

"Know ye not this Parable? and how then will ye know all Parables?" (Mark 4. 13).

The Parables

of the

Lord Jesus Christ

Analysed and Explained.

BY

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THE PARABLES OF THE LORD JESUS.

I

THE HOUSE ON THE ROCK.

MATTHEW vii. 21-27, compared with LUKE vi. 46-49.

Luke vi. 46. "And why call ye Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not the things which I say?"

Matthew vii. 21-23. "'Not every one that saith unto Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven [the heavens]; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven [the heavens]. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name *have** cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, 'I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.'"

PROFESSION AND REALITY

THE proof of sincerity is the obedience of love. "And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith 'I know Him,' and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth His word,

* In quotations from Scripture where italics are used, it is to indicate that words so marked are not in the original, and are thus distinguished in "The Englishman's Bible."

in Him verily is the love of God perfected" (1 John ii. 3-5). This obedience to Christ and subjection to His lordship is a fruit of the Spirit, for "no man can say *that* Jesus *is the* Lord but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. xii. 3). What solemn disclosures the day of Christ will make, when the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is! How much that appeared outwardly fair will prove to be but wood, or hay, or stubble, which the fire will consume (1 Cor. xii. 12, 13). How many a splendid reputation for what appeared to be good works, and acceptable doctrine, will turn out to be structures without a foundation, because the works were not done in obedience to Christ, and the doctrines taught were not based upon the Word and the will of God!

Matthew vii. 24. "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings [words] of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise [prudent] man, which build his house upon a rock [the rock]."

Luke vi. 47, 48. "Whosoever cometh to Me, and heareth My sayings [words], and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like; he is like a man which build a house, and digged deep [who digged and went deep], and laid *the* foundation on a rock [the rock]."

1st. THE BUILDER.—He that cometh to Christ, heareth the words of Christ, and puts them in practice, who is "not a forgetful hearer,

but a doer of the work" (James i. 25); not simply a believer on, but a disciple and follower of, Christ.

2nd. **THE HOUSE.**—An expression of large signification. It applies to whatever is built up, whether as regards faith or the doctrines believed, hopes and expectations, whether for time or eternity.

3rd. **THE PREPARATION FOR BUILDING.**—The builder exercises prudence, and this prudence is shown by his digging and going deep. He will not build his faith or rest his hopes on anything fallable, uncertain, or liable to change; not on the doctrines or opinions of men, the conclusions of human reason, nor the speculations of the ingenious mind, nor on the sublime soarings of a fertile imagination.

His faith is not suffered to stand in the wisdom of man (1 Cor. ii. 5), nor will he follow cunningly devised fables.

4th. **THE FOUNDATION.**—"Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. iii. 2). He builds on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself the chief corner Stone and also the head Stone of the corner.

5th. THE ROCK.—Though closely and immediately connected, the foundation and the rock must not be confounded; the foundation stone is Christ, but the rock on which it rests is the stability and testimony of God Himself. We read in Isaiah xxviii. 16, "Therefore thus saith *the* Lord God [Adonahy Jehovah], Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation stone, a *tried* stone, a precious corner *stone*, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste,"

It is God who lays the foundation, and He lays it in Zion—the mount which represents the divine sovereignty of grace; and it is Jehovah Himself who is the everlasting rock, according to Isaiah xxvi. 4: "Trust ye in *the* Lord (Jehovah) for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah *is* everlasting strength [for in *Jah* Jehovah *is* a rock of ages]."

The foundation on which the soul can build securely for time and eternity is not the Christ of human thought, reason, or imagination, but the Christ of God—the Christ which God reveals to the soul by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. When Peter made his noble confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living

God," Jesus adds, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but My father which *is* in heaven . . . Upon this rock I will build my Church, and *the* gates of hell [hades] shall not prevail against it." The Church is founded upon Christ, and not simply as Son of Man, but as the Son of God; a Christ revealed from the Father by the Holy Spirit. "For God, who commanded *the* light to shine out of darkness, *hath* shined in our hearts, to *give the* light of the knowledge of the glory of God in *the* face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. iv. 6).

BUILDING ON CHRIST.

The faith which builds on Christ, to be the faith of God's elect, must rest for its stability on the testimony of God Himself.

Matthew vii. 25. "And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat about [fell upon *or* dashed against] that house, and it fell not: for it was founded [had been founded] upon *a* rock [the rock]."

Luke vi. 48. "And when *the* flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded [had been founded] upon *a* rock [the rock]."

Sooner or later the professed disciple of

Christ will be put to the test, either as to his faith, doctrines, hopes, or expectations. The testings are various: "The rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew." Singly they may assail, or unitedly they may combine their forces for a fierce assault. But the faith and hope which rests upon this sure and certain testimony of God to his beloved Son, as contained in the Scriptures of truth, inspired by the Holy Spirit, will stand the test, for God cannot lie,—His testimony to faith in Christ is confirmed by an oath,—the Scriptures cannot be broken; and the Spirit who inspired them is the Spirit of truth, incapable of misleading or of error.

