—silence is the only true Christian answer. To many of the assaults of skeptics on our religion and on our Lord—it is better that we remain silent than that we speak. There is a time to speak boldly and without fear in the presence of Christ's enemies—Christ did speak several times in reply to Pilate—but there are also times when we should keep silence, attempting no answer.

Pilate tried to compel Jesus to answer him. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" The answer of Jesus is very clear. "You would have no power over me—if it were not given to you from above." No man's power belongs to himself, to do with as he pleases; it is given him from God, the Source of all power. This is true of the authority of parents and teachers, and of the power possessed by civil magistrates. Men are eager to obtain positions of power, and they do not always realize the responsibility which is attached to such positions. Power belongs to God, and must be used for God, or its misuse will bring its sore penalty. It is a talent which is given to us to be accounted for, and no treason is worse than malfeasance in the employing of power. This is true all the way from the power of the child on the playground or in the home, up to the power of the president of the nation or of the king on His throne. "You would have no power over me—if it were not given to you from above."

There is another sweet thought suggested by the words "against me" in this sentence. Christ in this world was under the protection of His Father, and no one on earth could lift a finger against Him but by the Father's divine permission. What was true of Him, the Son of God, is true of each one of the sons of God in all their earthly life. Each believer, the humblest, the weakest, is kept in this world as the apple of God's eye. No one can lift a finger to touch one of God's little ones, except by divine permission. This shows how secure we are, amid all the world's dangers and enmities, while we trust ourselves, like little children, in our Father's keeping. When Pilate ceased His weak efforts to have Jesus released, saying to the rulers, "Behold Your King!" they cried out, "Away with him, crucify him!" Thus they finally rejected their Messiah. We read at the beginning of John's gospel that "He came unto His own—and His own received him not" (John 1:11). The whole story of His life was an illustration of this rejection of Him. Wherever He went they received Him not. Here and there a home opened its doors to Him, and now and then there was a devout heart that made hospitality for Him—but these receptions were so few that they could easily be counted. Crowds of the common people thronged after Him, and many heard Him gladly—but very few became His true disciples. Even on Palm Sunday, five days before He died, there was a vast multitude to cry, "Hosanna!" and wave palm branches; but soon the palms lay withered in the streets, and on Friday only cries of "Crucify him!" were heard in the air. "He came unto His own—and His own received Him not."

It is the saddest event in all history, this coming of the Son of God to this earth, bearing in His hands all divine and heavenly blessings—but finding only shut doors and shut hearts, being compelled to take away His gifts because men would not receive them. We read this old story and wonder how His own people could have treated Him so; yet how is it with us? Do we treat Him any better? We do not cry, "Crucify him!" but we shut the doors of our hearts in His face and keep Him out. We reject and refuse His gifts which He comes all the way from heaven to bring to us. We may not with angry voice exclaim, "Away with him!" but in our hearts many of us do keep Him away. The struggle had ceased, and "Pilate delivered him therefore unto them to be crucified." He first tried every way to avoid the issue; then he temporized, hoping in some way to evade the responsibility. At least he yielded, and his name goes down through history pilloried forever, as the man who delivered Jesus to be crucified, knowing and confessing that He was free from any crime. He was known in the world by no other act. Surely it is an unenviable notoriety. It had been a thousand times better for him if he had never been horn, or if he had remained forever in quiet obscurity, instead of going to that high place of power in the land, in which he had to meet and deal with this most monentous question of history.

We read in one of the Gospels that Pilate took water in the presence of the people and washed his hands, thus by symbol declaring that he was not responsible for the sentencing of Jesus to die. But the water did not wash away one particle of the stain of the guilt of that terrible sin! Pilate had the misfortune to be the only man in all the province who could send Jesus to the cross. Upon him, therefore, the final responsibility rested, no matter the pressure that was brought to bear upon him by the enemies of Jesus.

Just so, the fact that others urge us to sin—does not take away our guilt for that sin. No being in the universe can compel us to do wrong; if, then, we do wrong—the sin is our own. True, Jesus said there was one other whose guilt was even greater than Pilate's—that was the high priest. His sin was not only that he himself was determined to do wrong—but that he dragged others with

him. We remember that the rulers replied to Pilate’s act of washing his hands, "His blood be on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:25). No one who has read the story of the next forty years can doubt that this self-imprecation was fulfilled. Forty years later, thousands of the people were scourged and crucified. The crime of the rulers was successful—but what came of the success in the end? Let us learn that sin brings always terrible woe, and that the worst of all sin—is sin against the Lord Jesus Christ. The Crucifixion of Christ

John 19:17-30 An old legend said that Calvary was at the center of the earth. So it was, really, for the cross was the meeting place of two eternities—a past eternity of grace and hope, and a future eternity of faith, gratitude, love and devotion. It is the center of the earth, too, because toward it the eyes of all believers turn for pardon, comfort, light, joy, hope. As from all sections of the ancient camp, the bitten people looked toward the brazen serpent on the pole at the center of the camp—so from all lands sin-stricken ones look in their penitence, and sorrow-stricken ones in their grief, toward the cross.

"Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha)." The first picture we see is Jesus leaving Pilate’s judgment hall bearing His cross. The custom was that a criminal should carry to the place of execution, the cross, on which he should be fastened. The cross was heavy. Yet, as heavy as it was, the wooden cross was not all the load Jesus carried that day. We know there was another still heavier, for He bore the burden of the world’s sin. The old prophet said, "All we like sheep have gone astray ... and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). It would seem that none of the apostles were with Jesus as He went out to Calvary. John was caring for Mary, whom Jesus had committed to His care. She, with John and other friends, were presently watching by the cross. Certain other women were in the crowd, lamenting with Jesus. These He comforted even in His own great-sorrow. When He staggered under His cross, a passer-by was seized and compelled to carry His load. It would have indeed been a strange irony—had the man who carried the cross missed the salvation whereof it is the instrument and the symbol. The next picture shows us Jesus being nailed upon the cross. He was not alone, for two others were crucified with Him, although this was contrary to Jewish law. These were criminals, men suffering justly for their sin. Thus He was "numbered with the transgressors" (Mark 15:28, cf. Isaiah 53:12). They put Jesus on the middle cross, as if He had been the greatest of the criminals. This was the place of the deepest dishonor. As He hung there, He was at the lowest point of shame in the world, in the place of the worst sinner. This tells us that there is no known stage of sin or guilt possible on earth, down to which Jesus cannot, will not, go as Savior.

One of the criminals beside Him was saved that day, lifted up by Him out of his guilt and sin, and borne in His arms to Paradise. This shows us that no sinner is so low in degradation or condemnation, that Jesus cannot lift him up to glory. But while we are looking at this one sinner who was saved that Good Friday, we must not fail to glance in sadness at his companion. He had the same opportunity for salvation that the other had, for he was equally close to Jesus, could hear His gracious words, see the blood dropping from His wounds, and behold His patience and compassion. Yet this man was not saved. He remained impenitent, though so close to the dying Redeemer. When people say they will take the chance of the dying thief on the cross, repenting at the last hour, they must remember that there were two dying thieves, equally close to Christ’s cross, and that one of them was lost. The next picture we see shows us Jesus Christ on His cross.

"Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS." Jesus was indeed the King of the Jews, their own Messiah. He was also the King of the world. After He arose, He said that all authority was given unto Him in heaven and on earth. In the visions of the Apocalypse we see Him in glory as King of kings. He did not seem kingly that hour on the cross. It was a strange throne for a king to occupy. Yet it was His throne, and the crucifixion was the point of His highest earthly honor. There His glory streamed out as at no other time in all His life. The love of God shone from the cross. It is the power of the cross that is changing the world today and drawing lives to the Savior! The rulers asked Pilate to change the title he had put over the cross. They wanted him to write only that Jesus said He was King of the Jews. They did not themselves wish to have it suggested that He was indeed in any sense their king. But Pilate refused to make any change in the superscription. "What I have written I have written," he declared. He spoke a deeper truth than he knew. He was making a record which would stand forever, and which in spite of all the injustice and dishonor of the day was true.

Just so—we are all writing, all the while, ineffaceably. What we have written, we have written. Every act we perform, every word we speak, every thought we think and every influence we give out—goes down to stay on the page. This is well when the things we do are good, right and beautiful things; but it is just as true when they are sinful and unholy things. We should lay this truth to heart and should live so that we shall write down in the inexpungeable record of our lives—only things we shall be glad to meet a thousand years hence. We never have the opportunity to go over our records—to correct the mistakes we have made. As we write the words, so will they stand. The next picture we see shows us the soldiers dividing the garments of Jesus among themselves. We can think of these men going about at their duty after that day, wearing the garments which Jesus had worn during His beautiful and holy life. We may carry the illustration farther, and think of ourselves and all redeemed ones—as wearing the garments which Jesus prepared for us that day on the cross. The scene of the soldiers gambling for the scant possessions of Jesus, while the most stupendous event of all time was being enacted above their heads, suggests to us how indifferent the world is to the glory of God and the glorious things that God does. Men are irreverent and are unmoved by even the holiest things! The next picture shows us a little group of the dearest friends of Jesus, standing near the cross, while He was enduring His unfathomable sorrows. His mother was there, and John, the beloved disciple. When Jesus saw His mother, His heart was touched with compassion for her, and He commended her to the beloved disciple, who from that time became as a son to her, taking her to his own home. In this scene we have a beautiful commentary on the Fifth Commandment.

Even on His cross, in the midst of the anguish of this terrible hour, He did not forget her who had borne Him, who had blessed His tender infancy and defenseless childhood with her rich, self-forgetful love. Every young person, or older one with parents living, who reads this fragment of the story of the cross, should remember the lesson and pay love’s highest honor to the father or the mother to whom he owes so much. The next picture shows us Jesus in His anguish of thirst. In response to His cry, "I am thirsty!" one of the soldiers dipped a sponge in the sour wine that was provided for the watchers and held it up on a reed, that it might moisten His lips. This is the only one of the seven sayings on the cross in which Jesus referred to His own suffering. It is pleasant to think that one of the soldiers gave a kindly response to His cry. This is the only gleam of humanity in all the dark story of cruelty and hardness enacted around the cross. It is a comfort to us to know

that even so small a kindness was wrought for Him who has filled the world with the fragrance of His love, blessing so many millions of suffering ones. For us the lesson is that we should train ourselves to deeds of thoughtful gentleness to all who are in distress. We remember that beautiful word of our Lord, that the giving of even a cup of cold water to a disciple in His name will not go unrewarded (see Matthew 10:42). There are thirsty ones coming to us continually, and countless are the opportunities of doing good to them in Christ's name. We should not fail to put the cup to lips that are burning with life's fever. Since Jesus thirsted on the cross and was refreshed, if only by so much as the moisture of a sponge filled with sour wine, He is quick to recognize and reward any kindness to one of His that thirsts. The last picture shows us Jesus dying. He said, "It is finished!" Then He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. It was a cry of victory which fell from His lips. His work was finished. He had done each day the work given Him to do that day, and when the last hour of the day came there was nothing that He had left undone. We should learn the lesson—and live as He lived, so as to have every part of our work finished when our end comes. But what was it that was finished when Jesus bowed His head on the cross? A famous picture represents Christ lifted up, and beneath Him an innumerable procession of the saints, advancing out of the darkness and coming into the light of His cross. There can be no doubt that He had such a vision of redemption while He hung there, for we are told that He endured the cross, despising the shame, because of the joy set before Him. "It is finished!" was therefore a shout of victory as He completed the work of suffering and sacrificing that the world might be saved.

"It is finished!"

John 19:30 The three hours of darkness was ending. The light was breaking. The Scripture tells us that Jesus then cried out in a loud, strong voice. It was not the cry of exhaustion and faintness; it was the shout of a victor. The cross seemed like defeat. Those who understood nothing of the meaning of the life and death of Christ, would think of Him as a man who had failed, all of whose dreams and hopes had perished. But we who understand something at least of the meaning of His mission and of the great purpose of His life, know that nothing failed. "It is finished," was the shout of a victor in the hour of His glorious success. It told of the completion of His work. All had been accomplished that He set out to do. His work was done. He had nothing more to do. There was no reason why He should live an hour longer, for the last task had now been done. A little while before, He said in His prayer in the upper room, "I have glorified you on the earth: I have finished the work which you gave me to do." When He said in dying, "It is finished!" He meant that there was nothing whatever left now for Him to do. His friends did not think so. They thought His work was only beginning. He was but thirty-three years old, and at thirty-three we regard life as no more than just begun. He had been only three years in His public ministry. Think, too, what years these had been, how full of blessing to those whom He had touched with His life. We can imagine Joseph and Nicodemus as they reverently took His body down from the cross and prepared it for burial, lamenting His early death, talking of what He might have done if only He had been spared longer. His disciples, too, in their anguish and their loss would speak together of the terrible bereavement they had suffered. He had just begun to live. He had gone about through the towns and villages, doing good for three years, healing, comforting, helping, blessing. What would fifty years of such ministry have meant to the world!

We talk the same way of our human friends who are taken away in early years. Their lives were full of promise. They had just begun to do beautiful things. They had shown a little of the power that was in them, to be a strength to others, to be a comfort to those who were in sorrow, to be inspirers of noble things. Our dreams for them were just beginning to be realized. Then, suddenly, they slipped away—and all was ended. We say that they could not be spared, that the world needed them longer. Over their graves we set up the broken shaft, symbol of incompleteness. It is a great comfort, then, to remember that life is not counted by the number of its years—but by what it puts into the years, few or many, that are lived.

We live in thoughts—not breaths.

We live in deeds—not years.

We should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives—who thinks most, feels the noblest, and acts the best. A millionaire recently, when dying, sent for a clergyman and said to him, "Doctor, I have failed, for I have groveled." He had not lived dishonestly; he had not made his money by unjust treatment of others, by the oppression of the poor, or in any way that men called wrong. Men said he had lived well. He had failed, according to his own thought, because he had groveled, lived as if he were a worm. Eighty years of such life, with God and heaven and love left out, however stupendous the earthly success, will not count so much in eternity—as much as one day of self-denying life of love, such as Jesus lived. Jesus, dying at thirty-three, had lived longer than any man who had reached fourscore years of selfishness, of groveling, of fame-seeking. When a friend dies early, with only a few years of life—but with those years filled with usefulness, helpfulness, unselfishness, and faithful doing of duty—do not say he had not done his work.

Another comforting truth started by the dying words of Jesus, is that God allots to us our work, little or much, and the time in which it must be done. Jesus spoke often of His hour. Again and again we read that His hour had not yet come, meaning the hour when His work would be finished, His earthly life ended. "His hour was not yet come." Then, at last, He said His hour had come. The time of His death was not accidental. Then He spoke also of His work as what His Father had given Him to do. It was not a haphazard matter how much work He should do, or what particular work it should be. It was all given Him by His Father. When He said in His last moments, "It is finished!" He meant that everything He had come into the world to do, all that the Father had given Him to do—He had done, and that now He had only to yield up His life into the hands of Him who gave it.

What was true of Him—is true also of us. There is an appointed time to man on earth, and each one has his mission, his work to do. Whether it is a brief time or many years, it matters not; our only care should be to do what has been given us to do, and to fill our appointed days, short or long, with duty well done. We need not fret, then, if our time is short, if we have only a few years given us to work. Faithfulness while the day lasts—is all that we need to concern ourselves with. The things we wanted to do and longed to do—but could not do, were not part of our work at all; they belonged to some other one coming after us.

"It is finished!" He meant fully accomplished, done perfectly. Not a word was unspoken which it was His to speak. Nothing, however small, was left undone which the Father had given Him to do. This never can be true of us. We do nothing perfectly. Our best work is marred and flawed by

imperfections. We get the white pages from God day by day—and return them blotted and stained. Our lives are full of blanks, neglects, duties not performed, things left undone—which we ought to have done. But all Christ's work was complete. He never omitted a kindness that was His to do, never passed by on the other side, to escape doing a service of love. We are never quite sure of the purity of our motives, even for the most sacred and worthy deeds we do. "Who of you convicts Me of sin?" Jesus could say as He looked into men's faces. But can we always say it? Why do we do our good things, our holy things? Is it really from love to God, and so for love to men, or is it sometimes from desire for praise? Everything in our lives is flecked and imperfect. We have to ask divine forgiveness on our best acts and words and thoughts. But when Jesus said, "It is finished!" He looked back upon a life work without a flaw, without an omission, without the slightest failure in thought or motive or deed. His life was brought under most searching light by the rulers in their eagerness to find something to accuse Him of when they sought justification for crucifying Him. But with all efforts to find a flaw, in the blaze of the most dazzling light—they found nothing! Herod sent Him back to Pilate with the testimony that he had found no fault in Him. Pilate declared the same of Him when he had examined Him. Then we have the witness of the Father, as He looked down upon Him and said out of the clouds of glory, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Christ's work was not merely ended when He bowed His head on the cross and said, "It is finished!" it was completed. His life was perfect.

"It is finished!" In a sense nothing He had done was finished; all His work was only begun. Luke spoke of the treatise he had made—as narrating only "all that Jesus began both to do and to teach." All would go on forever. This is true of everything we ourselves do. They tell us that every word spoken into the air goes quivering on through time forever; that if you throw a pebble into the sea it starts wavelets which will ripple on and on until they break on every shore. Thus it is with every word we speak, with everything we do, with every influence that goes forth from our lives. We are starting things each day—which will continue into eternity. Nothing we do—is ever finished. We cannot know the end of any act, of any word. The same was true of the life and work of Christ. He only began the world's redemption. He ever lives at God's right hand, interceding for His church, blessing and saving man. His life seemed a failure the day He said this word. He had made but a slight impression upon the great world. He had gathered only a few friends, and they were men of no distinction, of no power or rank among men. He had been teaching for three years, speaking words of divine wisdom—but they had not been written down, and seemed now to be utterly lost. There were thousands of beginnings of blessing—but they were only merest beginnings, like seeds dropped into the soil.

We know what Christianity is today. The words Jesus spoke, which seemed altogether lost the day He died, have been filling the world with their blessings. The influence of His life, which then had touched only a few lowly lives, has since touched nations and generations, and has changed all the world, has transformed millions of lives, and is bringing the nations up out of heathenism into holiness and happiness! The beginnings of the first Good Friday, have developed into a glorious kingdom of light and love!

"It is finished!" When Jesus said this, He had reached the end of His sufferings. All His life He had been a sufferer. He came into the world to redeem the world, by pain and suffering. He was the Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. Perhaps we are in danger these days of losing sight of the place of the wounding of Christ in the redemption of the world. In G. Campbell Morgan's book,

’The Crises of the Christ,’ there is a chapter called "The Wounded God." The title is startling. Dr. Morgan reminds us that it is impossible to omit from the ascended and reigning One, the wounds He bears. They are part of His personality. In glory He appears as a lamb that has been slain. He was our suffering Savior.

You remember how vividly this is pictured even in the Old Testament. He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. When He said, "It is finished!" He had just passed through the three awful hours of darkness. What took place in His experience during those hours—no mortal can ever know. We know only this, that in the mysterious depths of those hours, human redemption was accomplished. It was then, that He redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us. It was then that He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. As we hear His word of relief, "It is finished!" we know that the work of redeeming love had been accomplished. The infinite meaning of the sufferings He endured in those hours—we cannot fathom; earth has no line long enough to sound those holy depths; but we know that out of what was done on Calvary those hours—come all the hopes of our lives. Every one of us had a share in those pains of His. In some mysterious way—our sins were imputed to Him, part of the awful blackness that obscured the sun, and also for a time hid the Father’s face from the holy Sufferer. In some way, what took place there—set us free from the curse of sin.

"It is finished!" was the first announcement of the completion of redemption. It was the first proclamation of the gospel after the price had been paid. The Redeemer Himself made the announcement. Let us hear it today. Redemption is finished. We can be sure of eternal life if we receive this Savior—as our Savior. There was nothing left undone in those hours, that needed to be done to open the way for us to God, to put away sin, to provide eternal salvation for everyone who will accept it.

"It is finished!" Think of the words a moment—as words that we ourselves must speak, each of us. We are always finishing something. One by one duties come to us, and we must finish them quickly and leave them. How are we finishing them? Are we doing them as well as we can, or negligently? One by one the days come to us, white and beautiful, from God. What are we doing with them? What are we writing on the fair pages? One by one, in quick succession, opportunities come to us, opportunities to be kind, to be patient, to be forgiving, to help others, to honor Christ, to witness for Him, to plant a seed of truth in a heart—and we must meet them promptly, for a moment later they will be gone. What are we doing with our opportunities?

We are finishing a hundred things every day. What are we finishing? How are we finishing the things we do? Soon we shall come to the end of all our living, doing our last task, saying our last word. When we come to the end of all our living and doing—what will be finished? What will we leave behind? Will it be something that will make the world forever better, purer, holier? When you and I say, "It is finished," what will be finished? The Resurrection

John 20:11-23

John tells us that the new tomb in which Jesus was laid to rest, was in a garden. This is more than a picture—it is a little parable of the meaning of the grave of Christ. It was in a garden. Wherever the gospel goes it makes gardens, turning deserts into places of blossoming beauty. Since Jesus

died and rose again, every Christian's grave is in a garden. All about it bloom the flowers of hope and joy. Our dead shall rise again. Like His Master, the Christian cannot be held by death. As sad as bereavement is, the Christian has comforts which bloom like spring flowers and pour their fragrance on the air. The first appearance of Jesus after He arose, was to Mary Magdalene. She and other women had taken a tender part in the burial of Jesus, and then had come very early in the morning of the first day to the garden where the grave was. They were startled to find the grave open. They hasten to find Peter and John, and, having told them what they had discovered, Peter and John came quickly to the grave. John, being the younger and fleeter, first reached the tomb—but Peter, being the bolder, hurried in while John lingered. When Peter had pressed in, John followed him. In the grave they saw the linen cloths lying—but the body was gone! The two disciples, amazed by what they had seen, went to their home. Mary, however, could not tear herself away from the spot. She wept inconsolably because the body was no longer in the grave.

She did not realize that if the body had been there that morning, she would have had real cause for weeping. Then the world's hopes would have been quenched, lost in the darkness of eternal night! What to her was a great grief—was really the secret of a great joy. The things which we regard as causes of sorrow, if we could see them as God sees them—would appear to be secrets of joy. The empty grave, if only Mary had understood it, was the attestation of the Messiahship of Jesus!

Mary saw a vision of angels. "She saw two white-robed angels sitting at the head and foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying." We find angels all along the story of the life of Jesus. They sang at His birth. They ministered to Him after His temptation, and again in the Garden, after His agony. He said that He could have called twelve legions of angels to His defense during His trial. Now we find angels watching in His tomb; and at the ascension we see them waiting to comfort His disciples as their Master parted from them. The presence of the angels in the empty grave, suggests to us the change which Christ's resurrection made in the graves of all believing ones. We dread the tomb. It is a place of impenetrable darkness. But since Christ lay there, the sleeping places of His followers are all brightened. They are little beds in which the bodies of the saints rest—until He who has the key to their graves shall come to call them again. If we had eyes to see, no doubt, as we lay our loved ones away, we would see angels sitting at the head and at the feet of each, keeping their sacred watch. The angels tried to comfort Mary, asking her why she wept. She told them why very frankly, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they have put him." "At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus." She supposed He was the gardener. She was thinking of Him as dead, and did not recognize Him in the living man she saw. Then her eyes were dim with weeping, and she could not see.

Many a time it is the same with us. Christ is close by us in our need or in our sorrow—but we cannot see Him, and so we miss the comfort of His presence. If only we would believe in the constant presence of Christ with us, and would make that presence real by our faith, our darkest hours would be lightened, our loneliest moments would be filled with companionship, and in our weakness we should have all the divine strength about us. It was said of Moses that "he endured, as seeing him who is invisible." Moses did not see God—but His faith made the presence of God as real to him, as if he had seen Him with His human eyes. Such faith as this would change all of life for those who believe in Christ. The first recorded word from our Lord's lips after He arose, is

that which He spoke to Mary here, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" The words were spoken to comfort one who was in sorrow. Jesus had always been a comforter. He comes to everyone who is in grief with the same question, "Why are you crying?" He had come that morning from the grave, achieving His great victory over the last enemy. He was therefore the first who could have spoken such words, for before that, no one was able to wipe away the tears of sorrow. His question implied that there was no need for weeping. Mary was grieving for a dead Christ—and the living Christ was standing beside her! In our grief it is the same—He who comes to us is the risen One. The hand of Jesus has been wiping away tears ever since that morning. We may not get back our godly dead—but we have the blessed assurance that they have passed into the keeping of Christ, where they will be safe forever. Then some day we shall greet them and be greeted by them, alive!

Jesus revealed Himself to Mary by speaking her name. "Jesus said unto her, Mary!" The ancients believed that death washed away completely every memory of the earthly life, its friendships even passing from recollection. But we see Jesus here on the other side of death, and we find the old affections unchanged in Him. He took up the threads of the story with His friends just where they had been broken off three days before, and went on as if only a night's sleep had intervened. Death made no break in His life. Nothing was blotted out, nothing beautiful or good, nothing worthwhile. When our friends pass through death, whatever changes may be made in them, we know that there will be no change in their love for us. "Death does hide—but not divide." When Mary heard her name spoken in the old familiar tones, she recognized Jesus. "She turned toward him and cried out, Rabboni!" We do not recognize Jesus—until He calls us by name. We love Him—because He first loved us. Mary's answer showed the loyalty of her heart. She was ready now to devote her life to Him.

Many people get only a fragment of the true thought of Christ. They believe in Him as their Savior—but do not think of Him as their Lord and Master. Their faith leads them to trust in Him for salvation—but it does not bring to them the comfort of a living Savior, present with them, helping them. They think of themselves as having been saved by Christ's death upon the cross—but do not realize that, important as the cross may be, their actual salvation comes through their attachment to and companionship with a living Master and Friend. Mary had a true conception—she took Christ as her Master. She surrendered herself to Him.

It was a strange word that Jesus spoke to Mary after she had recognized Him. "Do not hold on to me, ... but go to my brethren, and say unto them." He probably meant to say to her that the old physical relationship was not to be reestablished. He was risen now, and the relationship must be spiritual. Further, He meant that there was no time now for the satisfying of love, however tender and true it was. Mary would have stayed at the Master's feet in the rapture of her joy and homage. But there was something else more important. Others must know of the joy. A message must be carried immediately to the other friends of Jesus. We are too apt, when we find a great joy, to wish to cherish it alone. But duty to others calls us away. When at the communion table, for example, we find a great gladness in fellowship with Christ, we must never forget that there are others outside the sacred walls, who are in sorrow, or in danger, and we should hasten to them with the message of Christ's love. The scene in the upper room that night was a wonderful one. The disciples had assembled in fear and trembling, hiding away, lest harm might come to them. Suddenly Jesus Himself appeared. "Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said unto them,

Peace be unto you." This was the first appearance of Jesus to the disciples as a group. His first salutation to them was, "Peace be unto you!" The words were familiar as a common greeting—but they had a new meaning to those men that night. They fell from the lips of the risen Christ! Wonderful among the gifts of Jesus to His disciples, was the giving of His peace. It quiets the troubled heart. It changes sorrow into joy. The disciples were awed by the presence of their Master, and to quiet their trembling fear He held up His hands. "He showed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the

Lord." They were pierced hands which He held up. They bore the prints of the nails. Thus they assured these men that they were the same hands which had been nailed to the cross! The wounds told them first, that He had indeed died for love of them. They told them, further, that He had risen also, His hands still bearing the marks of the nails. Christ is known everywhere, by the print of the nails in His hands. A gospel without these marks is not a gospel. The preaching that does not tell men of the cross will not point men to salvation.

"Peace Be unto You!"

John 20:19, John 20:21, John 20:26 No other benediction that could fall upon the ears of men, could mean more than this: "Peace be unto you!" This is a restless, striving, struggling world. Nation wars with nation. Business interests are in antagonism with other business interests. There are race wars which sometimes seem utterly unappeasable until one or the other race has been exterminated. Then there are family feuds which sometimes go on for generations in deadly enmity. And there are personal quarrels, alienations, strifes, which separate friends. Besides all this, there is a restlessness in human hearts. Men are unhappy and not at peace in themselves. There is strife within the bosom of nearly everyone. No word Christ ever spoke caught more ears than when He said, "Come unto me ... and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28), or "Peace be unto you!" His words answered a universal need and a universal yearning.

"Peace be unto you!" This was the first word the risen Christ spoke to His disciples as a body after He returned from the grave. This gives special significance to what He said. Three different times He spoke the same words, "Peace be unto you!" twice the evening of the day on which He rose, and once the following week. Yet, while He used precisely the same words, they had a different meaning each time, and were not merely a repetition.

Look at the setting of the benediction as He first uttered it. It was evening. The disciples had sought the quiet and safety of the upper room for a meeting together. The doors were carefully shut, for fear of the Jews. The little company was in sore dread of those who had crucified their Master. "Jesus ... stood in the midst, and said unto them, Peace be unto you! And when he said that, he showed unto them His hands and His side." Why did He show them His hands and His side? Because of the WOUNDS. He reminded them of His sufferings, through which alone peace could come to them. The second use of the words was a few minutes later. "Then Jesus said to them again, Peace be unto you!" Then He added, "As my Father has sent me, even so I send you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive the Holy Spirit." Here the benediction of peace, is accompanied by the gift of the Spirit. There can be no true, deep peace in us—except when the Holy Spirit holds sway in our hearts. The third time the benediction was given: "A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!'

Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.' " Here the purpose of the benediction was to help Thomas' slow faith.

"Peace be unto you!" The spirit of Christianity is all in the direction of peace. There is a picture called "Peace" which is suggestive. It shows a cannon lying in a meadow, in the grass, with a lamb feeding beside it, nibbling at its very mouth. But while the picture is beautiful, it is incomplete. The cannon, which once was used in war, dealing death, is still a cannon, useless—but ready to be used again in the old way. The prophet suggests a more fitting and complete picture when he says in his vision of the redeemed nation, "They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3). That is the kind of peace Christ would make. The sword shall no longer be a sword, though rusty and unused—but shall be made into a plowshare, doing its work for humanity. In the artist's picture would be truer to the spirit of Christianity, if the cannon were not merely lying in the meadow, with the lamb feeding quietly beside it—but instead was made into church bells to call the people to the house of God. The peace which our Master would make is not merely the laying down of arms—but a peace which shall bring good to both nations and restore them to fellowship. Christian peace is not merely a drawn battle, with the old bitterness remaining. The bitterness must be swallowed up in love. If two have been estranged through misunderstanding, or by whatever cause, Christ's peace leads them together in a new friendship which forgets the past—and wipes out all traces of difference in a relationship of love.

"Peace I leave with you!" This was the Master's bequest to His friends. He did not leave them gold and silver. He did not entail great estates upon them. He had none of these to leave. In His life on earth, the birds were better off than He, for in the world His hands had made—He had nowhere to lay His head. When He died—He had no grave in which His body might rest, and would have been buried in the potter's field, amid criminals and outcasts, had not a noble friend rescued Him from that ignominy and lent Him a new rock-hewn tomb, for the three days and nights He slept. He was poor, and had no earthly inheritance to bequeath. But He left peace as a heritage. "Peace I leave with you!"

"MY peace I give unto you!" (John 14:27) It was not merely peace—but His own peace, that He bequeathed to His friends. "My peace"! Think what Christ's peace was. It was the peace that He had had in His heart and life all His days. You know how serenely He met all experiences. He never lost His quietness and composure in any circumstances. Life had no terrors for Him. His was not an easy life. Soon after His public ministry began, opposition began, developing into bitter enmity, with plottings and schemings for His death. But nothing disturbed Him. He was never fearful or alarmed. He knew what was before Him. The cross threw its dark shadows on His path—long before He reached it. But with unruffled peace He moved on toward it. "My peace I give unto you!" It is possible for Christ's followers to have the same peace the Master had. He bequeaths it to them—let them claim their inheritance. He gives it to them—let them accept the gift. But why is it that so many Christians do not have this peace? What restless lives many of us live! Some of us scarcely ever have an hour of real peace. We fret at every trifle. We allow ourselves to be annoyed by the smallest things that do not go as we want them to go. We are full of discontents and complainings. We are envious at the prosperity of others. We vex ourselves over the things that are disagreeable in even the least way. We are continually dismayed by life's

experiences. We are afraid to live—and afraid to die. Is that the best that Christ can do for us? Is that the full meaning of His words here, "Peace be unto you; Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you"? Is that all that our religion can do for us?

No! Jesus meant just what He said. He means for us to have His peace. We may have it too. He shows us His hands and says, "Peace be unto you! I have purchased peace for you." He breathes on us His divine Spirit, and says, "Peace be unto you!" Let the peace of God into your heart today. You have had enough of restlessness, fret, anxiety and struggle. Let Christ's peace rule.

"Peace be unto you!" "My peace I give unto you!" When men have fought for their country, loyal patriots, and when the war is over, and the victory won, those who survive come home with wounds and scars, maimed and broken, and those who look upon them see the price of the peace which the country is enjoying. Let us not forget that the peace which Christ gives, cost Him suffering and shame and death. We have peace—because He went to His cross! In a gallery in Europe, two pictures hang side by side. One is of a sea swept by storms—great waves, black clouds, lightning bolts, and on the wild water wrecks of vessels, with human forms struggling or dead. The artists calls His picture, "Life".

Hanging beside this picture is another, almost the same—a rough sea, billows, clouds, lightnings, wrecks, men struggling in the waters. In the center of this picture, however, a great rock rises up out of the wild sea, reaching above the highest waves, standing serene and firm in the midst of the storm. Then in the rock, far up, is a cleft of herbage and flowers growing, and as you look closely, you see in the midst of the herbage—a dove sitting quietly on her nest. The artist calls His picture "Peace."

It represents the Christian's life. In the world there is tribulation. Peace does not come through the quieting of earth's storms. Christ does not make a little spot of calm for us, shutting off the storms. No! that rock rising above the waves tells the story.

It is peace in the midst of the storm, in Christ. We have it in the hymn, "Rock of Ages, cleft for me; Let me hide myself in Thee!" The Christian has no promise of less sorrow than his worldly neighbor; or of an easier life, a life without struggle, pain, or buffeting. You remember how Christ got His peace—not by living in a little paradise—but in the enduring of all manner of suffering calmly and quietly. His peace was within. We must get our peace—on fields of struggle. It must come through Christ's victory over the world. It must be Christ's gift. It must be in our heart.

President Eliot, of Harvard University, said this at the dedication of an art gallery: "The main object in every school should be, not to provide the children with means of earning a livelihood—but to show them how to live a happy and worthy life, inspired by noble ideals which will exalt and dignify both labor and leisure. To see beauty and to live it—is to possess large securities for such a life." To live only to get bread and clothes—is a groveling aim. To live only to make money, to get on in the world, is an unworthy aim for an immortal being. We live worthily—only when we live to grow into beautiful character and to do beautiful things of love. Peace is the highest mark of spiritual beauty.

There is a German legend of the origin of the moss rose. One day the angel of the flowers, weary in his ministry in the heat of the sun, sought a place to rest—but found none. Turned from every door, he lay down under the shelter of a rose, and slept and was refreshed. He thanked the rose

for the pleasure and comfort he had enjoyed in its shade, and then said that, to reward it, he would adorn it with a new charm. So soft, green moss grew around the stem, and those who looked at the flower saw the beautiful moss rose, loveliest of all the roses. So to those who are faithful to Christ, He gives a new charm, life's highest and most heavenly adornment, peace.

We should be at peace with all men. If there is bitterness toward any human being, our peace is not Christ's peace. No matter what wrongs Jesus suffered, how unjustly or cruelly He was treated—He kept love in His heart. It is easy to cherish resentments. We like to say we have a right to he angry. Yes—but that is not the divine way. God forgives and forgets and loves on. Suppose God never forgave! Suppose He cherished resentments and refused to love us and to bless us! Let love heal all heart-hurts. If we think we have been treated wrongfully, let us forgive, and new beauty will come, instead of a scar. The storm made a great gash on the mountainside—but grass, moss and flowers came, and the mountain was never so beautiful before as now it became.

We should have peace also in our own hearts. Why should we go on in the old restlessness and strife a day longer? Why should we worry so and fret—when Christ offers us His own serene peace? No matter what may come to us in any possible future, nothing will come which could break our peace, if only we are obedient and true to God. There will be mysteries, contradictions, perplexities, disappointments—but in all these a divine Hand will move—and nothing can fret us—if we are truly Christ's. "The peace of God ... shall keep your hearts and your minds through Christ Jesus" (Php 4:7). The Beloved Disciple

John 21:20 The name of John is not once mentioned in all his gospel. Again and again the writer refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." He has been criticized for this, as if he had been vain and self-conceited in thus speaking of his own distinction among the disciples. But no grace is more marked in John, than humility. He does not speak of himself as the disciple who loved Jesus. This would have been to claim preeminence among the disciples and would have shown a boastful and self-confident spirit. He said he was the disciple whom Jesus loved. He glorified the grace of Christ. He was what he was—only because Christ loved him.

Right here we have one of the deepest truths of Christian life, one of the great secrets of Christian peace, an essential quality of faith: that our hope does not rest in our love for Christ—but in His love for us. People are often discouraged when they find in themselves so little that is good and beautiful. They cannot see that they love Christ any more this year, than they did last. They do not find in themselves the beautiful fruits of the Spirit which they wish they could find. But there is another way to look at our lives, which gives us more hope. It is John's way—not our love for Christ—but Christ's love for us!

Ar the best our love is variable in its moods and experiences. Today it glows with warmth and affection for Jesus, and we say that we could die for our Master. We know we love Him. Tomorrow, in some depression, we question whether we really love Him at all, our feelings respond so feebly to His name. A peace which depends on our loving Christ—is as variable as our own moods. But when it is Christ's love for us that is our dependence, our peace is undisturbed by any earthly changes. The usual conception of John, is that he was gentle and affectionate, but not strong. Yet this is a mistaken conception. He was a man of magnificent strength. When we see John at first, he had his faults. He was not always the disciple of gentleness and love. He was

impetuous, fiery, intemperate in his zeal. We have an illustration of this quality in him, in his impatience with the people of the Samaritan village to which his Master was not hospitably welcomed. His anger flamed hotly against them. He wished to call down fire from heaven upon the town and the people! He had not then learned the mind that was in Jesus Christ.

Another blemish in John at first was his desire for greatness. He supposed that Christ was to be an earthly king, ruling over the world. In this great kingdom John and his brother were ambitious to fill the highest offices. "Grant unto us to sit at your right hand and at your left." This, too, was contrary to the spirit of Christ. The places nearest to Him—are reached by the paths of humility and service. He who becomes as a little child—is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. In our disappointment with ourselves—it comforts us to be reminded that even the disciple whom Jesus loved, was once a hot-headed zealot, ready to burn anyone who would not become a Christian, and a man with a worldly ambition clamoring for high office in Christ's kingdom! We need a religion that will take us as we are, with all our faults and imperfections, and make of us such a man as John's religion made of him.

It is not every kind of religion that produces such men as John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Some people are Christians a long while, and yet never grow into sweetness of spirit, never become gentle, kind, patient, thoughtful, unselfish. Not always does the resentful spirit—become the spirit of mercy, forgiveness and charity, even after years. Not always does the eagerness for first places, for prominence, for distinction, grow into the lowly humility which we see in John in his later life.

Instead of holding a prominent place among the apostles, he appears as a quiet, modest man, keeping close to Peter, walking in his shadow, sweetly accepting the second place. Instead of wishing to call down fire on those who would not honor his Master, he preached love as the great duty—as the one thing of Christian life.

You know how this "disciple whom Jesus loved" came to stand at last as the ideal of love, not only in his teaching, but also in his life. We all want a religion that will do for us—what John's religion did for him. We desire that our life, with its resentments, its insincerities, its selfishness, its irritability, its vanity, its pride, its worldly ambition—can be made into the life of love which John attained. We are not satisfied with our faulty character, our poor living. We are not the kind of Christians we know we ought to be. Our religion does not seem to make us grow ever better. We attend church, we sing the hymns and join in the prayers, we enjoy the worship, we give to the cause of Christ, we go through the rounds of services and ordinances—but somehow we do not become sweeter, gentler, truer, braver, stronger, more Christlike.

What was the secret of John's religion? We may put it into one phrase, "Christ and John were friends!" It was a great, all-absorbing, overmastering friendship began that day, when the Baptist said to two young men, as Jesus passed near, "Behold the Lamb of God" (John 1:29). The two young men followed Him and were invited to His lodgings, spending the afternoon with Him. What took place during those hours we do not know, but we do know that a friendship began between John—scarcely more than a boy then—and Jesus, whose bonds have never slackened since. For three years this friendship grew in sweetness and tenderness, and during those years it was that the wonderful transformation took place in the disciple.

We know a little about the power of a strong, rich, noble, human friendship in shaping, inspiring, uplifting lives. There are many lives that are being saved, refined, sweetened, enriched by a human friendship. One of the best of the younger Christian men I have known—I have seen lifted up from a life of ordinary ability and education, into refinement, power and large usefulness by a gentle friendship. The girl whom he loved was rich-hearted, inspiring, showing in her own life the best ideals, and her love for him and his love for her—lifted him up to love's nobility. She stayed with him only a few years, and then went home to God—but he walks among men today with a strength, an energy, and a force of character, born of the holy friendship which meant so much to him.

George Eliot's Silas Marner is about a miser who hoarded his money. Someone stole away his hoard, and his heart grew bitter over the wrong to him. Then a little child was left at his door. His poor, starved heart took in the little one, and love for her redeemed him from sordidness, bitterness and anguish of spirit. God saves many a life—by sending to it a sweet human friendship. A Christian climbed the rickety stairs to the miserable room where a woman lay in rags on a pile of straw. She bent over the poor woman, all vile with sin, said a loving word, and kissed her. That kiss saved her. Christ comes to sinners—and saves them with love. That is the way He saved the prodigals of His time. He came to them—and became their friend.

It is to a personal friendship with Himself, that Christ is always inviting men. He does not come merely to make reforms, to start beneficent movements, to make the conditions of life better. He does not try to save the world by giving it better laws, by founding schools, by securing wholesome literature. Christ saves men—by becoming their friend. John surrendered his heart and life to this friendship with Jesus. He opened every window and door to his new Master.