As suggested by Luke, there may be seasons, whether in the experience of the Church or of individuals, when the faith and hope of the professed believer may be assaulted in an especial and all but overwhelming manner. "A flood arose, the stream beat vehemently." It would appear that at the present time the course and current of popular thought would sweep away, if they could, the very foundations of revealed truth. John writes in his first epistle, second chapter, eighteenth and twentieth

verses: "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye *have* heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many Antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. . . . But ye have an unction [anointing] from the holy One, and ye know all things." "In the last days perilous times shall come." What, then, is the security of the humble believer, even the little child in the faith of Christ? It is the teaching and conviction of the Spirit of truth, the unction or anointing from the holy One which every true believer has received, for "If any *man* have not *the* Spirit of Christ, he is none of His;" as John also says in verses twenty-six and twenty-seven, "These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which ye *have* received of [from] Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any *man* teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it *hath* taught you, ye shall abide in Him." The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, does not speak of or from Himself (John xvi. 13-15), He testifies of Christ, and bears witness to the Father's testimony concerning Him. The faith

and hope that rest on the foundation, rest securely upon the Rock of Ages, which remains unshaken for time and eternity.

In Luke vi. 48, the Authorised version, in accordance with the *Textus Receptus*; or the Received Greek Text, reads "And could not shake it for it was founded upon a rock," or, more literally, as in the margin of "The Englishman's Bible," "And was not able to shake it: for it had been founded upon the rock." But there is another Greek reading which has been adopted in the text of the Revised Version, "And could not shake it: because it has been well builded."

The facts of the case are these:—

In favour of the reading "For it has been founded upon the rock," are the manuscripts ACDEHKMSUVXTAII; for the other reading, "Because it has been well builded," are manuscripts *Aleph* B1:Ξ. My own conviction, founded on a careful investigation of the subject is that these last named manuscripts, although preferred by the revisers, are quite unworthy of the confidence reposed in them. They are, in fact, copies made about the 4th century, when the professing Church was

leavened with Arius, and contain the most serious errors and omissions.

THE BEST TEST OF SCRIPTURE.

is Scripture itself. The undisputed testimony of Matthew vii. 25, "For it has been founded upon the rock," ought surely to decide the question.

Matthew vii. 26. "And every one that heareth these sayings [words] of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand."

Luke vi. 49. "But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man *that* without a foundation built a house upon the earth."

He is a hearer, but not a doer, beholding his face in the glass, but forgetting (Jas. i. 23, 24). Such profess to have faith, but have no works to show for it (Jas. ii. 14-26). They are foolish virgins holding the lamp in the hand, but having no oil in the vessel (Matt. xxv.). Such have the form of godliness, but are destitute of its power (2 Tim. iii. 5). Their faith, doctrines, hopes, and expectations rest on the opinions of men, the deductions of reason, the traditions of the elders, the various thoughts of individuals, who claim the right of the exercise of private judgment — opinions in-

numerable as the sands of the sea-shore, and, like them, variable, shifting, and altering with every tide—taking the character of the age, and varying with the fluctuation and advance of human thought. There are persons whose religious opinions are modified by the denomination to which they belong, or the school of doctrine in which they have been educated. And this is a foundation which is human rather than divine; faith standing in the wisdom of men rather than in the power of God.

Doctrines in themselves cannot save; it is not so much *what* we believe, but Whom we believe. Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John xvii. 3). A rope thrown to a drowning man may be clutched, and go to the bottom with him unless there be a strong arm at the other end of it. The anchor of the soul is the promise and oath of God connected with the person and work of Christ. Historical facts or doctrinal truths may be received, but it is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing. "Being born again of the word of

God, which liveth and abideth for ever." Abstract truth will not sanctify; it is God who sanctifies through His own word, and by His holy Spirit, and it is God who begets again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That faith and hope which does not rest on the firm testimony of God by the Holy Spirit, rests on a foundation which is earthly, and not heavenly—temporal, and not eternal.

Matthew vii. 27. "And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."

Luke vi. 49. "Against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell and the ruin of that house was great."

That superstructure of faith, doctrine, or hopes which rests upon the deductions or opinions resulting from the exercise of individual judgment, tradition, or human authority, when subjected to a rigorous test, being destitute of a divine basis of support, sooner or later must fall. This is the secret of the downgrade movement of the present day. The stream is now beating vehemently. Generally the first cardinal truth which is questioned is that of eternal judgment (Heb. vi. 2); then

follow the inspiration of Scripture, the fall of man, the doctrine of the atonement, the divinity of Christ, the personality of the Holy Spirit, and the doctrine of the Trinity; and the final result is infidelity, atheism, or agnosticism. The stream of popular opinion with the strong overwhelming current will be succeeded by "the swellings of Jordan;" and how fearful the ruin when the soul passes into eternity with nothing to sustain it, to sink into an abyss that knows no bottom, throughout an eternity which has no end.

And in the history of the world a period is coming, forcibly described by the prophet Isaiah (chap. xxviii. 17, 18, 22): "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to *the* plummet and *the* hail shall sweep away *the* refuge of lies, and *the* waters shall overflow *the* hiding place. . . . When *the* overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. . . . For I have heard from Adonahy Jehovah of Hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth." (See the whole chapter.)

II.

THE
SOWER AND THE SEED.

MATTHEW xiii. 3-9—explained in verses 18-23.

See also MARK iv. 2-20; LUKE viii. 4-15.

Verse 3. And He spake many things unto them in parables, saying, "Behold, *a* sower went forth to sow;

Verse 4. And when he sowed some *seeds* fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up.

Verse 5. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:

Verse 6. And when *the* sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

Verse 7. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:

Verse 8. But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

Verse 9. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

WHEN the Son of Man was on the earth, He was the Sower of the seed, afterwards the work was taken up by the Apostles, and is continued by His servants. The seed sown is the word of God (Luke viii. 11). According to Matthew it is the word of the Kingdom (ver. 19),

for it is the testimony of God concerning Christ, and also the proclamation of the kingdom. It is a life-giving, regenerating, sanctifying word, through the power of the Holy Ghost, as Jesus said, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth . . . the words that I speak unto you are Spirit, and *they* are life" (John vi. 63).

The wayside hearer is one that heareth the word, but understandeth it not. The seed lies on the surface; it does not penetrate the understanding; hence Satan or his emissaries soon catch it away. When once the word is understood and received in faith as the testimony of God, it is beyond Satan's reach.

In the stony-ground hearer, although the emotions are affected and the feelings are excited, there is no real and deep heart experience, hence "the root of the matter" is not in him. The impression is superficial and transitory; temptation or persecution arising, he is stumbled. In this case, the hard heart unbroken has prevented the truth from taking root.

When the seed is sown among thorns, the cares of this world, in the case of the poor, the deceitfulness of riches in the wealthy, and the

desire of other things entering in, choke the word and it becomes unfruitful.

In the wayside hearer, the danger is from Satan.

In the stony-ground hearer, the danger arises from the hardness of the heart, and the obduracy of the flesh.

When sown among thorns, the danger is from the world, its allurements, entanglements, and engrossing cares.

The good ground is that which is neither hard, nor trodden down; neither rocky, or stony, or cumbered with thorns and briers; it represents the heart that is prepared to receive the word with all readiness of mind, without prejudice or opposition, which allows the word to penetrate, and is open to deep conviction, and having received the truth, keeps and treasures it; and brings forth fruit with patience, not allowing the world with its cares or pleasures to interfere. The word is received as the word of God, under the constraining love of Christ, and in the purifying power of the Holy Ghost. Three methods of reading the Scriptures may be mentioned:

First—The ATTENTIVE hearing and AC-

CURATE reading of the word of God in the Divine presence, and in dependence on the teaching of the Spirit of God, "the ear of the soul being opened to hear what the Spirit saith" (verse 9). In contrast with the **WAYSIDE** hearer.

Secondly—So hearing or reading as that the truth may lead to an **EXPERIMENTAL** acquaintance with the mind of God, and affect the heart and character. In contrast with the **STONY GROUND** hearer.

Thirdly—The word of God so heard or read that it might lead to **PRACTICAL** results wrought out amidst the actual circumstances of every-day life; neither the cares of business, nor the possession of riches hindering fruitfulness, but rather used as a means of serving and glorifying God. In contrast with the **THORNY GROUND** hearer.

Where these three are combined, and the word of God heard or read **ATTENTIVELY, EXPERIMENTALLY, AND PRACTICALLY**, there is the good ground; and, just in proportion to the careful study, the experimental realization and carrying out of the instructions of the Word, will be the measure of fruitfulness, whether **THIRTY, SIXTY, or a HUNDREDFOLD**.

Or we may thus state it. The diligent perusal of the Scriptures will lead to a thirtyfold fruit-bearing. When with this is combined an experimental reception, there will be a sixtyfold. And when, again, the truth clearly perceived and experimentally held is put into practice in the ordinary affairs of life, there will be the hundredfold fruit-bearing.

In solar light there is a combination of three distinct rays; the yellow or luminous ray, diffusing light: the red, the calorific or heating ray, diffusing warmth: and the blue, or actinic ray, producing fruitfulness.

When the Scriptures are read in the light of the Divine presence, their truth and beauty are distinctly seen. This corresponds with the yellow ray.

When read in the apprehension of the person and work of Christ, the centre theme of inspired Scripture, the heart is warmed and comforted, as by the red ray.

When interpreted and brought home by the power of the Holy Ghost, ungrieved, invited, and depended upon, the fruits of the Spirit will be brought forth in their fulness and perfection, as by the blue ray.

III.

THE TARES AND THE WHEAT

MATTHEW xiii. 24-30.

Verse 24. Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven [the heavens] is likened unto a man who sowed good seed in his field :

Verse 25. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

Verse 26. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

Verse 27. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, 'Sir, did'st thou not sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?'

Verse 28. He saith unto them, 'An enemy hath done this.' The servants said unto him, 'Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?'