Another thing which helped on John's friendship with Christ, was his trust. He never doubted. Thomas doubted and was slow to believe. This hindered the growth of his friendship with Jesus. Peter was one of our Savior's closest friends, but he was always saying rash words and doing rash things, which interrupted his fellowship with Christ. But John loved on in silence—and trusted. At the Last Supper he leaned on the Master's bosom. That is the place of confidence: the bosom is only for those who have a right to closest intimacy. It is the place of love—near the heart. It is the place of safety—in the secret place of the Most High. The bosom is the place of comfort. It was the darkest night the world ever saw, that John lay on the bosom of Jesus. But he found comfort there. Trust in the secret of peace. "You will keep in perfect peace—all who trust in you, whose thoughts are fixed on you!" (Isaiah 26:3). That is what leaning on bosom means. Do not think that that place of innermost love was for John alone, and has never been filled since that night. It is like heaven's gates—it is never closed, and whoever will, may come and lie there! It is a place for those who sorrow—oh, that all who have grief knew that they may creep in where John lay, and nestle there!

John's transformation is the model for all of us. No matter how many imperfections mar the beauty of our lives, we should not be discouraged. But we should never consent to let the faults remain. That is the way too many of us do. We condone our weaknesses and imperfections, pity them—and keep them. We should give ourselves no rest until they are cured. But how can we get these evil things out of our lives? How did John get rid of his faults? By letting the love of Christ possess him. Lying upon Christ's bosom—Christ's sweet, pure, wholesome life permeated John's

life—and made it sweet, pure and wholesome. So it is the friendship of Christ alone which can transform us. You are a Christian not because you belong to a church, not because you have a good creed, not because you are living a fair moral life; you are a Christian because you and Christ are friends. What can a friend be to a friend? Let us think of the best that earth's richest-hearted friend can be to us, and do for us. Then lift up this conception, multiplying it a thousand times! If it were possible to gather out of all history and from all the world, the best and holiest things of pure, true friendship, and combine them all in one of great friendship— Christ's friendship would surpass the sum of them all.

Even our human friendships we prize as the dearest things on earth. They are more precious than rarest gems. We would lose everything else we have rather than give them up. Life without friendships would be empty and lonely. Yet the best earthly friendships are but little fragments of the friendship of Christ. It is perfect. Its touch is always gentle and full of healing. Its help is always wise. Its tenderness is like the warmth of a heavenly summer. If we have the friendship of Christ, we cannot be utterly bereft, though all human friends be taken away. To be Christ's friend—is to be God's child, with all a child's privileges. This is one essential in being a Christian.

We could not say Paul is our friend, or John—but Jesus is living, and is with us evermore. He is our Friend as really as He was Mary's or John's. Christ is our Friend. That means He will supply everything we really need. No want can be unsupplied. No sorrow can be uncomforted. No evil can overmaster us. For time and for eternity—we are safe! It will not be the streets of gold, and the gates of pearl, and the river and the trees—which will make heaven for us—it will be the companionship, the friendship of Christ! But we must not forget the other part of this friendship. We are to be Christ's friends, too. It is not much we can give to Him or do for Him. But He would have us loyal and true.

If a sacred human friendship exerts such influence over a true life, surely the consciousness that Christ is our Friend and we are His—should check every evil thought, quell every bitter feeling, sweeten every emotion, and make all our life holy, true and heavenly!

8. Volume 8

Volume 8

Volume 8, 1911 From the Acts, the Epistles and Revelation

1. Christ’s Ascension, Acts 1:1-14

2. The Holy Spirit Given, Acts 2:1-13

3. A Multitude Converted, Acts 2:32-47

4. The Lame Man Healed, Acts 3:1-11

5. The Trial of Peter and John, Acts 4:1-31

6. The Sin of Lying, Acts 5:1-11

7. The Apostles Imprisoned, Acts 5:17-32

8. Stephen the First Martyr, Acts 6:1-8; 7:54 to 8:2

9. The Disciples Dispersed, Acts 8:1-17

10. The First Ethiopian Convert, Acts 8:26-40

11. The Conversion of Saul, Acts 9:1-30

12. Peter and Cornelius, Acts 10:1-20

13. Gentiles Converted at Antioch, Acts 11:19-26

14. Peter Delivered from Prison, Acts 12:1-17

15. The First Christian Missionaries, Acts 13:1-13

16. The Council at Jerusalem, Acts 15:1-5; 22-29

17. Paul Before King Agrippa, Acts 26:1-30; also 19-32

18. Paul’s Voyage and Shipwreck, Acts 28

19. Justification by Faith, Romans 5:1-11

20. The Life-Giving Spirit, Romans 8:1-14

21. Christian Living, Romans 12:9-21

22. The Law of Love, Romans 13:8-14

23. Abstaining for the Sake of Others, 1 Corinthians 8

24. A Lesson in Self-denial, 1 Corinthians 10:23-33

25. The Lord’s Supper, 1 Corinthians 10:23-33

26. Paul on Christian Love, 1 Corinthians 13

27. The Risen Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:3-28

28. Paul on the Grace of Giving, 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

29. The Flesh and the Spirit, Galatians 5:16-26

30. The Imitation of Christ, Ephesians 4:20-30

31. A Call to Christlike Living, Ephesians 5: 11-21

32. The Christian Armor, Ephesians 6: 10-20

33. Christ’s Humility and Exaltation, Philippians 2:1-11

34. The New Life in Christ, Colossians3: 1-15

35. Paul’s Counsel to the Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 5:14-28

36. Paul’s Charge to Timothy, 2 Timothy 3:14 to 4:5

37. Sober Living, Titus 2

38. The Priesthood of Christ, Hebrews 9

39. Heroes of Faith, Hebrews 11

40. Believing and Doing, James 2:14-16

41. The Power of the Tongue, James 3:1-2

42. The Heavenly Inheritance, 1 Peter 1:1-12

43. Beneficial Warnings, 1 Peter 1:1-12

44. Sin and Salvation, 1 John: 1-5 to 2:6

45. God’s Love in the Gift of His Son, 1 John 4:9-16

46. Jesus Appears to John, Revelation 1:9-20

47. Heavenly Worship, Revelation 5

48. The Saints in Heaven, Revelation 7:9-17

49. The Heavenly Home, Revelation 22:1-11

50. The Great Invitation, Revelation 22:11-21 Christ’s Ascension

Acts 1:1-14 The Ascension was part of the work of Christ as our Savior. It was not the end of it. The Gospel narrative is described by Luke as "all that Jesus began both to do and to teach." It is interesting to think of words and deeds of Jesus as beginnings. He did not cease to live and work—when He went away from earth. He only returned to heaven, where He continued His active

interest in behalf of this world. The atonement was made on the cross—but the real work of saving men goes on all these common days. Men are not saved merely by Christ's death on Calvary; each one is saved by a personal relationship with Christ, and by the work of Christ, which goes on in his life from the day he is savingly converted, until he enters heaven. Thus the work of Christ is going on; He only began it in His years on the earth. The coming of the Spirit was really the return of Christ to this world to continue His ministry. His work is carried on, too, by His people in this world. We are the body of Christ and we are to be Christ to others; Christ would live in us and work through us. The most wonderful miracle the world ever saw—was the raising of Jesus Christ from the dead. The truth of the resurrection is the very cornerstone of our Christian faith. Everything depends upon it. If it could be disproved, the whole system of Christianity would be swept away! A Christ who died and did not rise again—could never be the Helper and Savior we need. If the body of Jesus still lies amid the dust of Jerusalem, how can He help us in our struggles, our toils and our duties? If death was too strong for Him—how can we hope that He can conquer death for us? In those forty days during which Christ remained on the earth—He appeared again and again to His disciples in different manifestations of His love, and gave them proofs, which left not a shadow of doubt in any heart.

"Do not leave Jerusalem—but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water—but in a few days—you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." No doubt they would gladly have gone forth at once to begin the work of preaching and saving men. It would seem, too, as if they were prepared to go, for they had been in training with Christ for three years. Now that He was risen and ascended to heaven, why should they wait longer? We think of them as eager to begin their work. But they were not yet ready. We learn that waiting sometimes is out first duty. It is easier to be active than to wait—but sometimes everything depends upon our ability to be patient and not to move. When Christ wants us to wait, though it may seem to be a waste of time—we can always serve Him best by simply waiting. Indeed we can serve Him then in no other way. Many a good life is marred and its usefulness wrecked, by impatience; it is the patient man—to whom blessings come. A story is told of a Christian woman who had been active for many years, busy in ministries for Christ, who at last was laid aside in wasting consumption. Yet she was as quiet in her waiting as ever she had been in her most active years. One day her pastor said to her: "I cannot understand your quietness and peace these days. In former times, when you were well—you were ever going somewhere on some ministry of love, and were never still a moment. But now you seem to be as contented and restful here in your bed, when you can do nothing, as ever you were in your busy days." She replied: "When I was well, I used to hear Jesus say, continually, 'Go and do this or that,' and I always went quickly and obeyed Him. But now I hear Jesus say each hour, 'Lie here and cough,' and I know that it is His will for me, and I do it as sweetly as I can." She had caught the secret of the restful life. The waiting was not idle—there was a purpose in it. There was a promise of divine power. "Wait for the promise." They were not yet ready to go out to work; they were not prepared to preach Christ's gospel—until they had received the divine gift. There is a good lesson here for very many of us. Ofttimes we are in too much of a hurry to get to active work. We do not think of preparation for it.

Some young men can hardly restrain their impatience to get through college and theological seminary, that they may begin to preach. They want to combine as many years as possible in their course of training, that they may get the more quickly into the field. They think they are wasting

time in studying Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Church history and theology. But they make a serious mistake. To be fitted for work in life—they need all the preparation they can possibly obtain.

Then, even after one has finished the formal courses of study and is intellectually ready for the work, there is still something more to wait for; no man should begin to preach the gospel of Christ—until he has waited at Christ's feet for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This preparation he cannot get from book nor in colleges and seminaries. The apostles had been well taught, with Christ Himself as the teacher; yet even they were not fitted to go out and meet the world until they had been filled with the Holy Spirit. The lesson applies to all of us. Every morning we should linger in prayer before God, to receive His Spirit to fit and empower us for the day's life and duty. Before every special ministry to which we are called—we should also wait until we are endued with spiritual power. The disciples were full of questions. All their original thoughts about the Messiahship of Jesus, and the form of their own service had to be readjusted. So they came with the question, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus answered, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority." They were anxious to know about the future, to have a sort of program or chart of the coming years. They were somewhat inclined to speculation. Jesus taught them that they had nothing to do with future times and dates—they did not need to trouble themselves about these things. The lesson is important for all of us. There are many things that it is better we should not know beforehand. Indeed, it is a merciful provision that we cannot see into the future. If we could see the sorrows, struggles, defeats and trials that we shall have to meet before we get to our heavenly home—all our bright days would be saddened by the anticipation of these things. As it is, we go on, unconscious of shadows that lie before us—living as if all were clear and bright, trusting God for the future. Then when we come to the hard points—God gives us grace to meet them. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own!" Matthew 6:34. On the other hand, if we knew the joys, blessings and prosperities, which we are to have in our life, it might make us vain and self-confident. At least it might hinder us from doing our work in the very best possible way. It is better far that we should leave all our future in God's hands; it is not for us to know the times or the seasons. The disciples were assured that they should receive something better than a chart of the times. Instead of worrying about the future, they would have strength given them to meet the future, as it would be opened unto them. Instead of idly prying into hidden things—their duty was to take up the work of Christ and enter heartily upon it. The lesson is very important. We are told to watch for Christ's coming—but the way to watch is not to sit down in idleness and wonder if He will come tomorrow—but to keep our hands ever full of earnest work in His service. Work which will help to hasten the coming of His Kingdom, work at which we should like Him to find us, when He comes. The particular form of the work of the disciples was indicated. "You shall be my witnesses." It was for this that they had been called and trained—that they might be witnesses for Him. A witness is one who know something of which he is to testify to others. Forty days before, Jesus had been put to death in Jerusalem, and they were to go out and witness of this. They had lived with Him for three years, hearing His words and seeing His life. They were to testify of all they had heard and seen. To the men who had stained their hands in Christ's own blood, was the gospel first preached. Another thought is, that the murderers of Christ first received the gospel and many of them were saved. This would prove to all the world, that none need perish. For if those who had nailed Christ to the cross should receive remission of sins, surely no other sinner anywhere could have sins too black to be

forgiven! A still further suggestion from this command, was that all Christian work should begin at home, right among those whom we know and love the best. We are to begin at this center—and then work out as we can into all the world.

While Jesus was talking one day to His disciples "He was taken up." In the other account of the Ascension, we are told that it was while with uplifted hands He was blessing, that He parted from them and was carried from them. This was the last glimpse the world had of Jesus. We like to remember how a friend looked and what he was doing, the last time we saw him. No wonder the disciples stood looking up into heaven after their ascending Lord. But this was not their most important duty. There was no reason for sorrow. They had not lost Jesus. He had told them it was beneficial for them that He should go away that He might send the Comforter. Besides, He had not gone to stay. In due time He would return again. Pensive gazing is never the best occupation. Working and witnessing are better. When our friends leave us, we are not forbidden to sorrow—but certainly we are forbidden to sorrow in a way that breaks up our life of duty and service. A mother, who lost a beloved daughter years ago, has done scarcely anything since but visit the cemetery and weep. He home duties have been neglected. The living members of her family have received almost no care. She sits and gazes up into heaven ad weeps for her child. This is not the way our Lord wants us to behave. He wants us to go at once back to our duties, thoughtful and serious, yet earnest and faithful, looking for blessing from heaven, and witnessing by our faith and hope—to the glory of our Savior.

One was telling me of a friend who came in one morning and sat for half an hour and spoke of matters which were much on his heart, giving this younger person advice and counsel and showing the deepest, most loving interest. In two days he was gone and then my friend said he never could forget that last visit, with the eager affection and the deep interest. That good face will always be remembered, just as when it was last seen. That was the way the disciples would always think of Him. This last act of the Master, as He was leaving the earth, ought to mean a great deal to us. The last thing He did was to stretch out His hands and breathe from His lips a blessing. Christ’s mission to the world was to bless it. At every step He left blessings. Wherever He went—He carried cheer. There are a few human friends whose visits are full of inspiration. A sick woman, a great sufferer for many years, said one day to a friend: "Yes, I am better this afternoon. I had Mr. Chalmers, my pastor, here, and he never comes but I say: ’That is just how Jesus would have come to see me. That is the way Jesus would have spoken. That is the way Jesus would have looked.’ And I am better afterwards."

Jesus was always lifting up His hands and blessing people. He blessed the children, the sick, the sorrowing, the lonely. His whole life was really just like that vision the disciples had of Him that day of the Ascension.

Some people spend too much time gazing into heaven. There is a time when we ought to look upward, toward the skies. Man was made to adore. The original word in Greek for man means the upward look. One who looks always downward only grovels. Heaven is above us. We get our inspirations from above us. Our final home is above us. Never to look upward—is to miss all that is worthy, beautiful and divine in life. But there is a gazing into the heavens, which is most idle and wasteful. The disciples saw their Master as He left them, and watched while His form was visible, until it was folded away in the cloud. Then it was their duty to hasten away to begin their waiting

and praying. They were not to lose a moment.

Peter wished to build tabernacles and keep the transfiguration glory on the mountain. But it was a mistaken wish. Work was awaiting him, and the purpose of the transfiguration was to prepare the Master and His disciples for going forward in the service of love. It is not enough to read the Bible—and to have our hearts warmed by its revealings and our spirits stirred by its calls to duty. The fervor is meant to send us out into the world—to live nobler and to make the world better and happier. Let us heed the call that bids us away from our idle gazing—to serious duty. We dream too much—dreaming accomplishes nothing, until we turn away and put our dreams into acts. We need the dreams to give us the inspiration, to show us the ideal, to set before us the heavenly pattern; then we must go forth to make the dreams become real in life, in character, in service! The Holy Spirit Given

Acts 2:1-13 This is the story of the beginning of the Christian Church. It was fifty days after the death of Christ. It did not occur at a convention—it was not an earth-born organization that was effected that day—it was was heaven—born. When Jesus ascended, He sent His disciples to prayer, continuous prayer. The prayer was for a definite object. A promise had been given to them—but they were to get it by prayer, persevering, believing prayer. Ten days had passed, and here is what is said about the disciples, "They were all together in one place." This was an ideal meeting. For one thing they were all there—the ministers and the women and the men, too. At some prayer meetings there are many women—but very few men.

All the friends of Christ living in Jerusalem, were present at this meeting. None excused themselves, because they had other things to do. The interest was so deep, that nobody thought of remaining away from a single meeting. This is now the tenth day of the meetings—and yet no one had grown weary. What a loss to the person it would have been if anyone had stayed at home the day the Spirit came! People who miss even one meeting, do not know what blessing may come that day which they will lose. Thomas was absent from a meeting one evening, and we know what he missed. Jesus came that night, and for a whole week Thomas was unhappy and lived in doubt. If anyone had been absent on this day of Pentecost, he would have missed a great blessing.

We must notice, too, that these people all came promptly. A long while after the meeting began, Peter said it was only nine in the morning. They must, therefore, have met at daybreak, at the latest—and yet they were all there. That was another good point—promptness and punctuality. They were also there with one accord. They were all of one mind. There was no discord among them. They had one purpose. Their hearts made music, and God heard the music in heaven. There is another thing about their praying—it was importunate. The meetings had continued now ten days—but none of them had wearied. All these points we should treasure up, so that we may pray in the same way. The breath of God was breathed upon the waiting company. Breath means spirit. The night after the resurrection, in the upper room, Jesus breathed upon His disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." On the day of Pentecost they heard a sound like the wind. It was not a wind—it was the breathing of God. Until the wind of God blows upon our hearts and lives there is no divine blessing for us. Hiss Havergal tells of receiving once from a friend a gift of an Aeolian harp. She did not know how to use the harp to make music on it. She tried picking and thrumming its strings—but there was no music produced by this process. Then she looked over

the friend’s letter that had come with the harp, and leaned how to use it.

"Raise your window," the instructions ran," and put it under the sash, that the wind may blow over the wires." Then the room was filled with gentle strains. The only way to get the music from these lives of ours, is to have the wind of God blow upon them.

First the wind, then the fire—both symbols of God—and then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Here we see the blessing of importunity and persistence. If they had ceased praying any time before the tenth day the blessing would not have come. No doubt many of our prayer fail to be answered, because we grow weary and give up too soon.

We talk a great deal about submitting to God’s will in praying. That is right—but we may be altogether too submissive. It is God’s will offtimes that we should not cease to cry to Him. He wants us to be importunate, to press our request, to pray, and not faint. It was a wonderful answer that came that day—they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. They were filled; not a little measure of the divine blessing was granted—but all they could receive. God will give us all we have room for, of His grace and love. The reason some have more blessing than others, is because they make more room in their hearts than others do for the blessing.

They boy who has his pockets full of nails and marbles, when his mother tells him to take all the cakes his pockets will hold, does not get many cakes. Just so, people whose hearts are full of this world, get but a small measure of the Spirit in their praying. It was the Holy Spirit that was given to these first disciples so richly; it was not mere good feeling—but warm emotion, not fresh enthusiasm, not a good influence—but the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God—it was Himself that God gave them. He came down to live in the, not with them only—but in them. So this was the same blessing we may receive—if we will only ask for it.

We all like to have visits from pleasant friends. Here is a Friend, the most pleasant, the most tender, the most helpful Friend in this world. He will come to visit us if only we ask Him, if we really want Him to come. He will come, not to make a short stay of an hour or a day—but to remain always as our guest; not merely in our house—but in our heart. The effect of being filled with God was seen at once. "They … began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." It was very important, then that the disciples be able talk to the crowds of foreigners on the streets in their own languages. They were to be missionaries, and they could not tell these strangers about Christ unless they knew their language. This miracle of tongues made them ready at once for their work. When our missionaries go to heathen lands the first thing they must do is to learn the language of those to whom they would tell the story of Christ. This takes a long time. On the day of Pentecost the foreigners from all countries were right there, and there was no time for the disciples to learn the different languages in the ordinary way; so God taught them at once how to preach in different languages. The Spirit does not give this same power to Christians in these days. You will not be able, without any study, to speak German, or Spanish, or French the moment you are converted. But there is a sense in which the Spirit gives every new convert a new tongue. A Christian has a new speech. The tongue that once spoke lies—speaks truth now. The tongue that once spoke bitter words—utters now only kind, loving words. So we do get new tongues when we receive the Holy Spirit. If a boy or a man swears or lies and speaks bad words, or gets cross and utters angry words—we know that he still has his old tongue and has not yet gotten a new one. But when he has the language of love, of praise, of prayer—we know that he is under a new

power, the power of God.

"Every man heard them speaking in his own language." This was a token that the gospel of Christ should be preached in that language. In a certain sense this was fulfilled in a far more glorious sense, for the Bible has been translated into nearly every important language of the world, and is sent to every nation, so that the people of all lands may literally hear the gospel and the wonderful works of God in their own tongue. That was a wonderful day. No matter from what country a man in the throngs on the streets had come, there was someone to tell him of Jesus Christ and His love, and of the great redemption offered now to all the world. "How is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? … They were all amazed, and were perplexed." No wonder they were amazed. It was really a wonderful thing that had happened. Indeed, everything about redemption is wonderful. The sending of Jesus Christ, God's Son, to be born as a little babe and to live a human life, was wonderful. The dying of Christ on the cross was wonderful. Then the coming of the Holy Spirit was wonderful.

Yet there are many people who find more to interest and amaze them in bits of shells or stones or minerals, or in birds or ants or beetles, than in the gospel. They think the subject of redemption a matter suited only to Sunday-school children, ignorant people, and sick folks; while they find subjects suited to great minds in the fields of the sciences and philosophies. How little earth's wise people know of the wonderful treasures of wisdom hidden in the gospel!

We are told in a later verse that some of the people mocked. There are always some people who will scoff and ridicule every extraordinary manifestation of God's grace. When Jesus performed great miracles, they said He was in league with Beelzebub's power. Festus pronounced Paul mad when he saw his great zeal and earnestness in Christ's service. These scoffing beholders accounted for the wonderful things they saw the disciples doing, by saying that they were drunk. The same kinds of scoffing are heard in modern days when a great work of grace is going on anywhere. There are always some who mock. A Multitude Converted

Acts 2:32-47

Everyone had a theory of the strange things that had happened. Some accepted the events as divine manifestations. Some mocked and ridiculed. Some said the disciples had been drinking wine too freely. Peter spoke to the throng and explained the meaning of the wonderful event. He brushed away the thought that the disciples were drunken, by reminding them of the early hour. He suggested the importance of the matter by saying it was something an old prophet had foretold, and then declared that it was the work of the Messiah.

Jesus had been crucified and had risen, and "he has poured forth this, which you see and hear." Jesus told His disciples it was better that He should go away, for if He did not go away, the Comforter would not come; but if He departed He would send Him unto them. It seemed strange to the disciples that anything could be better to them than the staying with them of their Master. But now, when the promise had been fulfilled, they began to understand it.

If Jesus had stayed on the earth with His disciples, not going to His cross, there would have been no atonement, no Lamb of God bearing the sin of the world. There would have been no resurrection with its glorious victory over the last enemy. There would have been no intercessor in heaven pleading for struggling souls in this world and offering evermore the blood of His own

sacrifice for sin. There would have been no Holy Spirit coming to stay with believers and to live in the heart of every Christian. Pentecost made it plain, that it was indeed better that Jesus should go away. In the plainest, clearest way, Peter declared the full, glorious meaning of the events of the past seven weeks connected with Jesus Christ. "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God has made him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified." The Jews had killed their Messiah! This would seem to be the defeating of God's purpose of redemption. Yet that was not the end. Though the Son of God was dead, God's plan of love for the world could not fail. Jesus was raised up and exalted to be Lord and Christ. The Jewish people had missed their chance, had lost their Messiah—but Jesus was still the Messiah for all the world. God's purpose was not allowed to fail. The blood shed upon the cross by the rejecters of Christ, became the very blood of eternal redemption. The love of God is greater than human sin.

Peter's words went to the hearts of the men to whom he was speaking. The Holy Spirit gave divine power to the words. "When they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts!" It was as if their hearts had been pierced with sharp iron. Their souls were filled with remorse. They saw now what they had done. God had sent His Son to be their Messiah, and although they had been looking and praying for the Messiah—yet they had killed Him! No wonder they felt the power of remorse. Jesus comes to each one of us now personally, as He came to the Jews. If we reject Him as our personal Savior we crucify Him afresh. What have we been doing with Jesus since we first heard His Name? People sometimes say they are not great sinners; they have done nothing very bad. They forget that the greatest of all sins is unbelief, and the rejection of Jesus Christ as Redeemer and Lord. The people asked in their great distress, "What shall we do?" They saw their sin and cried out to know what they must do to be saved. Could they undo the terrible crime they had committed in crucifying their Messiah? They were in sore perplexity, and they did just what they ought to have done—they asked Christ's apostles to tell them what they should do. If we have been rejecting Christ, we should ask the same question. We cannot change our past; we cannot undo our rejection. A soldier lay dying in a hospital. A chaplain was passing through the ward, and seeing the dying man, knelt beside him and asked him, "Can I do anything for you?" The soldier opened his eyes and looked up with despair in his face, and cried, "Oh, sir, can you undo?" They followed a sad confession of a wasted life. The young man had not only ruined his own life—but had also been a tempter to many others. "Oh. Sir, can you undo these things for me?" he cried again. No! there is no possible undoing. What is done—cannot be undone. But although the past be wasted, the future remains. God is ever giving us another opportunity to be saved. We shall see in Peter's answer, what we must do.

Peter put his answer in a few plain, clear words, "Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus." There was still a way of salvation, though they had so dealt with their Messiah. Repentance was the first step. What is repentance? It is more than dropping a few tears over a wrong life. The wrong must be given up, turned away from, forsaken forever. There must be a change of mind, and that change of mind must show itself in the conduct. A little way outside of Dayton, a young man met an old gentleman one day and asked him, "How far is it to Dayton?" "Twenty-five thousand miles," was the answer, "if you keep on as you are going now. But it is a quarter of a mile if you turn square about." If an impenitent sinner, facing away from God, asks how far it is to heaven, the answer is "Millions and millions of miles, if you go on this way; just two steps if you turn right about." We never can be saved—if we keep our sins. We must repent.

Baptism implied that the penitents had received Jesus Christ as their Savior and accepted Him as their Lord. If we would be saved we must do the same—give up our sins and receive Christ. The penitents were baptized unto the remission of their sins. It is sin that is the trouble. Our sins have destroyed us. But there is one way of being saved from our sins. It is through Jesus Christ. Remission is more than mere forgiveness. It means sending away, dismissing forever. This tells in a word what God does when we come to Christ. Merely to remit the penalty would be a poor blessing. In our heart the old sin still would live, with all its old power. The only way really to be freed from our sins—is to have the sins themselves cleansed out of our life.

God’s forgiveness is complete; He remembers our sins against us no more, forever. Then He sends His Spirit to live in us. He breaks sin’s power and gives us a new master. Christ says, "Take my yoke upon you." The final result is the lifting of the life up to glory. One summer day the sun found some foul, stagnant water lying in a gutter. It lifted it up and the winds bore it on their wings through the air, and on a mountain top, far off, it settled down again upon the earth, no more foul and stagnant—but cleansed and pure now, white, spotless snow, as radiant as an angel’s garment. So Christ takes souls stained and defiled by sin, lifts them out of the foul corruption of earth, and brings them at last to the mountains of glory, whiter than snow.

Peter assured the penitent people before him, that they need not despair. There was hope for them. "To you is the promise, and to your children," he told them. Although the Jewish people had crucified Christ, the offer of salvation was still made to them. Even hands, which had been stained with blood of the Messiah, were washed white in the very blood, which they themselves had shed! The gospel was not for the Jews only—but for all the world; it was for "all that are afar off." The circle widens out, as when a stone is dropped in the center of a lake and little waves roll in circles wider and wider, until they splash on all the shores, even out on the farthest bays and creeks. The promise was given first to the company that stood there and heard Peter, and then it reached out until it came to those who were afar off—the farthest off in space, living at the ends of the earth; the farthest off in time, down to the end of the world; the farthest off in character, the worst and the guiltiest.

Those early followers of Christ "continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching." Continuance and steadfastness are essential. It is not enough to begin a Christian life; one persevere unto the end, through all discouragement, through all temptation, through all trial, faithful unto death. These first believers kept themselves in the school of Christ, coming continually to the meetings to receive instruction from the apostles. The Christian life must always be a growing life. There must be growth in knowledge. Young Christians will never grow, however if they feed only upon trashy novels and newspapers. They must get the apostles’ teaching, God’s good bread for souls. They kept themselves also in the fellowship of the apostles. We would say they attached themselves to the Church and made Christian people their friends. They went regularly to the communion—breaking of bread. There were faithful in attending the meetings for prayer. Thus they took up the new life with great earnestness and faithfulness. At once love awoke in their hearts for fellow Christians. Some of these were poor, and those who were rich shared their plenty with them. "They sold their possessions … and parted them to all, according as any man had need." That is, they were large-hearted and generous. They gave to Christ not only themselves—but all that they had. They understood that the strong must help the weak, that the rich must help the poor. They lived together as one family. Whatever there was exceptional about

the condition of things in the early Church, the principle is always the same. Those who have blessings, must share them with those who lack. Those who are strong, must help those who are weak. Those who have abundance, must share their plenty with those who are in want. The result of such beautiful Christian living, was that they greatly increased. "The Lord added to them day by day." This is the way a church should grow. The Lord added those who were added; only the Lord can truly add souls to His Church. Men's converts do not amount to anything, if that is all they are. There is no use in our urging people to join the Church, until they are first joined to Christ and have been renewed by His grace. We might as well tie green branches to a bare pole, and think we have a living tree. It is interesting, also, to notice that the Lord added "day by day." Converts were not made merely at communion seasons or at revival times; day by day men came to Christ and took His as their Master. In every true, living church—there should be continuous revival. The Lame Man Healed

Acts 3:1-11

It could not have been more than a few weeks or months after the day of Pentecost. The apostles were busy teaching the three thousand converts. They continued to attend the temple services, at least the daily hours of prayer. The first miracle was wrought in connection with one of these services.

Peter and John appear here together. They were close, personal friends. They were complements of each other—the one having what the other lacked. Peter was the speaker. John was the quiet apostle. It was at the hour of evening prayer that the two men were going up to the temple. They were going to offer worship—they had no thought, so far as we know, of any special ministry of their own—the miracle they performed was a piece of wayside ministry. As the two men came near to the Beautiful Gate, a beggar was lying there. There probably were other beggars there who had come or had been brought by their friends to beg from the people. "Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money." As this man had been brought daily to this door, probably for many years, there is little doubt that he was there ofttimes when Jesus passed and repassed that same door. Probably he reached out his hand many time to Jesus, as He was passing the temple—but having no faith to ask for healing—he had remained unhealed all the while. So, year after year, multitudes of people lie unblessed and unhealed about the very gates of God's sanctuary, while Christ constantly passes by them. It is not enough to live near a church, even close by a church door. One may be lost even in such a favored position. This first apostolic miracle was more than a miracle. It illustrated the work of the Church. The man who lay at the gate was helpless—he had been carried there. The unsaved cannot save themselves. The beggar saw Peter and John about to enter the temple and "asked them for money." He did not know that they were able to do something far better for him than to put a silver coin into his hand. So, continually, in our praying we ask for little things, bits of money, or bread, or some worldly things—not knowing, or not realizing, that there are infinitely better things which we might get. We are fooled by life's appearances. The things that we think are the most important things—are the least important. Bunyan tells of the man with the muck rake, gathering up the rubbish—but not seeing the crowns, which hung in shining beauty close above him.

Many good people pay no heed to beggars. They do not give them a kindly look or a gracious word. How do you know who the beggar at your door may be? Of William Cullen Bryant it was said that he thought of every man he met, as an angel disguised, and treated him as such. Peter had a kindly heart. This man did not ask for healing. The miracle was not wrought in answer too his prayer—but the merciful thought had its origin in the heart of the apostle. So Christ looks upon us, sees our needs and pities us—even when we ask nothing of Him.

Notice, too, Peter's condescension and humility. He was not too fine a gentleman to stop and have a little talk with a lame beggar. He spoke gently to him. He did not forget that under those rags there beat a human heart whose feelings could be hurt by rudeness. It is certainly worthwhile for us to learn this one little lesson in passing. Even if we are finely dressed—we need not brush by a ragged beggar or poor man with disdain. We do not know who the person is. We do not know that wrapped up in that heap of wretchedness, is an immortal soul, which is capable of shining in heavenly glory. It may be one of God's children who sits there. At least it will do us no harm, in passing, to stop and say a kind word. We must not forget that Jesus said, "Inasmuch as you did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least—you did it unto me."

We may study the way Peter showed kindness to the beggar. There are a good many people who cannot give money to the needy—but they need not therefore do nothing. "Silver and gold have I none—but what I have—that give I you," said Peter. He was a poor man. He had left all to follow Christ. He had no money with him that day to give to any beggar, and he might have heaved a sigh, dropped a tear, and then passed on to his evening prayers. But that was not what Peter did. He did not conclude that because he had no money with him, therefore he could not do anything for the poor man. He would give what he had to give.

Money is not the only thing people need. It usually the poorest alms that can be given. Kind words are better, love and sympathy are finer. So far as we know, Jesus never gave money to anyone—and yet there never was such another giver of blessings as He was. We cannot impart the same large measure of help that Jesus gave—but we can give the same kind of help. There is not one of us who cannot give to other things, which will enrich their lives far, more than if we put money into their hands. We can give a cheering word, if nothing else, to some weary one in the way; a word will brighten his heart for many a long mile. Courage put into a tired heart, sympathy into a sorrowing heart—are better than any gift of gold. None of us are too poor to give something to others. If we cannot give silver or gold—we can certainly give love and sympathy, which are better than money.

It is interesting to read on and see what Peter did for this man to whom he could not give money. He said, "Silver or gold I do not have—but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk! Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong!" Surely this was very much better than any alms Peter could have given the beggar. If he had given him money—it would have helped him along a little further as a beggar. That would have been all. But when the man was healed, he did not need to be helped any more. He was able now to take care of himself. Was not that a far better way to aid him—than if he had left him still helpless, merely giving him temporary monetary relief?

Note the twofold help Peter gave this man. First, he spoke the word, which kindled hope and faith, and led to the man's healing. Then he reached his own strong hand to help the man rise. It is a

good thing to lend a hand when one is down—to help him rise again. There are many about us who need the helping hand. It is not enough to preach and teach; we must give sympathy, love and help to those who are lying helpless in their sins. Then the sorely tempted and those also who have fallen—need a hand to help them rise. There is a wondrous power in the touch or clasp of a human hand. While we bid men to rise up and walk—we must be ready always to help them. The lame man instantly responded. "He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God!" The cure was instantaneous and complete. The healing was proved by his rising and walking and leaping. We must prove the reality of our conversion, by acts of spiritual activity. Some people profess to have become Christians, and then just lie where they were, inactive, showing no evidence of spiritual life. They have mouths—but they speak not for Christ; they have hands—but they take up no work for Christ. They have feet—but they walk not for Christ. Conversion ought to send the life tingling into every member. When Christ enters our heart—we will walk and leap and praise God!

"Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God." He did not want to lose his friends and clung to them. Besides, he wished to make confession of his healing before men. The newly converted Christian should at once join Christ's people, and make his friendships and companions among them. This implies open confession of Christ, and that is a most important duty. Christ requires it, and it is needful to the completeness and the wholesomeness of Christian life. It implies also union with the Church, and this is a duty of great importance. The effect of this miracle on the people was very great. "When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him!" The mere sight of the man walking about—this man who had never walked before, whom all the people had know for years as a beggar at the gates—was a sermon in itself. If he had sat still after he was healed, still holding out his hand and asking for alms, his healing might have been a little comfort to himself—but it would not have been worth a straw for testimony or influence. Those who have been healed by Christ—ought to manifest it. To know of such a great Physician of souls and not tell men about it—is a crime against nature. Confessing Christ and speaking of Him—will bring deeper joy to our own hearts. Besides, it makes known to others in similar need, the Healer and Friend to whom they may go for blessing. We should rise up when Christ has blessed us in any way—and let people know about it—at least let them see in our life what He has done for us.

"Why do you stare at us—as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?" The people's first thought was to regard the apostles as wonderful men, because of the miracle that had been wrought through them. But Peter hastened to turn all the glory of the miracle, to Christ. It is a mark of true religion, that we seek to give Christ the honor and glory of whatever good we do. We are apt to accept compliments and gratitude ourselves when we have been blessed and used in doing good to others, forgetting that to Christ belongs the honor and glory. We cannot but be pleased to have Christ do good through us—but we need to watch that all the praise and honor shall go to Him. The Trial of Peter and John

Acts 4:1-31 The healing of the lame man made a great stir in the temple. Peter at once began to speak to the wondering people, explaining the miracle. In doing so he told again the story of Jesus Christ, who had been rejected by the rulers and crucified—but whom God had raised up and

glorified. Through Him, said Peter, is this man made strong and well. It grieved the rulers that Peter was proclaiming Jesus Christ as the power through which the lame man had been healed, and also as the author of the resurrection.

While Peter was thus speaking, there came a party of priests and Sadducees with a squad of temple police, to arrest the apostles, whom they put in prison over night. This, however, did not check the progress of the gospel. In the very next sentence we read, "But many of those who heard the Word believed." The rulers had cast the apostles into prison—but they could not put chains upon the Holy Spirit. The number of the converts continually increased until the three thousand of the day of Pentecost had become five thousand.

Always opposition has helped God's cause. The storm that sets itself to put out the flames, only fans them into intenser violence. This truth should give great confidence to those who are called to suffer persecution. There is a beatitude for such, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake—for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The story of the trial of the apostles vividly recalls the scenes of our Lord's trial, a few weeks before. The place was the same, and we find the same names—Annas and Caiaphas, for example. The rulers imagined that they could compel the apostles to submit to their dictation. How farcical all this appeared to the angels, as they looked down upon it, out of the skies!

Peter was the spokesman, and he spoke well. This is a different man from the old Peter of former days, especially the Peter of the night of Christ's betrayal, when he lacked courage to confess his Lord, and quailed before the taunting words of a girl. Now he stands before the highest tribunal of the nation, and exhibits a courage, which makes the rulers tremble. It was because for the hour of need, the Spirit of God freshly filled him. It was not Peter that spoke—but the Holy Spirit who filled him and spoke in him. The Spirit is for us—as truly as He was for the apostles. He is ready to fill us with His own life whenever we have any work to do, any testimony to offer, or any trial to endure. Let us claim our spiritual birthright. The rulers implied that the apostles had used some secret are—magic or sorcery in healing the lame man. They had demanded, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" intimating that some agency other than divine had wrought the cure. Peter was not angry; he kept his temper and spoke calmly. He used no insulting words. Then he was also tactful. He referred to "a good deed done to an impotent man, by what means this man is made whole." There ought to be no criticism or condemnation of a good deed done to a lame man, restoring him to strength. We condemn people for hurting others, not for helping them.

He then told his judges at once the source of the power which had healed the man. "Be it known unto you all." Christianity has nothing to hide. It has no secret arts by which it accomplishes its great works. It uses no incantation, practices no tricks, does nothing in the dark. It wants the whole world to know just what is the secret of its power. It has nothing to fear from the closest and most critical examination of its methods. This is not the case with the world's religions. They make everything as mysterious as possible. They dare not throw open to the gaze of men, the arts and practices by which they claim to work. One of the proofs of the genuineness of Christianity, is that it challenges the inspection of the world. Its secret power is an open secret. It has nothing to keep back. It never fears to submit to the fullest examination and the severest tests. It possesses an abounding confidence.

Peter then declared boldly that is was "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised," that the man had been cured. Why did he add the words about the crucifixion of Jesus? Why did he not refrain from using these offensive words, which threw the terrible charge right in their faces? That would have been trimming the truth down to make it less offensive, cutting off the very part that his judges disliked to hear. It would not have been faithful witnessing, for it would not have told his hearers of their sin and guilt, nor would it have proclaimed the power of God in raising Jesus from the dead. In our efforts to be courteous and polite, "wise as serpents," and to avoid giving offense, let us be sure never to keep back any part of the truth.

Peter further declared boldly that this Jesus was the Messiah. "He is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone." They had rejected Jesus as unsuitable to be their Messiah—but God had made Him the Savior and Lord of the world. In the same way do human and divine estimates differ continually. In the things men admire—God sees no beauty; and in the things which men despise—God beholds the rarest loveliness. He took for the foundation of His heavenly temple, a stone which the human builders thought unfit to be used anywhere in the wall, and He is building the whole temple out of things that men despise, for the saints of the Lord are not those whom this world honors. God is gathering into His Church, those whom earth sets aside, and then its glory in the end will outshine all the splendors of this world.

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Peter declared also to the rulers, that there is no possibility of personal salvation in any other but in Jesus Christ. If these men themselves, these rulers, ever reached heaven—it would be by the way of the cross which they themselves had despised. To all rejecters the same is true—if they ever are saved, it must be by the Christ whom they are now despising. There is no other way.

Two facts are unanswerable. One was the effect of Christ upon His friends. They were "unlearned and ignorant men," men who had not had the teaching and training of rabbis and scholars—and yet they were evidently men of great power. "They took knowledge of them—that they had been with Jesus." The marks of Jesus were in their lives. They had been impressed by His influence. They saw it in their very faces. There was something in them which recalled the bearing of Jesus that morning when He was on His trial, and then they remembered that they had seen them with Him at that time. It is a great thing when we make people think of Christ, by the way we bear ourselves. No one can be with Jesus as a companion, a teacher, a friend—and not show it in his life. It was said of Dr. Babcock that "the secret of his wondrous influence among men, was that he made God so attractive. He helped men to fall in love with Jesus Christ." The other fact which they could not answer, was the man himself. There he stood, healed—how? "Seeing that man who was healed standing with them, they could not say nothing against it." They could not say the man had not been lame—everybody had known him as the beggar of the Beautiful Gate. They could not deny that he had been healed. There was a man who said he had been able to refute every proof offered by the Christian religion, save one—his mother’s life. There is no argument in proof of the power of the gospel equal to what the gospel itself has done in the lands into which it has gone. Regenerated men and women were unanswerable proofs of the regenerating power of Jesus Christ. The Sin of Lying

Acts 5:1-11

There are blemishes on the fairest human beauty. The best man, has his faults and imperfections. The holiest periods of the church, have their imperfections and dishonors. The history of the apostolic days has in the brightest of its glory—this sad story of Ananias and Sapphira. The spirit of love was reigning in the early Church. It was a true brotherhood. Whatever anyone had—he was ready to share with those who lacked. "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own—but they shared everything they had." This generosity was voluntary; there was no forced communism. But many of the wealthier Christians sold their possessions and brought the money to the apostles, to be used by them in helping the poor. One of these generous givers named Barnabas, sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet. Elsewhere we are told that Barnabas was a good man. His name means "son of consolation," or "son of exhortation." Evidently he was one of those men who have a genius for helping others. He had learned how a Christian man should use his money. He was prompted by love for Christ and for the poor—to sell a piece of land and to lay the money at the feet of the apostles, to be used in helping his fellow Christians who were poor. The closing verses of chapter four and the beginning of chapter five should be read together. The word 'but' makes a striking contrast between what goes before—and what comes after. One man's good deeds inspire good deeds in others. No doubt the influence of the generosity of Barnabas did much to make others of the first Christians liberal. No doubt, too, his noble act put it into the heart of Ananias to do what he did. He wanted to be generous, too. The people were loud in their praise of Barnabas when it was known that he had made his gift of love.

Perhaps his desire to have the commendation of his fellow church members was the motive, which inspired Ananias. Possibly, at first, his impulse was right and his intention likewise. He may have meant to bring all the money to the apostles. It often happens that under a stirring appeal, a man resolves to give a certain large sum to some good cause. But as he thinks over the matter his enthusiasm wanes, his willingness to make the self-sacrifice diminishes, and he ends by giving nothing at all, or only a small part of what he intended to give. This may have been the case with Ananias. At least we know that, having sold the property, he brought only a small portion of the proceeds, which, however, he represented as all he had received—secretly keeping back a part, while getting credit for the giving of all.

Peter made it very plain that though Satan had put it into the heart of Ananias—but he reminded him that he himself had first conceived the thought, allowed the thought to be born in his heart. Satan may be the author of the evil thoughts which are whispered in our ears—but we make them our own—when we accept them and adopt them. Satan does not work them out—we do that. We cannot, then, throw off the responsibility for our sins—by blaming the tempter with them. They are our own when we commit them, no matter who first tempted us with them. We are not responsible for temptation, for suggestions of evil. Jesus Himself was tempted in all points; suggestions of evil were made to Him—but we are responsible for whenever we accept evil suggestions and let them into our heart. We must resist every temptation, for no matter how fiercely the tempter plies us; if we yield, the guilt and the penalty will be ours. Satan will never help us to bear the consequences of our sins. Peter reminded Ananias further of the terrible nature of his sin. His falsehood was not merely one that had been made to men. "You have not lied unto men—but unto God!" Is there any lying unto God in these modern days? Was this sin of Ananias' one that can be repeated in Christian service and worship in our day? Have we never come perilously near a like sin? When

we unite with the Church we profess, both in act and in words, to dedicate to God all that we are and all that we have. Do we keep back no part? It is told of some old Saxon warrior who came to unite with the Church, that when he was immersed he held up his right hand out of the water. When he was expostulated with, and told that his whole body must be buried, he replied that he would keep that hand to himself for battle with his enemies. He could not give up this part of his old life.

There are too many people who reserve some part of their life undevoted, when they make their consecration to God. We sing hymns not to men—but to God—and yet we frequently come upon lines, which declare our fullest love, and our unreserved devotion to Christ and that promise the most unbounded service. Do we really mean all we say when we sing such hymns? Do we not sometimes profess in our prayers—what we fail to make good in our lives? Are not these things of the nature of lying to God? Men boast of their character for veracity, that their word is never questioned by their fellow men. Are they as careful to keep their word with God, to fulfill every promise and vow to Him? It is a great sin to lie to men. No sin is condemned in the Bible more persistently than falsehood. Liars must be shut out of heaven’s gates and shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone! But lying unto God is far worse than lying unto men.

Quickly came the punishment, "When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died!" His death was not Peter’s act—but God’s. It was not merely summary punishment for his presumptuous and daring sin—but being visited thus at the beginning of the Christian Church, it became a beacon, marking a fearful peril and sending its warning down the after ages. Thus God branded hypocrisy in the Church, as among the most fearful of all sins. We should not forget that our Lord spoke no words so bitter and scathing as the words He spoke against hypocrisy. The lesson should be heeded by everyone. Such open penalty may not be visited now upon those who lie to the Holy Spirit as Ananias did. They many live on and die in quiet. But the guilt is none the less because the judgment is not visited at once. There is a day coming when every such sin will receive its just recompense.

Sapphira kept herself in the background, possibly intentionally. She was not present when Ananias brought in the money. Neither had she learned of his terrible death. Three hours afterwards, not knowing what had happened, Sapphira came to the meeting. Peter then asked her about the sale of the property. "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" She had an opportunity to repent and confess her sin. But she did not do it. She answered, "Yes, that is the price." Then swiftly followed the question, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?" It was one of the worst exaggerations of the guilt of this deed, that the two had deliberately agreed together to commit it—two people, especially, so closely and sacredly united as husband and wife. This shows that it was not a hasty sin, wrought under sudden and powerful temptation—but a sin deliberated over, calmly planned, and boldly executed. Many people will do things secretly—which they would never do if they were first put to their thoughts and purposes into words for any ear to hear. If men who commit evil deeds would always talk to their wives about them first, fewer crimes would stain their hands. Hearts are very hard when two people conspire together to do any wicked thing! The effect of this terrible occurrence upon the people, was awe and dread. "Great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard these things." Such examples of divine judgment should deter others from like sin. Though God may not punish hypocrisy in every case by instant death, yet the penalty will be no less terrible. We all should be

afraid also of every approach to sin, every smallest step toward it, for the evil that seems little at first, grows at last into a power which binds the soul fast forever!

One day when the tide was out, a man went out to gather sea plants on the rocks, and in stepping from ledge to ledge—his foot slipped down and became jammed in a crevice. He attempted to pull it out—but could not. He cried aloud, he shrieked, he prayed—but all in vain—no one heard him! So the tide came rolling in, and rose up higher and higher until it rolled over him and drowned his last gurgling cry in its remorseless waters. In the same ruthless way—sin clutches men. Even one sin, one secret sin, one evil habit—may hold the soul that indulges it—until the floods of judgment come and roll over it, engulfing it in eternal damnation!

One of the great lessons to be learned from this incident—is that we cannot possibly deceive God. We talk about secret sins, as if any sin were secret when all heaven sees it, when God beholds it and the angels witness it. Sometime exposure will come!

There is a story of a king who had been vanquished at war. His conqueror offered terms, which were satisfactory in every respect, save one—they required him to do public homage to his victor. That, however, was at length so far modified that he was to be allowed to render his homage in the tent of his rival. But when the hour came, and the captive was in the very act of doing homage, his conqueror, by some machinery, which he had prepared, suddenly stripped off the canvas covering, and the men of both armies saw the king on his knees before his conqueror.

Just so, if we allow sinful ambition or evil appetites to overmaster us, and think we can save ourselves from humiliation by doing homage to it under the secrecy of a curtained tent, we may be sure that when we are in the very act of confessing our allegiance to it—the Lord will throw down the covering and unveil our degradation before the eyes of angels and men! The Apostles Imprisoned

Acts 5:17-32 The sin of Ananias and Sapphira and the swift judgment that followed, did not check the progress of the Church. "Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by." Every one of us casts a shadow of influence on other wherever he goes. But the bitterness of the rulers was not allayed by the judgment. They grew more and more fierce. The narrative goes on: "The high priest rose up, and all they that were with him. … and they were filled with jealousy." The word "jealousy" gives us the key to this whole incident. The apostles were received with favor by the people. Multitudes were thronging about them with their sick, brought to be healed. It was the wonderful success of the gospel that so enraged the high priest and his party. There are some people who cannot bear to see other people succeed or to hear other people praised. Even in churches are sometimes found those who are embittered and aroused to jealousy by the prosperity of other churches. Instead of rejoicing that souls are saved, that the poor are helped, that evil spirits are cast our, that good is done—they criticize, talk bitterly, and oppose the efforts which are so manifestly of God. A godly Christian minister put it down at the end of a year, as one of the year’s lessons that he had learned to rejoice in the prosperity of others. No lesson is harder to learn, and none is more beautiful in life. We are all too apt to be jealous of those who are more honored in life and work, than ourselves. The rulers had not yet learned that walls do not make a secure prison for Christ’s friends. "They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But

during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out." There is no use trying to fight against God. He who sits in heaven laughs when rulers take counsel against His anointed.

Joseph’s brothers thought they had got the boy out of the way when they had sold him as a slave—but the Lord only laughed at their plot and took him into His own hands, making a mighty man of him. The princes chuckled when they got Daniel into the lion’s den—but the laugh was turned when he came out unhurt and they themselves were cast to the hungry beasts!

There was fiendish glee in certain quarters when the three Hebrew youths were cast into a fiery furnace. Their stiff knees would be limbered now. But that laugh was turned too, before the end came.

Haman chucked when he got the gallows built for Mordecai. He would soon be rid of the old Jew who had been in his way so long. But he fell into his own trap! The rulers crucified Jesus and sealed the stone and set a guard about His grave. But they only brought derision upon themselves; while by their act they exalted Jesus to a place of highest honor and glory.

Just so here, the rulers cast the apostles into prison, bolted the doors, and set their guard—but an angel came quietly by night, took the prisoners out, and left the keeper standing guard over an empty prison! Wicked men do not have all things their way in this world. There is a God who is just and true, who keeps His hand upon all the affairs of the earth, who takes care of His own and guards them as the apple of His eye. This is one of the most precious truths of the Bible, for the suffering and imperiled servants of God. They are absolutely safe in the hands of God! The angel who brought the apostles out their prison had a message and a commission for them: "Go, stand in the temple courts, and tell the people the full message of this new life." The angel did not tell the apostles to flee away and hide from the rulers. That is what escaping prisoners usually do. But these men were set free, not to go away from danger—but to continue their work. Then, they were not to go and talk about their trials and hardships, to excite sympathy among the people. They were not to say a word about themselves at all—but were to declare the words of "this new life," eternal life, the way of salvation. They were not to go and speak in quiet places, away from danger—but were to stand in the temple, the most public place in all he city. They were to speak to the people—that is, to all the people, poor as well as rich, ignorant as well as learned. It is a suggestive name, by which the gospel is here called, "Life"—this Life. Jesus Christ came that we might have life and that we might have it abundantly. The apostles were prompt and eager to obey the angel’s bidding. They hastened to the temple about daybreak and began to teach. The high priest did not know what his prisoners were doing. Full of rage, he was eager to have them punished, and called a full meeting of the court, and sent officers to bring the apostles from the prison. "But the officers returned, saying: We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!" The high priest was sure of his victims. He had them safely locked in the guardhouse. It was a startling surprise when he learned that the prison was empty! There is an old Bible promise which says, "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly." There is a promise also which assures us that "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." Satan is very shrewd and cunning, and by long practice has learned to do his work well. But God is stronger and wiser than Satan—and knows

how to deliver His own out of Satan’s hands! At length the apostles stood before the court and were accused of having disobeyed the command to speak no more in the name of Jesus. To this Peter answered, "We must obey God—rather than men." This should be the motto and life-principle of every one of us. This has been the martyr’s motto in all Christian centuries. Bunyan, when condemned to three months imprisonment for preaching the gospel, and told that if he did not promise to abstain, he would be banished; nobly replied: "If I were out of prison again today—I would preach the gospel again tomorrow, by the help of God!" Not many of us will be called to assert the principle in such circumstances of peril; but in life’s ordinary business, in its common affairs, in school, at home, at play, we shall every day have opportunities to follow conscience, to do what God commands, without being swerved from duty by what men say. It would be very fine to do some such heroic thing as the apostles did here—but it is fine in God’s sight—to live faithfully and loyally in the midst of the countless little temptations of the most commonplace life!

"God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel!" Here we have the whole gospel. Jesus was the Messiah of God. He was rejected and killed by those He had come to deliver and save. But God raised Him up and exalted Him to the throne of glory. There He is not only King of kings—but also the Savior of all who will believe in Him. The two words, "repentance" and "forgiveness", are full of meaning. We are not saved merely from sin’s power—but from sin itself. That is, we are pledged to give up our sin. Repentance means this. Then forgiveness means more than merely wiping out the penalty; it means also the putting away of sins themselves!

Stephen the First Martyr Acts 6:1-8, Acts 7:54-59; Acts 8:1-2

Stephen is one of the most interesting characters in the New Testament. His story is short—but intense. His work belongs to a few days, and he makes but one speech—but his influence belongs to all after time! He was the first deacon and the first Christian martyr.

Stephen’s fiery eloquence touched many hearts—but it also aroused the members of the Jewish synagogues, who set themselves against him. We must not be surprised if our efforts to do good, awaken opposition. The more we try to honor Christ and build up His kingdom, the more opposition we shall encounter. So long as we keep quiet about people’s sins and connive at their wrongdoings, they may not seriously oppose us. But when we assault the evil we see in them and openly condemn it—we shall certainly stir up enmity and antagonism and bring upon ourselves opposition and possibly persecution.

Stephen’s opponents were no match for him in argument. "They were unable to stand up against the wisdom and the Spirit by whom he spoke." It was not Stephen with whom they had to contend; there was an unseen One beside him all the while who helped him. The Spirit in Stephen whom his proponents could not resist—was the Holy Spirit. Stephen was an inspired man when he stood before his opponents and declared to them the words of God. He was filled with God, as were the apostles on the day of Pentecost. If we go out in Christ’s name to speak for Him, there will always be One with us whom no man can withstand. If only we remembered this, it would make us brave, resistless, in speaking the truth.

False witnesses were brought to testify against Stephen, to try to convict him, as the rulers had tried to convict Jesus. False witnesses are continually testifying against Christianity, in the effort to prove that it is not a divine religion. The world is full of books which seek to cast doubts upon divine revelation. In all life, too, there is a disposition to bear false witness. Reputations are made and unmade, in certain drawing rooms. In the council before which Stephen was standing, there was intense bitterness. The faces of the men grew dark with rage, as they looked upon him and heard his words, which they could not answer. They were little like honorable judges sitting in a court of justice. Their hearts were full of rage and fury. In contrast with all this, Stephen himself was calm quiet. The peace of God was in his heart. He was sustained and strengthened by the trust, which nothing could disturb. The record says, "All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel." What is the face of an angel like? We cannot tell—but we know that those who live in God's presence, in the light of God's love, must have shining faces. No doubt Stephen's face shone. The secret of the shining was in his heart. The peace of God was there, and even amid the excitements about him, with enraged enemies glowering upon him, he had no fear—but was kept in perfect quiet. An angel's face must be gentle and loving, for angels never know the feeling of anger or bitterness of hate—and we know that Stephen's heart was full of love. There was no unforgiveness in Stephen—he had learned from his Master the lesson of patience under injustice or wrong—to make dark lines upon his countenance. An angel's face must have marks of strength in it. Stephen was strong. Even with all the people against him, he had no fear. He was strong in God. The contrast between the members of the Sanhedrin and Stephen is most striking. His quietness and sweetness enraged them the more. "When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him." They became like infuriated wild beasts as they listened to Stephen's words. But while the rulers were so furious, Stephen was calm and full of peace. He had found refuge from the strife of tongues in the presence of God. The secret is given in the words, "full of the Holy Spirit." When God is in a man, filling him—there is no room in him for fear or anger, or for any earthly passion.

Stephen "looked up steadfastly into heaven." That was well. If he had not looked up—he would not have seen the vision of glory, which he now beheld. If he had looked down, he would have seen danger and would have been afraid. He looked up and saw not the human rage and fury—but the sweet peace of heaven above him. Like Moses, "he endured, as seeing him who is invisible." We should train our eyes to look up-ward, heaven-ward, God-ward—for there are our blessings, our goal, our home, God Himself, and all fair and beautiful things. The members of the Sanhedrin lost all self-control, all dignity, and in their rage became an ungoverned mob. They cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and, rushing upon Stephen, dragged him out of the courtroom, through the gate, out of the city, and stoned him! Thus the eloquent voice was hushed, so that no more could it be heard on the earth. His life, cut off so suddenly, so violently, when only beginning its usefulness, seems a failure. But it was not a failure. Someone says that Stephen's mission in this world was to deliver only one speech of half an hour. But if his words had reached or impressed no other life, they fell upon the ears of Saul, the persecutor, and he never forgot them. Stephen died, and Saul was converted. Stephen's preaching was stopped—but Saul was called to take up his unfinished work. We owe Paul to Stephen's martyrdom.

Stephen’s dying prayers were like his Master’s. He prayed first, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." To Stephen, dying was only breathing out his soul into the hands of Jesus Christ! He knew it was not death—but life, that was before him. His body was being mangled and broken—but his spirit, his real self, could not be harmed. Beyond the strange mystery of death—Jesus waits to receive the departing spirit. Death is only a gateway through which the soul passes, and then life and glory burst upon the vision of the emancipated spirit.

Stephen’s other prayer was also like his Master’s. Jesus prayed for His murderers, "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do." Stephen, with the same spirit of forgiveness, pleaded for his murderers, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." It is the old lesson of love for enemies taught over again.

Very beautiful is the picture of death which is given here: "He fell asleep." Sleep is death’s new, sweet name! What a picture of peace the word suggests, right here in the heart and fury of the mob! In the midst of all the wild scene—Stephen fell asleep!

We think of a tired child creeping into the mother’s bosom and falling asleep. Sleep is not a terrible experience; it is nothing to be dreaded. We sleep when we are weary—and we awake refreshed. Sleep is not the cessation of life. We expect to awake, after we have slept. As we part for the night, we do not say, "Farewell," but "Goodnight," for we expect to meet again in the morning. This beautiful Scriptural designation of death tells us, therefore, of life beyond, of resurrection, of immortality. We shall awake from this sleep of death—and our life shall go on again. We shall awake refreshed, lying down weary—and rising strong; lying down sick, or old, or deformed, or worn-out—and rising well, young and radiant in heavenly beauty! The last scene in our passage shows us the burial of Stephen. It was quiet—but impressive. He was greatly beloved, and the sorrow over his death was sincere. His body was laid away in the grave—but they could not bury his influence. Martyrdom did not destroy his life. No doubt he did more by dying than he could have done if he had lived on for years, preaching Christ. The Disciples Dispersed

Acts 8:1-17 The first glimpse we have of Saul is in the martyrdom of Stephen. The record is that he was consenting unto Stephen’s death. He was present, not merely as a spectator—but as one who approved of what was done and was instrumental in it. Yet this is the man who afterwards became a glorious apostle, the most influential of all, who wrought in the founding and extension of Christianity. We know it was Paul’s conscience that made him a participator in this martyrdom. In another place he tells us that he truly thought within himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus. We learn that one may be very conscientious—and yet very wrong. Conscience needs a guide—the Word of God.

Evidently Saul’s zeal as a persecutor was terrific. It is probable that Stephen’s speech made him more bitter for the time. He was driven by it to the fiercest frenzy in his determination to crush out Christianity by destroying every follower of Christ. He spread desolation everywhere. His activity as a persecutor is indicated in the words, "Saul laid waste the church, entering into every house, and dragging men and women committed them to prison." His name became a terror to Christians everywhere it was heard. This terrible bitterness magnifies the grace of God, which saved such an enemy and made him afterwards such an apostle of Christianity. Paul during his ministry continually referred to his own salvation, as assurance that no one can be so far away from Christ, that upon repentance and faith he would not be saved.

"Those who were scattered abroad went about preaching the Word." We would say that men driven away from their homes by persecution would be so frightened that they would not think of preaching—but would try only to hide from those who sought to kill them. But these men did not try to hide. They had the peace of God in their hearts, even amid all the dangers. Their earnestness in behalf of Christ grew the more intense—the more they suffered for Him. We are reminded of that wonderful verse in the Twenty-third Psalm, which tells us of God spreading a table for His people in the presence of their enemies. They were not afraid to speak of the gospel, which had cost them so much. They were compelled to leave Jerusalem—but their voices were not silenced. They had suffered for Christ's sake—but they would not give up Christ. The life of Christ in a true Christian, cannot be quenched or suppressed. It is like a bubbling fountain, which flows everywhere. We should be so full of love for our Savior that in school, at work, at play, in the quiet of our own home, and wherever we may go—our faces shall shine with the brightness of the indwelling peace, and the love of Christ shall find expression in our words.

We come now to an important point in the history of the development of Christianity. Until persecution began, there had been no effort made to carry the gospel out into the world. But the dispersion of the disciples became a great missionary movement. Philip was one of the seven men chosen to assist the apostles. He became a great preacher and had an important place in carrying the gospel to the world.

"And Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and proclaimed Christ unto them." Philip was one of the coals of the holy fire, which the winds of persecution scattered. The fire was not quenched, however, by the winds—but was only fanned into intenser flames and greater brightness. The enemies of Christ thought to put out the fire of Pentecost, but they only scattered it far more widely. Philip considered the misfortune, as men would have called it a providence. Perhaps he had heard the word of Jesus, which said to the disciples, "When they persecute you in this city, flee into the next." They were to flee—but not to cease their work. When Philip could not preach longer in Jerusalem, he went and preached in Samaria. He had a religion that could travel and not lose its energy and force. We ought to get the lesson, that wherever circumstances send us—we must continue our work for Christ. The captive maid in Syria still witnessed among the heathen for the God of her land, and the captive boys in Babylon did not forget their religion. The First Ethiopian Convert

Acts 8:26-40

Stephen was gone; his voice was hushed—but another worker rose up and took his place. "God buries his workmen—but carries on his work." It is instructive to study the character of Philip, as it comes out of this story.

He must have lived near the heart of Christ, for we see him here in communication with heaven. Those who are far away, are not called for important work. Bonar says, "God always uses the vessel that is nearest to him."

Another good thing in Philip, was his promptness in obeying the voice of God. God cannot use those who loiter and take their own time to do His errands. He must have servants who will go instantly, "minute men," ready at an instant's call to go to the end of the earth.

Another good point was Philip's self-denial. He was doing a great work in Samaria. He was popular. People gathered about him, throngs flocked to hear him. It was not easy to leave his great field in Samaria, with so much of encouragement and success, and go away into a desert, alone, with nothing definite marked out for him to do there. Yet Philip went as cheerfully on his long, lonesome journey—as he would have gone to preach to the largest crowd in Samaria. We should never raise the question of what is pleasant to us, when God gives a command. Our only desire should be to do his will. We do not know what is large or small in the work of the Lord. The desert call seemed small, only a desert road, and one man—but Ethiopia was behind it, and it may be, that the results of that one bit of obscure work surpassed all the other work of Philip's whole life. In any case, that is not, is never, the question. The only matter is, What does God bid?

Philip was also tactful. It required considerable courage and skill for this plain evangelist to speak to the great man riding in the chariot. Many a person with zeal lacks wisdom and blunders so in God's work as to do harm, rather than good in trying to win men.

Philip also knew his Bible. When he found the noble traveler puzzled over a text, he did not have to take time to look up its meaning. He had himself studied the Bible before, and knew its teachings, and was ready, therefore, at a moment's call to make plain the meaning of the difficult passage. Those who would do Christ's work—must know Christ's Book. A man was wanted for an important errand, and an angelic messenger came to Philip and bade him to drop his work in Samaria. The incident suggests the close connection between heaven and earth. The Christian work in this world is directed from heaven. If we are living as we may, as we should—we are always receiving messages from Christ, bidding us to go here or there—and do this or that. "Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip: Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." Why did not the angel go himself, instead of calling Philip away from his important work? The answer is that angels are not sent on such errands. They are ministering spirits, doing Christ's bidding in the great work of redemption—but they do not preach the gospel. How could they preach? They have not been redeemed, and how could they tell the lost of the love of Christ and the blood of redemption?

Christ makes His redeemed ones the messengers of the gospel to others. They know what sin is, and understand the need of salvation. They know what Christ has done for them, and can tell others what He will do for them. We should be ready every moment to speak to others of Christ and His love. If we are led to think of another, to be anxious for his salvation, and to pray for him—it is certain we have an errand to that person and that God wishes us to be the messenger to carry the very blessing we are asking Him in our prayers to send. We should hasten with our message. There may not be a moment to spare. Christ's errands are exactly timed. If Philip had loitered he would have missed the Ethiopian. It seems strange that Philip should be called away from the great work he was doing. Multitudes were awaiting upon his ministry, and his work was very successful. It certainly was a trial of Philip's faith. But he was not careless in his obedience. He went where the Master bade him to go—and he went immediately. He asked no questions and made no objections. God often sends His servants on what may seem to them strange errands—but He always has some purpose in doing so. No errand of God is useless. At last Philip found his work. His sealed orders were opened. "Go to that chariot and stay near it." He had been sent to explain a text of Scripture. Did it not seem a mistake, however, to call him away from hundreds—to speak to one? One answer is that individual souls are dear to God. Another is that

this one man was from the "uttermost parts," and if he himself had the gospel, he would carry it back to his own land, thus becoming a missionary. We never can know what is our most important work any day. Perhaps more may come from a five minute casual talk with some stranger, when we think we are wasting our time—than from a sermon preached to a thousand people. The true thing, is to put ourselves into God's hands—to do whatever He may send us to do!

Philip was eager now to do what he had been sent to do. "Philip ran to him." Philip was not afraid to open up the subject of religion even with a stranger. This man in the chariot was a man of high rank, and Philip was a plain man. The traveler was busy reading, too, and might not care to be interrupted. Yet when Philip was bidden to join himself to the chariot, he promptly obeyed. We should be ready always to obey the impulses of the Spirit of God in our hearts. Suppose had excused himself, on the ground that he was not acquainted with this man, or that the man might not welcome him, or because of his own shyness; what an opportunity would have been lost! We should ever keep ourselves ready for instant service wherever God may send us. The destiny of other souls may depend upon our prompt obedience, and they may be lost through our failure.

"Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" Now we see why Philip was sent away along this lonely road. Here was a human soul crying out for light. God heard the man's cry and took him away from a great work, sending him to answer a heart's wish. God always knows when there is a soul anywhere longing for salvation, and in some way He will send the blessing. This noble traveler is an example of a sincere seeker. He went to the right place when he opened his Bible to seek light. He was a humble seeker, for he was not ashamed to confess that he could not understand the Scriptures and to ask a plain wayfarer to tell him. He was teachable, for he was ready to receive the explanation Philip gave to him. He was a believing seeker, also, for the moment he understood the text and learned who the Messiah was; he accepted Him and began to follow Him!

"And Philip … beginning from the Scripture, preached unto him Jesus." The picture of Christ lay in this ancient prophecy in all its beauty—but the Ethiopian prince could not see it until the evangelist had stripped off the veils and coverings, when it burst upon him in all its tenderness and grace. The Bible needs explanation. That is the teacher's work—to show Jesus in the Scriptures to the pupils who bend with eager interest over the holy page. The traveler was intelligent and quickly understood Philip's explanation. He had a good teacher, too, and at once wanted to confess Christ. "The eunuch said, Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" He did not propose to be a secret disciple—but desired to make open confession. The moment the vision of Christ is opened to any soul, there should be, first, instant acceptance, and then, at the earliest possible moment, public confession. Some people imagine they can be good Christians without taking an open stand. But confession is a large part of faith. We should wait for nothing. Fuller instruction will come afterwards.

"He went on his way rejoicing." He did not give up his journey and go back among the other Christians because he was now a Christian. He went on the way to his own country, and probably continued in his place as the queen's treasurer. A newborn Christian is not to give up his pursuit in life, because he has given himself to Christ. Of course, if the pursuit is a wicked one—it must be given up; but if one's occupation is right, he is usually to stick to it, carrying Christ with him into it. A carpenter when converted is ordinarily to continue to be a carpenter with Christ.

Another thought suggested here, is that Christ gives joy. Some people think religion would rob them of joy. Certainly it did not have this effect upon this Ethiopian. Life was all changed for him after he had received Christ. He went on his way—but his heart was full of song. He was like one of those clocks with a music box hidden in it that plays a sweet tune each time the clock strikes the hour. The clock does not stop to give the music—but keeps ticking on and making music at the same time. The Christian goes on in his work—but while he works his heart sings, and the songs make the way shorter and burdens lighter. At the same time they give cheer to others on whose ears they fall. The Conversion of Saul

Acts 9:1-30

Before conversion Saul was as intense in his zeal for the destroying of Christianity, as he was after his conversion in his efforts to extend the kingdom of Christ. From place to place he went, from house to house, seizing men and women, casting them into prison and punishing them. This was the sort of man Saul was, the morning of the day of his conversion.

Why was Saul so bitter against Jesus? What was the reason for his opposition? He was a loyal Jew, and Jesus had been crucified by the rulers of his people as a blasphemer. In this hatred of the rulers of his nation to Jesus, Saul sympathized. That such a man should claim to be the Messiah foretold by the prophets, appeared to Saul proof that He was an impostor. According to Saul’s thought, Jesus had fulfilled none of the Jewish expectations regarding the Messiah: He had established no kingdom; He had wrought no deliverance for His people. Thinking of Jesus in this way, Saul readily conceived that He was an impostor and that belief in Him as the Messiah was heresy, which he as a true Jew was bound to do all he could to stamp out. Saul was conscientious in his opinions concerning Jesus, and in his work as a persecutor. In his journey Saul was drawing near unto Damascus, intent upon his errand of finding and seizing all disciples there. We can imagine the terror of the Christians at Damascus as they heard of the approach of the terrible persecutor, whose name spread dismay wherever it was heard. No doubt they were praying God to stop his progress. We can imagine also what passed in the mind of this traveler as he journeyed along the way. He never had forgotten Stephen’s words before the council, or Stephen’s death, with the prayer that he made for his murderers with his last breath. In all his terrible work as a persecutor, Saul had also seen many glimpses of Christian life in the homes he had entered. Stephen was not the only man of those Saul had met in his warfare on Christians who had shown the gentle and kindly spirit of the Master. He must have seen sweet faith and gentle trust, which deeply affected him. Is it possible that doubts of the rightness of his own course troubled him? The words of the Lord to him about kicking against the goads seem to indicate that Saul had really been fighting against his own convictions, especially the later days of his persecuting work. Thus he was prepared for the sudden appearance of Jesus to him in the way.

He had almost reached the end of his journey when a strange thing happened. "Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him." It was more than light—it was the glory of a person, the divine person of Christ. In the dazzling brightness of the great light Saul fell to the earth. As he lay there he heard a voice, calling him by name, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Every word was emphatic. "Why?" What had Jesus done to Saul, to deserve such treatment? If He had been a tyrant while on the earth, if He had gone about burning towns, desolating homes, crushing the weak and the poor, and causing pain, poverty and sorrow—there would have been some excuse

for Saul’s bitter relentless enmity. But Jesus had gone about only doing good. Whey had Saul so fought against Jesus?

"Why do you persecute me?" The question was personal. Saul had to stand face to face with the glorified Jesus and answer why he, Saul was His enemy. Every human soul stands in a personal relation to Jesus Christ. We cannot lose ourselves in any company. The question is always a personal one, "What do you think of the Christ?"

"Why do you persecute me?" Saul had not personally persecuted Jesus—probably he had never even seen Him. But one who lifts a hand against any of Christ’s disciples, lift a hand against Christ Himself, for Christ makes common cause with each one of His people, even the lowliest. "I was hungry, and you gave me nothing to eat… Inasmuch as you did it not unto one of these least, you did it not unto me." He, who wrongs a Christian, wrongs Christ!

Saul saw before him the glorified form of Jesus. He was amazed and asked, "Who are you, Lord?" He never had dreamed that the lowly man who went about through Galilee working miracles and teaching the people—was indeed the Son of God, the Messiah! He had thought Him only a man, an impostor. But now he saw before a glorious Person, the most glorious he had ever seen, radiant in divine splendor. Then, when he asked, "Who are you?" the answer came, "I am Jesus." This divine Being was the lowly Jesus whom Saul was persecuting! Instantly he saw the terrible mistake he had been making. This Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God! But he resisted no longer. His opposition was over forever. In one of the accounts which Saul gave of his conversion, we are told that the first question, "Who are you, Lord?" was followed by another, as soon as he heard the answer, "What will you have me to do?" This question implies full surrender. He asked at once for his duty, entering the service of this new Master immediately. To the question, "What will you have me to do?" came the answer, "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." Acts 9:6. He was not to lie there in the dust, defeated and broken. This was not to be the end of his Life. Jesus had not meant to destroy him—but to save him and call him into service. He must rise up. When God finds us in our sins, we are not to lie down and weep inconsolably over the ruined past. No matter if the best part of life is gone, we may not, we dare not—spend one moment in mere idle tears and regret over it. We should rise instantly, turn our faces resolutely away from our wrong and wasted past, and put into the days that remain all we can of strength and beauty.

God guides us one step at a time. Saul did not learn that moment what his whole mission would be; he did learn, however, the first step of obedience. He was to go into the city, and when he got there he would learn more. When a young Christian begins to follow Christ he is not likely to be shown his duty for his whole life. He will be shown one step, however, and if he takes that, another step will be made plain, and another, and another, and so on, step by step, until he has reached the end of a noble and beautiful life.

"I do not ask to see

The distant scene—one step is enough for me." The part of Ananias in the conversion of Saul, has interesting lesson for us. Why did not Jesus Himself complete the work without calling in any man to help Him? We do not know, excepting that it is usually His way to use human helpers. Ananias was startled to receive the command, "Arise, and go to the street which is called Straight, and

inquire in the house of Judas for one named Saul, a man of Tarsus." It brings Jesus very close to notice how intimately he was acquainted with all that was going on in the city. He knew the names of the streets and where each person lived or was even temporarily staying. Christ in heaven today knows us by name and is familiar with the most intimate events of our lives. He knows the house we live in, and the street, and knows our present desires and needs, and hears our prayers. No wonder Ananias hesitated when he was bidden to go to meet the terrible scourge of the church. He had heard a great deal about Saul and had learned to dread him. But the Lord assures Ananias that there will be no danger in his going to find Saul. "Behold, he is praying." This was evidence that Saul was not now a dangerous man. Not only was he praying—but he was praying for just the help Ananias could bear to him. Further, Ananias was assured that this very Saul, who had been such a terrible persecutor, was a chosen vessel for Christ, to bear His name before Gentiles and kings.

Peter and Cornelius

Acts 10:1-20

It was not easy for Peter to go to the house of Cornelius. All his life he had been trained to Jewish exclusiveness as part of his religion. It was hard for him to forget all this—and to regard the Gentiles as having as much right to receive the gospel as his own people. Yet Peter accepted the teaching when it was made plain to him, and went promptly on his errand. We should keep our minds free from prejudice and open to the truth, whatever way it may come to us.

Cornelius is an interesting man. The New Testament centurions are all worthy men. We call Cornelius a heathen—but some modern Christians might learn from this heathen's life and character. He worshiped God. His home was a home of prayer. He gave alms generously to the poor. That his religion was not of the formal kind is evident from the fact that his prayers reached heaven and found acceptance with God. The angel came to him to assure him that his prayers had been heard and that they were about to be answered. We may be quite sure that he had been praying for more knowledge of God and of heavenly things. Wherever there is a human soul longing for God and for light, the fact becomes known in heaven and the answer comes. To Cornelius the angel said, "Send men to Joppa, and fetch one Simon." Why did not the angel himself tell Cornelius what he needed to know? Angels do not preach the gospel. Only one who has been redeemed, can explain redemption to one who wants to understand it. The angel could only tell Cornelius how to have his longings satisfied. He must send to Joppa for a man.

While the messengers were nearing Joppa, Peter also was having a vision. Nothing less than this could prepare him for going on the errand to the Roman's house. His vision was calculated to show him that now, since Christ had come and died and risen—the distinction between Jew and Gentile was wiped out. When he saw the herd of animals of all kinds in the sheet let down from heaven and heard the command to kill and eat, his Jewish exclusiveness was so ingrained that he at first objected to the contact with what he had been taught was unclean. But most emphatically the objection was answered, "Do not you call anything impure, that God has made clean." The emphasis is on "God" and "you." Peter was not to set up his standard against God's. Of course, the lesson was not merely about foods. The mingled herd in the descending sheet was a picture of the world with its nations. The Jews thought none "clean" but themselves. But the blood of Christ had cleansed all nations, so far at least, that all were invited on the same terms into the family of

God. The lesson is yet before us, to be learned or better learned. While we treat the Chinese as we do, while we make distinctions on social lines, while we turn away with revulsion from anyone, even the basest, who wears the divine image, we have yet to learn what this vision means. The vision and the duty came very close together. The lesson was taught in the vision; now, instantly, came the divine call to put the lesson in practice. Peter had been shown that the old social walls and distinctions were to be broken down. Just what the lesson meant, he could not make out. He was sitting, then, on the roof of Simon's house, perplexed over the strange vision, wondering what it could mean. Was the gospel to be given to all nations alike? That seemed to be the teaching of the vision. But was it? Just then there was heard the tread of feet on the pavement below. "Simon, three men are looking for you," the Spirit whispered to Peter, "So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." In a little while Peter was on his way with Gentile messengers to the house of a Gentile.

There is an illustration here of the way God often first shows us our duty, and then calls us out to do it. He gives the vision, and the vision pictures the task. The vision carries in it a bit of God's will for you. You must work it out in the duty of the moment, or prove disobedient. For example, there comes to your knowledge in some way, a story of human need or sorrow of some kind. The vision is before you. It has in it a call to a new duty. Immediately a voice begins to bid you go and minister to the trouble or sorrow. The duty springs out of the vision. So it is continually in life. Visions are always coming; almost every Bible verse we read, brings up a conception of moral and spiritual beauty—which we are to try to attain; or hints at a task—which waits for our hands. God sends the calls to duty—and we dare not disregard them. When Peter reached the house, he was cordially welcomed. He asked why he had been sent for, and it was told him what had happened. "So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us." The attitude of Cornelius was beautiful. He believed that Peter was the messenger of God to him, and he was ready to hear, with reverence and love, whatever message this messenger might give. That Peter was ready now to speak his message, appeared from his words: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism." It had cost Peter a great deal to learn this lesson. Up to that time, he had thought that God showed favoritism, that He had a special regard for the Jews, and that the Gentiles had but small place in His favor. In the wonderful vision of Joppa, God had taught him the truth that now all nations were alike before Him. We should learn well this lesson for ourselves. God never asks to what country a man belongs. He looks upon the heart and judges men by their character. He hears the cry for mercy and help from any one of His children, never asking what country or to what rank they belong. No royalty, greatness, or beauty will count in God's sight—if the heart is wrong; and no poverty, lowliness, or humbleness is a blemish—if the heart is right.

Peter's conversion from the narrowness of Judaism, to the wideness of Christianity, was very remarkable. In his words to Cornelius, he makes it very clear that the gospel is for all men—and not merely a little handful of people in the world. He desires all to be saved, and the gates of the gospel are opened to men of every nation. "He accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right." The way of salvation is just as open for the lowest heathen—as for the king of the metropolis. Yet the way is not open to anyone—until he gives up his sins and turns his heart to seek God. The only condition of salvation, is the acceptance of the divine way.

Peter made plain to Cornelius the way of salvation by Jesus Christ; he told of "the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all." This was the gospel, which had come to the Jews, and the same gospel Peter was now bringing to the Gentiles. He recounts briefly, the story of the life of Jesus Christ. He then declares that "everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." Cornelius, good man though he was, prayerful, obedient, upright, needed Christ and must receive Him as his personal Savior. There is no place to bring our sins for pardon and cleansing—but to the cross of Christ! As on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit fell upon the Jewish disciples, so now upon these Gentile disciples the same Spirit fell. Thus the promise of Christ was fulfilled to the Gentiles, as well as to the Jews. At once those who believed were baptized, and thus the Church began among the Gentiles.

Gentiles Converted at Antioch

Acts 11:19-26

After the death of Stephen, the believers in Christ were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. And as they traveled—they preached. Some of the scattered Christians—men of Cyprus and Cyrene—when they reached Antioch, began to tell of Jesus to the Greeks. These men do not seem to have been ministers or men set apart as preachers. They were what we call laymen. But they were men full of the Holy Spirit and who could not repress within them the fire of love for Christ. We must not think that because we are not ministers or elders or Sunday-school teachers, therefore we have no commission to speak the Word of Christ. Every Christian ought to be a witness for the Lord Jesus wherever he goes. "He who hears, let him say, Come!" Every Christian man and woman, boy and girl, who knows of Christ, should go out and tell of Him, and keep telling of Him all the week.

We know that God blessed their labors, for it is said, "The hand of the Lord was with them." The hand is that with which one works. The hand of the Lord means the power of the Lord. Theses men did not go in their own name, with only their own strength. They had faith in Christ, and wherever they went—Christ went with them and wrought in them. When they spoke, His power was in their words. We must not think that this was simply a blessing for the apostolic days; it was as much for our own days as it was for the time in which this story belongs. Jesus commanded His disciples to go into all the world, to preach the gospel to every living creature, and He gave them the promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." The hand of the Lord did not work in those days, independently of His disciples. It was not an invisible hand that did the mighty acts. Christ wrought through His disciples. The instrument is human—but the power is divine. Paul tells us in one of his epistles that we are coworkers with God. When He bids us do anything, we are to go and do it, and then He works with us. A mother cannot change her child’s heart—but if she teaches it the words of Christ—there is an unseen Hand working with hers, in her words and in the influence of her life, which does the mysterious work upon the child’s heart. When a young person goes with a few flowers to a sick room, and speaks a few kind words, doing all in Christ’s name—Christ Himself goes, too, and His Spirit works through the beautiful flowers and through the kindly words—to comfort and bless and help the sick person. If only we have faith in Christ and do His will—His hand will always be with us to help us.

News of the activity of these volunteer workers, was taken to Jerusalem, and the church there sent Barnabas to inquire about them. "Who, when he was come, and had seen the grace of God, was glad." Barnabas was glad because he saw that God was working in that church. It should always make a Christian glad—to see people listening to the gospel and accepting its message. We should notice here, that the work which pleased Barnabas was not his own—but that which others had been doing. Sometimes people do not rejoice when they find the work of others blessed and prospering. It makes them envious. This is as bad spirit. Barnabas rejoiced when he saw that the blessing of God attended the work of other preachers, even of plain, common men. We should learn this lesson.

Boys and girls in school should be glad when other members of their class succeed, and should never be envious of them. Teachers should rejoice when they see the class of another teacher growing, interested and prosperous. Business and professional men should be pleased when they hear that associates are doing well. The success of others should never make us envious. It should only stimulate us to do better work ourselves if we possibly can.

Barnabas was glad to cooperate with the workers whom he had been sent to investigate. "When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts." This was good counsel. They had begun well, listening to the voice of the preachers, and accepting Jesus Christ. But beginning well was not enough. They must continue to follow Christ. They must cleave unto the Lord. The words are very suggestive. They must not let go their hold upon Christ. There would be many things, which would try their faith—but they must still cling to Christ.