Verse 29. But he said, 'Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

Verse 30. Let both grow together until the harvest : and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

THIS parable is the second of a series of seven, in which the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven—or rather of the kingdom of the heavens—are given; wherein is shown the character which the kingdom of the Son of

Man takes whilst He, being rejected by Israel, is seated at the right hand of God.

These parables, like the addresses to the seven Churches in Asia, in Rev. ii., iii., are arranged in chronological order; they mark certain epochs in the history of the Church during the present dispensation.

There is this distinction between the seven parables in Matthew xiii. and the addresses to the seven Churches in Asia in Rev. ii., iii.,—in the parable the KINGDOM aspect of the dispensation is given, hence notice is taken of outward nominal profession; in the seven addresses in Revelation ii., iii. the CHURCH character of the dispensation is contemplated.

The seven Churches are represented by seven golden lampstands; gold being the emblem of that which is divine.

It is the Church of God which is addressed, composed of those who are regenerated and partakers of the divine nature.

The parable of the SOWER and the SEED applies to the first proclamation of the word of the kingdom by Christ, and those sent by Him; just as the epistle to the Church at Ephesus (Rev. ii. 1-7) applies to the Apostolic age of

the Church, and corresponds with the historical type in the reign of Solomon.

The parable of the WHEAT and TARES foretells the entrance of mere professors into the Church of God, which began at so early a period of its history, accompanied, indeed, by fierce persecution, as indicated by the address to the Church in Smyrna (Revelation ii. 8-11), and foreshadowed by the reign of Rehoboam.

Four of these parables Jesus delivered in the presence of the multitude (verse 34); the three remaining were spoken to the disciples in the house. That of the SOWER and the SEED WAS explained to the multitude; this of the WHEAT and TARES He expounded to the disciples when alone with them (verse 36).

This second parable gives us our Lord's estimate of Christendom, from the first entrance of mere professors into the outward church up to the time of the Lord's return; while the explanation continues the prediction to the end of the age.

Verses 38, 39. "The field is the world; the good seed are the children [or sons] of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the Devil; the harvest is the end of the world [age], and the reapers are the angels."

Strict discipline is to be maintained in the CHURCH, and the wicked person put away (1 Cor. v.), but persecution is not to be resorted to in the WORLD: human reason may be utterly at fault here, for a persecuting Saul may in due time become a nursing father to the Church. "The harvest is the end of the age." This harvest extends over a certain period; it is not confined to one specific action. There are three things noticed in connection with it.

- 1st. The collecting of the tares in bundles.
- 2nd. The gathering of the wheat into the barn.
- 3rd. After a time, the burning of the tares.

1st. The time of harvest is the time of ripening, both of the wheat and tares alike. As the end of the age draws nigh, before the removal of the Church, false profession will have ripened, and false systems of theology will have become matured; human combinations, on fundamentally false principles, will unite mere outward professors of Christianity in bonds too strong to be broken. God will overrule all this for the accomplishment of His own purposes, and angels are the instrumentalities which He employs. The tares are not at once

burnt ; they are collected together, but left on the field, preparatory to the final action.

2nd. But the wheat are gathered into the barn : the real believers in Christ, sealed and indwelt by the Spirit of God, changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall be for ever with the Lord.

With this the parable, as delivered in public, ends. This action closes the present dispensation, which commenced at Pentecost, and will terminate with the Lord's return to receive His Church to Himself.

The interpretation of the parable not only explains what goes before, but supplements what follows after. This principle of interpretation is of the utmost importance to be observed, otherwise, in some instances, the interpretation will appear to contradict the parable. This principle will apply to the interpretation of the prophecies of Daniel, and also to the concluding parable of the NET (verses 47-50).

The same remark is applicable to the first and second epistles to the Thessalonians. The first epistle is occupied entirely with the coming

of the Lord Jesus to receive His Church—that is, “The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him.”

The second epistle supplies the details of these things which will follow after—Babylon the great, the Man of Sin, and the manifestation of the Lord in flaming fire.

Verses 40-42. “As therefore the tares are gathered [collected] and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world [age]. The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather [collect] out of His kingdom all things that offend [stumble], and them which do iniquity [practise lawlessness]; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

“The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him,” represented in the parable by the wheat gathered into the barn, closes the present dispensation; but the times of the Gentiles run on till the end or completion of the age. During the interval between the gathering of the wheat and the burning of the tares, the last week of Daniel’s prophecy of the seventy weeks of years will be accomplished.

3rd. In these seven years, and especially in the last three and a half years, the tares previously collected in bundles will become fully dried, and ready for the burning.

The great apostacy of Christendom, culminating in Babylon the great, and the rebellion of man, headed up in the Lawless One, the Man of Sin, will call for the execution of speedy and signal judgment.

Before Messiah establishes His kingdom of peace and righteousness on the earth, the transgressors will be removed out of it. The Son of Man "shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity," and the angels of His power will be the accomplishers of His will; while the temporal judgment will be succeeded by the eternal judgment and unavailing woe: for, according to the prophecy of John the Baptist, He will not only "thoroughly purge His floor, and gather his wheat into the garner, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. iii. 12).