Mere emotion is of small account in this world, where life is ofttimes so hard. It takes purpose, fixed purpose, to enable one to continue faithful. We have an example of purpose in Daniel—he purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king’s rich food and drink. He made the purpose—and he stuck to it. It is quite important that young Christians should have purpose, purpose of heart, and that they shall cleave to the Lord through all temptation, through all that might loosen their hold or tend to draw them away from Christ. The passage gives a word of commendation concerning Barnabas. It is not often that the Bible pays compliments. It tells the good things men do—but it says very little about the men in the way of praise or commendation. Here is an exception however. The Book says Barnabas was a good man. Goodness is better than greatness. When Walter Scott was dying, he said to a friend who stood by him, "Be a good man." Many men are great and not good. Their fame is widespread, and their names go everywhere—but they are not good. Goodness is Godlikeness. A good man is patient, gentle, kindly, humble. All the Beatitudes live in him and work out their beauty in him. He is full of gentle ministries—Jesus went about doing good. Whatever else we may be or may not be in this world, we should all try to be good. Thus we shall please God and bless the world.

Barnabas showed his goodness and faith by going after Saul. Together they remained in Antioch, helping the people. For a year they labored. This work was successful. Many believed.

"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." Acts 11:26. The lives of the converts were so different from their unbelieving neighbors, that they were called Christians. It is supposed that the name was given them in mockery or contempt by the heathen people of Antioch. The name was so continually upon their lips—that those who heard them began in jest, to call them "Christians."

But the name stuck, and is now used universally to describe those who follow Christ. It may not be the very best of names.

Perhaps disciple is better—disciples means learners, followers. We should all be disciples of Christ and should ever be learning of Him, growing in grace and likeness of Him as we follow Him.

Perhaps believers is a better name. It carries in itself the thought that we are saved by believing on Christ. It is faith which works the victories in this world.

Perhaps followers would be better. To follow Christ is to receive Him as Master and to cling to Him in obedience and devotion wherever we may go. But the word "Christian," given at Antioch as a sneer—is now used everywhere. It is full of meaning. Those who are Christians should be like Christ—"little Christs". They should represent Christ in the world. Those who see them—should see the image of Christ in them!

Matthew Henry says, "Hitherto the followers of Christ were called disciples, that is, learners, scholars; but from that time they were called Christians. The proper meaning of this name is, a follower of Christ; it denotes one who, from serious thought, embraces the religion of Christ, believes His promises, and makes it his chief care to shape his life by Christ's precepts and example. Hence it is plain that multitudes take the name of Christian—to whom it does not rightly belong! But the name without the reality will only add to our guilt. While the bare profession will bestow neither profit nor delight, the possession of it will give both the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

Peter Delivered From Prison

Acts 12:1-17

One day James and John asked Jesus that they might be given exalted positions in the Master's Kingdom. Mark 10:37. They knew not what they asked. It was only a few years later, that Herod killed James with the sword. So James got, sooner than he expected and in a way far different from his thought—to his place at the right hand of Jesus. Truly we do not know what we are asking for, when we pray for nearness to Christ, or for high places in His Kingdom. Yet James has never regretted the path by which he ascended. His work was soon done—but death was no calamity to him—as it only exalted him to his home in glory.

There were two doors to that prison. One opened out into the city—the way Peter was delivered; the other opened upward into heaven—the way James was taken. We pray for our friends in sickness, that God would restore them to health. Again, there are two ways in which the prayer may be answered. God may heal our friends with bodily healing, and restore them to us in this world; or He may take them up into heaven, into eternal health and blessedness. A man who had been an invalid all his years was near death. A friend asked him how he was, and his answer was, "I am almost well." When Herod saw that his action in taking the life of James pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. He was one of those rulers who was swayed by public feeling. Nor have we to go among the rulers to find the same spirit. There are plenty of people everywhere who have no settled principles of their own, who do not stop to ask what is right—but who do wait to know what their neighbors will say or think. Even young children very soon begin to be governed by the fashion of the day. We had better get the lesson here, that the true thing is

always, not what will please the world and win the approval of our fellow men—but what God would have us do. Men who follow public opinion are like ships, which are propelled by sails—going whichever way the wind blows. Those who are governed by principle are like the vessels which are propelled by and engine, which do not depend on the winds.

Peter, therefore, was kept very securely in prison. Herod treated him as a dangerous prisoner. He not only had him in prison, with doors and bolts and bars—but he had sixteen soldiers to guard him, four at a time. To two of these he was always fastened by chains on his wrists, one chain binding him to each soldier, so that he could not move without disturbing the soldier. Why were such extra precautions necessary to guard such a poor, defenseless man as Peter? Had Herod heard the story of a former imprisonment of this same man, when the doors were miraculously opened and the prisoner released? Did he mean to defy the power of Peter's God when he put double chains on him and kept four armed soldiers on guard about him all the time? So it appears. No doubt the wicked king thought his plan perfectly successful. Tomorrow the execution would take place. Men plot against God—but He who sits in heaven laughs!

While Peter was in prison, his friends were praying earnestly for him. To Herod's power and the strength of his prison walls and chains, and the vigilance of his soldiers, they opposed only the quiet power of earnest, importunate prayer. They made no appeal to public diplomacy, nor did they think of using any force to rescue their friend from prison they stormed the prison through the gate of prayer. The sequel proves and illustrates the power of prayer.

Men talk about the invariableness and unchangeableness of the laws of nature—as if God had no control of affairs in His own universe. We need not give ourselves any trouble about how He can answer our prayers—we must leave that to Him; but we may as well settle it in our minds once for all—that the God to whom we talk in prayer can do whatever pleases Him. He can always find some way to help us or bring deliverance when we are in trouble.

We must not conclude, however, that He will always save us from danger, as He saved Peter. No doubt the disciples prayed for James, too, when Herod seized him—and yet he was beheaded. The prayers were answered in a different way; he was supported in the trial of martyrdom, and his release was not through the iron gate into the streets of Jerusalem—but through the gate of pearl into the streets of heaven! If Peter had been executed, who could have said that the prayers of his friends were not answered? God knows how best to answer our requests, and all true prayer submits even its most earnest petitions to the divine will. The Bible story tells us most realistically, "the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains." There is something very beautiful in this picture. The time is just at hand for Peter's execution. Tomorrow he is to be brought out to die before the people. How is he spending his last night? We are permitted to look in upon him in his prison. There he lies on his cell floor. Two chains bind him, wrist to wrist, to two guards. But there is no evidence of distress in his cell. Peter is sleeping in quiet confidence and peace. If we could look into Herod's palace, it is not likely that he, on his soft bed, with his luxury and liberty, slept that night half so sweetly as did Peter in his prison. This peace is possible to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ. "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you." In a great flood on the Ohio River, some men in a skiff saw in the center of the broad river, amid the wreckage of houses and fences and forests and fields—a baby's cradle floating. Rowing to it, they found the baby sleeping there as sweetly as if it had been lying in its

mother’s bosom. So in the wildest storms the believer may rest in the love and power of Christ. As Peter prayed, "an angel of the Lord stood by him." Tarry a moment to think of the ministry of the angels. It is a wonderful thought that these good spirits from heaven are continually bringing help to God’s people on the earth; that they serve the saints in countless ways. They can go anywhere, through closed doors and prison walls. They move noiseless and unseen. They can fill even a cell with light. They can knock off fetters and open doors and lead us out of the worst perils. They are our friends, if we are Christ’s friends. No doubt they help us continually, although we are not always aware of it. The most real things in this world are the unseen things. I believe in the actual presence and help of angels. They wait on us, and guard our home and guide our steps.

"Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. ’Quick, get up!’ he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists." Wherever Christ’s messengers go there is light. They carry the light in their faces. They are God’s shining ones. Keble fancies that the apostle was dreaming in his last sleep, as he supposed, of the release coming to him on the morrow, and thought the angel’s arousing that of the executioner come to call him out to die.

Notice here by way of illustration, that many people are bound with chains—bound to other man, too, ofttimes, and led by them wherever they will. But to such Christ’s messenger comes, as the angel came to Peter, bidding them arise. And if they obey, the chains will fall off. In eight words we are told the sequel. The angel said to Peter, "Follow me. And he went out, and followed." That is all we have to do in this world—simply to follow Christ, or the guide He may send to lead us. We have nothing to do with opening the way; our part is only to follow implicitly and unquestioningly, and He will always open the door for us. This lesson is worth heeding.

Here is a Christian man in sore perplexity. He cannot free himself. He can see no way out of the entangling circumstances. He is just like Peter that night in his prison, doors bolted, chains on his hands, stern guards encircling him. Is there any way out of such environment? Yes, Christ can lead him out. All that is needed is complete surrender to Him, and simple, unquestioning, absolute obedience and childlike following where He leads. Chains fall off when He bids us rise and obey. Prison doors open when we follow Him. Our only duty is obedient following; He does all the rest.

Peter did not understand at first who the friend was that was taking him out. They he said, "Now I know of a truth, that the Lord has sent forth his angel and delivered me." It is not until they are gone, that we recognize the angels. While they are with us we do not know them. This is true of many of the blessings God sends us. We do not prize the worth of our best human friends, until they have left us. Our very familiarity with them, hides from our eyes the excellencies of their character and the value of their helpfulness. They grow up alongside of us and grow into our lives so gradually and unconsciously that we do not know how much they are to us, how we lean upon them, how many doors they open for us, how their love brightens our paths. Suddenly they vanish, and then we see that they are God’s angels. Their plain garb at once appears radiant with glory as they withdraw. A vacant chair is ofttimes the first true revealer of the worth of one whose presence and love have blessed us for years!

Peter came to the house of Mary the mother of Mark. In answer to his knock, "a maid came to answer, named Rhoda." We ought to get a lesson or two for our young girls from this little maidservant. Her work was lowly—only attending the door—but she had her reward that night.

She was the first to know of Peter’s release. She seems to be the only one who had faith enough to recognize that it was Peter. Her great gladness shows us that she loved Peter, and no doubt had been praying for his deliverance. There is one thing that every girl should learn of Rhoda—not to let her joy run away with her wits. A sensible girl would have opened the door as soon as she recognized Peter’s voice; but she was so happy that she ran off to tell the good news, and left the apostle standing outside shivering in the cold. We should never in our happiness forget the practical duties of the moment. This maid, Rhoda, waited not to greet Peter—but ran in and told that Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, "You are out of your mind." They had been praying for Peter’s release or deliverance from the power of Herod. Now the answer to their prayer stood before the gate, knocking for admission, and they could not be convinced that it was their friend. That is often the way it is with all of us. When the answer comes to our prayers—the very things for which we have been praying—we are surprised, and cannot believe that they have really come. No doubt we ofttimes keep the answers to our prayers standing outside our doors and knocking. The First Christian Missionaries

Acts 13:1-13

We are told that "there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers." There were many of these more than were needed for the work at home. That was the reason some of them were sent out to work elsewhere. There are a great many churches nowadays that contain more Christian men and women, capable of effective service, than can possibly find work in their own parish. There are churches many of whose members are well educated, able to teach in Sunday school, to speak in public, and conduct religious services. Ofttimes only a little handful of these are actually engaged in any kind of Christian work. But this ought not to be so. Every Christian should become useful at once and continue to be useful in some way. Every church should be a missionary church. In cities, especially, there are needy places enough to occupy in them all who have the love of Christ in their hearts. Those who are not needed in the work of the Church in its own parish should find places outside where they can help build up the Kingdom of Christ and save souls. The time is coming, too, when single churches will send out their own missionaries to foreign countries to carry the gospel there.

There seems little doubt that this church was considering very earnestly at this time—its duty to the outside world, and was engaged in a special service, imploring guidance. When God wants a great work done—He usually puts the thought of it in the hearts of some of His children, and then they begin to pray about it. As they think and pray, the burden grows heavier continually, and at last God sends the answer. This passage gathers intense interest from the fact that here we see the very birth of the foreign missionary work of the Church. The apostles and other Christians were very earnest in preaching the gospel—but only to the Jews. The disciples were driven out of Jerusalem and scattered, and went everywhere preaching—but to the Jews only. The church at Antioch was the first Gentile church established, and it is a very interesting fact that in this Gentile church the first effort to carry the gospel to other Gentiles originated.

God is always ready to guide those who seek His guidance. To these watching, planning, praying people of Antioch He said, by His Holy Spirit, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." The Lord has a plan of work for His church. Foreign missions was no accident. It was not merely the result of enthusiasm of an earnest church. It was part of God’s

plan. The part which these two men took in it was no chance part. That, too, was in God's plan. He had chosen and prepared them for that very duty.

Everyone's work is definitely marked out for him in the great purpose of God. Men are not born and trained just to pick up anything that may fall to their hands as they go through life. There is a particular something, which everyone was born and trained to do. What it is, we may not know until God puts the work in our hand—but He knows from the first. A successful life is one, which does just the work for which it was created—whereunto God calls it. How can we now what our part is in God's plan? Only by submitting ourselves to the divine will at every point, and faithfully doing what He gives day by day. If we do this—He will lead us into the work for which He created and redeemed us. The way these men proved their fitness for the new and greater work was by doing well the duties that were given to them in the lowlier place. That is the way God always promotes His servants. Those who prove themselves faithful and efficient in humble tasks—will get larger service in due time when ready for it.

Another point here is, that Christ wants the best workers for the foreign field. Many think that any poor stick is good enough for preaching to the heathen—but God chose the best men for His most difficult work. The best men are needed for the same work. The Christians at Antioch did as God directed. They sent away Barnabas and Saul. The Church must have loved these men who had been their pastor so long; yet when the Spirit asked for them for this new work, the people did not resist the call. They did not say, "There are heathen here in Antioch; let us get them all saved first." That is the way people talk in these days. They "don't believe in foreign missions," and they are continually prating about their zeal for home missions, and pointing to the unconverted in our own towns and cities. Surely, if there ever was a time when this plea should have been urged, it was when this first missionary was talked of. Both fields are important—but the heathen countries must not be compelled to wait until there are no sinners remaining at home. There should be no rivalry between the two great interests. The one receives the best attention when the other is not neglected. A church that does nothing for foreign missionary work—very soon comes to doing nothing for home or any other kind of work.

Barnabas and Saul made no objection, and they did not delay. "So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit," departed. It is a good thing to be sent forth continually to our work by the Holy Spirit. Why may we not be? Whatever there may have been unusual and special in these early days of the Church, there is no doubt that the Holy Spirit works today just as really and effectively as He did then. No one need go anywhere, into any field, without being sent forth by the Holy Spirit. "No pastor should accept any call to a church until he believes that he is sent there by God."

Then, there is a personal sending which is also very real. The Spirit sends us each time we go forth to any work, to any duty. The guidance or the sending becomes minute, a matter of detail. A dozen times a day we may be sent forth by the Holy Spirit to some service of love, or the service may be sent to us, to our very door, to be done by us. If we learn to look continually for divine direction, and then always promptly follow and obey it, we shall never go without a blessing. The Spirit never merely sends—He goes with us and works through us.

"They had also John as their attendant." This was John Mark. He was not a preacher, or even a teacher. He was only an attendant. He went along with the missionaries to help them in any way he could. He was probably a servant to wait on them personally. This suggests to us that there are

many ways of helping in the Lord’s work besides being preachers. Mark did not preach anywhere, so far as we know—and yet he was very helpful. Boys and young men get a special suggestion from this young man. If they cannot be teachers or preachers, they can be attendants, and can find a great deal to do in the Lord’s work. Samuel "ministered" unto the Lord about the temple when he was only a little child. Of course, he could not do the priests’ work yet, as he was too young—but there were many things he could do—attend the doors, look after the lamps, and run errands for the old priest. So there are many things the youngest Christian can do for Christ. To be even only an "attendant" in the work for Christ is a high honor and privilege. One evening, at an open-air service, I saw a young man holding a lantern that another one, who was reading the Bible, could see the book. He could not speak in public himself—but he could help the minister by holding the light for him. There are many such ways of helping others to do Christ’s work.

After a time the missionaries had an adventure. "Elymas the sorcerer opposed them, seeking to turn aside the proconsul from the faith." It is a grievous sin to try to turn any believer from the faith; yet there are at all times those who try to do this. They try to put a doubt on the religion of Christ. They seek to make people believe there is no reality in the things which they believe, or they offer inducements to Christians to go elsewhere. At the present time the air is full of skepticism and doubts of all sorts. People who are unbelievers themselves try to keep their friends from coming with us. The Devil is at this same sort of work yet. First he comes with pretended wisdom and offers to guide seeking souls himself—but leads them farther and farther away from the truth. Then, when the voice of true wisdom comes and offers to show them the right way, he interferes and tries to hinder them from listening to or believing what is said. If the devil can only keep human souls from Christ, or can turn them away from the faith after they have heard Him—the Devil is satisfied.

"You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun." Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand."

It was the Lord, and not Paul, who had inflicted this judgment, for we are told that Paul was specially "filled with the Holy Spirit" when he said this. The punishment itself was to Elymas an outward emblem of his actual spiritual condition. He was only a blind man professing to be a guide to others. So his natural eyes were darkened that he might be made to realize his inner blindness. There was also in his punishment a disclosure of the kind of doom those bring on themselves who shut their eyes to the holy light of truth. He is here warned that the result of such perverse refusal to see, if persisted in, will be total inability to see at all.

William Taylor mentions in illustration the account given in Roman history of one who had been proscribed, and who, to save his life, disguised himself by wearing a patch over one eye. A good while after, when there was no longer any danger, he removed the patch—but in vain, for the sight was gone. So, if men stubbornly shut their hearts against the truth, the light that is in them, will become darkness. It is a terrible thing to resist the truth of God; it is still worse to try to lead other souls in false paths.

Paul’s word was fulfilled. Immediately the sorcerer was stricken with blindness. Seeing this, the proconsul believed. So after all, good came out of the apparition of the sorcerer. It was the manifestation of the divine power through the missionaries, in the punishment of Elymas, that led Paulus to believe. This power would not have been manifested had not the sorcerer resisted Paul and Barnabas. Thus God overruled the evil effort of this "son of the devil." He sought to keep the proconsul from believing; but became the means of compelling him to believe. Thus God is always overruling the evil of the world, and makes even the wrath of Satan glorify Him. It is better sometimes to have opposition when we try to be good. Serguis Paulus probably would not have believed at all—had it not been for the sorcerer’s rage and punishment. The Council at Jerusalem Acts 15:1-5, Acts 15:22-29

It is easy to start quarrels. There are some people who make trouble wherever they go. They seem always to be watching for something to find fault with. Instead of being peacemakers, seeking ever to allay strife and bring together those who are in danger of falling apart—they go about sowing seeds of dissension and starting quarrels.

We have an illustration of this in the story of this Antioch church. Everything was prosperous and happy. But one day some strangers appeared and worked their way in among the Christians. They had come from Jerusalem. They were Christians—but not the right kind of Christians. They had not learned the large lesson of Christian love—that the gospel is for the whole world. At once they began to make trouble in the peaceful Antioch church. They told the Gentiles that they could not be saved unless they first became Jews. We should beware of the danger of trying to force others into our own way of receiving the grace of Christ. This was a time of crisis in the history of Christianity. It would have been easy to split the church. But wise counsels prevailed. The Holy Spirit ruled in the hearts of believers and led them to make a peaceful course. A council was called and the matter was calmly considered. This was a most important council. If the Jewish idea was to prevail, the progress of the church would be very slow. If, however, the other view should prevail, and the doors be thrown open to all, so that whoever would might enter and enjoy its privileges, then the largest prosperity would be assured.

It is wise when Christian people have differences to get together and talk them over. If this is done in good temper and a kindly spirit, it is generally possible to reach a peaceful conclusion. That is what these Christians did. As they did so, new light broke upon the question they were considering. Paul and Barnabas told what God had done at Antioch. Peter related his experiences. James, who was presiding, made some conciliatory remarks and gave his advice. The result was that the danger was averted, all agreeing on a course, which showed wisdom and love. The decision was that a commission should be sent to Antioch with a kindly letter. There were four things it was decided they should require of the Gentile Christians. Even some of these requirements were only concessions to Jewish sentiment, and not essential to the spiritual life. We should have patience with other people’s opinions when they differ from ours. Some of us are apt to be too severe with what we think mere prejudices. When people have been brought up from infancy under certain influences and teachings, their beliefs have become part of themselves, and it is not easy for them to give them up at once. We must beware that our liberty does not become intolerant and despotic. The treatment of the whole matter in this council shows us the beauty of mutual concession in all nonessentials. The truth must never be given up—but the truth must be held in love. We must be patient even toward prejudices, and with what we may call bigotry.

Some points in this letter we should study. A rebuke was given to those who tried to compel the Gentile Christians to do things not required by our Lord’s teaching. "We have heard that certain who went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls." We should guard against meddling with the spiritual life of others. If we should judge others less—and try to encourage, cheer and build up all our fellow Christians in faith and love—we would do better service. The letter assured these Gentile Christians also that those in conference had all come "to one accord." That was something wonderful, when we think of the difference of opinion among the members of this council when they first met. The Holy Spirit was evidently in their midst, moving their minds and hearts, and they had love, the one to the other, which inclined them to respect each the other’s opinion. The lesson is one that should be well learned and diligently practiced on all occasions where Christian people meet together. Godly men who think at all—differ in opinion on most subjects. No true fellowship can be got anywhere, except by mutual concession. It is not right either that all the conceding should be done on one side—both sides should vie in their spirit of tolerance. Even in the truest home, the only basis of perfect accord is mutual yielding in love. Where one stands up, in stubborn self-will, for his personal rights, and demands that all the others shall submit to him—loving fellowship is impossible. There may be the peace of despotism—but not the peace of love.

Paul and Barnabas had just come back from the mission field, and they bore the marks of suffering. Elsewhere, Paul, referring to this journey, speaks of bearing in his body "the marks of Jesus." He was thinking of the stonings and scourgings, and the hardships and sufferings endured as a missionary. There are things from which Christians should keep themselves—things which may not be sinful in themselves—but which would lower the tone of spiritual life and hurt the soul. One essential point of pure religion, is to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. There are things we dare not touch—if we would preserve our souls in purity. There are companionships we must not let into our life, even for an hour, if we would get the beatitude of purity, which our Lord promises. There are things which seem pleasant—but which end in death.

"Look, father," cried a child, "at the beautiful berries I have found." The color fled from the father’s face as he asked, with much alarm, "Have you eaten any of them, my child?" "No, father; not one." And as she gave the berries into her father’s hand to be destroyed, tears were in her eye as she asked, "Why, father, what are they?" The father answered, "They are poison berries!" The child did not know that death was hidden in the berries. Just so, the world’s pleasures look very attractive to the eyes of some—but ofttimes deadly poison lies under their fascinating beauty.

Paul Before King Agrippa

Acts 26:1-30

Saul the Pharisee, who consented to the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1), immediately gave himself to persecuting the Christians. Unless all he had been taught was false, every believer in Christ was a transgressor of the law, and to the support of the law—Paul had devoted his life. Only when his eyes were opened by Christ, did he see his mistake. This should be remembered when we are tempted to be uncharitable in our interpretation of motives which we condemn. Many of those with whose conduct Christian men and women disagree, are not willfully wrongdoers—some of them are merely misguided. This does not excuse them—but it is a claim on our charity.

Years after Paul had learned his error, he told Agrippa the story of his conversion. He described the vision and told of the words of Christ. It was a vision of Christ that Paul saw. He knew now that Jesus was the Messiah, and turned at once to follow Him. Heavenly visions come to people, inviting them away from evil and from worldliness, to pure, good, true and divine things. The Christian mother's teachings, as she holds her little one on her knee and talks to it of Jesus—places before the young eyes a vision of the Savior in His beauty and grace and love. Every sermon in which Christ is lifted up—sets the vision before the young listener. How often do the tears of childhood and youth flow as the Savior is seen in mental vision on the cross? The Holy Spirit also brings the vision in all its vividness before the eyes—the lovely, suffering, dying, glorified Jesus.

Doddridge, in his life of Colonel Gardiner, describes the conversion of the wicked soldier. He was waiting near midnight, the hour fixed for a sinful meeting with another, and was carelessly turning over the pages of a religious book, when suddenly he saw before him, vivid and clear, the form of the Redeemer on His cross, and heard Him Speak, "All this I have done for you; and is this your return?" Like Paul, he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision—but from that moment followed Christ. That is what every one of us should do; when we see Christ and hear His voice, we should straightway leave all and go after Him. Not only at the beginning—but all the way through life, God sends us visions to guide us. Every time we see in a verse of the Scripture a glimpse of something beautiful commended, it is a heavenly vision given to us to lead us to the beauty it shows. Every fragment of loveliness we see in a human life—is a heavenly vision sent to woo us upward. Wherever we see beauty which attracts us and kindles in us desires and aspirations for higher attainments, it is a vision from God, whose mission is to call us to a higher life. We should not prove disobedient to any heavenly vision—but should follow every one—as sent from heaven to woo us nearer God.

It is thus every true artist works. He dreams dreams and sees visions, and then seeks to put on canvas or in marble, his dreams and visions. Every great and noble thing anyone does, is first a vision in his soul, to which he surrenders himself. All of Paul's life, was but a struggle toward the realization of the vision that he saw at Damascus. "One thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." He saw ever before him, the vision of the perfect character of Christ, and put forth every energy of his life to realize it in himself. So should we all do.

Soon after Paul saw his vision, he began the work of preaching Christ, whose followers he had persecuted. He went to the people of Damascus and Jerusalem and Judea, Jews and Gentiles alike, and "declared … that they should repent and turn to God." Repenting is not merely giving up one's sins; it is also turning to God. The sinner needs to turn to God for mercy and for refuge from the divine wrath against sin. He must also return to God as a prodigal returns to his father and his home. He must turn to God in life, in obedience, in heart, in love, in spirit. A Christian is one who has truly left his sins and is now walking with God, doing God's will and growing into Christ's likeness. Therefore, repentance is not a mere passing emotion of regret. It is not mere sorrow that the sin has been found out. It is really an abandonment of the old life—and the reception of Christ as the Master of the new life, and the turning of heart and soul after Him. But Paul preached that people must also "prove their repentance by their deeds." We have a right to ask every professing

Christian to prove that he is a Christian. His mere statement is not sufficient. He must give the evidence in his life; and the evidence that will prove it beyond doubt, will be faithfulness in every day's duties, consistency in every day's conduct, and the moral beauty in all the developments of the character. True religion is very practical. Christian life is nothing at all—if it is only a fine sentiment. It must touch and affect every part of our being. It must work into all the relations, experiences and duties of our common days.

"I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike." Acts 26:22. When Paul stood before Agrippa, it was twenty-five years after his conversion. They had been years of toilsome life, amid enemies and dangers; but the heroic old apostle had never given up, never faltered, never turned aside. It was a great record—but he takes no praise to himself. The help came from God—for all these years of faithful witnessing.

Many Christians fear that they will not be able to stand faithful and true to the end. Here is an encouraging word for all such: They shall obtain help from God for every duty, for every hour of danger, for every struggle. They need only to be faithful day by day, doing the day's duty quietly, and trusting God. This help will come from Him, silently, secretly, just as it is needed, always sufficient grace, so that they shall be able to stand faithful year after year. God never puts a burden on us—without giving us the strength we need to carry it. The way to obtain help of God—is to go faithfully and promptly forward in the way of duty, asking for the help, and sure of getting it. It will not come if we wait to get it before we set out to do His will. "I am sure of this, that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Php 1:6

"I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles." Acts 26:23. Paul explained to Agrippa that he had not abandoned his old religion for a new one. Christianity is the ripe fruit of which Judaism was the bud and blossom. Moses and the prophets preached the same gospel that Paul did. The Bible is one book. The same streams of promise and hope flow through all its parts, only that in the Old Testament they flow underground, and in the New they burst out in the sight of all men! Abraham was saved just as we are, only he saw Christ merely by faith, and dimly, a Savior promised; and we see Him clearly, a Savior who has come and finished His work.

"At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense: You are out of your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane!" Acts 26:24. That is the way earnestness in religion is rewarded by the world. Even Christ own family thought He was crazy—"When his family heard what was happening, they tried to take him home with them. 'He's out of His mind!' they said." Mark 3:21

Festus said that Paul was insane. But who was the madman that day—Paul, who believed on Christ and was living for eternal realities; or Festus, who sat there and sneered? Who is the madman now—the devout and the fervent Christian, or the worldly scoffer and reviler? There is no insanity like that which disbelieves in the realities of eternity and rejects the glorious gospel of Christ. Men really only come to their right minds—when they awake to their true condition as lost sinners—and return to God their Father.

Agrippa seems to have been affected differently. He said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to be a Christian." Acts 26:28. Perhaps we cannot be absolutely sure whether these words were a sneer or whether they were meant to hide conviction. No matter; it was Agrippa's one great opportunity for salvation—and he threw it away! Such opportunity comes to all. Every lost one was at one time on the very edge of salvation. Fear drives some almost to the point of fleeing to Christ. Or, the love of Christ almost wins them. Or, the truth faithfully presented and pressed into their hearts, leads them almost to decision. They reach the door—but do not enter. There is a story of a prodigal who turned homeward and traversed weary miles, until he had his hand on the knocker of his father's door, and then withdrew it, and turned away again, plunging into deeper sin and shame. To be "almost a Christian" is not a safe condition. A woman was lost in the mountains. All night she wandered, seeking the way home. At length she sank down and died as the dawn was breaking. In the morning they found her but a few steps from the door of the hotel, which she had been struggling to reach. Close about heaven's gates, millions of souls perish—almost saved, yet lost! God wants us to be altogether Christians. Almost will not avail. How terrible the thought, forever, to the lost sinner, that he was once almost saved—and yet lost for all eternity!

Paul's answer to Agrippa came from the heart. "I would to God … all who hear me … might become such as I am, except for these chains." It is not enough that we are saved ourselves; we must be propagators of the gospel; we must try to save our lost fellows. Paul knew he had something which Agrippa and the others had not.

Sometimes Christians forget that they are children of God and heirs of God, that they have eternal life, that heaven is theirs. They go about hanging their heads in the presence of those who are not Christians, almost as if apologizing for being Christians. But even in the presence of a king, the governor, and the other people of rank—Paul was conscious that he was far richer than they were, had a higher rank. He had something they had not, and to possess which, would greatly add to their happiness and honor. If all Christians had this realization of their dignity, honor and noble rank—it would greatly add to their power in impressing Christianity upon the world and in urging others to come with them into the same blessed life.

Perhaps Agrippa's answer to Paul's earnest words showed how he was impressed, "This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar." So it looked as if Paul had made a mistake in appealing to Caesar. This made it necessary that he should be sent to Rome. It would have seemed better, that he should at once be released from prison that he might go out to preach. But there was another Hand, not a human hand, that was at work unseen those days amid the complicated movements of things. God's plan was being wrought out in spite of, even in and through, men's enmities and persecutions. God had a mission for Paul in Rome. He was needed to carry the gospel there. Had he been released at this time he would probably have been seized again by the Jews and might have fallen a victim to their rage and hatred, thus ending his work. His appeal made it necessary that the Roman Government should take him to Rome. Thus he was sure of protection and was carried to the world's capital without expense, that he might there preach the gospel! Thus Rome itself became a helper in extending Christ's Kingdom. We shall see, as we read on, what good and blessing came out of this, which seemed that day an unfortunate thing, a hindrance. God's plan for our lives are always good, and we need only submit to them.

Paul’s Voyage and Shipwreck

Acts 27

Paul had been eager to go to Rome. His eagerness was not that of a tourist or explorer—but that of one constrained by the love of Christ, desiring to carry the gospel to the world’s great capital. At last his longing is being realized. He is going to Rome—but in a strange way. He is going as a prisoner. The remarkable providence in this, is that he is carried on his great missionary errand—at the cost of Rome itself!

Paul was the only man on the ship whose hope and courage did not fail in the storm, which overtook them. In the midst of the tempest an angel stood by him and assured him that he must be brought before Caesar, which meant that he could not perish in the sea. He was assured also that for his sake—all the people on board should escape, though the ship should be lost. At first sight, it seems a contradiction. Paul, noting the attempts of sailors to escape in one of the ship’s boats, said, "Except these abide in the ship, you cannot be saved." Yet Paul had said before that there should be no loss of life on the ship. He had received this assurance, too, from an angel of God. If it was the divine purpose that no life should perish in this storm—why did Paul say here, that unless the seamen stood at their posts, the passengers could not be saved? The divine assurance of safety—did not do away with the use of all proper means for securing deliverance. Indeed, it implied that these means should be used. We say that every man’s life is a plan of God—that God’s plan extends to the most minute things in our condition and circumstances. The purpose of God here, was that Paul, and all with him on the ship, should reach the shore in safety; but the fulfillment of His purpose depended upon the faithfulness of those who had the care of the ship.

Paul’s appeal had its effect. "The soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall away." The sailors had let the lifeboat down, intending to escape in it. The soldiers foiled their plan by cutting the ropes and letting the lifeboat drift off. Thus the sailors were kept on the ship and compelled to do their duty.

There is a story of a little girl with a warm heart for animals, who prayed that the rabbits might not be caught in her brother’s traps. After praying very earnestly, she whispered to her mother that she knew they could not be caught. When her mother asked her why she was so sure, she said she had destroyed the traps. We must work—as well as pray.

Paul’s common sense appeared again a little later. "Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat." For fourteen days they had been fasting, eating but little, losing rest and sleep, and without regular food. It was very necessary that they should take food to be ready for what lay before them. We must always care for our bodily health. No matter what our danger may be—we need food. When Elijah was fleeing from Jezebel’s threat, despairing because of the seeming failure of his work, an angel found him lying under a juniper tree wishing he were dead. Instead of giving him good advice, or even reminding of the divine promises—the angel brought him something to eat. Then, after he had eaten, he slept. Food and sleep were what Elijah needed. There are times when what people need is not a gospel tract, nor good advice, nor even words from the Bible, or a prayer—but comforts for their bodies, something to eat, clothes to keep them warm!

There are beautiful things in Paul’s bearing during this storm. One is his calmness in the hour of danger. It was not merely his physical courage and self-control, that gave him this serene

composure; it was his confidence in God. He knew that the Lord ruled on the sea and in the storm, and that he was safe in God's strong hands. Like Moses, he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible. Every Christian may have this same peace in time of danger or trial.

Another fine thing in Paul here, is his thoughtfulness for others. He forgets himself and tries to cheer his fellows in their fear. There is no truer test of the spirit of Christ—than sincere interest in others.

Another thing in Paul's conduct is his noble confession of Christ. He was not ashamed of his religion.

Paul set the example of eating. Then the rest followed. By being brave, cheerful and composed in time of danger—Paul lifted up the whole ship's company into the same confident mood. By his cheerful manner and loving interest in the others he inspired them all with confidence. There are few things the world needs more than just such influence. The next step was to lighten the ship; the wheat was thrown out into the sea. There come experiences in life when material things must be sacrificed for the sake of higher interest. In this case, the cargo was thrown overboard in order that the ship might be beached and the men's lives saved. We cannot reach the haven of eternal rest, laden down with the things of this world. When a vessel was burning near the shore, and all were leaping into the water to swim to safety, there was one who tied his gold about his body, thinking to carry it to shore; but the moment he leaped into the water, he sank to the bottom like a stone. If he had been willing to give up his gold—his life might have been saved.

We have an illustration of this truth in the history of the flight of Cortez, on that fearful night when the Aztecs compelled the invaders to escape for their lives. The vast masses of gold that had been accumulated, were more than could be carried off, as each soldier would have to fight his way through the host of the enemy. Each man was allowed to take what he would—but their commander warned them of overloading. Said he, "He travels safest in the dark night—who travels lightest." The more cautious men heeded the advice—but others were less self-restrained. Some bound heavy chains of gold about their necks and shoulders, and some filled their pockets with the bulky gold ingots until they literally staggered under their burdens. All who tried to carry off the gold, became an easy prey to the lances of the enemy. On that fearful night, poverty itself was the greatest wealth.

Even the anchor chains were cut, and the anchors were left in the sea. Anchors are very important—but there is a time when even they must be cast off. There are other anchors which hold many people from salvation or a full consecration to Christ. Sometimes a secret sin is the chain, sometimes a human companionship or friendship, sometimes love for the world's riches or pleasures. Whatever, it is that keeps a sinner from salvation, or a Christian from greater nearness to Christ, should be cut off. Christ made this very strong when He said that if our hand or our foot cause to sin, we should cut it off; that we would better escape into life, halt or maimed—than keep both hands and feet and perish. We should be very honest with ourselves in this matter. We should see whether there is anything holding us back from the shore of safety, keeping us out of the Church, or hindering us from getting near to Christ. If we find that there is any such thing, no matter how dear it is to us—we should resolutely cut it off and cast it away.

Paul’s common-sense action had commended him to the centurion in charge of the prisoners, for when the soldiers proposed to kill the prisoners, "the centurion, desiring to save Paul, stopped them from their purpose." The soldiers forgot all that Paul had done for them during the storm and, to avoid further responsibility for themselves, proposed killing all the prisoners.

After a battle, a wounded enemy within the lines piteously cried for water. An officer ran to him and gave him drink. Refreshed and revived by the water, the wounded man, seeing that his benefactor was of the opposite army, drew his pistol and shot him. Something like this was the spirit of those soldiers. The centurion, however, shows us the reverse spirit—gratitude. He remembered how much they all owed to one particular prisoner, and checked the evil purpose of his men, not only saving Paul himself—but for his sake all the prisoners. The first chapter in the dramatic story is simply told. The advice was given by the centurion that "He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land in safety." We have here a beautiful parable. The voyage itself is a parable of the Christian’s life-voyage. The island represents heaven. Everything has to be given up to reach it. But it will be noticed that not one person was lost—all reached the land. However, all did not get to the shore in the same way. Some swam out, gaining the land easily, while others had to cling to pieces of board, thus barely escaping. So not all Christians reach heaven in the same way. Some enter triumphantly, victoriously, with song and shout; some are barely saved, gaining the shores of glory only on the shattered fragments of their earthly hopes. Happy will we be if we get into heaven at last in any way, through any difficulty or earthly loss. But it is possible for all to have the "abundant entrance," and we should strive so to live that we may secure it.

Justification by Faith

Romans 5:1-11

Justification by faith is the starting point in the Christian life. There can be no tree without a root; no stream without a fountain. The careless, unsaved ones may read about the blessings of redemption, as we have them here in our lesson, and may say, "Yes, they are very beautiful and good." But they never can possess these gifts and blessings, until they have been "justified." And they never can be justified, until they receive the Lord Jesus Christ by faith. Nothing but His blood can put away sin. Nothing but His Spirit can change and renew the life. When we have been "justified" our sins are put forever away. There is, therefore, now no condemnation. We stand before God—as if we had never sinned.

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 5:1. We must stop at these first words and study them carefully. They are the gate at which we must enter the Father’s house, whose blessedness is described in the verses following. After justification comes peace. Peace is a favorite word with Paul. He does not mean peace in an earthly sense, for he did not have such peace. His life was full of suffering, care, toil, persecution and trial. Yet his epistles are starred all over with the bright word peace. There are several different kinds of peace mentioned by Paul. Here, he speaks of "peace with God." This means the consciousness of reconciliation with God. We have an illustration of it, in the prodigal son after his return to his father, when he had been forgiven and restored to his place.

Sin separates us from God. While the feeling of guilt is in the heart, there is no peace. We cannot look into God’s face. But when we have repented of our sins and have confessed them and received God’s forgiveness, there is peace WITH God.

Paul speaks also elsewhere of the "peace OF God." Writing from a prison, he exhorted his friends to be anxious for nothing—but to make all their cares known to God; and then he said the peace of God would keep their hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. This is a step further than peace with God. It is a peace which holds the heart quiet and still—in the midst of whatever things are hard and trying in this world. It comes from nestling in God’s love, and leaving all tangled things in His hands. Christ promised the same peace when He said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you." Evidently peace is a Christian duty—as well as a privilege. It is named as one of the fruits of the Spirit, in the same cluster with love, joy, gentleness, goodness and meekness. The peace mentioned here in our lesson, is the beginning of all true peace. The peace of God cannot be ours until—we have peace with God. The peace of God comes through Jesus Christ, "through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace." Always and everywhere, Christ is the door. We enter every place of blessing through Him. The way to peace with God, is through our Lord Jesus; and here "access" into the grace of salvation is also "through" Him. To reject Christ—is to reject everything of blessing and good. To receive Christ—is to be admitted to all the privileges and benefits of redemption. This "access" is into all "grace." Grace is undeservedfavor. What we earn by our own work, is not grace—it is wages. What comes to us as mercy, through the love of God—is grace.

"Access"—to what? To all the blessings that belong to God’s children. "All things are yours!" says Paul, in another letter. "All things are yours; … and you are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s." There is the privilege of prayer—we have access to that. There is the Bible—that is ours. There is the Church—that is for us. There is the storehouse of grace—grace for life, comfort for sorrow, all divine fullness—we have access into that. There is heaven at the last—the door is open for us to enter in—and go no more out forever!

Because the door is open to us, "we rejoice in hope of the glory of God." It may seem ofttimes that the present gains of faith in Christ are not very great. It may even appear as if the worldly man had the better of it here. But this world is not the end. There is a future in which there shall be compensation for earth’s ills and losses to all who are in Christ. We are some day to be like Christ and to be with Him in glory! This ought to cheer us in our earthly life. Those who have this blessed hope ought not to be affected by the hardness and trial of the way.

There is a man journeying along a lonely road at night. It is dark. The storm beats about him. He is weary and faint—but in his heart there is a vision of a beautiful and happy home, not many miles away, to which he is going. Loved ones are there, waiting for him. There he will find shelter from the storm, food for his hunger, rest to relieve his faintness and weariness. This vision of happiness, comfort, joy and safety, a little way before him—makes him forget the hardness and discomfort of the journey. So it is, that the "hope of the glory of God" should cheer us as we move through the world’s darkness and sorrow and trial.

Paul reminds us that we are to rejoice also in our tribulations. This seems a hard lesson. We may learn to bear troubles submissively, without complaining; but to rejoice in them—that is something which seems impossible to many. The tree is too bitter—to have such sweet fruit growing on it. But

the grace of Christ is equal to this strange task—enabling us to rejoice in our tribulations. Thousands of Christians have done it. Paul himself did it. We remember his songs in the night at Philippi. This is what Christian faith may always do. The secret of it is, perfect trust in the will and love of God. No one can rejoice in pain or loss who has not a settled confidence in the righteousness of God's ways. Then he knows that the thing God sends or permits—is the best thing, though it almost crushes him.

Someone tells how a flute is made. Here is a piece of wood. It is solid and hard and it makes no music. Then a workman take it and cuts holes in it, and makes a hollow tube through it. It is by thus cutting as if destroying it, that it is made into a flute, which gives forth sweet music. God seems ofttimes to be destroying His children by tribulations—but He is really preparing them to give forth sweet music. Tribulation is good, for it "works patience." Patience is a blessed lesson to learn. Any school in which we can learn it, is a good school, and the lesson can scarcely be too costly. Patience is ofttimes learned in the school of suffering. We are there trained to endure, not to cry out in the hour of anguish—but to sing instead.

Richter tells of the little bird that is shut away in the darkness to learn new strains, which afterwards it sings in the light. Many Christians are taken into the darkness and kept there for a time, while they are taught the songs of patience. We look at patient people with admiration, not knowing what it has cost them to get this pearl of the Christian graces.

Patience is only the first link in a golden chain. It begins in tribulation—in the fire. That is where the gold is refined. I saw the men in the great smelter at Denver, bringing in the ore—rough, unsightly, without any appearance of value, and I followed the processes until they showed us the pure metals ready for use. That is the way this chain of gold begins. The rough ore of common life is taken and put into the hot furnace, where it is purified until it shines in lustrous beauty.

"Patience works experience." Experience is what we have learned for ourselves by living. Most of us do not learn much any other way. Every day's life leaves its new lines written upon our character.

After experience comes hope. The more we know of the truth and the beauty of the blessedness of hope—the more does the future mean to us. Trying Christ, makes us even the more sure of Him. Testing the promises, makes us feel more secure in resting upon them. This "hope," too, is one that never shall disappoint us. One of the most pathetic things I saw in all the great West, was a little graveyard near the foot of Pike's Peak, in which sleep many of the men who journeyed there with the wild expectation of finding gold. Their hope put them to shame—and they died broken-hearted. Not so does ever the Christian's hope. The ground of all our hope is in Christ, who died for us while we were yet sinners. God does not begin to love us—when we begin to get good and love Him. He loves us first in our sins, and it is His love that starts in our hearts the first glimmering of love for Him. The argument here is very strong. If He loved us in our sins so much that He died for us—surely now, when we have been justified and saved, He will be faithful to us and will keep us from falling away. Thus the cross is the abiding proof of the unchanging love of God.

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we

have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" The Life-Giving Spirit

Romans 8:1-14

Someone says that if the Bible is compared to a ring, and the Epistle to the Romans be it precious stone, the eighth chapter would be the sparkling point of the jewel. It is one of the most precious chapters in all the Scriptures. It begins with no condemnation, and ends with no separation. The very first verse tells us "There is therefore now no condemnation." This is a great word. They are not condemned, are not guilty, have nothing charged against them. How does this come? Are these people holy ones who never have sinned? If so, it can be no comfort to us, for we all have sinned. It is a word only for angels. But this is not what it means. It is not the sinless ones who are thus free from condemnation. The reference is to those who have sinned—but have been forgiven.

Those "who are in Christ Jesus" are the people who are free from condemnation. They have sinned, many of them very grievously. But when they accepted Christ as their Savior—all their sins were put away, blotted out. To be in Christ Jesus means to be in Him by faith and love. Then He takes away all our guilt, and when He does this, it is as if we never had sinned. Our sins are remembered no more forever. Their crimson red becomes whiter than snow. The divine forgiveness is so full, so complete, so thorough, that we are restored to our place in fellowship with God—as if we never had gone astray.

Those who are in Christ, have a new life in them. Christ Himself lives in them by the Holy Spirit. They are filled with the Spirit and are lifted out of the old life and thus are made free from its power. Elsewhere Paul said, "Walk by the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." If the Spirit lives in us and rules us—we shall no longer be under the influence of the old nature—but will rise into a new life, as when one carries a plant from a cold arctic winter into a tropical summer. One writer compares this "law of life" to the antidote, which counteracts a deadly poison and frees one from its "law of death." Another illustrates it by the coming of relief to a beleaguered city. The deliverer frees the people from prison and gives them a friendly government. Another uses the illustration of a balloon, which overcomes the attraction of gravitation and lifts its passengers upward. To be living under the power of the Holy Spirit, is to be free from sin’s terrible bondage.

Those who are still living the old life, ruled by natural desires, have no care for spiritual things. Men who live only a worldly life, a life of self-indulgence and of sin, would find no comfort in a prayer meeting or at a church service; while you, if you are a true Christian, sitting in the same pew, would find great pleasure in the worship. Those who have the Spirit love spiritual things, while those who have not the Spirit are made unhappy in the presence of these heavenly enjoyments.

Only those who have received the Holy Spirit, are really spiritually alive. There are men who are as dead to the things of God and heaven—as is the man in his coffin to the things about him. Friends sob out their sorrow beside him—but he is not disturbed by it. There are people who never think of God or of heaven. Alive to this world, they are dead to all the things of the heavenly world and to the spiritual life—the love of God, the divine grace, the beauty of holiness, the promise of God—as dead as if their bodies were stone! One tells of seeing a retarded child growing up in a home. All the wealth of holy affection was poured out on it. Loving parents watched with intense eagerness

for some response to their great love. But no response came. The child never became conscious of the tender love about it. So those who are devoted only to this world live amid the manifestations of the love of God, under the very shadow of the cross of Christ—and yet are dead to all this wonderful affection, utterly unmoved by it!

Those who are ruled by the Spirit—have the mind of the Spirit. That is, the Spirit dwells in their hearts and they are spiritually alive. They love God and love their fellow men. They commune with God in this world. They and Christ are close personal friends. They are alive to all the things of divine grace. In their hearts they have the divine peace, which is one of the fruits of the Spirit.

"If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ—he does not belong to Christ." It does not make one a Christian to have a correct creed, or to be a member of a church. We are Christians only when we have the Holy Spirit in our hearts. If the Spirit is in us, we shall have the marks of His indwelling in our life and character. One of these marks is love, another joy, another patience, another meekness, another gentleness, another self-control. No one can see the Spirit in us—no one can see God—but people soon know if the Spirit is in us—by the way we live, by our disposition and conduct.

Jesus once said to one of His disciples, "If I wash you not, you have no part with me." Not unless we are cleansed by Christ—can we really claim to be His. The words here are quite as strong—"If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ—he does not belong to Christ."

If we would have the Spirit of God, we must "put to death the deeds of the body." Out hearts are great battle fields where destinies are decided. Two forces are ever contending for the mastery: the flesh—the old nature; and the Spirit—the new life of God in our souls. If the old nature conquers, we have lost all and must perish. But if the new nature, the Spirit, conquers, then we enter life. Without Christ we can only be defeated; through Christ’s help we can be victorious. We must be careful not to make this simply a human struggle, for alone we never can contend with the power of evil. But there is a beautiful promise in this same chapter, which says that we can be more than conquerors through Him who loved us. We must make sure to have Christ with us in the battle.

Those who are led by the Spirit are the sons of God. It is a wonderful thought that we can be led by the divine Spirit Himself. The Spirits leads us not from without, as in old times the pillar of cloud led the people—but by living in us and filling our hearts with right motives, feelings, desires, affections. We must open our hearts to the Spirit, for He never will force His way in. He stands at the door and knocks, and if we open to Him, He enters and becomes our guide. It is a glorious privilege to be a child of God. Here we are told how we can enter this relation. In John’s Gospel it is said that as many as receive Christ, to them He gives the right to become God’s children. It is very plain, therefore—the door stands wide open into the household of the heavenly Father. All who submit themselves to the divine life and love and rule, become children of God.

Christian Living

Romans 12:9-21 Our love should be sincere, "without hypocrisy," as Paul says. A hypocrite is an actor. He pretends to be what he is not. We are not to live in this way—merely pretending to love people, speaking to them kindly words—while bitterness is in our heart. Our life must be as good as our speech, our heart as good as our profession.

If our love is to be without hypocrisy, we must "Hate what is evil; and cling to what is good." God hates wickedness, hates everything that is sinful; if we would be like God—we must hate sin. It is not enough to love what is right and to cling to it. This is very important—but we must also abhor that which is evil. This does not mean that we are to hate wicked people, for we are taught to love all men. We are not to hate the people—but the wickedness, being ready meanwhile to show our love in kindness and helpfulness even to the worst and most degraded. God hates sin—but loves the sinner and yearns for his salvation, doing everything to bring him back to right ways. In these days of tolerance, we need to watch lest sometimes we be tolerant of things we ought to hate! But we must not let our hatred of evil interfere with out love for others. Paul urges that we, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love." Perhaps ofttimes we are too cold in our affection, at least in our showing of affection. There is something wonderfully beautiful in the way Jesus loved His disciples and friends. He loved them and he let them know that He loved them. He spoke to them of His tender interest in their life, and showed His interest, too, in many sweet and gentle ways. He commanded His friends to love one another as He had loved them. Not only should we love—but we should be tenderly affectioned.

Especially in homes is there ofttimes a lack in the showing of affection. The family love each other—but their words and acts do not show it. We are too miserly with our loving words. We are to do more. We are to show our love by preferring one another. This is not easy. We like to claim the first place for ourselves. We do not like to sink ourselves out of sight when we have been doing something good and beautiful, quietly allowing some other one to get the credit and carry off the honor.

It is in associated Christian work that this lesson has its special application. As long as we are clamoring for honor and recognition, we have not learned this part of Christian duty. If we only knew it, there is a wonderful comfort in caring only for the work, and not caring to have the praise of men for it.

Another thing not easy we are asked to do: "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." Indeed, none of these life lessons are easy. Possibly we may learn part of the lesson—not to be resentful, not to try to punish others for the hurt they do us. We say we will drop the matter and not think of it any more. But this is not all of the lesson. Not only are we not to curse—but we are to bless those who persecute us. We are not to return injury for injury, nor are we to return nothing; we are to pay the debt in full—but we must pay it with love instead of hate; instead of persecuting those who persecute us, we are to bless them.

Then, we are to "rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep." The latter part of this counsel we hear about very often. It is quite natural and not very hard to weep with those who weep. We go to the house of mourning, and we feel very sorry for our friends in their trouble. But this is not all the lesson. Sometimes we are disposed to envy those who are prosperous or who have great blessing or joys; the teaching here is that we are to rejoice with these; we are to be glad, because they are glad and happy.

Those who have the Spirit of Christ must "Live in harmony with one another." If two people are to live together happily, they must make up their minds that they both cannot have their own way all the time. One way to get along, is for one to do always just what he wants, while the other yields in everything, having no mind of his own, claiming no rights. This can scarcely be called the Christian

way. It makes one a tyrant—and the other a slave. The way for people to live together, is for both to have the same mind, each to think of the other's comfort. Being of the same mind implies that there is no quarreling, no dissension. Both move together in unselfish love, seeking lowly things.

"Do not be proud—but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited." Self-conceit is a miserable thing. Ruskin says, "Conceit may puff a man up—but never prop him up." Nobody admires self-conceit in another. Everyone thinks it is a most detestable disposition. We must think of ourselves, as we appear to others. We ought to know very well, that self-conceit makes us very unlovely in the eyes of others. Humility is the grace which adorns. God loves it and men love it. The truly humble Christian will "Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody." We represent God in this world. We have the interests of God's cause in our keeping. This makes it a very serious thing to profess to be a Christian, for people have a right to look to us—to see what God is like. Besides, God has a right then to look to us—for the true manifesting of His own character and will. It is very important, therefore, that in every disposition we show, in all our conduct, in all our business transactions, in all our social relations, in all our acts and words of influence, we shall show the things that are godlike and beautiful. We must be honorable as well as honest.

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." In God's mind, peace is a part of beautiful living. It is not always possible to live in peace with people. There are some people who would quarrel with an angel. They are so selfish, so ill-tempered, so domineering, so unreasonable, that they can be at peace with no one. It may not be possible, therefore, even for the best Christian to move through the world, without having somebody hate him or strive with him. But the lesson is, that it must never be our fault if there is quarreling. So far as we are concerned, we must be at peace with all people. Abraham preserved peace with Lot by letting Lot have his own way. This is a good rule. The Law of Love

Romans 13:8-14

Christian teachings deal with life. To begin with, here is a word about debt-paying. "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another." We should never fail to pay a debt when it falls due. The person to whom we owe it expects the money at that time, and bases his own engagements upon the receiving of it. If we do not pay him, he in turn is left unable to pay another to whom he is indebted, and who can tell how many other people, in turn, will be disappointed, and perhaps left in embarrassment, because of our failure to pay our debt? Then, it is a bad habit for anyone to form—allowing debts to go unpaid. Like other habits, too, it grows easily, and soon becomes so fixed that a man thinks nothing of being in debt.

There is a kind of indebtedness, however, which none of us can help—the debt of love. We never can get it paid off. Of course, we are to pay it as fast as it falls due. But even when we do this we cannot get out of love's debt. At the close of a day we may feel that we have met all our obligations of love to all about us—family, friends, neighbors. Yet, when we arise next morning, we find all the debts of yesterday facing us again, not one of them diminished. We can do nothing but begin to pay them off again, toiling the whole day to do it.

Love includes all other duties. "He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law." All the other commandments are mere fragments of the law of love. All the duties which we owe to others,

really gather themselves in concentration into the one golden duty of love. He who loves—truly obeys all the commandments. This Paul illustrates in the following verse. "The commandments: "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Love never does another any harm. "Love does no harm to its neighbor." Love always thinks of other people's good. Whatever, therefore, injures another in any way—is a violation of love's duty. What about the man who tempts a boy to drink and puts the first glass of alcohol into his hand? Has he wrought no harm on his neighbor? Suppose that a few years hence this boy has become a drunkard—whose is the guilt of having started him in his course of ruin? What about the saloon-keepers, who, to make money, deal out intoxicating drinks to the men—young and old, weak and strong? Think of the ruin wrought in lives, in homes? Is there any good to counterbalance the evil? Are any homes, brightened, sweetened, made happier, better, holier, truer—by the saloon? Are any lives made purer, cleaner, more earnest, more beautiful, nobler, more godlike—by the saloon?

There is a call here to awake. "It is time for you to awake out of sleep." The picture suggested is of one still asleep when the sun is high in the heavens. There is a great pressure of duty—but the man sleeps, indifferent to all calls. During the day we have duties, which would crowd every moment if we were doing them all. But here are men sleeping away half their day, leaving their work untouched. The man who never thinks of eternity is asleep; yet he may be very busy in worldly things, a "wide-awake man," his neighbors may call him ambitious, alert, diligent, successful—but if he does not think of God and the eternal world, he is asleep. The world is full of such people, and we ought to try to wake them up before it is too late.

Night covers many deeds of sin and shame. When day comes, wrongdoings hangs its head. We are living in the light and we should be ashamed to continue doing the things of darkness. Here again we touch the saloon business. Surely it is among the "works of darkness." Even saloon keepers practically admit this, for who ever saw a saloon open to the daylight and to all eyes, as other kinds of business are? Its windows are made dim or opaque, and its doors are made to shut quickly after a man enters. No one passing outside can see what is going on inside. This itself is a confession, which puts a question on the business. It all were open to the public, as a dry goods store, men would be ashamed to go in. In the thirteenth verse we come again upon intemperance, "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy." Whatever anyone may say about the Bible's position on the question of wines, there is not a shadow of doubt where it stands concerning drunkenness. It puts it down among the most debasing of sins, the most degrading, the most ruinous of all vices. Can there be anything more debasing of a man with an immortal nature—than to get drunk! Of course, no one intends to get drunk when he begins to drink. But the story is familiar to need writing out—of the end of nine cases out of ten of moderate drinking. The only absolute safety is total abstinence.

"Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." The only true way to get rid of the wrong things in our life—is to put on Christ. Being good merely by not being bad, is not enough. There is a striking parable of an expelled evil spirit. He went out of the man under some pressure, and wandered, desolate and

restless, through deserts until, discontent not to be injuring someone, he wandered back to his old place and found the man in whom he had dwelt. He found his old house swept and garnished—but empty yet, and gathering up some other demons worse than himself, he reentered the unoccupied house, and the last state of that man was worse than the first. It is not enough to put out the demon; we must also admit the Christ into our heart's house. Emptiness is always a condition of peril.

Abstaining for the Sake of Others

1 Corinthians 8

"Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up—but love builds up." When Paul said to the Corinthians that "knowledge puffs up," he did not mean to depreciate knowledge, nor was he glorifying ignorance. Knowledge builds up, too. He who is content to be ignorant in this world while the stores of knowledge are accessible, fails to grasp the meaning of life. Knowledge makes one's life broader and deeper—and adds to one's power of usefulness. But there is a knowledge, which makes a man cold, haughty and proud. He stalks through the world, thinking only of himself, without regard to others. He knows his Christian liberty—and he thinks no further about it. He says it is no business of his, if any weaker Christians are hurt. They ought not to be so weak. It is all nonsense for them to keep their old superstitions. They cannot expect him to limit his privileges—by their narrow scruples. He is going to exercise his liberty without regard to any such childish whims.

We may apply the principle—to the matter of temperance. A man claims his right to take a glass of wine at dinner. He has always done it, and it has never hurt him. All around him are those who are not so strong as he is. His example may lead them into a course, which will be ruinous in the end. But he knows he has a right to his wine, and that it will do him no harm; so he refuses to think of others. They have no right to be "weak" in this intellectual age. Thus mere "knowledge" puffs up, makes one haughty, vain, coldly selfish. But while, "knowledge puffs up," "love builds up." Love may know just as much as knowledge does. The man who has Christian love, knows that there is no harm in eating theses meats. But he knows also that there are Christians only recently converted, who think differently. If he asserts his privilege, he knows it will grieve them, and also may lead them to violate their conscience and thus start on a course of sin, which will end in the loss of their souls. This man, with love as well as knowledge, thinks of other people, and denies himself his liberty—rather than harm them by his example. In the case of wine, this same man may feel just as confident as the other of the harmlessness to himself of his glass of drink; but he knows that not all are fortified as he is against the dangers of the wine cup, and he believes Christian love requires him to deny himself rather than put the least danger before any weaker person. He does not talk haughtily about his "rights" and "liberty." He believes that it is his business to limit his privileges for the sake of his weaker brethren.

Even knowledge depends upon love, "if any man loves God—the same is known by Him." We cannot know any person truly, unless we love the person. Mere knowledge sees people critically, sees their faults, the blemishes in them, the mistakes they make, the evil things they do—but sees not the good. It takes love, mingled with knowledge—to see people as they really are. We should have patience with all men. We should be charitable to all, and charity covers a multitude of sins. Our Lord's own teaching is, "Judge not—that you be not judged." If only we would see people

through eyes of love—we would ofttimes find beauty, where now we find only spot and stain.

One of the old legends of Jesus, says that as He and the disciples walked one day they saw a dead dog lying by the wayside. The disciples turned with loathing from the dead creature—but Jesus remarked, "What beautiful teeth this animal has!" He saw beauty even amid the ruin and loathsomeness of death. An eye for the good and beautiful in others—is a mark of a fine, loving character. We never can be of much use in the world until we learn this lesson.

Charity should make us mindful of others, who have not the same advantages as we have. Certain things may do us no harm—but those very things may do harm to others. The harm is in the influence of example on those whose "conscience being weak, is defiled." Being influenced by the example of the strong Christian, they do that which they regard as wrong. Thus they sin against God. This meat sacrificed to idols question, which disturbed the Corinthians, will not come up in our modern church life—but there are other applications of the same principle. It touches all personal liberty in matters involving no moral wrong. May a man drink wine?

How richly may a Christian woman dress at church?

How fine a residence may a Christian man build and live in?

What games and amusements may Christian people enjoy?

There are some things which we must never yield. We must never violate a moral principle, even to please some other one. We have no right to break any commandment of God, for anybody's sake. It is only in matters involving no moral principle that we are to be ready to yield our liberty. It is no recommendation of us in God's sight that we do or do not eat certain kinds of food. The laws of diet are not moral laws. We must be ready, therefore, to deny ourselves things that we like—if the using of them will do harm to others. The example of the strong, emboldens the weak to do that which he himself thinks to be wrong; and when a man once violates his conscience, he has broken down the fence and started on a course the end of which may be destruction. It is a terrible thing to do even the slightest wrong. Jesus said to those who cause others to stumble, "Whoever shall cause one of these little ones who believe on me to stumble, it would be better for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea!" Such startling words from the Master's own lips, should make us tremble at the very thought of causing another to stumble. He may stumble into hell—and it will be our fault!

We must see to it that never through our knowledge, that is through our selfishness in determining not to give up a privilege, does "he who is weak" perish, "the brother for whose sake Christ died." It does not mean that we tempt the other to some great sin—but that we forget that he may be influenced by our example. Thus we see the importance of example. We dare not strut through this world, doing just as we please, as if it mattered not, as if it were no one else's affair. We must walk softly, ever asking ourselves what the effect of our walk will be upon others.

Paul laid down a principle for all time when he said, "Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall." Elsewhere he says, "It is good not to eat flesh, not to drink wine, nor to do anything whereby your brother stumbles." This was Paul's application of the law of love. He would rather, as long as he lived, forego the exercise of a personal right, the indulgence of a personal taste—than run the risk of causing another to sin.

It is good not to drink wine, however harmless one may think it to be—if it may make another stumble.

Here we have a good temperance motive. Suppose that a man is satisfied that he has a right to drink moderately, and that he can do so with perfect safety to himself and without sinning; but suppose also that his example may cause others who are weaker to drink, and that they will drink to the destruction of their souls. What does this principle of Paul's say to this man? Very clearly, that he should forego his liberty forever rather than cause his brother to do wrong. The application is very wide, referring to every possible cause: "It is good not to do anything whereby your brother stumbles." A Lesson in Self-Denial 1 Corinthians 10:23-33

Drunkenness is a sore peril. We cannot at once remove the evil from the land—but we may put into the hearts and minds of young people such principles and such motives that they may be able to resist the temptation about them and keep themselves pure and safe, clean and unspotted. Our Lord's prayer for His disciples was not that they should be taken out of the world, away from its evil—but that they should be kept from the evil. The passage is a discussion of the question of personal liberty and duty to others—how far we may exercise our liberty, and where and how far we are required to by the law of love to deny ourselves practices or enjoyments for the sake of others. This question has an obvious bearing on the matter of the use of alcohol. Some men claim that they have a right to drink alcohol, so long as they do drink to the excess of drunkenness. They claim that no one has a right to interfere with their privilege in this regard, and that they are not required to think of the influence, which the exercise of their liberty may exert on others about them. Are they right in their contention? Or is there a higher law, which requires them to deny themselves if there is danger that the exercise of their liberty shall hurt others, lead them to put their lives in peril?

Paul says, first, that there are things which are lawful—but which are not beneficial. When he says, "All things are lawful," he does not mean sinful things. These are never right. He is referring directly to the eating of meats which have been offered to idols. He is entirely satisfied himself, that the meats were not affected by their being taken into an idol temple, since an idol is nothing—only a piece of wood or stone. It is "lawful" for him to eat such meats. God does not care what kind of wholesome food we eat—it is our moral acts of which He takes notice. Paul says that all such things were lawful to him. That is, so far as he was personally concerned, it was no sin for him to eat of these meats, which had been carried first to an idol temple.

Yet that is not the end of the answer. "But not all things are beneficial," he adds. There may be things that are right enough on simple moral grounds—and yet which as Christians it is not well that we should do. If we were living alone on our little island, and no other person lived anywhere about us, the question would be very much simplified. We might do as we please, then, so far as lawful things are concerned. We may play our flute or keep our noisy phonograph going all night, if it gives us any pleasure, for there is nobody next door nor anybody near to be annoyed or kept awake—by the exercise of our liberty. But if we have neighbors, if there is a sick person in the house next to ours, that introduces a new element into the question. "Let no man seek his own good—but each his neighbors good." We have no liberty to distress the sick woman next door with our noisy phonograph. We must think of the other person, and be ready to deny ourselves any dear liberty of our own—if it is going to cause hurt or give pain or trouble to another. The other's

good is to be thought about—before our own pleasure.

You have a right to eat any food you wish, not troubling as to whether it may have been offered to idols or not. But if someone calls your attention to the fact that certain food has been offered in sacrifice, you must stop for conscience' sake—that is, for the sake of the conscience of the person who spoke to you about it, and who thinks it wrong to eat it. That is, you must deny yourself your liberty in the matter, because the exercise of that liberty would do harm to another person.

Paul gathers the whole question into one wonderful, comprehensive and luminous sentence, "Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatever you do—do all to the glory of God." We are to do everything to the glory of God—that settles it all. That is one standard of Christian living. Selfishness is not, never can be, to the glory of God. We must think of the people about us, of their comfort, of their good, of the influence of our acts upon them. We must think of the weak brother for whom Christ died, and not by our liberty cause him to stumble.

It is very easy to apply the principle of this lesson to the use of alcohol. Nothing comes in here concerning the matter of alcohol in its effect upon the person himself. The man to whom this argument is specially directed, is the man who claims the liberty to drink moderately, temperately, as he likes to call it. He says he has a perfect right to do so. In one sense, he has. If there were no other people about him to be influenced by his example, if he is satisfied in his own conscience that he can drink moderately and yet safely—no one could say a word against his exercising his liberty. But if he has boys growing up in his own home, or brothers, or friends, or companions, or neighbors, who may be influenced to follow in his steps, and who may not be able, as he claims to be—to stop inside the danger line, the question is different. Then, is he not bound by the higher law of love to abridge his own liberty, to sacrifice his own desires, to deny himself his lawful indulgence, lest he might put a stumbling block in the way of weaker ones. But this is not the only phase of the alcohol question which we must consider. In teaching children and young people, it must seem to be necessary also to present always the duty of abstaining for one's own sake—as well as for the sake of others. Every boy should want to make the most possible of his life, and the use of alcohol works ruin in everyone. It does harm to his body. It injures him mentally. Then, it destroys his spiritual power. It robs him of that delicate refinement which is an ornament to the life that possesses it. It leads him into companionships and associations which are degrading and debasing. As a result, he loses his good name, the respect of worthy people, and the confidence of the community. What the final outcome will be, need not be sketched here. On the other hand, boys should be helped to realize and always to remember that a clean, pure, wholesome, self-restrained youth is the beginning of a noble and worthy manhood. The boys have only one boyhood. Some things they can experiment on, trying different ways to see which is the best. But there is no room for experiment in living. "Youth comes twice to none." Life has been compared to an arrow, which flies as it is directed on the string. If it is aimed westward, it cannot possibly fly eastward. If the life begins wrong in boyhood and youth, if it is directed toward dissoluteness and debauchery, there is little hope that it ever can be turned about so as to attain the beauty, the nobleness, and the worthiness of an honored manhood. Let the boys think of this matter seriously, and begin right. If they do this, they will find it easy to make all their life manly and noble. The Lord's Supper 1 Corinthians 11:20-34

We ought to have true and right views of the Lord’s Supper. It is a sacred ordinance. It leads us to think of the death of our dearest Friend, and we are always reverent in the presence of death, or when thinking of death. It is the death of the Son of God of which this memorial leads us to think, and that was the most wonderful death that ever took place on this earth. When a king dies, the whole land stands mourning; what should be our emotion when God’s Son bows His head and dies! The object of His death, ought to add to its sacredness in our sight. He died for us—to save us. To the Christians Paul wrote, "When you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat." Why? Because of the spirit in which they met together. There were dissensions and strifes among them. Besides, there was no reverence in their meeting. They did not understand the true meaning of the Lord’s Supper. They had no thought of its sacredness. They met for eating and drinking, as if it were a revel they were keeping—rather than a solemn act of worship. It was impossible to eat the Lord’s Supper in such a way as that. We have no such temptation in these days. Everywhere this sacrament is invested with sacredness and is observed reverently—at least as to form. Still, even this wild abuse is not without its lessons for us.

We can truly receive the Lord’s Supper—only when we take it with hearts in full accord with its holy meaning. Strife and bitterness unfit us for it. We ought to have the love the one for the other, without resentment, without anger, without jealousy or envy. The rich and the poor meet together at the Lord’s table, and it ought to be indeed as brethren. The highest and the lowest in earthly position sit here side by side—and there should be the sweetest accord of spirit. Before God, they are one. Without any of the wild orgies that dishonored the Lord’s Supper at Corinth, it is yet possible, even with all our decorousness, to make it a mockery. If we make it only an empty form, without love, without faith, without a discerning of the Lord’s body, without any true dependence upon the atonement of Christ, without any spiritual receiving of the things represented in the sacred emblems, is our receiving of it anything that pleases God? Is it possible for us, when we come together thus, to eat the Lord’s Supper? The apostle went into particulars as to the sins that kept them from receiving the blessing Jesus planned for those who eat at His table: "for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk!" Those who stumble so at the word "unworthily" in verse twenty-seven, should study this verse carefully as it gives the sense of "unworthily" as it is there used. The Lord’s Supper was most sadly profaned by these early Christians. When the time came for it, while the poor people present were hungry, not having had any share in the "love feast" that preceded, another ’set’ were really drunken from overindulgence. It is easy to understand what Paul meant by eating and drinking unworthily, as he had these Corinthian scenes in his mind.

Another suggestion is that the permeation of the Church with the spirit of Christ was not a sudden attainment—but was gradual. Our present high conception of what Christians should be, how they should live, is the growth of centuries. Not all the "good days" are behind us, as some croakers tell us.

Paul emphasizes the sacred character of the Lord’s Supper by telling its history. Paul was not present at the institution of the Lord’s Supper. He was not a Christian for some time after Christ’s death. Yet he did not get his knowledge of that wonderful night from the apostles who were at the table. He received it directly from the Master Himself. This gives us a hint of Paul’s relation to Christ, his intimacy with Him, and the reality of his communion with Him. Unless we make Paul an impostor, it is one of the strongest evidences of Christ’s resurrection and life in glory, that He made

Himself known to him and made important revelations to him. He seems to have talked with this apostle familiarly as one talks with a friend. Then Paul became a witness to us of the resurrection, ascension and glory of the Savior. The time of the institution of the Lord's Supper ought to be noted. It was not on a pleasant day on the seashore, when the sun was shining brightly and the birds were singing sweetly and the heart of the Master was made glad by the kindness of the people. The words, "the night in which he was betrayed," tell the whole story of the time. It was just before He went out to the Garden. He knew all that lay before Him—that the traitor had now gone out, during the passion supper, to arrange to betray Him; that before the morning He would be dragged as a criminal before the Sanhedrin, and that tomorrow before the nine o'clock He would be hanging on a cross in shame. Yet, knowing all the terrible events that were to be crowded into that night and the next day—He took all the first part of the night for sweet and loving fellowship with His friends. He sat down with them at the Passover meal. Then, at the close of this, He instituted the memorial supper, after which He sat and talked with them in tender, loving way, and then prayed with them and for them.

All this shows the utter self-forgetfulness of our Lord. He did not let His own approaching sorrow and death cast any shadow upon the hearts of His disciple. Instead, His love made those last hours the most sacred they had ever enjoyed with Him. There is a lesson here for us. We ought to do as Jesus did, and should never permit our grief to make us selfish. In all our own sufferings, we should hide away our pain and pour only the chastened love of our hearts upon others. It comes to us from the very night of Christ's anguish. It is a memorial of His bitter sorrows. In the midst of His sorrow, Jesus gave thanks. Then He broke the bread and said, "This is my body, which is for you." The thanksgiving that night, amid all the gathering woe, is very remarkable. Surely we should always give thanks for our mercies—even in the darkest hours of our life. No gift should be taken from the hand of God at any time without gratitude. Suppose there is a great grief in your home, or the shadow of an overwhelming sorrow is hanging over your home; when you gather at the table for the family meal, lift up your hearts and thank God for what he has given you. The Lord's Supper should be eaten always with thanksgiving, even in the darkest hour. The breaking of the bread was also suggestive. Thus, too, was His body about to be broken. We feed on broken bread. Many of our sweetest blessings come to us from or in broken things. "Bread grain is bruised." We do not eat the wheat whole—but crushed. The alabaster box was broken that the ointment in it might flow out to anoint Christ and to fill the house and the world with the odor. We get the blessings for forgiveness and the divine grace only when our hearts are broken. "My body, which is for you." This tells us all. It lays bare the very heart of the Savior.

Jesus asked His disciples to eat in remembrance of Him. We are very forgetful creatures. One of the exhortations of the Psalmist is to his own soul, in the One Hundred and Third Psalm, that he should not forget God's benefits. But that is the very thing we are quickest to do! We do not appreciate the true value of the monuments or memorials in keeping alive the memory of past deeds or great events. We do not know how much of our vivid thought of Christ's death we owe to the Lord's Supper, which is observed so often. The chief reason Christ gave it to His Church—was that we might never forget His love, His sufferings, His death for us.

One morning a young man, an Englishman, at that time living in Philadelphia and attending the same church of which I was pastor, came into my study, and drawing from his pocket a letter, opened it, showing me, in among the folds, some pressed flowers. "These are from my mother's

grave in England," he said. Then, with exceeding tenderness, he spoke of his mother, her sweet life, her love, her thoughtfulness, her trust in Christ, her beautiful death. The letter he held was from his sister at home, and she had plucked these flowers from the grave of the precious mother and sent them across the sea to him. No wonder they recalled afresh all her sweet life. In the communion service we have flowers from the grave of Christ, and they bring back to us all the tender recollections, helping us to think anew of His love and its great sacrifice for us.

After breaking the bread, Jesus gave the cup, with the explanation, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." The Lord's Supper is a silent sermon, telling to the world that Christ died—and that we are His followers. It is not a proclaiming of our own goodness, that we are better that others. In taking our place at Christ's table, we say to all men that we are sinners, that Christ died for us, and that our sole dependence is upon the merits of His blood. Some people shrink from a public confession, as if it were a setting of themselves before the world as better than others, as if it were a heralding of their personal piety. But it is not a "profession of religion" that we make when we unite with the Church and come to the Lord's table—but a "confession of Christ." There is a great difference in these two phrases. Here it is a proclaiming, not of our own goodness, that we make at the communion—but of the death of Christ. We honor Christ, we humble ourselves, for we put ourselves behind the death and the cross of Christ—and hide there. We are not seen at all—it is Christ's death for sinners that is seen.

Paul on Christian Love 1 Corinthians 13

Paul was speaking of the spiritual gifts, which were conferred upon Christians, and there flashed upon his mind a vision of something far better, than any power of healing or miracle working or speaking with tongues. This more excellent way is the way of love.

Love is better than eloquence. "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels—but have not love I am become sounding brass." One who can talk in a number of languages is regarded as an accomplished man. But one may be a good linguist and a good orator—and yet not be a good Christian. To be a Christian is to have love.

Love is better than great learning. "If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge… but have not love, I am nothing." We live in an age when education is highly extolled. The training of the mind is considered of the highest importance. But there is something better than knowledge. One may be a learned scientist, a profound philosopher, may even be a brilliant theologian knowing the Bible and all sacred literature and Christian doctrine—and yet be nothing as God rates men. We are measured before God by the love that is in our character. In every foot of cordage used in the British navy, there is a red thread so intertwined that it cannot be taken out without the unraveling of the rope or cable. Just so, in every true character, there is a red cord of love. Christian loving-kindness, which spreads warmth all about it, like the soft light or the sweet fragrance of flowers, is more excellent than the most brilliant learning.

Love is better than benevolence. "If I bestow all my goods to feed the poor,… but have not love, it profits me nothing." It is not the gift that God blesses—but the love, which bestows the gift. It is not the service rendered—but the spirit, which prompts the service. There is a story of a king who built a great temple, paying all the cost himself. It was built for his own glory. When the time of dedication came, it was seen that someone had rubbed off the king's name and put in its place

that of a poor widow. The king was greatly amazed, not knowing that anyone but himself had done anything in the building of this temple. Inquiry was made, and the woman bearing the name came tremblingly into the king's presence. When he demanded of her what she had done in the building of the temple, she could think of nothing. When pressed still further, she remembered that one hot day, as the oxen were drawing stones past her door, she had in pity gathered some handfuls of grass and given them to the panting beasts. Pity for the dumb animals weighed more in heaven's sight—than all the king's vast outlay of treasure. In a few striking sentences the qualities of love are sketched. "Love is patient, and is kind," The first touch of the pencil, presents love as patience. Love always costs. One of the first things to be learned in a Christian life is endurance, sometimes of wrong, ofttimes of injustice—not enduring merely—but patient endurance. It is not enough to bear wrong for a day or two, "Love is patient." Not seven times—but seventy times seven must the insult or injury be patiently borne with. Nor is it enough to endure in cold silence the injuries. "Love is patient, and is kind,"—love keeps a gentle heart, continues to do good for evil, to bathe with fragrance the hand that smites.

"Love does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude." Here is a whole cluster of bright jewels shining on the bosom of love. It does not ENVY. Far more than we are willing to confess does the poison of envy lurk in our hearts. Nothing can be more unloving than this spirit. Love rejoices in the success of others. We should train ourselves to be glad even when others surpass us.

Love is HUMBLE. It does not pose for admiration or praise, nor blow its own trumpet, not put on airs of any kind. It does not try to get into places it is not fitted to fill.

"Love is not RUDE." This seems to refer to one's manners. Love is refined, gentle, thoughtful, considerate. If anyone makes religion unlovely, he is presenting only a caricature of it. Love is always courteous.

"Love is not easily angered." Hasty temper is so common, that most people have come to think of it as only a kind of harmless weakness, a mere infirmity. Men apologize for their friends who are bad tempered, as if it were a small matter. But really it is a sad blemish on character. We have no right ever to say a harsh or unkind thing anywhere, especially in our own home. There is too much sulking and sullenness in many homes. When we feel such moods coming upon us we would better go away by ourselves, and, getting down on our knees before God, fight the battle out, not leaving our refuge until we can come back with sweet spirit and gentle, kindly speech.

Love is the most enduring thing in the world. It "never fails." Textbooks that are a few years old are not of any use any more. Old machinery is constantly being replaced by new machinery.

"For we know in part and we prophesy in part—but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears." We may be thankful for the little revealed now, for it serves us well on the way. The morning dawn is very welcome to the early traveler—but it is only partial day, not the best. When the full day comes, the dim twilight passes. Lamps in our homes and on our streets are good at night, when darkness covers the earth. But their light is not perfect, and when the sun rises, we care no longer for them and put them out. The knowledge we have on the earth serves well when it is the best we can have; but it will not be prized when heaven's perfect knowledge comes. The things we know here are but the scaffolding, which men set up when they are erecting a great

building. It serves a good purpose for the time. Without it, the walls never could be built. But when the work is finished, men do not prize the scaffolding… They tear it down and take it away, for there is no longer any use for it. So the gifts and graces and all the experiences of earth, which serve well enough now—will be discarded and left behind when we reach the fullness of God. Of all things in the world, love is that which will endure as the most imperishable. "Now abides faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love." We should gather treasure, which we can carry with us to heaven. We should paint pictures, which will not fade out as we pass through the valley. We should do things, which will live in the other world when this world has vanished. Three things are names, which will abide—faith, hope, love. There will always be faith, for we shall never cease to trust God and believe in His love. There will always be hope, for we shall never reach the end of growth in blessing. But greater than either faith or hope is love. Whatever else we strive for I this world, we should put love always first in our request. The one great lesson to be learned in all life is—love. The Risen Christ 1 Corinthians 15:3-28

"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." There are "first things" in the gospel, things that not only come first—but are first in importance. Not all truths are of equal value. There are some we must know in order to be saved, and there are others which one may be ignorant of and yet be saved. The truths given by Paul as first are those which tell us of Christ's death for our sins and His resurrection from the dead. We should be sure that we understand these great teachings.

Some people in these days would like to leave out these great facts in receiving Christ, taking Him only as an example and as a Teacher. But this is not enough to save us. We need a Redeemer to take away our sins, and we need a victorious Savior who has conquered all enemies for us—including death—and is able to save us out of all our distresses. The cross and the broken grave are the true symbols of our redemption. The scarlet line of the Redeemer's blood runs through all the Scriptures. We find it in the law of sacrifices, which seem to have been given at the very gate of the lost paradise. We find it in the prophets and in the Psalms, where the sufferings of the Messiah for His people are foretold. We find it in the Gospels, for the shadow of the cross fell back over all the life of Jesus. He spoke over and over of His death, and said that He had come to give His life a ransom for many. In the Acts and the epistles we find the same red cord running, for we read continually of redemption through the blood of Christ; of His suffering, the just for the unjust; of our being redeemed by His precious blood, and of the blood that cleanses us from all sin. Nothing could be clearer than the declarations of the Scriptures, that Christ died for our sins. This tells us what a terrible thing sin is—to require such a costly atoning sacrifice. It reminds us, too, what a fearful thing it is for anyone to reject the redemption of Christ, thus keeping his own sins. There is no other way of salvation. To reject this redemption is to perish eternally.

Just as important as Christ's death for our sins, is His burial and resurrection. Perhaps we have not all thought of this. We are told much about Christ's death for us. Our hymns are full of the story of the cross. We come to Christ as sinners for forgiveness. We do not think so much, however, of the blessings that come to us from His broken grave. But if He had died only, and had not been raised from the dead—He could not have been the Savior we need. It is a great thing for us that we have a Savior who was dead and is alive again, alive now for evermore.

One blessing is that He knows the way of death just as He knows the way of temptation and the way of sorrow—and can guide us when we come to pass into the dark valley. Another blessing is that He has proved Himself stronger than death. He could not be held of it. During His life, He met all the other enemies of our souls. He met temptations and was victorious. He encountered diseases and demons and showed His power over them. He ruled the forces of nature—changing water into wine, walking on the sea, quelling the storm. He showed Himself master over death when He called back at least three people to life. Now He Himself met death and went down under his power—but here again He proved Himself master, vanquishing death and coming alive from the grave. Thus He conquered every form of enmity and antagonism, and stands at the close, victor over all things. Hence He is able to be our Savior who knows all about life, and who has lived victoriously through it all. He is our Friend as well as our Savior. He is with us in all our life, as Companion and Helper. The appearances of Jesus after His resurrection, during the forty days that He remained on earth, were in order to make it very clear to human witnesses that He was really alive again. Hence He met His disciples and friends at different times and left none of them in doubt.

It was a wonderful moment to Peter when Jesus appeared to him. Peter had denied Christ bitterly, saying with oaths and curses that he did not even know the Man. A little later Jesus looked at him, and that look broke Peter's heart. He went out and wept bitterly. That same day Jesus died. The grief of Peter can be imagined. He had done a great wrong to his Friend, and now he would never see Him again to ask forgiveness. How glad Peter must have been that morning when Jesus stood before him alive! Now Peter could get forgiveness. Of the other witnesses, Thomas is one of the most interesting. He doubted when he heard that Christ was risen. He would not believe it until he could see Him for himself, and see and feel the wounds in His hands and side. Jesus gave him the proof he demanded, and Thomas was convinced. So at the end of the forty days there was a company of witnesses ready to go out and tell the world of the death and resurrection of Christ, and who believed what they told and were ready to give their lives in proof of their faith. The last appearance of the risen Lord was to Paul himself. The effect of this appearing of Christ was wonderful. It found him a persecutor of Christians—bitter, relentless, breathing blood and slaughter against them. It changed Saul to Paul; the enemy of Christ—into a friend. The whole story is told in this eighth verse, showing how the resurrection of Christ transformed Paul's life. He became a preacher of the Savior and of the gospel he had been trying to destroy. We learn from what this belief did for Paul, what it will do for all who will accept it.