When the peaceful reign of the Son of Man shall be established on the earth—all Israel saved and righteous—the nations blessed in association with them—the knowledge of Jehovah covering the earth as the waters cover the sea—"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (verse 43). The dead in Christ who rise first

and the living ones caught up at the Lord's coming—represented by the wheat gathered into His garner—will then shine forth in resurrection glory, with the brightness of the firmament.

Then the kingdom of the heavens will no longer be in mystery, but in full manifestation—the kingdom of the Son of Man established on the earth, and the saints of the heavenlies taking the kingdom and shining forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father above.

Well may the Lord add, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (verse 43). For in the consideration of subjects so great, so glorious, and so full, we need not only to mark well, and rightly divide the Scriptures of truth, but we need to hear the voice of that Divine Spirit, under Whose inspiration these Scriptures were written, and Who alone can interpret them, that He may not only bring to our remembrance the very words which Jesus uttered, but give us to know the mind of Christ in them.

iv.

THE PARABLE OF THE
MUSTARD SEED.

MATTHEW xiii. 31, 32.

Verses 31, 32. Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven [the heavens] is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of [less than] all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among [greater than] herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."

IN the parable of the sower, the seed is the word of God. In that of the wheat and tares, the wheat represents INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS. In this parable, the grain of mustard seed, in its original character as a herb, corresponds with the CHRISTIAN CHURCH in its lowly form as at first planted in the earth.

The first parable relates to the sowing of the seed ; the second, third, and fourth are added as parables of the kingdom by the word "another." The fifth, sixth, and seventh are subjoined by the word "again."

The parable of the grain of mustard seed corresponds in point of time with the era marked by the address to the Church in Pergamos (Rev. ii.), when the Church, at first planted in lowliness and humility, assumed the appearance of worldly greatness, and passed from under the persecuting power of Imperial Rome, to be the subject of its patronage, in the reign of Constantine the Great ; corresponding typically with the reign of Jeroboam, who, by his corruption of religious worship, made Israel to sin.

The tree, with its lofty height and wide-spreading branches, is an emblem of earthly dignity and greatness. (Compare Daniel iv.) But the words of the Lord Jesus to His disciples, as recorded in Matthew xx. 25-28, are these, "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion [lordship] over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you : but

whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister : and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant : even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

For the Church to become great in the earth is contrary to its original character and design ; whereas, with regard to the Kingdom of the Messiah (compare Daniel ii. 34, 35), the stone cut out without hands, after having smitten the image on the feet, becomes the great mountain, filling the whole earth. Emblematic of Him who on earth was the meek and lowly One ; but, who after He will have exercised judgment upon Gentile power, in its last finished form of evil, will establish His kingdom of righteousness and peace throughout the whole earth.

The One who sowed the mustard seed is the Lord Jesus ; the field is the world, as belonging to Him ; the grain of mustard seed is the Christian Church as at first planted in the earth. The great tree is Christendom as it appears in its outward form of earthly dignity and worldly prosperity. The birds of the air are those evils, introduced by the enemy,

which are harboured and sheltered beneath its patronage.

The fear of the apostle Paul was that the Church should be corrupted from the simplicity which is in Christ (2 Cor. xi. 2, 3); and this corruption was foreseen and foretold by the Lord Jesus. What is needed in these last times is that the Church should return to her first love (Rev. ii. 4, 5). The love of a chaste virgin espoused to one husband, and to do the first works in lowliness and humility, and in separation from the world, as the followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, watching and waiting for His return, and desiring to be found of Him in peace, at His coming, without spot and blameless.

v.

THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN.

Verse 33. Another parable spake He unto them. "The kingdom of heaven [the heavens] is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."

THIS parable corresponds in chronological order with the address in Revelation ii. to the fourth Church, the Church in Thyatira. The historical type is found in the account of the reign of Ahab, with his wife Jezebel. "There was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of Jehovah, whom Jezebel, his wife, stirred up" (1 Kings xxi. 25).

In His address to the Church in Thyatira, the Lord says, "Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest

that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce My servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols" (Rev. ii. 20).

It is the Papal system represented by the woman Jezebel, through the dogma "Hear the Church," which has corrupted Christian doctrine, and by that means has leavened the Church wherever that doctrine prevails. Thus, it is that the Papal system corresponds with the woman that puts the leaven into the meal.

(1) The MAN sows the good seed (verse 24).

(2) The ENEMY mingles tares with the wheat (verse 25).

(3) The MAN sows the mustard seed, but the EARTH adds its own increase, changing the herb into a tree (verses 31, 32).

(4) The WOMAN puts the leaven into the meal (verse 33).

(5) The MAN takes up the work again, and purchases the field for the sake of the treasure (verse 44).

(6) The MERCHANT MAN seeks and buys the pearl (verses 45, 46).

(7) The FISHERMEN cast the net and draw it to the shore (verses 47, 48).

(8) The ANGELS at the end of the age complete the work (verses 49, 50).

The three measures here mentioned are, according to the Greek, three sata, each saton being equal to one seah in the Hebrew, and the three measures are equal to one ephah.

In the parable of the mustard tree, the Lord Jesus had foretold the appearance which the kingdom of the heavens would assume during the present Church dispensation, in outward, worldly form. In the parable of the leaven, He foreshows its internal doctrinal corruption.

The Church of God, represented by the three measures, or one ephah, of meal, looked at as in Christ, is said to be unleavened. "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened" (1 Cor. v. 7).

Leaven, in Scripture, is sour dough beginning to ferment or corrupt, which diffuses its influence throughout the entire mass into which it is inserted: hence always used to typify corruption in morals or doctrine.

It is the woman who puts the leaven into the meal, and it is the woman Jezebel that calls herself a prophetess who teaches and seduces

the servants of Christ. The apostle Paul says, "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (1 Tim. ii. 12); and in Ephesians v. 24, "As the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be."

The Church's true position is that of entire subjection to Christ, both as to practice and in doctrine; she is to learn rather than to teach, to obey rather than to rule; and even as to discipline, it is only in so far as the Church carries out the mind of the Lord Christ, that what is done on earth is ratified in heaven.

In the temptation in the garden of Eden, Satan does not make his first assault on Adam, who had received the prohibition as to the tree of knowledge of good and evil directly from the mouth of God, but on Eve, who had probably heard of it from the lips of Adam; and God reprimands Adam for hearkening to the voice of his wife in thus being induced to transgress the Divine command (Gen. iii. 17; 1 Tim. ii. 14). And that old serpent the Devil, encouraged by that first success of his wiles, still continues to act on his former tactics.

What we learn in direct communion with

and communication from God, by His Spirit, through His Word, becomes fixed and immovable in the experience of the soul. It is when doctrines are learnt at second hand on human authority, or on the teaching of the Church, that we are open to Satan's seductions. In Jesuitism the authority of Christ is substituted by that of the human will; and in Romanism the teaching of the Church is substituted for the teaching of God, by His Spirit, through the Scriptures. Rome does not permit God to speak directly to man through His Word; hence the possession and perusal of the Bible is discountenanced, and the Scriptures themselves, she says, are only to be received on the authority of the Church as explained by her.

Thus it is that the woman introduces the leaven into the meal, and thus not only are souls corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ, but the whole system of revealed truth has been vitiated by her.

Before the manifestation of the Son of Man for the execution of judgment, two things must first take place: first, "the falling away," or literally, the apostacy; and, secondly, the revelation of the man of sin (2 Thess. ii. 1-8).

Ecclesiastically, the leaven of false doctrine, working in professing Christendom, will culminate in Babylon the Great.

Politically, the mystery of iniquity or lawlessness, which already works, will be headed up in the Wicked or Lawless One, the man of sin. During the present dispensation, whilst the Holy Ghost, as Comforter, maintaining the authority of the Lord Jesus, is on the earth, there is a restraining power keeping down the full development of ecclesiastical and political evil.

But when the fulness of the Gentiles shall have come in, and God shall have taken out from among Jew and Gentile a people for His name, and a bride for His Son, this restraint will be removed; the living saints being caught up to meet the Lord in the air, the outward shell of nominal Christianity will become apostate, and during the first three years and a half of Anti-christ's reign will become the harlot of the beast, and during the latter three and a half years "the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird" (Rev. xviii. 2).

This is strikingly foreshadowed in the vision

of the ephah (Zech. v. 5-11). The prophet is shown first an ephah going forth (verse 6), then a talent or weight of lead (verse 7); thirdly, a woman who is to sit in the ephah (verse 7). The ephah, as we have seen, is three measures; the talent of lead is a restraining power; and the woman herself is said to be "wickedness"—literally, "lawlessness," in the feminine, or the lawless woman; just as Anti-christ is styled the "Lawless One," masculine, or the lawless man.

In the parable of Matthew xiii. the woman is said to put the leaven into the three measures, or ephah, of meal. In the vision of Zechariah, the woman herself is cast into, and sits in the midst of, the empty ephah; as also the Lawless One will sit in the temple of God showing himself that he is God (2 Thess. ii. 4).

In Matthew xiii. 33 is shown the corruption of doctrine in Christendom during the present dispensation; the prophecy of Zechariah goes further and shows the final apostasy.

Two women are seen in the vision with the wind in their wings, which may represent their going forth in the full current of popular favour; "their wings as the wings of a stork," that is,

with the outward appearance of great piety; the stork being remarkable for its care of its parents, and for its affection for its young, and is, as its Hebrew name implies, the emblem of kindness and piety.

They lift up the ephah between the earth and the heaven, giving it a position in reality neither earthly or heavenly; this is just the character of worldly religion, and it is this mixture of the carnal and the spiritual which makes it so fascinating.

These women carry it forward to establish it on its original base in the land of Shinar, which was the site of ancient Babylon.

Thus the Babylon of the Chaldeans, in the land of Shinar, becomes the type of the mystical Babylon of the Book of the Revelation, which represents apostate Christianity, when the leaven of false doctrine originally inserted will have accomplished its design in corrupting the entire mass.