Paul always remembered the evil he had done before he became a Christian. This kept him humble. It also stimulated him to work for Christ. A regiment of soldiers failed once in a battle, proving cowardly. The reproach on their good name stung them to the heart, and they waited eagerly for an opportunity to bum out the disgrace. The time came at length, and in a battle they did heroically. The recollection of their old shame became mighty energy in them. So it was with Paul. He became a far more earnest apostle, no doubt, than he would otherwise have been, because of the constant remembrance of his past life. Who has not done some things to give Christ pain? We should be all the more loyal and devoted Christians, because of the remembrances in us of unworthy things done in the past. The resurrection meant so much to Paul that he was earnest in telling others what it should mean to them. The fact of the resurrection of Christ, is the keystone of the arch of Christian truth. Take it out and the whole arch falls to the

ground. If the body of Jesus yet sleeps in the grave beneath the Syrian stars, we simply have no Savior, and all the hopes of Christianity are empty dreams, with nothing substantial in them. "But now has Christ been raised from the dead." The resurrection is true beyond all question. Not a shadow of doubt rests upon the teaching. No other fact in all history is more certainly and indubitably established. Hence all the promises and hopes of Christianity are sure. Not one of them can fail. They all bear upon them the double seal—a cross and a broken grave.

If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, our faith has an immutable foundation, our sins are forgiven, and we, too, shall be raised. There is an Eastern story of a child who saw a silver spangle lying in the sand. Picking it up, she found that it was attached to a fine thread of gold. As she drew this out of the sand there were spangles on it, and the filament seemed to be endless. She wound it about her head and about her neck and her arms and body until she was covered from head to foot with golden threads and silver spangles. So it is when we take up this one truth of the resurrection of Christ. As we lift it we find that it is attached to a thread of gold, and as we draw up the golden thread we find all other truths and blessings, promises and hopes clinging to it. To believe the resurrection of Christ is indeed to have all the treasures of redemption in our possession.

Paul on the Grace of Giving 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Paul wanted to stimulate the Corinthian church to give generously, and he told them what other churches had been doing. Giving merely not to be behind other people, is not good giving. At the same time we should be desirous of imitating every good thing we see in others, for its own sake, because it is beautiful and like Christ. The early Christian givers were poor—but they gave liberally, and "Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity." They were in trouble, and yet the joy did not die out of their hearts. So it is in a true Christian life. The floods of trouble do not drown the songs of joy. Another proof of grace in this people to whom Paul refers, was that in their deep poverty their liberality still abounded. They were poor—but their poverty did not prevent them from giving to others who were poorer than themselves. A story is told of Henry Thornton. An appeal was made to him for missions, and he made out a check for five pounds. Before the ink was dry a telegram was handed to him. He opened it and turned ashy white. He said to the visitor, "I have just received bad news. I have lost thousands of pounds. Give me back the check." The visitor supposed that now the check would be canceled. But Mr. Thornton altered the five pounds to fifty, saying, "God has just taught me that I may not much longer possess my property, and that I must use it well." In time of poverty, if we must retrench in our expenses, we should not begin with the gifts which God asks of us for His cause.

These Corinthian givers did not say, "I can spare this and not miss it." They gave what it seemed they could not spare—beyond their power.

Then they "gave of their own accord." They did not have to be urged and begged to give—but were eager to give, and gave gladly, cheerfully. But "first they gave their own selves to the Lord." That is where all true consecration must begin. God does not care for our gifts, while He has not our hearts. It is much easier to give a little money, or to pay a visit now and then to some poor person, or even to do Christian work of other kinds, than it is to give ourselves to the Lord. But nothing comes of such giving or such work. We are first of all to present our body a living sacrifice

to God—and then God will receive the things we offer and the service we render in His name as part of our consecration.

After telling the Corinthian Christians of the good example of others, Paul spoke in praise of them. He told them, "You abound in everything." It is right to praise people when they do well. Hearty, cheerful, sincere commendation is good everywhere. It is good in homes. Parents would better always commend their children when they have done well. Approval encourages and stimulates to better service in the future. It is good for teachers, also, to commend their pupils who are doing what they can. Our Lord commended Mary, saying, "She has done what she could," while His disciples were condemning her and finding fault.

Too many people seem afraid ever to say a kindly word to others about what they have done. When a person dies, there is no lack of commendation; but what does the dead man care for such words? Many a time along his years, when he was weary and overburdened, if the thousandth part of the kindly things spoken by his coffin had been spoken in his ear—he would have been cheered and strengthened by the approval.

Paul wisely used commendation as an introduction to further appeals. "You abound in everything," he had said. "See that you abound in this grace also," he concluded. So giving is a grace. Paul puts it down here in the same cluster with faith, knowledge, earnestness, love.

Many of us make our Christian ideal only a very small fraction of the full image of Christ. We pick out one or two virtues or graces which we think are important, and magnify these, overlooking and leaving out other things which are quite as essential. Liberality is one of the graces of the Holy Spirit which must be found in the complete ideal. A miserly Christian is a misnomer. One who is greedy, grasping, covetous, is not the kind of follower Christ wants. A Jesuit priest testified that while thousands had come to him with confession of all manner of sins, no one had ever come confessing the sin of covetousness. Does "this grace of giving" abound in us, alongside of our faith, love, meekness, gentleness and patience?

Christ is the highest of all examples. He was rich—but He became poor. We know the story of His humiliation. He touched the deepest depths of pain and suffering. Then, the object of it all we know, too—it was that we might be made rich. He lifts up all His people from the depths of sin, shame and curse—to the glories of heaven. In comparison with this great giving, how small are our little penny contributions to the cause of Christ or for the relief of the poor!

It is comforting to know that Christ judges gifts by the heart: "For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according as a man has, not according as he has not." The widow’s two mites were of more value than the largest offerings cast that day into the treasury. They were, in fact, the very smallest offerings; none gave as little as the poor widow. What Jesus meant was that in proportion to her means—she had given more than anyone else of all the givers that day. The rich gave out of their abundance and had much left. She gave little out of her extreme poverty, and had nothing left. Christ’s eye is always on the treasury, and He rates the contributions, not by their monetary value—but by their largeness in proportion to the person’s ability. The Flesh and the Spirit Galatians 5:16-26

Paul states a great principle in spiritual ethics, when he says, "Walk by the Spirit—and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." He prescribes here the true rule of spiritual culture. The way to cure

ourselves of bad tendencies, is to cultivate the good. It was on these words that Dr. Chalmers preached his famous sermon, "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection." The way to become cured of evil lusts and desires—is to get the Spirit of God into one's heart. Where the Spirit is, everything is made to conform to the Spirit's life. The Spirit is love. Love is the fulfilling of the law, and love drives away all evil passion, all bitterness, all hatred. Those who walk by the Spirit—will not bite and devour one another—but will help one another ever toward "whatever things are true, . . . whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report." In another place, Paul contrasts the Holy Spirit and wine. He says, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Nothing could be farther apart in their nature and effects, than wine and the Holy Spirit. Wine incites to all unruliness, all bitterness, all destructive tendencies. On the other hand, the Spirit is full of love, goodness, kindness, gentleness, and incites to everything that is Christlike and upbuilding. Paul is right when he says that these—that is, the Spirit and the flesh—are "contrary the one to the other." The way, therefore, to get rid of the fleshly appetites and passions—is to become filled with the Spirit, whose influence is always toward the things that are heavenly.

It is a terrible picture of the works of the flesh which Paul gives in the following verses. We need not linger upon the words in detail. They describe all forms of impurity, and then include enmities, strife, jealousies, anger, factions, envyings, drunkenness and revelings. It is not saying too much, to assert that all of these are in the line of the results of drunkenness. Just such things as these drunkenness produces wherever it is allowed full sway. Drunkenness is a most debasing and degrading vice, and the others are of the same kind. We should note well what Paul says about these works of the flesh: "Of which I forewarn you . . . that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

We should never think of calling a man a Christian who indulges in such vices. Then, we may go a step farther and say that it is impossible also for persons who live in such debasing ways to enter into heaven itself. For heaven must first begin in our hearts. We never can enter the gates of pearl, unless we have received the heavenly life and Spirit, while we stay in this world. In wonderful contrast with this most pitiful cluster of works of the flesh, we have the virtues and graces which Paul enumerates as "the fruit of the Spirit." These are heavenly qualities. In our daily prayer we ask that we may do the will of God on earth—as it is done in heaven. These verses tell us how the will of God is done in heaven, how people live who have been redeemed and are inside the gates with Christ. It is well for us to study these qualities and characteristics of the kingdom of God in this world, also, as well as in heaven itself.

"Self-control" is also a fruit of the Spirit. The object of Christian culture is not only to know the will of God concerning our life and character—but also to achieve self-mastery. A drunkard has not self-control. He may say that he can drink or let it alone, as he chooses—but the fact is that he cannot. Indeed, men often make as an excuse for the debasing habit of drunkenness, that they cannot help it. It is a pitiful condition when a human being, made to be a child of God, made to be Christlike in life and character, is unable to control his own passions and desires, and is swept away by every unholy impulse. But it is this condition to which indulgence in any sort of evil tends.

We soon form habits for ourselves, and then our habits become our masters. When one has formed the habit of kindness, it becomes second nature, as it were, to be kind. If one has formed

the habit of sobriety, of resisting self-indulgence of any kind, this quality also becomes second nature, as we say. It is easy for us, then, to refuse to do evil and choose to do good. He who has attained perfect self-control, and has the complete mastery of himself, need not be afraid of temptation. But how can one get this perfect self-mastery? It is only when Christ lives in us, His Spirit filling our hearts, and producing in us all gentle and kindly desires, all holy impulses—that we really have self-mastery. A story is told of Henry Drummond and the way he sought to save a friend from the drinking habit. This friend's wife had appealed to Mr. Drummond privately regarding the habit of drinking into which her husband was falling, requesting him to try to save him. One day this friend and Mr. Drummond were riding behind two spirited horses which the friend was driving. As they were about descending a hill, Mr. Drummond said to him, "What would happen if these horses got out of your control and started to run down the hill?" The man said that they could not help being dashed to pieces. "But," continued Mr. Drummond quietly, "suppose in such a case there sat one beside you who was able to control the horses and save you from the disaster impending. What would you do?" The man was silent for a moment, and then said, "I should put the lines into his hands." It was not hard for Mr. Drummond to pass to the man's own increasing danger, as he was losing the mastery over himself in his indulgence in strong drink.

Christ is ever by us and we may always put the lines into His hands if we will. Paul intimates that the self-controlled life is not an easy one. "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires." Crucifixion suggests that only by nailing the desires of the flesh to the cross can they be put to death. No doubt Paul was thinking of the cross of Christ, and meant to intimate that only by entering into Christ's own death, by accepting Him as Savior and Master, can anyone have the evil lusts of nature put to death. We cannot by any mere child's play overcome the evil tendencies in our lives. It cost Christ a terrible death to redeem the world. It costs any man a terrible crucifixion of self to enter into complete self-mastery of a Christian. The Imitation of Christ Ephesians 4:20-30 The Christian is to learn Christ. He is to go to school, where the pupils are Christ's followers. The textbook is Christ Himself. What a wonderful Book it is we have to study! How can we study it? We can study the life of Christ as we have it portrayed in the gospel. We can see how He lived, what kind of boy He was, how He treated His mother, how He treated His heavenly Father; what kind of man He was—His character, His disposition. His treatment of all sorts of people; how He endured personal injustice and wrong. It is a wonderful book—just the story of Christ's life. Then, we have also His teachings, which make another book. In every Christian—there are two men. Several times Paul speaks of them. When a preacher was preaching before a king, and spoke of the struggle that goes on between the old man and the new man, the king unconsciously broke out, saying, "I know those two men!" We all know them, if we are trying to live right. The problem of Christian living is to have the new man triumph over the old man, more and more completely, until the old man is in perfect subjection to the new. Here Paul is speaking of the outer life, and urges all Christians to put away whatever in the old manner of living is not right. When we give ourselves to Christ we ought to put away firmly and forever, whatever is not in accordance with the commandments of our new Master. The old man cannot be patched up; there must be a new man. Nor will a new outer life do. The evil within will continually work through and soil all without. A whitewashed outer wall will never make a beautiful home while the house within is full of foulness. The only true cleansing is that which begins within and makes the heart right. Hence we are told that we must be "renewed." Not only so—but we must be renewed in the spirit of our mind; that is, at the heart of us. This is just what Jesus said to Nicodemus: "You must

be born anew." The new life from above must enter into your heart. When the heart is right—the words, the conduct, the disposition, the whole character will soon be right.

"Put on the new man, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." The new man is the Christian man. We see at once, however, that more than reformation is required to make the new man. He is "created," and only God can create. We cannot change our own heart so that we shall have only holy feelings, desires, affections. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. We have a part in it, of course. God does not work on us as a sculptor works on the marble, hewing it into any shape he desires without any consciousness or acquiescence or will in the stone. We are not blocks of marble; we are immortal beings, and as such all work on us is wrought through our own wills, affections, desires. We are exhorted here to "put on the new man," as if it were altogether our own work. We are to listen to God's voice and seek to obey Him; then as we obey—His Spirit will work in us and produce the change which we could never of ourselves produce. We have here also the pattern after which we are to fashion our new life—"after God." God Himself is the pattern for every Christian life. The new man will put away falsehood, and will speak truth with his neighbor. There is a story that a distinguished Englishman complained bitterly to Mr. Gladstone of some parish preacher, who in his sermon insisted upon the application of religion to a man's everyday life. This distinguished Englishman thought this was an outrageous proceeding on the clergyman's part. He thought religion should deal only with doctrine and celestial truths. But the Bible insists upon the application of religion to all our words and acts. Lying is a terribly common vice. A writer tells us that the Persians are great liars. Very likely—but they are too far away. No good can possibly come to us—from our berating the Persians. But we want to let this teaching come into our own life, and cut close as it will.

"Putting away falsehood, speak truth each one with his neighbor." How is it in our speech? Is it always true? Do we never lie? Do we never try to leave a wrong impression on another? Do we never deceive? Lying is very hateful to God, for He is absolute truth, and whatever is less than truth—His soul abhors. People talk about "little white lies." Every lie is black! A lie is a rotten stone built in the wall of life; some day it will crumble and then the foundation will sink away. Anything built on a lie—is built on the sand. We ought to train ourselves to absolute truthfulness. People are continually discussing the question whether it can ever be right to tell a lie, whether a falsehood ever can be admissible. Some people say it can, that it may be right to tell lies, for example, to save your life. What do you think about it? But suppose it is another person's life you could save by lying; would it be right then to lie? We have an illustration in a recent trial, when a sister could not tell a lie on the witness stand, though a lie in one short word would have saved her sister's life. She said she could not do it. She would give her life's blood to save her sister—but she could not tell a lie even to save her.

"In your anger do not sin." But how can one be angry—and not sin? Is not all anger sinful? No, God is angry with the wicked. We read, too, that Jesus was sometimes angry. There is, therefore, a sinless anger—anger against sin. For example, if you see a great, strong, brutal man beating a weak, helpless woman—there must rise up in your soul a burning indignation against the act. That is sinless. But if as a result you lose your temper and fly into a passion and speak unadvisedly, you have sinned. The counsel here is that our righteous indignation against baseness, injustice, cruelty, or wrong of any kind—shall not be permitted to pass into personal bitterness, resentment, or ungoverned temper.

Here it was that Moses failed. He could not but feel a righteous indignation at the people's unbelief and rebellion—but he sinned when he made it personal, and lost his patience and spoke the angry words.

"Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry." The second counsel in this verse is very interesting. We are almost sure, sometime in the pressure of life's contacts, to grow angry. If we do, we are exhorted to get the bitterness out of our heart before the sun goes down. Several reasons for this may be suggested. Anger allowed to smoulder overnight, may break out in uncontrollable passion in the morning.

Then, at the close of every day, we ought to be ready to die, as we may never see another morning. We ought not to sleep, therefore, before getting out of our heart, everything that is not right. This word was interpreted literally in the ancient times, and the Christians who had had any differences would hasten before the setting of the sun to confess and settle their quarrels. The using of the Lord 's Prayer in the evening would seem to compel forgiveness, as we must pray, "Forgive us our debts—as we forgive our debtors."

"He who has been stealing must steal no longer—but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need." The new man will not steal. There are a great many ways of stealing, besides rifling a cash drawer, or picking a pocket. There have been a great many defalcations and embezzlements in recent days—but all of these were but the riper fruit of dishonesty in little ways, running on probably through years. He who steals a pin, steals—and is a thief. The boy who picks up a marble that is not his, or a penny, or takes an apple from a tree, or purloins anything—has stolen—and is a thief. He who takes off an envelope a stamp used—but not canceled, and uses it again, is a thief. He who keeps the one cent too much the grocer gives in mistake in making change—is a thief. He who, when the conductor does not take up his fare or ticket, goes out of the car and says nothing—has stolen. There is no other word for it. We must study the matter out for ourselves.

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths—but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." The new man will let no corrupt speech proceed out of his mouth—but only that which is good. There is very much corrupt speech falling every day from human lips. It is a good rule for boys and men never to tell a story or to say anything in a company of their own, which they would not tell or say if their mothers and sisters were present. That was General Grant's rule, and he would not permit any officer or companion to repeat any story in his presence, which the person would not say if there were ladies present. The kind of words a Christian may speak, is well defined here. They must be good words, that is, pure, kindly, loving, worthy; and they must be words that will edify those who hear—words that will benefit or help others, giving comfort, encouragement, incitement, instruction. Only think what havoc this rule would play with much of the talk that goes on everywhere among Christians! What edifying words did you speak last evening to your friend in that two-hours' talk you had with him? This is a large lesson. The new man will not "grieve the Holy Spirit of God." It scarcely seems possible to us at first, that we could give pain to God. Yet the apostles warned the Ephesians against this very thing. Boys know what kind of things in their life grieve their mothers. The Holy Spirit is nearer to all of us than any mother can be, and has a more tender heart. Let us watch our words, our acts, our wishes and feelings, and all the motives of our life, lest we grieve the Holy

Spirit.

Finally, the new man in Christ Jesus will "be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." If all these rules and exhortations about kindness and gentleness were followed out in our lives—how the world's happiness would be increased! How loving would our homes be! How delightful would Christian fellowship of all kinds be! The reason urged for forgiving each other—is that God has forgiven us. Not only the reason—but also the measure of our forgiveness is indicated in this way; we are to forgive, even as God forgives us. Our Lord taught this lesson in the prayer which He gave to His disciples. Every time we ask Him to forgive us, we say, "As we forgive." But suppose we keep bitterness in our heart against someone; what is it we ask God to do, and how do we ask Him to forgive? There certainly is a wonderful field for quiet thought in these few verses which we have been studying. A Call to Christlike Living Ephesians 5:11-21 This chapter is a call to Christlike living. "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children" is its keynote. This means that sin is to be avoided. There are vices that are not even to be named by those who belong to Christ; they are so vile, so loathsome. It is a black list, indeed, that is given in the fifth verse—people who have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Perhaps we do not draw rigidly enough, the line that divides between the things of God and the things of the evil one. Our passage starts with an exhortation which calls for uncompromising separation from all unholy things. "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." We know what works of darkness are. All sin is of darkness. It shuns the light. It hides away out of sight. It lurks in the shadows. Everything that is contrary to God's commandments, is a work of darkness. A Christian is to live a pure and holy life. But more than this—he is not even to have fellowship with the works of darkness; he is not to have anything to do with them. He lives in a different world, a world whose atmosphere is the love and the holiness of Christ. The reason for this counsel is frankly given. "For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret." It would stain our lips even to tell of these vile things! A disciple of Christ should never allow himself to mention impure things or to think of them. He should never permit his ears to hear unclean stories. Books and newspapers which describe vile resorts and the deeds that are done in them—are not fit to be put into the hands of those who are following Christ. They leave a trail of foulness wherever they go. A godly man in his old age said that when he was very young, another boy drew him aside one day into a secret place and, opening a book, showed him a vile picture. He glanced at it only for a moment—but it left a blotch on his memory, like a stain on a white garment. All the fifty years he had lived since that hour he had not been able to forget that moment's unholy glance. We cannot keep ourselves too carefully from all fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. The call to awake implies that the state of sin is a state of moral death. "Awake, you who sleep, and arise from the dead." People living without Christ resent the suggestion that they are dead. They claim to be very much alive, indeed. Many of them are full of ambition and are in the very forefront of the world's leaders. They are active in business. They are high in the ranks of society. They wear badges of honor won in life 's arena. They think the meek and lowly people are the dead people—those who do not seem to care for earth's prizes. But as God looks down upon men, those are dead—who do not know Him, who are unconscious of the spiritual realities about them, who live only for this world. Especially are those dead who are living in sin and for pleasure—dead while they live! The voice of God calls over all such, as Christ called at the door of the grave of Lazarus, bidding them awake from the dead. The next exhortation is a call to walk with eyes wide open. "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise."

The way is full of danger. He is very foolish indeed, who goes carelessly through this world. Yet there are many who seem never to have a serious thought about life. They never try to avoid the temptations that beset them. They have no sense of responsibility. They walk as if blind into all manner of temptations.

Another lesson is the value of opportunity. "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Everyone's path is filled with blessings from heaven—but we must watch for them and take them as they come, or we shall miss them altogether. Youth is a time of special opportunities. If it is wasted, it never can be redeemed afterwards.

There is a strong lesson here against drunkenness. "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." A glass of wine may seem very harmless as it sparkles on the table—but what "debauchery" is in it! This picture of the evil, the shame, the strife, the trouble, the harm—which the wine cup contains, needs no filling out. A wise oriental shiek mentioned to a young Arab prince, from whom he was about to part, a list of crimes and bade him choose the one which seemed least harmful. The young prince turned in horror from murder, theft, immorality—and told the patriarch that he would choose intemperance. "You have chosen that," said the wise old man, "which will bring you all the rest!"

There is always danger in wine. There still are some Christian people who claim the privilege of using it on their tables and on other occasions. But they do not know what they are doing, how unwisely they are acting, what possibilities of harm there are in what seems to them such a pleasant and innocent habit. Our nature craves stimulation, and this, men tell us, they find, when they are jaded and weary, in the wine cup. But Paul says that there is a better way—instead of being drunk with wine—be filled with the Spirit, he says. There is debauchery in wine—but in the Spirit are all pure, holy and heavenly aspirations. If we would let the divine Spirit into our heart we should have such satisfying, such filling of the life, as would give us deep and blessed joy, the joy in which there is no bitterness. The Christian Armor Ephesians 6:10-20

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." A great many times in the Bible, we are urged to be strong. It is not mere strength of body that is meant. Of course, we should develop our body, and so obey the laws of nature, as to keep well and be physically as strong as possible. But Goliath was not God's ideal of manly strength—he was nothing but a big body, with neither intellectual nor spiritual development. The strength which the Bible makes so much of, is strength of character—firmness of purpose, staunchness of principle, moral strength. The secret of it, is faith in Christ. If we are in Him, then all His strength is assured to us to fill our weakness. In one place Paul said he was strongest, when he was weakest—that is, he had most room then for Christ, and the most of Christ's strength rested upon him. We may always be sure of victory—if we keep close to Christ, rallying round His cross. The way to be strong is to "Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." It is the armor of God, because He provides it. Our Captain does not send His soldiers out, without furnishing them all the equipment they need. But the soldier must put on the armor. Armor hanging on the wall, would not protect a man as he went into battle; he must take it down and put it on. There is armor provided for every Christian soldier. The Bible is a great armory, and there are in it all kinds of weapons of offense and defense. But it is not enough to have these pieces of armor provided in the Bible. We must put them on. The breastplate, the shield and the helmet will be no protection, unless we wear

them. We must put on the armor ourselves—even Christ will not do it for us. Every soldier must look to his own preparation for warfare.

God’s armor is essential because "our struggle is not against flesh and blood—but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Perhaps the air is as full of evil spirits—as the streets are of people. It is well to understand, that we have enemies which we cannot see. There are bad men. Sometimes we see on the street a face which is full of evil, every look revealing wickedness and vileness. There are also invisible beings all around us which, if we could see, would terrify us with their loathsomeness. They are demons of Satan’s army. If it were not that Christ had overcome Satan and all his hosts—this would be a fearful world to live in! But they are not all evil spirits, demons, which crowd the air—good angels are there, too, guarding Christ’s little ones, and they are stronger than demons. Nevertheless, we must not underrate our enemies. The first item in the armor of God which we must wear, is the belt of truth. Having first this on, we are to stand in the face of the enemy, ready for the battle. It is not easy to stand in the presence of danger. That we may be able to stand, we should gird up our loins. Again, notice that we must gird our own loins—no one can do it for us. Truth is the belt, and no one can get truth for us. We must read our Bible for ourselves if we would have its truths enter our heart and become wrought into our character. Truth means reality, sincerity, honesty—no one can be sincere, real, or true, for us. It is a great thing to be true through and through, with truth in the inward parts, in the character, in the soul.

Then, we must put on "the breastplate of righteousness." The breastplate covered the heart. It was made of the strongest material, so that no weapon could pierce it. The Christian’s breastplate is righteousness. For one thing, this means Christ’s righteousness, which makes us safe in the shadow of His cross. To belong to Christ is to be in holiest protection. When an American citizen was about to be shot in a Spanish country, his friends threw over him the American flag. This saved his life. So Christ’s righteousness protects Christ’s own people. Another meaning is that righteousness wrought into our character, in right principles and conduct, is a breastplate of protection for the Christian. The Christian must put on his feet the "preparation of the gospel of peace." The soldier needs strong shoes for rough roads; the Christian needs good shoes, too, for much of the way is hard and steep. There is an old Bible word about shoes of iron, which God promises to give to His pilgrims when they have to walk over sharp roads. There is a beautiful legend of Jesus which says that one day, when He was walking beside the sea, being weary. He took off His sandals to bathe His feet in the pure, cool water. Then He said to Himself: "Three years, three years, and then, poor feet, the cruel nails will come and make you bleed! But that blood will lave all weary feet in their painful ways." Christ’s feet bled and were hurt on the hard roads and with the nails—that we might have shoes to wear in life’s rough paths. But all this preparation will be useless unless we take up "the shield of faith, with which . . . to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one." The ancient shield was large enough to cover all the person, and it was made so that darts striking it would not go through it. Faith is the Christian’s shield. The evil one is always trying to wound us with his darts. These are ofttimes poisoned, or they are fiery—life’s temptations are terrible. But if we are truly in Christ, none of these darts can touch us—they will be quenched in the shield we carry.

Then comes the "helmet of salvation." "Salvation will he appoint for walls and bulwarks," said the old prophet. When one is safe in Christ, one is sheltered. No evil can touch us if we are near Christ. "Your life is hid with Christ in God."

"Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." All other parts of the armor are for defense. There is something for every portion of the body—but the back. This suggests that the Christian soldier should never turn his back to the enemy, for his back is unprotected. The only weapon for active, aggressive fighting is the sword. It is called the sword of the Spirit, because the Spirit gives it its sharpness and power to thrust into men's hearts. Jesus Himself gave us an object lesson for the use of the sword when He met the tempter. He pierced him with texts of Scripture! We should learn to use the sword of the Spirit in the same way. The Word of God will drive away the enemies.

Last, prayer is named, not because it is least important—but because it is so important. We are in danger of forgetting that prayer is a mighty force in the world. We live in a working age. We believe in all manner of earnest activities, in full consecration of our gifts and services to God. This is well—but, after all, there is no such power—as the power of prayer. Jesus made a great deal of it in His own life and in His teaching. In the book of Acts we find prayer everywhere, and in the epistles it is continually commanded. Paul many times pleads with his friends to pray for him, and he exhorts that intercessions shall be made for all men. Here he asks for prayers for all the saints, and then for himself, not that he might be set free from his chains—but that he might have greater power in witnessing for Christ.

Christ's Humility and Exaltation

Php 2:1-11

"Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose." The people at Philippi had Paul's happiness in their keeping. They could give pain to his heart—or they could give him gladness. We all carry in our hands, in greater or less measure, the happiness of others. Children have power either to make their parents unhappy or to make them glad. A class has their teacher's happiness in their keeping—if they receive the lessons and live them out, they give the teacher deep joy. A few people gave Jesus comfort and gladness—by their love and kindness. We never can know what the Bethany family did for His pleasure. But the people in general, broke His heart. The scene of Jesus weeping over the city illustrates this. We should always try to give joy to our friends—and above all to Christ.

Christians should live together in love. There can be no sadder sight than a quarreling church. With what pity that Jesus must look down upon the unseemly spectacle! One of the last prayers of Jesus for His disciples, was that they might live in unity. One of His last commandments to them—was that they should love one another as He had loved them—that is, patiently, helpfully, thoughtfully, unselfishly, faithfully, unto the uttermost. Wherever Christians are associated together, they should be of the same mind, of the same love, being of one accord. The secret of being of the same mind, being of one accord, is stated plainly: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit—but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests—but also to the interests of others." This happy result can be reached only by mutual yielding and giving up. It never can be attained by each one determining always to

have his own way. No two people can be intimately associated and live in love, without cost to both. The secret of wedded happiness is in each counting the other better than himself. Sometimes there is a unity made in marriage by one being "head" and the other surrendering all rights—but that is not an accord of love; it is merely a unity produced by force—master and slave. The "one mind" comes through the desire of each to serve the other. So it is in all friendships. Friendship is always discipline. Two friends learn to live together in love—only by each thinking of the other, and forgetting self.

There are other people besides ourselves in the world—and they live all about us. We are to think of their interests. We cannot step in any direction, without coming in contact with some of them. Now we must think of these others, and shape our life in reference to their interests as well as our own. We dare not go on treading as we like, picking up every beautiful thing we see, plucking every flower we find blooming anywhere. Other people have rights, and we must regard them. Besides, there is a law of love which bids us think of others before ourselves, "in honor preferring one another." We should have an interest in the prosperity, the success, and the happiness of all about us. This is not easy. The only way to fulfill its precepts, is to have in us the mind of Christ. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Christ's wonderful condescension, is the true type of every Christian life. Each in his own sphere should live over again, the marvelous story of condescension and humiliation.

We are not merely to copy Christ in His acts—but we are to seek to have the mind and the spirit that was in Him. All true life must begin within. A new heart is the starting point. There is little use in a bad man changing his habits or manners—while his spirit remains bad. He is the same man still. The only true change is that which begins in the heart. "Create in me a clean heart, God; and renew a right spirit within me," is the prayer for those who wish to be Christians. If we have the mind that was in Christ, we shall have no trouble in getting the Christlike life. But how can we get the mind that was in Christ? Paul tells us everywhere in the words "Christ lives in me." We may have the very mind of Christ in us, His Spirit being the spirit that animates us. We have but to open our heart to Him, to be willing to be made like Him, to yield our being to Him. If Christ really rules and reigns in us—we have His mind swaying, influencing, directing and controlling us. The whole story of the condescension of Christ is in the words: "Who, existing in the form of God . . . emptied himself, taking the form of a servant." He was "in the form of God." He was God Himself. This was the starting point. It is this which made the condescension so wonderful. It is no humiliation for a man to be born. There is no special condescension even in the fact that Jesus was born in a stable and in poverty, and lived in a quiet village, working as a carpenter, and then went about the country teaching and doing good deeds, being misunderstood, and at last nailed to a cross. Other good men have been born in poverty, have worked as mechanics, have been persecuted, and have died as martyrs. If Jesus is only a man—there is no great condescension in all this. But when we look up and see Him in His divine glory, the eternal Son of God, and then think of what He did, we see the condescension!

Queen Victoria, in her summer rambles in Scotland many years ago, went into the homes of the poorest people and sat down and talked with them. In one place she found a poor, crippled, old woman, and gave her money. She read a chapter of the Bible to a sick man, and then prayed by his bedside. If some female missionary had done these things, no one would have talked about condescension—but when the good queen did them—all the world was touched. So, while we

read the gospel story—we must remember WHO it was that was born in a stable, cradled in a manger, did deeds of mercy in the land, and died on the cross! Then we shall understand the mind that was in Christ Jesus. When we recall, further, the OBJECT of this condescension, why He who was in the form of God took on Him "the form of a servant" among men—that it was to lift up the fallen sons of men and make them sons of God—then we get another thought of what it is to have this mind in us. It is to have love for others, love for the unlovely, a love strong enough to lead us to make the greatest sacrifices in order to do them good, to save them. If we would love as Christ loved—we must be ready to make the condescension and sacrifice He made.

Christ "humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death." We should think of Jesus always as God's ideal man. How different His life from that of most men! They have their worldly ambitions. They want to make a name, to get rich, or to climb to power. Jesus was here to serve, to be a blessing to the world, to do good, to live out a life of love. He so devoted Himself to this great purpose, that He literally gave His life, going to a cross, in love for undeserving sinners! This is the true ideal of human life. We are to hold all that we have, and all that we are—at the service of Christ for our fellow men. But Christ was exalted after His humiliation. The exaltation was because of the humiliation. Service always has its reward. Those who empty out their life here—will find it again. No doubt the disciples of Jesus thought He had made a fearful mistake in giving up His life as He did. We can easily imagine them, during the days that the Master lay in the grave, saying one to another: "This is terrible—such a life to end on a cross! He was so young, too! If only He had been more prudent, and had thought of Himself a little more—He would not have met this fearful death! What a waste of precious life! What a blessing He would have been to the world—if only He had lived to a ripe old age!" But we know that no mistake was made—that His life was not wasted. In one of the old prophets we read of the Messiah, "He shall see of the travail of his soul—and shall be satisfied." In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are told that for the joy set before Him—He endured the cross, despising the shame. Jesus knew that He was not wasting His life—but that glory would come out of His sacrifice, not only for Himself—but for His people. He humbled Himself to be a servant and to die on a cross—but He went from the cross—to the throne of the universe! The law of life is the same in its application to Christ's followers. Those who give themselves up to service and sacrifice in doing the Master's work—are preparing for themselves high places in glory.

There is a legend of one who, when given money by a king for the building of a great palace, finding the people in sore need, spent the money in buying food for them. When the king came and found no palace he was very angry, and, sending for the builder, demanded an explanation. He then cast the builder into prison, saying, "Tomorrow you shall die, for you have been unfaithful." But that night the king, in a dream, saw a wonderful palace, surpassing all of earth's most splendid buildings. "What building is that?" he asked. "The Temple of Merciful Deeds, built for you by the Great Architect." Then the king understood that the spending of his money in service of love had erected for him inside the heavenly gates a palace of immortal beauty. Although only a legend, its teaching is true. In a life of sacrifice and service in this world, in Christ's name—we are laying up treasures in heaven which some day we shall have forever! The New Life in Christ Colossians 3:1-15

Paul said to The Colossians what to many must have seemed surprising: "If then you were raised together with Christ." How could these Colossian Christians have been raised with Christ? Of

course, it was a spiritual rising. The people really had been spiritually dead, and they were now living a new spiritual life. Everyone who truly believes on Christ, receives the Holy Spirit, comes out of his grave, and walks with Christ among the living.

Those who have risen with Christ should "seek the things that are above, where Christ is." What things? We are taught to pray that the Father's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. That is bringing heaven down to earth. The things which are above are: holiness, goodness, truth, peace, love. The lessons the Bible teaches us are all of things above, the truths and principles of God's kingdom. These are the things which are unseen and yet are eternal. We are to seek to live here in this world—as we would live if we were really in heaven.

More, they must set their mind on the things that are above. Where the mind is—there the life is tending. Where the thoughts go—the soul is climbing. If we think continually of earthly, unworthy things—our whole being will gravitate downward. But if we train our thoughts to fly away like eagles into the deep blue sky—our life will be lifted upward. This means, at least, to attach oneself to something heavenly, that one 's life may be borne irresistibly upward.

We should form the habit of setting our thoughts on things above. It is said that many years ago, when a great suspension bridge was to be built over a wide river, a kite was sent over, carrying a fine wire across the chasm. It was not hard then to get a second and a third wire over also, and by and by the tiny thread of steel—had become a great bridge of twisted strands, on which human feet crossed over. So we may train our thoughts to fly across the abyss to heaven—first one thought, then another and another—until we have built a bridge for ourselves from earth to heaven. But we must begin and train our thoughts thus to fly, for nothing but such a habit will bring to us the blessing. The Christian life is secret, and no one can see its workings: it is hid with Christ in God. You pray and grace comes into your heart. But no one sees it coming. You lean on God in your trust, and your strength is renewed—but the process, no one can perceive. Christ is the Friend whom having not seen we love, in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable. The Christian's life is hidden also, because its real beauty is not visible to the world's eyes. The artist keeps his picture veiled while he works upon it. At last he removes the veil, and men see the loveliness which his hands have been fashioning in secret. So God works in our life, in joy and sorrow, in His providence, and by His Word and Spirit. The beauty He is producing, human eyes see not. "What I am doing, you do not now understand," He says, "but you shall understand hereafter." By and by, when the work is finished, men and angels shall see the marvelous beauty of Christ glowing in even the lowliest, plainest life.

"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived." Colossians 3:5-7 A new life in Christ calls for the utter destruction of these evils. It is a shameful list which Paul names. It makes us ashamed to think that such qualities may belong to us—or may nest in our heart! Who would have thought that any these vile things could exist in anyone who wears the human form! Yet many of these ugly things are found in each of us! Our hearts are naturally cages of unclean birds.

What does Paul tell us we should do with these unholy things? He says we are to put them to death. When we find in ourselves any evil thing, we must kill it, for it is not right for it to live. An uncompromising war should be waged against all evil. He who cherishes any impurity in

himself—is nursing a viper which will sting him to death by and by!

"But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips." This part of the chapter is not for the good people who are now studying it—is it? Look at the words honestly.

"Anger." Do you ever get angry? Does you temper ever get the mastery of you? Do you ever fume with rage, even if you do not let people know of it?

"Malice." Do you ever cherish a grudge, ever keep bitterness against another in your heart?

"Slander." Do you ever spit out spiteful things about another who is absent? Do you ever rail at anyone?

"Filthy language." That means speaking of which we ought not to be ashamed of, which we would be ashamed of before our mother or some pure-minded friend. Do you ever utter a word you would be ashamed to have Christ hear?

"Lying." One may lie by a look, or a wink, or by keeping silence. Robert Speer tells of asking a Sunday school once what different kinds of sin there are. One little boy answered, "Good sins and bad sins, sir." Then he asked what kind of sins, bad sins are. Promptly the boy answered, "Lies."

These are a few of the things which we are to put away, if we have risen with Christ. It is not enough to put away the evil things of the old life. The house cannot be left empty. If it is, the former bad tenants will soon be back again, bringing with them still more wicked companions, and the last state will be worse than the first. "To replace—is to conquer." The only sure saving of our life—comes through expelling sin from it—and then getting Christ into it.

"Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." Colossians 3:12-14

These are beautiful virtues which we are exhorted to put on. They all are fragments of the image of God. They each belong in the life and character of Jesus Christ. We must notice how large a place love holds among them. Indeed, all of these qualities are phases of love. The compassionate heart comes first—for the heart makes the life. A kindly heart fills the life with gentle things. Kindness has been called the small coin of love. It is always scattering blessings.

"Humility" is often caricatured, for there are many who try to be humble. But it cannot be put on consciously or by any effort. It must be in the heart and must work out in the life.

"Gentleness" is patience under insult.

"Patience" is enduring without complaining, keeping sweet whatever the circumstances may be.

"Bearing with one another" is the power of getting along with people who are not easy to live with, getting along without being irritated, fretted and made ugly in spirit by their unreasonableness.

"And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." Then comes "love" which is over all, above all, in all. It is this which makes the character complete. If we truly

get love into our life—all the rest will follow! As the true result of this transformation, the "peace" of Christ will rule in the heart. Peace is quietness in the midst of turmoil. It is gentleness in the midst of hate. It is patience in the midst of suffering and trial. It is self-mastery; rather it is Christ-mastery. We have but to think what Christ's peace was, and then to remember that it is this. His own peace, which He promises to give to us. If this blessed peace rule in our hearts, feelings, affections and desires, we shall lack nothing more!

Paul's Counsel to the Thessalonians 1 Thessalonians 5:14-28 The Bible touches life at every point. While its great principles cover all moral acts in a general way, it descends to particulars in many cases, giving special instructions of great value. The passage noted above contains golden counsels for the common days, and for the common experiences of life.

"We urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle." 1 Thessalonians 5:14. There is a duty of warning others. We may not always speak words of commendation and approval. When Christian people are living in a sinful way, that is, not living in harmony with the divine laws, they are to be admonished. We must make sure, however, that we do this in the spirit of Christ—in love, in order to help and save those we admonish. No duty requires more wisdom and more grace—than that of telling others of their faults.

"Encourage the timid." Then, we should always be encouragers, for there are many timid, faint-hearted people who continually need to be lifted up and helped onward. We should never be discouragers. There are those, too, who are weak and need the strength and support which we can give them. The strong should help the weak. We should bear each other's burdens.

"Be patient with everyone." We are also to be patient towards all, no matter how they may treat us. This is one of the great lessons which Jesus taught in His own life—to bear sweetly and patiently with those who are unkind and injurious. It is not easy—but we are not Christians if we are not trying to live after this law of love.

"Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong." The teaching of Christ also requires us to render always good for evil; never evil for evil. This is a very practical counsel, and it is never easy to follow it. Yet it is an inseparable part of all Christian life. If one strives for the heroic in Christian character, nothing could be more heroic than this! To return love for hate, kindness for injury—is far braver than to be angry and resentful, demanding satisfaction.

"Always pursue what is good for one another." We should always strive after that which is for the good of others, and in all things make this our aim. Anything that would injure or harm another, is absolutely unchristian.

"Rejoice always!" Joy is never to be left out of any scheme of Christian life. We are to rejoice, not now and then only—but always. Even our sorrows should not hush the songs in our hearts. This element of joy, can be only in the life in which Christ lives and rules. There is a difference in people in the matter of joyousness—but true Christian joy is not that which the world gives, nor that which nature inspires—but the joy which conies from the heart of God—and which nothing ever can overcome or destroy.

"Pray without ceasing." Prayer is another essential element in every true Christian life. Not to pray—is not to live at all as a Christian, for prayer is "the Christian's vital breath." The exhortation

to pray without ceasing may seem a strange one. It means, however, that our communion with God never need be broken, never should be broken. We cannot always be on our knees; for we have work to do, duties to perform, which we may not neglect, and which are just as sacred as praying. But we may pray at our work, by keeping always close to Christ, so that anywhere, any moment, we can look up into His face and speak to Him and get an answer.

"Give thanks in everything." Thanksgiving should never be lacking in a Christian life. It is not enough to observe one day in the year for 'Thanksgiving', although it is a very beautiful thing to do. Nor is it enough to put a sentence of thanksgiving into our daily prayers, although this also is proper. It is the grateful heart that pleases God, the heart that is always full of praise. There should be a note of thanksgiving running through all our life. Too many of us go to God only with requests, with our burdens, our worries, our troubles; while we but rarely go to Him with any word of thanks. We are not to be thankful only for our prosperities and for the pleasant and agreeable things that come into our days—we are to be thankful, too, for the things that appear to us as adversities.

"Give thanks in everything." That means in the sad days as well as in the glad days, when clouds are in the sky, as well as when the sunshine is pouring everywhere. It is specially said here that this is the will of God for us. This is the way God wants us to live—always giving thanks. A rabbinical teaching says that the highest angel in heaven is the angel of praise. The Christliest note is one that is always keyed to the note of praise and thanksgiving.

"Do not quench the Spirit." It is the glory of our Christian life, that God lives in it. Paul said, "Christ lives in me!" A fire burns in our hearts which is fed from heaven. We live at our best, only when we let this flame burn brightly in us. We are exhorted here, not to quench the Spirit. Fire is quenched by pouring water upon it, or by covering it up so as to exclude the air. The Spirit may be quenched in us by sin, by worldliness, by evil thoughts, by bad passions, by resistance. To quench this heavenly flame, is to put out the light of life, leaving the darkness of death within us. "Do not quench the Spirit."

We are also exhorted not to "despise prophesyings." Prophesyings, in a general way, are divine teachings, the message of God to us. The Bible—is a book of prophesyings. All heavenly instructions, counsels, warnings, from whatever source, may in a sense, be called prophesyings.

We should keep our minds and hearts always wide open to receive the Words of God, and to welcome all divine influences and impressions and inspirations, whether they are spoken by the Spirit of God or by a human friend. "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening," is the true attitude of every believing heart toward the truth, however it is spoken.

"Test all things." Not all voices, however, that speak in this world, are divine voices. Not all words that fall upon our ears, are words from heaven. We should test all things to see whether they are of God or not.

Then we should "Hold fast to what is good." We should judge carefully between genuine and counterfeit coins. Put to the test of truth—all counsels that are given to you. Not all such counsels are from God. It is said by our Master of His sheep, that "they will never follow a stranger; instead they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers." We should make sure that the voice which we hear is our Master's own voice; that it is the voice of one who counsels us wisely, and not the voice of a stranger speaking to us in unheavenly words, to draw us

away from the truth.

"Abstain from every form of evil." We are accustomed to think of some violations of God's Word—as only slightly evil; while we imagine that other transgressions are very black in their sinfulness.

Some people appear to think that if we keep ourselves from the worst kinds of evil—that we need not be so watchful against the minor forms of misconduct. They will not lie, nor steal, nor swear, nor do other things which would brand them in the eyes of the community as 'wicked'. But meanwhile they are ungentle, unkind, selfish, bad tempered, and loving the world. But Paul's exhortation is, "Abstain from every form of evil." We are not to pick out certain sins and condemn these alone as evil, abstaining from them; meanwhile indulging in pet vices and sinful habits of our own. Whatever is wrong in even the slightest way—is to be abstained from. There really are no little sins, no 'little white lies', no slight deviations from right and purity. Even evil thoughts, our Master says, break His commandments!

"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." This prayer for consecration is very comprehensive. It is that we may be sanctified, that is, set apart wholly for God and God's use. We belong to God, for He has bought us with a price, and we should make ourselves altogether God's by keeping ourselves separate from sin, and from the world. It is a prayer that our whole being, spirit, soul and body—shall be kept pure and holy, amid all the world's evil; preserved entire, without blame, until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It may seem impossible for anyone to realize this high ideal of living. It is impossible for us thus to keep ourselves. But the words which follow tell us how it becomes possible. "The One who calls you is faithful, and He will do it." We are safe in this world, therefore, when God keeps us—when His sheltering, protecting love enfolds us!

Paul's Charge to Timothy 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 2 Timothy 4:1-5 This letter to Timothy, the last product of Paul's pen—was written from the prison at Rome. In his desire to encourage the young evangelist, he gave him much counsel—counsel which is as valuable for the Christian today as it was for Timothy.

Paul urged Timothy, "Continue in what you have learned." 2 Timothy 3:14. That is what we should always do with the good things we have learned—abide in them, keep them in our hearts—then live them out. A great many people know a great deal more truth than they put into practice. The true test of knowing—is doing. We really only know—what we get into our experience and conduct. A young man said to his pastor at the close of a year that he had gone through the Bible five times that year. His pastor asked him quietly, "How often has the Bible gone through you this year?" "If you know these things—you are blessed if you do them." John 13:17

Paul reminded Timothy of his home training: "From childhood you have known the sacred Scriptures." It is a great privilege to grow up in the atmosphere of Bible teaching, to have for one's teacher a godly mother, who whispers into her child's ear the truths of God, the counsels of heavenly wisdom. Such lessons affect the life, even down to its close. Those who have had such mothers should never cease to be thankful for them. The reason for valuing the Scriptures, is that they are able to make the reader "wise unto salvation". There are different kinds of wisdom. A man

may know a great deal of science, literature, philosophy, and be very wise in this world's matters—and yet not have found salvation. It is very clear, that that is not the true wisdom—which fails to show men the way of eternal life. The true wisdom is found in the Word of God, which reveals to us our need, and then tells us of God and of Jesus Christ, and of the way to be saved. This Book may not answer questions about geology, astronomy, mathematics or world history—but it does answer all necessary questions about Christian duty, about God, about the way of salvation.

Someone tells of hearing a sermon in which he said the distinguished clergyman told him a great deal about the way from Jerusalem to Jericho—but did not tell him anything about the way from earth to heaven. How sad!

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness." Paul has no uncertain word about the inspiration of the Scriptures. The Bible alone is the Word of God. Holy men wrote it as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. There are other good books in the world—but none like the Word of God. We ought to read the Bible reverently, since God speaks to us in its pages. We ought to believe it, for His Word must be absolutely true. We should obey it, since what God commands must be right. We may yield our whole life to its influence, to be guided and fashioned by it. It is profitable for teaching—that is, for instruction in all matters that concern life. It is profitable for rebuking—it shows us our sins, our follies, our mistakes. It is profitable for correcting—to bring us back from wrong ways to right ways. It is profitable for training in righteousness—it gives us instruction for all true and beautiful living.

"So that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." The purpose of the Bible is to make complete men of us. If we follow it in everything, it will show us the right way, it will reveal to us the perfect ideal of Christian character, it will inspire us to holy living.

"In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge." Living according to God's Word, we must ever be conscious that we are living in God's sight. Life is very serious. We often say it will be a solemn thing to stand before God in judgment. Our common days are judgment days. We should learn to do everything as in the sight of God. This makes our every act and word solemn. We should never leave God out of our life, nor do anything otherwise than we would do it—if we saw the divine eye looking down upon us! The Word Timothy had received, he was to give to others. "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season," Paul said to him. He was not preaching with the burning ardor which should characterize a minister of Jesus Christ. Paul sought to stir him up to do better work. Many of us need this lesson. We are living, some of us, only half-heartedly, probably the saintliest of us below our best. From this Roman prison, comes the call to every young Christian to rouse his best energies in behalf of Christ. That a minister's work may not be all soft words, Paul indicated when he told Timothy that he must be ready to "correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction." The minister is to watch his flock with a shepherd's care. If he sees any of them going astray, he is not to be indifferent—but must seek to save them. We need great wisdom, however, when we speak to others of their faults or mistakes, lest by our lack of tact—we only drive them further away. Words of reproof should always be spoken in tender love and unwearying patience.

One reason for the faithfulness in preaching, is that "for the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear." We often hear about the serious responsibility of the preacher—but we should think also of the responsibility of the hearer. Of course, the teacher should teach well. There is no excuse for being dreary or dull in presenting the glorious truths of Christianity. Paul urges Timothy to do his part earnestly for the very reason that the people would be apt to turn away to fables instead of listening to the gospel. He must preach the old gospel in such a way, that the people will be compelled to listen.

Sober Living

Titus 2

Here we have special words of exhortation addressed to five different classes of people—aged men, aged women, young women, young men and servants.

"You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine." Titus was exhorted to think carefully what he should speak as a minister, so that his words should be fitting. It is serious work to teach others. Paul exhorts another young preacher to handle aright the word of truth. Wrong direction has sent many a life to destruction! Those who speak for God—must know well the Words of God.

There is a word here for aged men. The preacher is to exhort them, "to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance." Temperance is commended in every part of the Bible. Drunkenness is unworthy of any being wearing God’s image. The old men ought to set the example to the younger. But temperance in the Bible includes all the life—the appetites, the feelings, pleasures, and it means self-control.

Older men are also to be grave, preserving dignity and propriety in all their conduct. They should be sober-minded, serious, thoughtful, realizing the meaning of life. We often hear about being sound in the faith. This is well. But Paul exhorts these older men to be sound in love and patience as well as in faith.

"Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good." The second word is to aged women. They are exhorted to be reverent in demeanor and behavior. It is not fitting to see an old woman, foolish and frivolous in her conduct. She should watch her acts and words and bearing, for younger women look to the older for example. Aged women should not be slanderers, says Paul. Perhaps it was then as it is now, that there was too much gossip in certain companies of women. Gossip borders perilously close all the time to slander. It is a fearful thing to start or to repeat a bad story about another person. Christian women should never do it. Aged women are urged also not to become slaves to wine. They are exhorted to be teachers of that which is good. Very beautiful is a saintly old woman who has learned her lessons well and is living sweetly. She has a wide and helpful influence wherever she goes.

"Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the Word of God." The young women have their word, too. Their mothers and older women are to be their teachers, training them to be sober. Over and over again this word sober is

repeated in this passage. It has a much wider meaning than the sobriety which comes from abstinence from strong drink, though this is properly included, too. Life is not merely a bit of fun from the cradle to the grave. We are in the world to do something of God's work. We are moving toward the judgement bar of God, where we must give account of every act; and toward eternity, where we shall forever eat the fruits of the trees we plant now and here. We should live soberly, taking hold of life with earnestness, striving with all our might to do God's will.

Young women are also to love their husbands. Certainly—if not, they should never have married them. They should love their children, too, and be sober-minded, watchful of their conduct. They should be workers at home. This is a very suggestive bit of teaching. Home is the young wife's realm—and she is to do her sweetest and best work there. It is not enough for her to be active and earnest in societies outside; if she neglects her own home duties—she has disappointed God. She should be a good housekeeper and a good homemaker, kind, loving, thoughtful, earnest, and filled with the Christly spirit.

"Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good." The apostle has earnest words also for young men. They, too, are to be sober-minded. They should put away childish frivolities, and not trifle. Paul was writing here to a young man, and he exhorts him to be a pattern to other young men. There are several things in which this young minister was to be an example. One was in good works. We are to be interpreters of Christ, and His life was full of good works.

He was also to be serious—not long-faced, solemn-visaged—but remembering always that he was living in God's presence and must give account for all his life.

He was also to watch his speech. This is important. Some young men are careless in their talk. They speak rashly, foolishly, sometimes saying false words, sometimes staining their own lips and the souls of those who hear them with indecent stories or allusions. This young man was to live so that those who disbelieved Christianity should be ashamed when they saw how beautifully, how unselfishly, how purely, and helpfully he lived. This is a noble ideal for life—that the enemies of Christ shall be compelled into silence, "having no evil thing to say of us."

There is a word also for servants. "Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive."There were slaves in those days—many Christians were in bondage among the Romans. Paul tells the young minister what to say to them. They are quietly to accept their bondage, not rebelling against their masters—but cheerfully obeying them. Christ always counsels His followers to submission, even when they are unjustly treated. The starling in a cage flies against the wires and tries to get out. All it does, however, is to batter and bruise its own wings and breast. It does not get out. The canary, far more wisely, when put into a cage, flies up on a perch and sings, filling its cage with song. We may take a lesson from the birds.

Servants were also exhorted to do what would please their master, obeying, not complaining, not talking back to argue the case—"Theirs not to reason why."

Servants are not to steal—but are always to be faithful and honest. In other epistles Paul encourages servants to do their best always, regardless of the character of their master, because

it is Christ they are really serving; they should do their work as for Him, even if their human master is hard, unjust, unreasonable. Christian slaves also were to adorn the doctrine of God in all things. That is, they were to live so beautifully that by their conduct that in every way, they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.

While these counsels were primarily for slaves, they are applicable to all who are under others as servants or employees. The great majority of us have to work under a master or superintendent. Not always is this master gentle, patient, or lenient; sometimes he is unjust, harsh, severe, exacting and oppressive. But the character of the master does not modify the duty of the servant. We must keep sweet and must be faithful and gentle with the worst overseer. Other people's sin does not excuse sin in us.

"For the grace of God . . . teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present world." This a great teaching for all of us who bear the name of Christ. There are some things we are to condemn, that is, give up, put out of our life—ungodliness and worldly lust. There is something we are to do—live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. It is not enough to intend to be saintly when we get to heaven; we are to be saintly in this present evil world. The closing words tell us what the motive for a Christian life should be—"the blessed hope and appearing of Jesus Christ." He has given Himself for us—this reminds us of the cross. Then, He is coming again—this is a glorious hope, which cheers all believers in this world. Life may be hard here, with struggle, self-denial, toil and loss—but we are to live for that day when Christ will come again, when all earth's iniquities shall be made right. The Priesthood of Christ

Hebrews 9 The Epistle to the Hebrews was written to those who felt that in giving up Judaism for Christianity, they had lost much that was dear to them. The writer showed them that while the outward form was gone, Christianity had given them instead realities which were incalculably better and more glorious than what they had parted with. In this passage, Hebrew Christians are shown that in place of the human priesthood, they had now as their priest Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. In other parts of this epistle, we have other words about Jesus as High Priest. The Jewish priest was chosen by God, not self-appointed. Christ did not glorify Himself to be made a high priest—but was called of God for the holy honor. Again, the human priest was to be a man of kindly sympathies, patient and forbearing, one who could bear gently with the ignorant and erring. Christ was boundless in His capacity for compassion. He knows human life, not through His divine knowledge merely—but because as man He had been tried all life. He was tempted in all points like as we are—yet without sin, without yielding, always victorious. He offered prayers with strong crying and tears. Though the Son of God, He yet learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

Thus He was glorified to be our Priest. A priest is one who stands between us and God. The Jewish priest was only a type of the divine. No man can truly go to God for us or come to us from God. An ancient philosopher, of peculiar character, received a visit from Alexander the Great. The emperor stood in the doorway of the hovel in which Diogenes lived and asked if there was anything Alexander the king could do for him. The philosopher replied, "Yes, there is one thing—you can stand out of my light." One thing which our friends can do for us is to keep out from between us and the Sun, from between us and God.

We need no man to be our priest. Indeed, no one can reveal God to us, except as he has the mind of Christ and thus becomes an interpreter of the divine nature and the divine love and grace. Yet everyone does really need a priest—for in our sinfulness, we cannot go to God, neither can God come to us, excepting through a mediator. Christ came to bring God down close to us, into intimate, personal relations with us. He was indeed God Himself, revealing in a human life the grace and beauty, the love and mercy of God. "He who has seen me—has seen the Father," He said. In no other way can we see or know God—but in Jesus Christ. Then, in no other way can we come to God. Jesus said, "I am the way ... no one comes unto the Father—but by me." In Christ we can get nearer to God than we can to any friend. No Jewish priest was ever to his people, what Christ is to all His friends as their High Priest. Human priests, the holiest and best, were full of faults and sins, and could be but most imperfect revealers of God to men. But Christ is perfect, holy, without fault or blemish. In the passage before us we have other points of superiority in the priesthood of Christ.

1. He was a High Priest of good things to come. The old dispensation was but the dim dawn of the glorious day of the new. The blessings of the gospel are infinitely greater than were the blessings of Judaism. Of these good things Christ was the High Priest. He came to bring them to us.

2. Christ ministered as Priest in a greater and more glorious tabernacle. It was only a tent, first, and afterwards a temple, in which the Jewish priests ministered, a tabernacle made with hands, earthly and temporal. But Christ passed into the true Holy Place, that is, into heaven itself. The Jewish priest stood in a little inner room, interceding before a mercy seat of gold; Christ stands in the midst of the divine glory, in the immediate presence of God Himself!

3. The Jewish priest brought the blood of goats and calves when he appeared before God. These offerings had their use. They were pictures of the offering which Jesus afterwards made. But they had no efficacy in themselves. "For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins." But Christ entered in through His own blood into the Holy Place. This offering had infinite efficacy because it was the blood of the Son of God. This is made very clear in the words we are studying. "The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean, sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" The blood of animals had no power to purify a life—but the blood of Christ can make clean the most defiled conscience. That is, the redemption of Christ purifies the life, changes it, transforms it, makes it holy. We must not think that all Christ does for us, is to deliver us from the penalty of sin, setting us free from condemnation. This would not be salvation so long as the life continued sinful. He saves us from our sins in the true and full sense, putting His Spirit into our hearts as a new motive principle, to displace and replace the old evil heart. Thus we are saved from the love of sinning.

4. The Jewish priest made intercession for the people in the Holy of holies. But he himself was a sinner and had first to make intercession for himself. Christ, our High Priest, makes intercession, too. He made His offering on the cross, and then passed into heaven and stands before God, making continual intercession for us.

We cannot understand all that this intercession means. We know that Christ has the interests of all His people in His heart and in His hands. He does not forget any of us, nor is He ever ignorant of

our need or our danger. He makes our interests His own, and speaks to His Father for us. All authority is His, in heaven and on earth, and we need never fear that anything can go wrong with us, while He is thinking of us and caring for us. In some mysterious way He presents His own blood before the face of God as a plea for us. We are sinners—but He died for us. In one place He is called our Advocate, appearing before God to look after our case, as a trusted earthly advocate stands for his client before a court of justice.

5. The superiority of Christ's priesthood is shown further in the fact that His offering of Himself once was sufficient. The Jewish high priests made atonement yearly, entering into the Holy of holies with blood. But Christ made only one sacrifice, and this sufficed for the eternal redemption of all who believe on Him. "Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." We must note that by the blood of Christ is meant the giving of His life in love's sacrifice. "The blood is the life." Christ poured out His life, giving all, giving Himself, to redeem us.

6. Christ's work as our High Priest will go on until all of His redeemed ones are all brought home to glory. "So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." The meaning of this is that Christ's work for His people is going on now in heaven, and will continue until He comes again, not then as Savior bearing His people's sin—but bringing full salvation and eternal glory!

Heroes of Faith

Hebrews 11 A great deal is said in the Bible about FAITH. We live by faith—when we believe in things we cannot see, and then act as if the things were true. That is what the first verse teaches us. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." We hope that God loves us. If we become so assured of this that we take the hope into our hearts as a fact, that is faith. If we really believe that God loves us, the truth means a great deal to us. We are not then afraid of God—He is our Friend. We have many hard things to endure—losses, sorrows, sufferings, disappointments—but if we really believe that God loves us, we shall not be greatly disturbed by such experiences. If we actually believe that Christ rose from the dead, we know that we have a living Savior who is our Friend, our Companion, our Helper, our Guide.

Faith is being "certain of what we do not see." That is, it makes us as sure of the unseen spiritual things in which we believe, as if they were visible to our natural eyes. Columbus believed there was a land, a continent, another country, beyond the sea, and the belief became such a strong conviction, that he pushed out upon the sea to find the land he believed in, and sailed on until he found it. The Bible tells us of an eternal world beyond the earth, our Father's house, home, eternal life. We cannot see it. But if we have faith, this heavenly country becomes as real to us as England is to the tourist who puts out upon the sea this month to cross the ocean to Liverpool.

"This is what the ancients were commended for." The men who have won an honorable record in the past, have won it through faith. People who have no faith, never make much of their lives. It is so even on lower planes. We can have friends only through faith. We cannot always watch people

to see if they are true to us. We cannot keep them always in our sight. When they are away from us, we cannot have spies following them to see if they are friendly to us. Then, we cannot see in people the virtues we want in our friends—truth, goodness, gentleness, unselfishness, faithfulness, nobleness. We can see these qualities only by faith. So we can never have friends, except by faith. All lofty attainments and achievements of every kind are reached only by faith. All true heroes—are heroes of faith.

"By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible." Nobody saw God making the worlds. Only by faith do we know how they came into being. The Bible tells us all that we know about this. We turn back to Genesis, and we have a vision of a period where there was nothing but God. "In the beginning God." Then we have a vision of the earth as chaos, "waste and void," and the Spirit of God brooding over it in love, as the future home of God's children. Then we have the story of creation, completed at last in man made in God's image. Whatever theory of the manner of order of creation we may accept, we know at least that "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible."

"By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice." Abraham's whole life from his call was a life of faith—but the supreme test came when he was bidden to give up his son, his only son. He raised no questions. It was not his business to ask why. It was God who had given the promise which centered in Isaac, and it was God who now sent Abraham to Mount Moriah to offer Isaac on the altar. He could not understand—but God understood, and that was enough; Abraham's only duty was to obey. That was faith. He accounted that God was able to raise up Isaac from the dead. Nothing that God commands us to do, ever can bring harm or real loss to us. His commandments never annul or cancel His purposes or clash with them. No painful and costly sacrifice He ever demands can possibly interfere with God's covenant of love.

"By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph." The faith of Jacob, shown in this incident, was in the way he crossed his hands when he blessed these boys. Joseph heard that the old man, his father, was sick, and he took his sons to have the grandfather's blessing upon them before he died. Jacob loved Joseph, and he loved Joseph's sons and adopted them, taking them in among his own sons, kissing and embracing them, then stretching out his thin, trembling hands and laying them on the heads of the lads, while he uttered this beautiful blessing upon them: "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long unto this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them." Joseph had set the boys before his blind father, so that his right hand would rest on the elder and his left on the younger. But Jacob crossed his hands so that the right lay on the head of the younger, "guiding his hands wittingly." Joseph tried to correct the old man's mistake—but Jacob knew what he was doing. Ephraim, the younger, should be greater.

"By faith Joseph, when his end was near, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones." We are looking for faith in our study of these old-time stories. Joseph took an oath of his brothers that they should not bury him Egypt. "God will surely visit you, . . . and you shall carry up my bones from hence." That was faith. Egypt had been the place of his glory—but he was not an Egyptian; he was a patriotic Israelite. He believed God's

promise that He would lead His people to their own land, and he left it in his will that then his body should be carried up and buried among his people.

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months . . . when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." The first example of faith was in his parents. They were led to believe that their boy was to be the deliverer of his people, and so they determined that his life should be spared. It is a beautiful story that tells of the way they preserved him and secured his bringing up, first, under his mother's care that he might be a loyal Israelite, and then under the princess of Egypt, that he might have the best education the world of that day could give him, so as to be ready to be the leader and lawgiver of his nation. The other example of faith was in Moses himself, who, when he came to know and understand the condition of his people, and their wrongs, renounced Egypt with its honors and wealth, that he might devote himself to the interests of his people. It was a tremendous cost and sacrifice that Moses made cause with his people. But faith never counts the cost. It sees the good before it and gives up everything to attain it.

"He endured, as seeing him who is invisible." Here we have the secret of the endurance of Moses in all his noble life. He did not see God—no one ever saw God, who is invisible. But his faith made God as real to him—as if he had actually seen Him. If we had the faith, we might have and would have, Christ's presence, which is promised to us continually, would be as real to us as it was to His first disciples when they were with Him in Galilee. Then we would be strong, invincible, victorious. Why should we not begin to "practice the presence of God"?

Believing and Doing

James 2:14-16

James was a practical man. He wanted a religion of deeds. "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?" That is, faith without works, faith which is only of the intellect, having no influence on the life. We are saved by faith, because the faith unites us to Christ. There is no virtue in faith itself—except as it brings us into relations with the source of all blessing.

One of the figures James himself uses, is the vine and its branches. By faith we became branches in Christ. As the life of the vine flows into its branches, so the life of Christ flows into those who believe on Him. They are changed, born again. They do the same kind of works that Jesus did, because He lives in them.

It is made very plain in the Bible, that the faith which saves, produces a holy life, and obedience to the holy commands. Hence any faith that does not produce good works—is not saving faith. There are people whose creed is excellent—they believe all the important truths in the Bible. Yet they do not keep the commandments, do not live the Christian life. Can that faith save them? Nothing is more clearly taught, than that only those who are holy can enter into the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are the pure in heart—for they shall see God"—they and they alone, shall see God.

James uses a very practical illustration: "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?" This is about all that a good many people do for those who are in need. They speak courteously and kindly to them. They say: "I am very sorry you are

having all this trouble—but I am sure you will find the help you need. I hope somebody will give you some clothes and something to eat." Sometimes they close their sympathetic little speech with a pious, "God bless you!" Perhaps they say, for the still greater encouragement of the needy one, "I am going to pray God to send you relief." Yet what does all this cheap sympathy amount to? It does not warm the shivering man, nor relieve his hunger. Such "love" is only an empty mockery. What a pity it is so common!

True love proves its genuineness, by works of mercy and kindness. Instead of saying, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," it brings out warm garments and bread, and the brother or sister goes away in comfort with hunger satisfied. That is the kind of love that profits. Love, as well as faith, without works is dead. A little girl was overheard saying her evening prayer, and this is part of what she said: "Lord, I saw a little girl today. She seemed very poor. Her clothes were very thin, and she was shivering in the cold. She looked hungry, too. I felt very sorry for her. It seemed that I ought to do something for her. But it wasn't any of my business, was it, Lord?"

"I will show you my faith by what I do." That is the only way faith can be shown. Faith is not some mysterious thing which saves us by magic. It is not a charm which one may wear upon his bosom to ward off evil spirits and bring good fortune. There is no such thing as faith—apart from works. The belief that does not affect the life—is a dead belief. If a man says, "I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," and then is dishonest, untruthful, selfish and envious—he proves that his faith in Christ is only an empty thing. On the other hand, if a man says, "I believe on Christ," and then lives a godly life, true, loving, unselfish, helpful, and is earnest in doing good in the name of Christ, he is showing his faith in his works.

Paul tells us that we are justified by faith—but in the same sentence he goes on to show that the faith which justifies us—works in us. We have peace with God, access unto the grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Paul's great doctrine is that of justification by faith—but no one insists more earnestly than does Paul upon good works, holy living, the fruits of the Spirit, a life full of Christ, as the outcome of this justifying faith.

We must not infer that all good works are pleasing to God, or that any man is justified by works alone. All the good works of the world put together, would not save one soul. It is only when one has true faith—that works count for anything. The good works which God approves are those which are inspired by faith in God and love for God. Abraham had strong faith, and his faith inspired noble life, obedience, holiness, and whatever things are true. So Abraham became known as the friend of God, because he trusted God so fully and because his trust was shown in his deeds—in his character, and in his whole life. We may become friends of God, too, if we will. A friend is one whom we have learned to trust, on whom we know from experience we may depend. When God can depend on us to trust Him, obey Him, and follow Him, then have we become God's friends. The Power of the Tongue

James 3:1-12 The exhortation, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers" is a warning against the spirit which is always giving advice to people, trying to direct their lives and control their opinions and their movements. Some people are ready with advice on every subject. No question of duty in other people's lives is so delicate, that they cannot settle it at once. Where wise, thoughtful men are silent—they speak out with boldest self-confidence. They are always obtruding advice unsought upon others. They understand your business far better than you do

yourself. They know what you ought to do in every experience. They are as much at home in spiritual matters as in local gossip, and can tell a distressed soul what to do as glibly and as unfeelingly as they can give advice about farming or sheep-raising.

Perhaps James did not have this sort of "teachers" in mind—but it would be a blessing to the world if some of them would take his reproof to heart. There are very few people fit to give advice to others. Especially are there few who are fit to guide others in spiritual matters. It does not matter so much if it be only the cut of a coat or the color of a dress—but when it is the eternal interest of a soul, only one who is living near the heart of God and has learned by long and deep experience, should dare to give advice. The ambition to be recognized as leaders is a sure mark of vanity! It is better to be the propeller of a ship, hidden under the water, than the figurehead, vaunting itself on the prow.

"We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check." The tongue is the most sensitive to impression from within, and most quickly interprets the emotions and feelings, good or bad. It is also the hardest of all to control. Therefore, if we can control our tongue, there is no doubt that we can control all our other members. Our tongue is the wildest and most wayward thing about us. People who in every other way live almost faultless lives, are constantly stumbling in their speech, speaking words they ought never to utter. It is a wise rule in all self-culture and discipline, to give most attention to those things in which we are most lacking, to strengthen the weak points, to curb the wayward elements, to put the restraint where there is the most tendency to defy control. Every tongue, therefore, needs watching. With most of us, this is the weakest and the strongest point—the weakest in its self-control and the strongest in its wild waywardness.

"The tongue is a small part of the body—but it makes great boasts." Two admirable illustrations of this are given. The great, strong horse is controlled by a bridle, and the largest ship obeys the rudder even in the wildest storms. What the bit is to the horse, what the rudder is to the ship, that the tongue is to the body. Not only does the speech express the inner emotions—but it reacts again upon those emotions. Thus uncontrolled speech does double harm.

Evil words spoken, while they do harm to others, kindle also into still intenser flame, the inner passions which first prompted them. "You cannot deliberately besmirch your neighbor’s reputation, however bad a woman she may be, without making yourself a worse woman." We are not done with wicked words, when we have uttered them. While they go out into life on their career of hurt and injury—our own life has in it a new element of evil because of their utterance! Our duty is to get and keep our tongue well in hand; to get a rider on the horse who shall guide the fiery animal; to get a pilot on the ship whose hand on the wheel shall be instantly recognized and instantly yielded to in the fiercest gale. The tongue is capable of wonderful mastership over the life, if only it can be made servant to a good heart and a strong will.

"The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell." The old hunter lit his pipe, then threw down the match among the dry leaves and passed on. In a little while the whole forest behind him was ablaze! A kerosene lamp was upset by the kick of a cow in a stable, and soon almost the whole city was in ruins! A boy’s Fourth of July firecracker carried a spark to a dry roof, and another city suffered from a terrible conflagration! A spark from a passing locomotive flew into

the dry grass, and a prairie was overswept by fire!

There are many people like the old hunter, throwing burning matches among the dry leaves in almost every conversation. There are men and women who are continually upsetting lamps among the hay and starting conflagrations. The tongue is a fire, and words are sparks. Ofttimes the words burn into some tender heart, almost extinguishing its life!

"No man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison!" This may seem rather a discouraging word. We must not conclude from it that the tongue cannot possibly be tamed. No man can tame his own tongue or the tongue of another—but Christ is able to get the mastery for us over every power of our own being. The story of Moses is suggestive. When he went out, at forty years of age, thinking he was able to begin his work, he had not yet mastered his tongue or his temper. God took him into the wilderness, and for forty years had him in training. Then he came out, at the age of eighty, and was ready to become the leader and the lawgiver of his people. This may seem discouraging, too—that it took forty years to tame a man's tongue. Perhaps most of us will find that it does take a good many years to get perfect mastery over our speech. At the same time, there is no sin in us so masterful, so resistless, so perverse—that the grace of God cannot bring it into full subjection.

"With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing." It is inconsistent that the same tongue which is given to praise God—should tomorrow, out in the world, speak bitter words against men. No doubt many good people are sometimes led by sudden impulses to speak words that are not true or loving, to or of others. But every Christian should understand that the tongue which has been given to Christ, should never speak any but Christly words.

We are to be Christ to others, and our words should be Christ's words. We should train ourselves, under God's grace, to nourish only good thoughts, kindly thoughts, loving thoughts, and instantly to quench in our heart every thought of bitterness or cursing. If the evil thoughts are quenched, there will be no flame of anger or passion bursting from our lips. If our heart is filled with love—our speech will not give vent to bitterness, to wrath, to anger, to scandal, to anything that is not beautiful.

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom." A man may achieve the honors of his class in college and be a walking encyclopedia of information—and yet have no wisdom for the ordinary affairs of life. His knowledge does him no good. One may know all the precepts of the gospel concerning love, gentleness, or patience—and yet if he does not show these qualities in his daily life—all his knowledge is worthless. Knowing how to live is good—but doing is the test of true knowing. The tongue is an index of the heart. Out of the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks. We must, therefore, show our wisdom in our words. The kind of speech that proves our wisdom, is that which is filled with the Spirit of Christ. On the day of Pentecost the disciples got new tongues. Only the Holy Spirit can enable us to speak the language of heaven, the language of love—the soft answer which turns away wrath, the word of blessing for one who curses, the word of gentleness in reply to rudeness, the prayer for those who persecute us. The Heavenly Inheritance

1 Peter 1:1-12

"To God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered . . . who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." It is a sweet pleasure to be chosen to be a friend even by a true and noble man, to have a pure and loving heart turn to us and choose us from among many for regard, affection and interest. But it is far more precious to know that God has chosen us to be His friends. His children. Jesus said of His disciples, "You did not choose me—but I chose you."

We are told also that we love God—because He first loved us. Instead of puzzling our brains over the doctrine of "election," let us accept the sweet thought which such words as these bring to our hearts. How sacred it makes our life seem to think of it in this way!

"Through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood." When God chooses us to be His children, He also provides for making us holy and fit to be partakers of the heavenly inheritance. The word "sanctification" has two senses. It means a setting apart. The Father chooses us—and the Holy Spirit sets us apart as God’s. We belong to Him and are sacred to His uses. Then the word means also the actual cleansing of the nature—making it holy. The Spirit enters into our heart and makes His home there, purifying the fountains of life and overcoming and driving out the evils of the flesh. The blood of Christ also has a part in the making holy of those whom the Father has chosen. We are redeemed by His blood. The blood cleanses from all sin. Thus the three persons of the Trinity are active in the saving of everyone who is saved:

The Father chose,

the Son made atonement, and

the Holy Spirit purifies and sanctifies.

We enter God’s spiritual family by a new birth. "In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope." In our natural state we are not ready for life in God’s household. A wicked man, with an unholy heart, could never be happy in heaven. He cannot even be happy in a prayer meeting on earth. We must have holy feelings, desires and affections, before we are prepared for living in a holy atmosphere. The kingdom of heaven must come into our heart—before we can enter into the kingdom. So God provides that when we receive Christ, the Holy Spirit renews and changes our nature, giving us the child-heart. We see here also that it is not for anything in ourselves that God has chosen us, changed our heart, and taken us into His family—but "according to his great mercy." Mercy always implies unworthiness. We are saved through the grace and love of God.

There is a glimpse here, too, of the blessedness of the Christian’s hope. It is a "living" hope. We are born again to an inheritance of life, eternal life. Our hope itself is living and eternal. Earth’s best things are uncertain, and at their best are only for a time. But the hope of the Christian is immortal. It is guaranteed by Christ’s resurrection. He conquered death, and all who rest upon Him—live with Him for evermore.

"An incorruptible and undefiled and unfading inheritance—reserved in heaven for you." Here we see what our living hope is. It is an inheritance, a free gift to us, something which comes to us from our Father. It is not like earthly inheritances, however, for they are liable to waste or to be lost. This inheritance is "incorruptible," that is, it is not subject to decay—but is eternal. It is "undefiled." Some earthly inheritances pass down to children stained in the getting. An honest old man, dying,

said to his sons, "I do not leave you very much—but there is not a dirty shilling in it all." He meant that every penny of it had been honestly earned. This is not always true of this world's inheritances. Too often there is many a stained shilling in them. But the heavenly inheritance is absolutely without stain. It is purchased for us at the price of Christ's blood, and comes to us from our Father's hands, white with heaven's own purity.

Another thing about it, is that it fades not away. Earthly inheritances often fade away, leaving the inheritor in poverty. This inheritance is beyond the reach of robber and money panic and all shrinking in values. It never can be taken from us. It is not in any banks or investments of earth—but is laid up for us in heaven, reserved there in security until we get home.

"Who are being protected by God's power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." Not only is the inheritance kept in secure reserve for us—but we are guarded on the way to receive the inheritance. This is very important. The world is full of dangers through which we must pass to get to heaven. On every hand there are enemies. We could never get safely to the blessedness laid up for us—if we had no protection along the way. But we are guarded by the divine power. God Himself is with us always, sheltering us with His wings of love, keeping us. Our part is faith—resting in the divine keeping, simply going forward in the way of duty, leaving to God the guarding of our lives.

"You rejoice in this, though now for a short time you have had to be distressed by various trials." For a little while the Christian is to be tried. "Weeping may tarry for the night—but joy comes in the morning." We can surely bear trial a little while. Then, there is a "need be" in the trial. There is a blessing which God has to give us—that we cannot get in any other way. The purifying of the gold never can be gotten without fire. Not to be cast into the hot furnace—is to keep the dross. God never chastens unless there is a "need be."

"These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." Again, the grief is caused by "trials" which are testings of faith, so that it may shine at length in glory at the appearing of Christ. So we ought not to be troubled by our trials. There is a blessing in them. As the rough, unsightly ore, by passing through the fire, yields at last bright, shining gold—so our weak faith, with its admixture of self-will and pride and evil—is purified by the fires of trial, so that at last it appears before God to receive praise, honor and glory.

"Though you have not seen Him—you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him." The love of Christ will keep us in temptation and trial. The secret of a faithful, true and beautiful life—is this love of the unseen Friend. Drummond tells of a young girl who became wondrously beautiful in her life and character, growing into a rare Christlikeness. Her friends wondered what the secret could be. She wore upon her breast a little locket, which she always kept closed, refusing to allow anyone to see within it. Once, however, when she was very ill, a friend was permitted to open it and found there only a little piece of paper, bearing the words, "Whom not having seen—I love." This told the whole story. Her love for the unseen Christ was the secret of that beautiful spiritual life which had so impressed itself upon her friends. The secret of the life of Moses is given in one phrase, "He endured, as seeing him who is invisible." Faith is better than sight. If we believe and love the unseen Friend, our life will be firm and steadfast in all trial, and will be transformed little by little into the beauty of Christ.

"Though you have not seen Him—you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." We find here two blessings resulting from the love for the unseen Savior. One is unspeakable joy, even in a life of sore trial. The other is "salvation." We need but to continue faithful unto the end, to receive the full and glorious inheritance.

"Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care." Both earth and heaven are intensely interested in this great redeeming work of Christ. There are smart men who are so busy in their researches into little earthly matters that they cannot get time to study the things of the spiritual kingdom of God. Here, however, we see that in heaven's sight, nothing in this world so merits the thought, study and research of the wisest beings in the universe, as Christ's work of redemption. The interest of the angels in Christ's sufferings as the Redeemer is very beautiful. There is a picture by Domenichino which represents the scene on Calvary, on the evening after the Savior's body had been taken down and laid in the grave. The cross is empty. An angel stands beside the crown of thorns which lies there, feeling with the point of his finger one of the sharp points. His face wears a look of mystery and wonder. He is trying to find out the meaning of suffering. Angels in heaven know nothing of pain by personal experience. The artist's thought is that to this angel, the sufferings of Christ were a great mystery which he was trying to understand. The same thought is suggested in the words, "Which things angels desire to look into." Surely it is worth while to give thought and attention to the great and wonderful things of Christ, since even the highest angels find in them mystery worthy of their deepest study. Nothing else in all the ranks of knowledge, is so worthy of our deepest study and most diligent research and investigation, as is the glorious gospel of the blessed God!

Beneficial Warnings

1 Peter 4:1-8

"Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin." It was not easy for Christ to be our Redeemer. He was in this world as the Captain of our salvation, and His work here was a conflict. He came to destroy the works of the Devil. He met sin and sin's influences everywhere. It was not easy for Him to fight the battle. He resisted unto blood, striving against sin. He went to the cross for us, bearing our sin. We are His followers, and should be inspired by His example—should arm ourselves with the same mind.

Jesus taught that not only He must bear His cross—but that every one that would follow Him—must likewise take up the cross. He taught that the only way to save one's life—is to lose it, to hate it, to be ready to sacrifice it. We never can get through life victoriously, unless we fight. The armor we need is not something to put on outside—but a holy heart and mind within. That was Christ's armor as He went through life. He had no helmet of brass, no sword of steel; His holy purpose was His armor, and He was victorious. If we have a pure heart and a holy life, the world will have no power over us. The best armor—is the armor of the soul.

We are not to understand that the Christian who has died with Christ, shall never sin any more—but that he has given up his sins, repented of them, and renounced them. He used to make

his sins part of the aim of his life. He loved them; his heart ran to them greedily. Now he is a Christian, he has taken Christ as his Savior, he has found mercy. Hence he gives up the sins which he used to commit. Instead of following the devices and desires of his own evil heart—he now lives according to the will of God. This is the way every Christian should live. We should crucify the flesh—the old evil things, and let Christ live in us. This is the change that Christ works in every life that is given to Him. That is what the new birth means.

There is an old legend of an instrument which hung upon a castle wall. Its strings were broken and it was filled with dust. No one understood it, and no one could put it in order. But one day a stranger came to the castle. He saw the instrument on the wall. Taking it down, he quickly brushed the webs of dust from it, and with gentle hand reset the broken strings and began to play upon it. The chords long silent awoke, beneath his touch, and the castle was filled with rich music. Every human life, in its unrenewed state, is such a harp, with broken strings, tarnished by sin. It is capable of giving forth music marvelously rich and sweet—but first it must be restored, and the only one who can do this—is the maker of the harp, the Lord Jesus Christ. Only He can bring the jangled chords of our life—into tune, so that when played upon, they shall give forth sweet music. If we would make our lives beautiful, we must surrender them into the hands of Him who alone can repair and restore them.

"As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry." Not a moment of life should ever be given up to sin. Life is too precious to be stained and wasted in evil. Those who are thus throwing away their life—should instantly abandon all that is wrong, and turn to God and to the life to which He invites them. The time past which has been spent in sin—is surely enough for such a ruinous waste. Few things are sadder, than the story of one who lives in sin all his days and then, at the last, creeps back to God’s feet to find mercy. One such, lying in a hospital, and near unto death, was very happy, for he had found Christ and had the assurance of eternal life. A friend said to him, "You are not afraid to die?" "No," answered the man, "but I am ashamed to die." He was ashamed because he had nothing to bring to God but a wasted life—forgiven at last—but of no service in the world. The words used in the third verse, which describe the life of wickedness, are black with shame. We turn away from them with loathing, if we are walking in Christ’s way. But we must not forget that these very words describe what is going on continually in thousands of places. Modern life is no better than was the life of men nineteen hundred years ago. This is the end to which sin leads. We need not go to the slums to find this picture realized; we can find it in many places which are regarded as respectable and high-toned. The encouraging note in this sad verse, is that the evil things he named were things of the past of those to whom Peter wrote. The gospel of Christ saves men. It turns men’s Sodoms into Edens!