The spirit of lawlessness which began to work in the apostle's time, and the manifestation of which is becoming more and more apparent in various forms, will reach its full and final development in the empire of the

beast, with the Lawless One, or man of sin, at its head.

Intellect, apart from the teaching of the Holy Spirit, or science without God, will find its adequate representative in the false prophet.

These both will be destroyed at the coming of the Son of Man, and the revelation of His glory and power (Rev. xix. 20).

But the apostasy of Christendom, developed and matured in Babylon the Great, will be completely and for ever overthrown by the combination of the ten kings: "For God will put in their hearts to fulfil His will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled" (Rev. xvii. 17).

vi.

THE TREASURE HID IN THE FIELD.

MATTHEW xiii. 44.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven [the heavens] is like unto treasure hid in a [the] field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth [hid], and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.”

THIS parable corresponds chronologically with the address to the Church in Sardis (Rev. iii. 2-6), which Church is symbolic of the period of the Reformation.

The historical type is found in the history of Jehu (2 Kings ix., x.), which was a time of outward reformation.

The MAN who found the TREASURE, as explained in the preceding parables, is the LORD JESUS, and the FIELD is the WORLD.

What, then, is the TREASURE? In the parable of the wheat and tares, “the good seed are the children of the kingdom,” mingled together with mere professors, so as with difficulty to be distinguished from them. Here the same children of the kingdom are looked

at as treasure hid in the world; that is, among the mass of mankind. After the Apostles' times, up to the period of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, there was no distinction made between those who were actually saved and those who outwardly belonged to the professing Church, whether the Greek or the Roman Church; and although the Reformation in the energy of the Holy Ghost brought again to light the great truth of justification by faith, there was no vigorous attempt made to separate those who were justified and in possession of everlasting life from the professors around—the distinction was simply between Protestants and Roman Catholics.

Nevertheless, the foundation of God stood firm; the Lord knew them that were His. From eternity He had foreknown them; they were His treasure—every individual soul being of more value than the world itself; and as at the first He would not suffer the tares to be gathered out from among the wheat, so at this period of the Church's history their separate and united testimony was in a great measure obscured by their surroundings.

“And for joy thereof goeth and selleth all

that he hath." These precious souls given to Christ by His Father, redeemed by His precious blood, quickened and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, were His joy as well as His treasure; the world knew them not, even as it had not known Him, and He was content that for a season they should remain in obscurity, even as He had been, in the anticipation of that time when He, the Son of God, shall be manifested, and they shall be manifested with Him in glory.

Though in the form of God, and thinking it not robbery to be equal with God, yet He emptied Himself, and for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame.

The result of this surrender of Himself and all that He had was the redemption of the souls of His elect, and the remission of their sins, and not only so, but creation itself was ransomed, and the field which is the world became His by the double right of creation and redemption, all authority having been given to Him in heaven and on earth.

When David was commanded by God to go up and rear an altar to Jehovah in the threshing-floor of Ornan, the Jebusite, in order that the sword of the angel who was executing judgment

might be put up again into its sheath, David not only purchased the threshing-floor as the site for the altar for fifty shekels of silver, the redemption price for one hundred souls, but he also purchased "the place"—that, is the surrounding field—for six hundred shekels of gold (1 Chron. xxi. 25), whereon the temple was to be erected to Jehovah's praise.

And we learn from Colossians i. 20 that the blood of the Cross has not only made peace for ransomed souls, but has also reconciled all things to God, whether they be things on earth or things in heaven.

The world is not purchased so much for its own sake, but because of the treasure contained in it. It is now a "purchased possession" (Eph. i. 14), but not yet redeemed by power from the hand of the usurper. The life of the believer is hid with Christ in God, and creation groans, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, when creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. viii. 19-21). Then Christ Himself shall be manifested, and His redeemed shall appear with Him in glory.

vii.

THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL.

MATTHEW XIII. 45, 46.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven [the heavens] is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”

THIS is the sixth parable in this chapter, and corresponds with the address to the Church in Philadelphia (Rev. iii. 7-13), in which are recognised the principles of brotherly love, holiness, truth, and subjection to the Lordship of Christ, together with the preservation of the word of Christ, and the hope of the Lord's return to receive His Church, which is His body and His bride.

The typical foreshadowing of this period may be found in the times of Hezekiah and Josiah, wherein there was a return to the first

religious principles of the kingdom, and such an observance of the passover as had not been before since the reign of Solomon (2 Chron. xxix.-xxxi., xxxiv., xxxv).

In accordance with the interpretation given in the other parable by the Lord Himself (verses 37, 38), the merchant man is the Lord Jesus, and the pearl is the Church, as the object of His desire and self-sacrificing love.

In Ephesians v. 25-27 the same truths are expressed by the Holy Spirit, "Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it."

In the unity of the Godhead the Divine affections of the Lord Jesus were satisfied in the love of the Father, and in the love of the Spirit; but as the Son of Man, and the second Adam, there needed to be found a helpmeet for Him. And this suitable object, this second Eve, in the Divine eternal counsels, was found in the Church, who was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. i. 4). For this, among the other joys that were set before Him, He endured the Cross and despised the shame; He emptied Himself and became obedient unto death; and though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor.