"They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you!" Those who find their pleasures in sin’s evil and debasing ways, cannot understand the secret of the Christian’s joy. They think it must be dreary and dismal to be a Christian. They cannot conceive of any happiness in the life which turns away from sinful indulgences, which restrains evil appetites and passions, which curbs the natural sinful desires. To them it seems impossible that there should be any real joy in living a holy life, in walking with God, in prayer and Bible reading and hymn singing or in Christian work and fellowship. The blessedness

of the Christian life—is all a mystery to those who know only this world's detestable life, and find their pleasures in lust or passion. A prayer meeting would be to them intolerably dreary, because they know not God and have no fellowship with Him.

"But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." It is not only in this world, that the superiority of the Christian's exalted position is seen; the world to come will also reveal this. This world does not mean the end of life; it goes on into the unseen future, and things begun here—are finished there. We are sowing now, and there will be a harvest by and by, when we shall reap there what we have sown. Those who sow in the flesh—shall reap corruption from the flesh. Those who live in unrestrained lust and unbridled passion—must give account to God.

They are without excuse, for the gospel was preached "even to the dead." Some people trouble themselves about the heathen who have died without hearing the gospel. But we may safely leave them in God's hands. We need never fear that He will be unjust to any soul He has made. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right!" We need not fret ourselves over any such questions. Our only care need be that we who have the gospel—shall live worthily of the gospel. We, too, shall have to give an account of our privileges and how we have used them. We must remember, too, that to whom much is given—of the same shall it be required.

"The end of all things is near! Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray." In view of the eternity on whose edge we are living all the while, we should walk thoughtfully and prayerfully. We do not know when the end of this life for us may be. This should not sadden us and spoil this world for us—that is not the way God wants us to be affected by thoughts of eternity. But we should look at life seriously and learn to live earnestly. If any day may be our last, we should make every day beautiful enough and complete enough to be a fitting last day. We should leave none of its duties undone, none of its tasks unfinished. We should live unselfishly and kindly, so as to leave no pain or bitterness in any heart. Then, we should live in constant communion with God—a life of prayer. We need God at every point, at every step, and no day can be beautiful or complete, without its portion of divine help. A day without prayer—is never a good day.

"Above all, LOVE each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins." Above all things, we must be loving. Love is always the most important thing. One may be honest and truthful and just and upright and diligent and sound in the faith—and yet if he has not love—his life shows a great lack. Paul tells us this in the wonderful thirteenth chapter of Corinthians. Christians should be affectionate among themselves. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples—if you love one another." Love makes us patient with others. We all have our faults—our friends have their faults—but if we love them—we do not see their faults. We overlook the things that are not beautiful, and see them as Christ sees them.

Sin and Salvation 1 John 1:5-10; 1 John 2:1-6

"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you." Everyone has a message from God to announce to men. John had heard Christ speak in human words. Christ had come from the Father, with a message to the world. His message was the announcement of God's love, and of God's desire to save His lost children. Christ delivered His message—He went everywhere and told it. But especially did He announce it to His disciples. For three years they lived with Him and

witnessed His works. Then, among the disciples, John had the closest place. He lived near the heart of Jesus all those three years; he leaned on the bosom of Jesus, and heard even His faintest whispers. In a very special way, therefore, had John learned the lesson which Christ had come to announce. He was well prepared to go out and deliver his message.

It is the duty of every one of us—to go with our message from God to others. Everyone who lives near Christ must hear the whispered word which he is to repeat. We should be ready to tell our message wherever we go. It should so burn in our heart, that we cannot help telling it—this message of God's wonderful love. A minister once climbed the stairs to a miserable garret to see a sick boy who did not know Christ. Bending over him, he said, "My boy, God loves you—God loves you!" and hurried from the room. The boy was startled by the sudden appearing and vanishing again of the stranger—but he could not forget the message. It crept into his heart and stayed there, and changed all his life. We should deliver our message in burning words in every ear.

John's message was, "God is light." Light stands for everything that is beautiful and good. It is pure—God is holy. "In him is no darkness at all."

Light is life-giving. All the life in the world is wooed out and nourished by the light of the sun. A friend asked Tennyson once, "What is Jesus Christ to you?" They were walking in the garden at the time, and, pointing to a rosebush, full of blooming roses, Tennyson said, "What the sun is to this bush—Jesus Christ is to me." As we open our heart and life to Christ, who is the revealing of the love of God, the life-giving influence spreads everywhere, and we grow into whatever things are lovely, whatever things are pure.

Again, light reveals, makes manifest. In the darkness of the night we see nothing; but when the sun rises, all the beauty about us is manifested. A man sleeps on a mountain top, and all is blackness about him. The morning dawns, and the glorious splendors of nature burst on his view. One might walk through a great art gallery at night—and he would not behold anything. At length, however, the day breaks, and he finds himself in the midst of the loveliest paintings. They were there before—but were invisible to him before the light revealed them. So the light of God makes all things visible to us.

"If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness—we lie and do not live by the truth." It is an impossibility to have fellowship with God—if we are walking in darkness. Moral darkness is sinfulness. It is the reverse of light and righteousness. The only way to have fellowship with God—is to be like God, to love what He loves and hate what He hates. If one professes to be God's child, Christ's follower, and meanwhile lives an evil life—it is evident that he is self-deceived, or else is a hypocrite. "Why do you call me, Lord, Lord—and do not obey the things which I say?" asked the Master. Jesus said of His own life, "The Father . . . has not left me alone; for I do always the things that are pleasing to him. " The secret of the fellowship of Jesus with the Father—was unfailing obedience. We must do the things that are pleasing to God—if we would have fellowship with Him. There is no way of being nearer to God, and abiding in His love, except by keeping His commandments.

"But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light—we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin." There can be neither fellowship, nor cleansing, unless we walk in the light; that is, unless we are following Christ. Sin has no true fellowship. It

may have its compacts and covenants for evil ends. Pilate and Herod were made friends the day Jesus was condemned—but it was only a rope of sand which united them. Their fellowship was only partnership in the darkest crime of the ages. There may be companionship in wrongdoing—but there can be no heart-union. The only real and indissoluble friendship, is that in which both are in friendship with Christ. Christian fellowship is the only union of hearts and lives possible in this world. Thrice sacred is marriage when, both parties kneel together in prayer, sit together at the Lord's table, and unite in love for Christ.

Cleansing from sin is likewise dependent upon walking in the light. So long as one continues to walk in the filth of sin, one cannot be made clean. A man must leave the gutter—and walk in dry, clean paths if he would have feet undefiled. There can be no cleansing from sin—while we continue living in sin. It is only the forsaken sin—that is a forgiven sin. It is interesting, too, to note closely the words used here. It is the blood of Jesus Christ which cleanses. How can blood cleanse? In a way beyond our understanding, the dying of Christ was the atonement for sin. We are forgiven, because Jesus bore our sin. He was the Lamb of God who bore our sin. "In whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses." The word "cleanses" is present tense, and tells of continuous cleansing. If we are walking in the light our sins are forgiven as soon as they are committed, and we are made clean and kept clean as we travel along earths miry paths.

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." No one can get off on the plea that he has no sin. There is no person who never sins. What, then, can we do, since heaven is only for the pure? Here is the answer: we can have our sins, all our sins, forgiven! God's forgiveness puts away not only the guilt of sin—but the sin itself. Notice that we must confess our sins—if we would have them forgiven. Unconfessed sin—is unforgiven sin. But why must we confess? Does not God know that we are sorry? Why need we tell Him that we are? The blessing lies in our opening our heart to God, in our recognition of our relation to Him, and of His authority over us. Hidden and unconfessed sins—are full of curse! They smoulder like the fires in the heart of a volcano. Sins confessed and put away—have lost their power to hurt the life. "He who covers his transgressions shall not prosper; but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall obtain mercy."

We ought to try not to sin. "Little children, I write unto you—that you may not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins." We ought to live a holy and godly life. But the best of us, with the most diligent care, sin, for we are all weak and human, and surely sometimes fall into unintended sins. Is there any hope for us if we do? Yes! We have an Advocate, One who stands for us before God to plead our cause, to make intercession for us. He has a right to speak for us, for He is holy and sinless. Besides, He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins—He died for us. What, then, should we do when we have stumbled into some sin? Should we despair and give all up, and say there is on use in our trying to go on? No! We should flee at once to our Advocate and beseech Him to plead for us, that we may be forgiven. The Father always hears His intercession. If we would live thus, although we sin many times along the way, our sins shall at once be forgiven, and we shall be restored and ever kept in unbroken fellowship with God. The Scriptures never give us the impression that we can sin with impunity because we are saved by grace, and not by our

own good works, or because God is so merciful and forgives so readily. Nothing is taught in the Word of God more clearly—than that faith in Christ always implies surrender to Christ and obedience to His commands. There is no true faith, without obedience. This is made very plain here, "We know that we have come to know Him—if we obey His commands. The man who says, 'I know Him!' but does not do what He commands—is a liar, and the truth is not in him!" 1 John 2:3-4 In the ancient cathedral of Lubeck, Germany, there is an old slab, with the following inscription:

Thus speaks Christ our Lord to us:

You call me Master—and obey me not;

You call me Light—and see me not;

You call me Way—and walk me not;

You call me Life—and desire me not;

You call me Wise—and follow me not;

You call me Fair—and love me not;

You call me Rich—and ask me not;

You call me Eternal—and seek me not;

You call me Gracious—and trust me not;

You call me Noble—and serve me not;

You call me Mighty—and honor me not;

You call me Just—and fear me not.

If I condemn you—blame me not!

God's Love in the Gift of His Son

1 John 4:7-16

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." One reason why Christians should love one another, is because God would have them interpret His love to the world, and this they can do, only by love. Anything unloving—is not of God. We ought to think of this—that it is our mission—to let the world know what God is like. A great many people do not know God, do not know what His character is. We know Him and we are to make Him known to others. This we cannot do merely by telling them about God. The Bible is full of revealings of God—but it is not enough for us to read the Bible to people. It does little good for us to quote texts which tell of God's goodness, kindness and holiness—if we cannot show the goodness, kindness and holiness in our own life! The only Bible we can really get others to read—is the one written in our own conduct, disposition and character! People must see God's love in us. When Mr. McAll went to Paris to begin his mission work, he knew only a few words of

French. All he could say was, "God loves you, and I love you." His message was that God loved the people to whom he was speaking—but this would not have been listened to by them—if they had not seen the love also in the preacher. That is, the love of God was interpreted to them, in himself. We must give the same interpretation.

There is no other love like God's. There has always been love in the world. Mothers have always loved their children. There have always been tender home affections. Men have always loved their country. But these are only little fragments of love, imperfect and faulty at best. The great fountain and center of all love—is God's love. It is to all other love—as the sun is to all earth's little candles. God's love is love which does not depend on our love to draw it out. God does not love us because we love Him—if that were true, we would never have God's love. The message of the gospel is not that we should love God—but that God loves us. It makes a great deal of difference how we read the words. Which love comes first—ours, or God's? Our confidence is not in our love for God, which is very weak, faulty and ever changing—but in God's love for us. This is infinite, eternal, and never changes. Whatever our need or feelings may be, we may always be sure that the love of God is everlasting, the same yesterday and today and forever.

"The Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." We think of the holy child sleeping His first infancy's sleep in the manger, and we hear the angel say, "There is born to you this day in the city of David—a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. " It is because God loved the world—that He gave His only begotten Son!

It is knowing and believing the love of God in Jesus Christ, which saves us. It is possible to know it and not sincerely believe it. To be blessed by it—we must believe that God loves us with an individual, personal love, and must let His love into our hearts. A story is told of a child in Luther's day, who for the first time heard and believed this love. She lived in a home where only severe thoughts of God were known. The name of God was used to frighten the children. Every mention of God made the child tremble. She had learned to think of Him as her enemy, watching her only to punish her. One day she found on the floor of her father's printing office a piece of torn paper with some words printed on it. Picking it up, she began to read, "God so loved the world, that he gave," it was torn off here. She did not know what followed. But the thought that God loved was an altogether new one for her. If He loved the world He could not be such a terrible God as she had been taught to believe Him to be. "God so loved the world that he gave," her paper said. What He gave, she did not know—but if He loved enough to give anything, He must be a kind and good God. So her thought ran on until, by and by, a new conception of God had taken possession of her heart. With nothing more than this little fragment of a verse—she had received a great truth, and the thought of God had become a wonderful blessing to her. She knew and believed the love that God had for her, and it saved her. This is the lesson all of us need to learn afresh!

Jesus Appears to John Revelation 1:9-20

Jesus appears here to John in his banishment and reveals to him many things which John was to write and send to the churches. The writer identifies himself with the Christians to whom he sends the messages, "I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus." It is remarkable that in all the Gospel of John, the writer's name is not once mentioned. He hides himself away and exalts and honors only the one Name. Here,

however, he writes in his own name. The reason for this difference may be that now John is speaking as the prophet of Christ and delivering the messages which have been entrusted to him. It was proper, therefore, that he should declare who he was, that the witness might be received with the more confidence by his friends. The words "brother" and "companion" show John's love for his fellow Christians. He was one of them. He was their companion in the tribulation of persecution—this drew him and them close together. The phrase "patient endurance" has in it the thought of suffering which is endured sweetly and victoriously.

John refers to his own sufferings, not to plead for pity or sympathy for himself—but to honor Christ. It was "for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus" that he had been banished to the Isle of Patmos. It is an honor to be a sufferer in a worthy cause. Paul spoke of the scars and other traces of trials endured as a Christian, as "marks of Jesus." In the narrative of his vision, John begins by saying that he was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day." Here we have one of the proofs that very early, the first believers began to observe the first day of the week, the day of Christ's resurrection, rather than the Jewish Sabbath. Though far away from the worshiping assemblies of his fellow Christians, John was in the Spirit on that sacred day. We should all seek to be in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. During the week our hands are full of work that must be done.

"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world—but that You protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it!" John 17:15-16. Unless we are watchful, the world is apt then to get into our heart—and we are apt to become secularized in spirit, made worldly-minded, losing interest in spiritual realities. The trouble is not that we are in the world—but that the world too often gets into us! It is a proper enough thing for a ship to be in the sea—but when the sea gets into the ship, there is an end to sailing. Christ wants us to be in the world—but He does not want the world to get into us! On the Lord's Day, therefore, we should run our bark just as completely as possible out of the world's troubled waters into the peaceful bay of spiritual rest and enjoyment. A well-spent Lord's day, will keep up the spiritual tone of the life, amid the most intense pressure of week-day care. The revelation of John came in a VISION. He saw a cluster of lamps. "I saw seven golden candlesticks." Christian churches should be like candlesticks. A candlestick itself gives no light—but it holds the candle from which the light pours forth. Christ Himself is the light—but the light can shine in this world—only in the lives of His followers. Every Christian should be a light shining before men. If we live worthily—we make the world a little brighter. If we live carelessly or inconsistently, we disappoint Christ. We must notice that the light which shines in these churches—all comes from Christ, who is "the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." We can only shine—by letting Christ's light pour through us.

John describes also the vision of Christ as He appeared that day in the midst of the golden candlesticks. "His head and his hair were white as white wool, . . . his eyes were as a flame of fire!" The words describe the glorified Christ. When He was on the earth, there was no brightness in His face as men saw Him. Once only, when He was transfigured, did the glory appear for a short time. Now, however, in heaven, all the brightness shines out unrestricted. The vision of John, gives us a glimpse of Christ as we shall see Him when He comes with clouds!

One part of this vision of Christ represented His power. "He had in his right hand seven stars." The seven stars represent the ministers of Christ on the earth. "The seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches." As Christ held the stars in His hand, so He keeps in His hand the ministers

who on the earth witness for Him and serve Him. He keeps them in His care, under His protection.

Another thing in this vision, suggests the power of the living Word of Christ. "Out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword!" The picture seems strange at first—a sword proceeding out of Christ's mouth. The teaching is, that Christ's weapon in the conquest of the world—is His Word, "the sword of the Spirit." He sets up no kingdoms like the kingdom of this world, with pomp and pageant, with armies and navies. He rules men's lives, and the sword He wields is His Word. The sword is sharp and two-edged. It cuts deep. It reveals sin and all lust in the heart. We should learn to use the Word of God with confidence in all our conflicts with sin, and in all our efforts to advance Christ's kingdom. The effect of this vision upon John was overwhelming. He fell at the feet of Christ as a dead man! With infinite gentleness, Jesus came then and touched him with His right hand, bidding him "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever!" Here we see Jesus a way beyond death, and His life has not been harmed by dying. None of His glory was quenched by death's floods. He still lives—and has all the grace, gentleness and love that He had before. Neither does death injure our friends who die in Christ. It robs the believer of no beauty. Indeed, in this world, life at the best—is only like an opening bud; in dying, the bud opens into the full-blown rose! Not only is Christ Himself beyond death and its power—but He is the "Living one!" That is, the only one who really lives, having life in Himself. He is the great fountain and source of all life. Besides, He has power over all the realm of death. "I have the keys of death and of Hades." Keys are the symbols of authority. Christ can open the doors of earth's prison-houses when He will—and bring out His people who are under death's power! He Himself lay in the grave and then arose and came forth. In like manner, in His own time He will call up all who sleep in Him. "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who are fallen asleep in Jesus—will God bring with him."

Another thought suggested by Christ with the keys of death in His hand is, that He is the Guide of His people now in this lonely walk through the valley of death. He knows the way by experience, and thus is prepared to conduct us over it.

Heavenly Worship

Revelation 5

John describes his vision most vividly. "Then I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne—a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals." We may study this picture with great profit. The book is the scroll of the divine purposes—this much, at least, we know about it. As we look at it, we learn that God has purposes for His Church, and knows what the future will be, down through all the ages to the end. This ought to be a great comfort to us, especially when we are disposed to be anxious or discouraged concerning the progress of Christ's kingdom. God is never taken by surprise. He knew all from the beginning. The world is not run by 'chance'. God's plans are never defeated. In all that to us seems confusion, His eye sees at all times perfect order. Even the wrath of man He makes to praise Him, and the remainder thereof He restrains. The fact that this scroll was written on both sides, and was entirely filled, shows that no part of the future was left in uncertainty, or unplanned for; also that no other than God has to do with the direction of the world's affairs. When we remember that it is our Father whose purposes are being wrought out in the troubled history of this earth—we ought not to be afraid. His children are always safe in His hands!

"And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?' But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it!" This shows not only that no one can read the future—but also that no one can meddle with God's purposes and plans! They are in His own hands—and are hidden from all eyes. This truth should also make us very modest in our efforts to interpret prophecies and predictions concerning future events. The book is sealed—and we cannot read its contents.

Nothing is hidden from us, however, that we need to know in order to salvation or in order to duty; but there are great events in the future clearly foretold as to the fact that they will occur—but not foretold as to the time and manner of their occurrence. Is it the part of wise and loving faith—to try to open that which lies in God's hands sealed?

There is also a very practical suggestion here. The scroll of each individual life lies in God's hands, written full to the end. God knows it all—right down to the last moment. Each change, each experience of joy or sorrow, each danger or duty—is written down! God knows all our biography from the beginning to the end. But the book is sealed to us. We cannot read its contents. We cannot know, therefore, what lies before us in the days that are to come. And surely it is better that we should go on, not knowing; since God knows, and since He is leading us step by step. To know of trials and hardships and perils and sorrows—would discourage us. To know of coming defeat and failure—would take the nerve out of our energy and paralyze our efforts. To know of coming joys and achievements, would make us vain and self-confident. It is a great deal better as it is, and we should leave the book sealed and in the hands of God—while we move quietly on in the little bit of path unsealed and unrolled to our eyes!

Then John had a vision of Jesus:

"Look! The LION of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed!

Then I saw a LAMB, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne!" Revelation 5:5-6

John was looking for a Lion—and he saw a Lamb—a little lamb, too. This strange, double picture of Jesus as He appears in heaven—is very suggestive.

He was a lion in His conflicts and victories, and as such overcame all His enemies and ours also. But He was a lamb in the gentleness of His character and disposition. The lamb is an emblem of meekness and of unresisting obedience and submission. As we think about Christ, we soon see how true both of these pictures are. Like a lion, He has power and majesty, and is dreadful to His enemies! As a lion He met and overcame Satan, and triumphed over death and the grave. As a lion He is able to defend us from all our enemies, and the feeblest believer is safe under His protection. He is the omnipotent God and has all power in heaven and on earth. At the same time, the other picture is just as true. He is like a little lamb in His gentleness. The whole spirit of His life on earth shows this. Never was a mother so gentle to her children, as was Jesus to the weary, troubled and penitent ones who came to Him. He was lamb-like, too, in the way He endured wrongs and sufferings. Other animals fight in their own defense—but the lamb does not resist. When Christ was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten in return. "Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers—He did not open His mouth."

He is the same Jesus now in the midst of the throne, and it is this astonishing combination of strength and gentleness which makes Him such a wondrous Savior! In Him, we have the union of all the truest qualities of love that our hearts so hunger for: tenderness, affection, patience, sympathy. Then, when we have laid ourselves down to rest in all this blessed warmth of love, we look up and see that we are in the bosom of Omnipotence! Mere gentleness may be very weak—but while He is a lamb—He is also a lion!

There is a story of a cruel man who came one day with a little dog in hand, which he thrust into the cage of a great lion to see the mighty beast tear the defenseless creature to pieces; but, strange to say, the lion did not harm the terrified dog—but took him under his protection and became his friend. He was as gentle as a lamb to him, and all his lion strength was used for the sheltering and protecting of his frail charge. This very rustic illustration will help us to understand the representation of Christ which we have in this picture.

"Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne. He had seven horns and seven eyes." Here we have three other thoughts about Christ. Not only did He appear as a lamb—but as a lamb that had been slain. There were wound marks on Him, telling that once He had been dead.

One suggestion of the emblem of the lamb, is sacrifice. Lambs were offered as sacrifices in the ancient worship. Jesus was the Lamb of God who took away sin by bearing it Himself! So even in heaven, Jesus shows that once He suffered and died. Thus even in glory, the fact of salvation by His sacrificial death, is set forth to the eyes of all. Thus we are always to be reminded of the cost of our redemption. A second suggestion about Christ, is in the representation of the "seven horns." The horn in the Bible is the symbol of strength, and seven is the symbol of completeness. Jesus appears there as the omnipotent One, having all power. The third symbol in the picture is the "seven eyes," which are explained in the same verse to mean the Holy Spirit. An eye sees, and seven eyes represent the perfection of vision, seeing everywhere. The eyes of Christ are in all parts of the earth, and on all events. This thought of the omniscience of Christ is dreadful to the sinner—but to the Christian at peace with God—it has great comfort! Christ is watching over us and is ready to fly to our help and rescue at any moment. His eye is fearsome only to the wicked; to those who are His friends and are saved by Him, it gives no terror to think of the unsleeping divine eye ever looking down upon them with love!

Then came a vision of prayers, "Golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." Revelation 5:8. There is something very beautiful in this glimpse of how the prayers of the saints on earth, appear in heaven. They are not lost in the air—but reach heaven, and are put into bowls to be kept secure. The bowls are golden, intimating the preciousness of the prayers that are put into them. The prayers which are put into the golden bowls—are gathered and preserved!

Sometimes it is a great while before they are answered, yet they are not lost or forgotten—but are safely stored in the golden bowls. These prayers are as incense, and that shows how they seem to God. Incense was used in the temple worship, and divine instruction was given as to its compounding. When the incense was burned, it emitted a sweet fragrance. The heart-prayers of earth—are the true incense.

One writer suggests that the three ingredients in the incense of prayer are: petition, confession, thanksgiving. Then divine fire falls upon it, and it ascends to God and is acceptable to Him. It is a very sweet thought that true prayer is as incense unto God. He loves to hear us pray!

There is more than prayer in heaven—there is song. "And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation!" No old song, no song of earth would do—for the world has never before seen any occasion like this. Earth's songs are too dull, too sad to be sung where all is gladness and joy. The song of heaven will be of Christ, and it will celebrate the victory which He won at His death. We shall join in the song because we owe to Christ every joy, every blessing and hope of our souls.

Heaven's singing, it may well be noticed here, will be congregational. No soloist, or quartet choir, will sing for the people—but every redeemed one will unite in the song of redemption for himself. The angels, too, will join in the chorus, and all the universe will unite their voices in the ascription of praise and worship that goes up to God and the Lamb!

"Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb—be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" Revelation 5:11-13 The Saints in Heaven Revelation 7:9-17

"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands."

Some people have the impression that very few will be saved, that the lost will far outnumber the redeemed. The Bible, however, gives no such impression. On the other hand, its representations are that immense numbers of the race will be saved. There are no lamentations in Scripture about empty mansions, or small choruses, or thin ranks in the final gathering in heaven. There is no intimation that the Father's house will not be filled, that the prepared places will not have occupants. Christ's redemption will not prove a failure; there are repeated indications that it will be a glorious success. In every generation there are millions who have confessed Christ, and doubtless there are always great numbers of true disciples on the earth of whom none know but God. As Christianity spreads over the world we may confidently hope that the number of the saved will be increased every year. There is no doubt, therefore, that the company of the redeemed at last will incalculably surpass the number of the lost.

John's picture, therefore, is suggestive. The multitude was one that no man could number. Then it was gathered out of all nations and tribes and tongues; this shows that the gospel is to reach all the world, and that every land shall have its quota in the great host of the redeemed at the last. The posture of this vast company was one of high honor, as well as of great privilege. Whatever heaven may be, it seems clear that the redeemed shall be near to God and to Jesus. Elsewhere in the Scriptures we learn the same thing. The redeemed shall see Christ as He is; His servants shall serve Him and they shall see His face. The Bible everywhere represents the redeemed as dwelling

in the very presence of God in heaven. They shall live always where they can have constant communion with Him, and where they can enjoy forever the blessedness of His love.

Another thought, suggested in this picture, is in the attitude of the redeemed. They stand before the Lamb. This probably indicates readiness for service. Heaven is not to be a place of idle rest—but the saved will have work to do. These powers of ours are not being trained so carefully here, to be folded up and laid away in idleness through all eternity! We are to be as the angels in heaven, and they are engaged perpetually in service before God's throne. What our work will be we, cannot tell—but we may be sure it will be suited to our enlarged capacities and powers in the heavenly life. Probably we have a hint of the work of the redeemed, in the coming to earth of Moses and Elijah at the time of Christ's transfiguration, to minister to Him and cheer Him in His way of sorrow. May it not be that in the eternal ages, all the redeemed shall be similarly employed in carrying blessings to other spheres'?

"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands! And they cried out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"Revelation 7:9-10.

Here we have a glimpse of the redeemed in heaven. For one thing, their white robes indicate purity. There will be no sin in heaven. Before entering the gate, every stain will be washed away in the blood of the Lamb, and the saved will be made perfectly whole. We groan here on earth, under the humiliation of our faults and blemishes, our many infirmities and imperfections, and our corrupt hearts, which keep our lives always blotched and stained. We never can get clear of this burden of sin, in our present life. The holiest saint can never have a perfectly white robe on this earth. But here we have a glimpse of a day coming, in which all who reach heaven shall be entirely free, and free forever, from every stain of sin! The garments of the redeemed shall be white, without one spot! Our hearts shall be thoroughly cleansed. They shall leave behind them all corruption, and shall never again have a sinful thought or feeling or desire—but seeing Christ as He is—they shall be like Him forever! The white robes indicate not only purity—but glory! On the transfiguration mount, we see two heavenly inhabitants on a mission to earth, and we are told that they appeared in glory—in glorified forms. They were saints in their everyday heavenly dress. Here on earth, our bodies are dull, and their beauty is marred by sin; but the spiritual body will be glorious, like Christ's. The palm branches in the hands of the redeemed, probably indicate joy and rejoicing. Heaven will be a place of great happiness and of blessed triumph. There will be no tears there, and no defeat, no failure. Those who have been always sick here—will be well there; and those who have failed here in all their earthly life—will be among the victors there. The occupation of the redeemed in heaven will be praise. Their praise will be for salvation. They will never forget in their blessedness, that they owe it all to God's mercy, and Christ's atoning sacrifice on their behalf. They will always remember what they were by nature, and how they were redeemed and lifted up to glory—at a great cost. "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect!" 1 Peter 1:18-19

We should notice here, also, that Jesus is worshiped along with the Father in heaven. Some people tell us that Jesus was only a good man; but would all the redeemed in heaven worship a

mere man?

We have a glimpse of the redeemed in heaven. "All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God." Throngs of angels mingled with them. The angels were not redeemed by Christ, as men have been, for they never sinned nor fell, and therefore they needed no redemption. Yet they are deeply interested in the salvation of sinners, and help God's saints in their earthly struggles and dangers. They are ministering spirits, who on earth minister to the heirs of salvation. They are bright, holy creatures, and it will be great joy to meet in glory, these friends that we have never seen—but who have seen us, and have done so many beautiful things for us.

Note well the question and answer of the thirteenth and fourteenth verses: "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?" "These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb!" They are not those who have lived in palaces, and have never known pain or trial. Heaven's people are those who have had much suffering on the earth. Some of them had to pass through martyr fires; some of them had to endure sore persecutions; some suffered poverty and sickness; some were wronged and oppressed; some had trial and mocking and imprisonment and cruel scourging. The way to heaven is not always an easy way! "Through many tribulations, we must enter into He kingdom." But here we see how the saints passed through all this tribulation and are not ruined by it. It does not leave them crushed and broken. They stand beyond it all—glorious! There is an antidote to all these tribulations: washing in the blood of the Lamb removes all the scars and marks of pain and sorrow!

There will not be a want of any kind in heaven, that is unsupplied. The ills of earth are past forever, when we reach that glorious country. In this present world, life at the best is one of hunger and thirst. Even if the bodily needs are all met, there are mental and spiritual cravings that never can be supplied here. But in heaven all these desires shall be fully satisfied. Our minds shall hunger no more, because we shall know even as we are known. Our soul's cravings shall all be met, for in God we shall have all that we need.

"The One seated on the throne will shelter them: no longer will they hunger; no longer will they thirst; no longer will the sun strike them, or any heat. Because the Lamb who is at the center of the throne will shepherd them; He will guide them to springs of living waters, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes!" Revelation 7:15-17

Jesus will be our Shepherd in heaven, just as He was on earth. He called Himself the Good Shepherd, and we know that He is a faithful shepherd to His sheep in this world. He seeks the wandering and the lost, and bears them back to the fold. He feeds and leads and shelters and defends all His flock with loving care. He gave His life for the sheep—dying to save them!

Here we see Him continuing the same tender care in the heavenly life! He will never have to give His life again for the sheep in that new home. He will never have to defend them from danger, for there will be neither enemy nor danger there. He will never have to bring back any wandering or lost ones, for there none will wander away, nor be lost. He will be with them as their continual companion and friend. He will be their guide, leading them from joy to joy, from blessing to blessing—to the trees where heavenly fruits grow, and to the fountains of the waters of life! The

Heavenly Home Revelation 22:1-10 In the early pages of the Bible, we have the story of paradise lost. In the closing chapters, we have paradise regained. Between the two pictures, we have the story of Christ's redemption. All we can do at present, is to glance hurriedly at some of the features of the restoration.

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city." The new Jerusalem is a city. A river runs through it. The waters of earth's rivers are stained and impure—but these waters are pure, as clear as crystal. A river is a great blessing in a country. It bears refreshing, fertilization and renewal where it flows. It quenches thirst. A wilderness has no water. This present world is described in the Bible as a dry and thirsty land, where there is no water. A country without water is a dreary place to live. Man and beasts suffer from thirst; vegetation will not grow. Plants and flowers dry up and wither. A river flowing through the holy city, suggests that there shall be no thirsts unsatisfied. Nothing shall wither. No flower shall fade. The water is the water of life. This suggests the spiritual nature of the blessings pictured. The source of the river is suggestive. It flows "from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city."

There is a strange legend of the Valley of Chambra. The water which had supplied it failed. Everything was parched and burnt up. Birds and beasts and men were dying of thirst. The oracle said that if the Princess Reni would give her life for her people, the water would flow forth from her grave. When she heard this she answered, "Here am I," and gave herself gladly to the sacrifice. Then from her grave there burst out a great stream of water, which flowed into all parts of the valley, carrying refreshment to every plant and flower, and supplying drink for bird and beast and man. This heathen legend is a beautiful illustration of the redemption of Christ. The world was dying of thirst, and there was no hope of blessing. Then God gave His only begotten Son, and Jesus Christ gave Himself in death on the cross—and from His open grave there poured forth the streams of the water of life, which carry blessing wherever the gospel goes.

"On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." There is more of this picture of the garden city. On the banks of the river grows the tree of life, another feature of paradise restored. This tree of life bears a great variety of fruit. Each month has its own fruits, so that at no time in the year will those coming to the trees, go away unsatisfied. You remember that Jesus Himself once went to a fig tree to find food—and found only leaves. But this will never be true of the trees that grow beside the river of life in the New Jerusalem. There is also great variety of fruits, so that every form of hunger will find satisfaction. Every longing, every desire, every craving, every need of every life will be fully met.

Even the leaves of these trees are for use. They possess medicinal value. May we not think of the pages of the Bible, the messages of the gospel, and all Christian literature—as leaves of the tree of life, scattered abroad for the healing of the nations? Think what blessings these leaves, bearing on them the Words of God, have been to the world wherever they have gone! They carry comfort to the sorrowing, strength to the weak, cheer to the discouraged, knowledge to the ignorant, inspiration, hope, joy, life to all.

Fairbairn speaks of the Words of Christ as a handful of sweet spices cast into the bitter waters of this world, sweetening them. These leaves of the tree of life, likewise scattered through the

nations, work healing and blessing everywhere. The new city of God, while it has in it all beauty and good, is characterized also by the absence of things that mar the happiness and joy of the earth.

"No longer will there be any curse." Sin is the cause of all curse, and there will be no sin in this holy city, and consequently none of the bitter fruits of sin.

"There will be no more night." Night is caused by the withdrawal of the sun's light, and Christ is the light of this new city. His light never fails and never hides itself. Night is a symbol of ignorance, of superstition, of all evil—and none of these shall be found in the regenerated life. In the twenty-first chapter of Revelation we are told that "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any pain; and no one ever shall be sick there." These, too, are miseries and evils that follow sin, and when sin is excluded, all its baleful consequences are also excluded.

Those who dwell in this new city, shall have privileges and enjoyments of which they have never even dreamed in the present world. "The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city." It is thought to be a high honor to live close to earthly kings and great men. It is an infinitely higher honor to live close to the throne of God! This means continual blessing, everlasting joy, divine companionship. It will be a safe place to live in, for nothing can ever go wrong beside the throne of God—the center of all power and also of all love. This new life will not be one of idleness. Those who live in this city will not spend all their time in rapturous enjoyment, in ecstatic peace. They will be active. "His servants shall serve him." Love always serves. It what ways Christ's friends shall serve in heaven, we do no know. There will be no human need to relieve, no. sorrow to comfort, no sick to visit, no hungry to feed in that land of life. Perhaps, however, they will be sent to other worlds, where such needs shall exist—as exist now in this world of ours.

"They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads!" They will also be admitted to Christ's immediate presence. Their hearts will be pure, cleansed from all sin, and they can look upon the face of God and live.

Another blessing will be that Christ's name shall be on their foreheads. The name means the character and the likeness of Christ, shall appear in His friends. When they see Him—they shall be like Him. It is noted that this divine beauty is said to be on the forehead, where others can see it—and where they themselves cannot see it. This is a mark of all true excellence—those who possess it are unaware of the radiance. "Moses was not aware that his face was radiant."

"These words are trustworthy and true." These promises are not mere impossible dreams. Not one of them shall fail of fulfillment. They are fulfilled in a sense in the Christian life in this world, in everyone who believes Christ and follows Him. The holy city descends out of heaven from God. Heaven must come down and begin in us, in our hearts, in the present life—or we never can enter into heaven above. The words are fulfilled in a measure also for every one who, dying in Christ, passes into the presence of God. The full and final fulfillment, however, will be at the end of all things, when Christ shall come again, and gather all His own into one great company in the New Jerusalem! The Great Invitation Revelation 22:11-21

"Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy." The character with which men reach the judgment—will be their permanent character forever. The man who lives in

sin, refusing the cross of Christ unto the end—is making his own destiny. Habits of sin—make the whole life sinful. It is this that gives such solemnity to life. The seeds of our future—lie in our present. Out of our little acts—habits grow; from our habits—character springs; and character—fixes our destiny, for everyone goes to his own place—that is, the place for which he is fitted by his life on the earth. He who has always sinned here on earth—will continue to sin forever. Eternal death—is simply eternal sin, with the punishments and consequences thereof. The punishment of the wicked will not then be an arbitrary punishment—but the natural result of their own choices and acts in this life.

Another thing which seems to be taught very clearly is, that this final fixing of character takes place at the close of the life on earth. Nothing but divine grace can change the tendencies of a sinful life, regenerating it, and making that holy which was wicked; and when sinners pass out of this world—they pass away from the sway of grace, and he who does wrong—will continue to do wrong; and he who is vile—will continue to be vile—forever!. As the tree falls—so must it lie.

As the man lives—so must he die.

As a man dies—such must he be,

All through the ages of eternity! In the words, "let him who does right—continue to do right; and let him who is holy—continue to be holy," there is a hint of the nature of the heavenly home. The same good things we have learned to do here on earth—we shall continue to do there in heaven. Righteousness is the doing of right things, and the righteous life is one that has been transformed by divine grace into Christlike character. This verse says simply that those who have learned here to do righteousness, shall continue in the next life to do righteousness. We shall still obey God there, and do His will—only we shall be more obedient, and shall do His will there better than here. We shall never in the smallest thing, disobey or cross God’s will. We shall love God there, and love each other, and our life shall be a perfect brotherhood!

Heaven shall be a perfect home. It will still be more blessed there to give, than to receive. They shall still be chief there, who shall serve. Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, meekness, gentleness, goodness, truth—will still be fruits of the Spirit there, as they are here. Life in heaven will not be so strange to us as we think, if we have learned to do God’s will in this world. The "everlasting life" begins the moment we believe on Christ. While we remain here on earth, it is hindered and hampered by the limitations of earth—but in all true Christian experiences, there are intimations of what the full blessedness will be. When we reach heaven, the life begun here will go on, only without hindrance, limitations, or imperfections, forever!

It makes a great difference, therefore, how we live in this world. There is an false impression in some people’s minds, that they can live in sin all their days, and then by a few tears of penitence and a few cries of mercy in a dying hour—can change all the course of their life and spend eternity in heaven. This verse does not favor such a view. The future life is but the harvest of this present life.

Men will be judged by their deeds. The New Testament everywhere teaches the same solemn truth. This does not mean that salvation is by works. We are saved by grace—but grace changes the life and makes us holy. There is no evidence in the unregenerate life that Christ has wrought there at all. Of course the deathbed repentance may be genuine, and if so, it will avail. Only one

repentance in the hour of death is recorded in the gospel—but even then the man lived long enough to show that his repentance was true, that his life was indeed regenerated. Christ can any time work the same miracle, changing the heart and transforming the life in an instant; but this is not the usual way. "To die is gain" only to those have been able to say, "To me to live is Christ!"

"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city." What is it to wash one's robes? It implies sinfulness and guilt in every life, which must be removed before heaven's gates can be passed. Without holiness it is impossible to see God, or to dwell in His presence. The words imply also that nothing but the blood of Christ will remove the guilt and the pollution of sin. We must accept Christ's atonement for the cleansing of our guilt, and depend altogether upon the merits of His sacrifice for our salvation; and we must depend altogether upon the Holy Spirit for the renewing and cleansing of our natures.

It must be noticed here also, that we ourselves must do the washing. That is, no one is cleansed of sin's guilt or pollution, excepting those who voluntarily turn to Christ and receive Him as their Savior. This shows us at once where the responsibility rests. After all that Christ has done in making at such great cost the glorious salvation for sinners—none can enter into heaven but those who come to Him and wash their robes in His blood.

"OUTSIDE are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood." It is well sometimes, to study heaven from the outside. We often talk about what it will be like inside, who will be there, what they will do, how they will live. Here we get a negative view. So there will be an "outside." Some people would have us think there will be nobody outside of heaven, that all will somehow get inside. This verse does not favor such a view. It certainly was not so in John's vision. In another place we learn that heaven has twelve gates. So many gates indicate abundance of entrance room. From whatever point you approach heaven, there is a gate before you. Yet the fact that there are gates indicates that there are conditions of entrance, and that people cannot flock in indiscriminately. We have just learned in the previous verse, that only those whose robes are washed, or those who do God's commandments, can enter these gates. Then here we see who are excluded. There is admission for the worst of sinners—but not while they remain sinners; they must be washed and sanctified and made fit for the heavenly inheritance. A casual glance over the description of those outside, shows the kind of company they will be in, who reject Christ and heaven. Who wants to live forever in such society? It would be worse even than living forever in a state's prison, among convicts. It would be well, too, to take a glimpse of the excluded characters described here, to see whether we are in danger of being kept out.

"The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life!" The invitation to enter heaven is wide and free. No one will be shut out for lack of room, or because there is no invitation for him. Those who are finally lost, will be lost simply because they will not be saved. Through the whole New Testament Jesus labors to show men that His salvation is for all who will take it; it is even pressed upon all. Every page of the book glows with invitations. Even here, as the volume is about to be closed, the invitation is given again in the most earnest, affectionate, beseeching way. As we come to the last words of the Bible, and find this blessed invitation here, we should ask ourselves whether we have accepted it or not.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen." The Book closes with a blessing. Its last word is grace. It is interesting to compare with this the last words of the Old Testament, "Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." The old volume ended, leaving a threat of curse hanging over the earth. The New Testament, however, closes with a blessing, a message of grace and mercy. As the sunshine floods the fields and hills and waters—so the love of Christ is poured out upon the earth. God’s thoughts toward men, are thoughts of peace. He is not willing that any should perish—but earnestly desires that all shall be saved. If we are not saved, it will be because we reject the light and love darkness and death better! With this blessing resting over us, shall we not hasten now under its bright wings? It will be a blessed shelter for us! A traveler plodded on, weary and hungry, not knowing where to turn to find food and rest. A storm broke upon him, and he fled under a wide-spreading tree for shelter. Here he found not only refuge from the storm—but food also, for the tree gave him of its fruits to eat; and rest, too, for his weariness. Just so, the weary people who will flee under this blessing, shall find shelter, rest and bread!

sermon index

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net