The Church of God is *ONE*, as represented by the one pearl—one body though composed of many members; one habitation of God, through the Spirit, though builded of many stones; one, as the purchase of the same all-atoning blood; one, as the workmanship of the same Divine eternal Spirit, and by that one Spirit baptized into one body.

It is unique, it stands alone.

Its commencement is at Pentecost, and it will be complete before the Lord returns to receive it unto Himself (Eph. iv. 13).

The preciousness of this one pearl consists not so much in its own intrinsic value as in the price paid for its redemption, the skill and labour bestowed upon it.

It was the gift of the Father to the Son in the counsels of eternity; purchased by the Son by His own precious blood, and at the sacrifice of Himself. In order to its formation it was expedient that the Son of Man should go away, and that the Holy Ghost, in His especial office of Comforter, should come and remain with the Church, and in it, until its completion.

As the diver descends beneath the ocean wave, and at no little risk detaches from its

rocky bed the rough oyster shell, which contains within itself the precious pearl, and brings it up to light; even so the Lord Jesus descended, not only at the risk, but at the sacrifice of His own life, into those depths of sin, of ruin, and of distress in which the Church lay, in order to bring it up from those depths into the light of life.

And as the pearl is at first embedded in a mass of living, but corruptible flesh, and needs to be separated and cleansed from its surroundings in order that it might appear, in its purity as well as in its beauty, fit gem for the imperial diadem; even so it is with the Church.

Alas! with what a mass of corruptible flesh is it surrounded, and how deeply is it embedded, and what a purification is needed!

But this is the work on which the Lord Jesus is now occupied.

He is sanctifying and cleansing his blood-bought Church with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself, in due time, a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. v. 26, 27), then to present that Church

unblamable in holiness before God, even His Father, and before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; and afterwards to appear when He comes with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, "to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe" (2 Thess. i. 10); for "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory."

The pearly aspect of the Church is beautifully and symbolically represented by the gates of the Holy Jerusalem in Revelation xxi. 21, where we read that "every several gate was of one pearl." "The twelve gates have one appearance, and this aspect of oneness, and purity, and beauty appears on every side; for those who will compose the Church in glory have all been redeemed by the same precious blood, and sanctified, perfected, and united in one by the same all-pervading and uniting Spirit." (See "Notes on the Book of the Revelation," by the same author).

VIII.

THE PARABLE OF
THE NET.

MATTHEW XIII. 47-50.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven [the heavens] is like unto a net [drag-net] that was cast into the sea, and gathered of [brought together out of] every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to [drew upon the] shore, and sat down, and gathered [collected] the good into vessels, but cast the bad away [corrupt out]. So shall it be at the end of the world [in the completion of the age]: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

THIS is the last parable of the series, corresponding with the address to the Church in Laodicea, the last of the addresses to the seven Churches, which contemplates the close of the present dispensation, through the Church's failure in testimony and its lukewarmness.

At that time the final division will be made, and the true saints will be separated from the false professors. The aspect of the last days of professing Christendom is represented as characterized by lukewarmness concerning the vital truths of Christianity, up to the time of the end of the dispensation, when, having failed as an outward witness to the faith once delivered to the saints, it is rejected. It is the Church aspect to the end. See Rev. iii. 14-22.

This parable has its allegorical foreshadowing in the reigns of Manasseh and Zedekiah, when through the sin of Manasseh, in the time of Zedekiah, Judah was carried captive by the Babylonians and the temple destroyed. In the times of these kings we have the closing days of the kingdom of Judah, after which the dominion was transferred to the Gentiles, and the vessels of Jehovah's house were carried to Babylon (2 Chron. xxxiii., xxxvi. 11, &c).

In the parable of the net, it is the kingdom aspect characterised by great activity in the spread of the Gospel, and efforts for the conversion of man, as is manifest at the present time on every hand.

The word here employed for net (*sageenee*),

signifies a "draw" or "drag" net, which may either represent a large net or seine enclosing a wide surface, and then drawn to shore, or a net which drags up from the bottom.

By the sea is signified the masses of the Gentiles ; it is the Gospel preached to all the world for a witness to all nations before the end shall have come.

Into this Gospel net people of every nation and clime, of every character, high and low, rich and poor, young and old, are gathered.

In the Church at Sardis many had a name to live who were spiritually dead ; here it is rather a gathering on the profession of faith, which profession is afterwards to be put to the test.

"Which, when it was full, they drew up on the shore."

This especial dispensation of the Gospel, and of Gospel grace, in this accepted time and day of salvation had its commencement in the preaching by the Lord Jesus, and from Pentecost onward by the apostles and others.

This character of Gospel preaching will continue until the work on account of which the Comforter was especially sent down will be

completed : that is, until every member of the spiritual body of Christ shall be brought in, and the Church arrive at its full stature (Eph. iv. 13).

Just so the sheet that was shown in vision to Peter was let down from heaven, and contained beasts, creeping things, and fowls of every kind, and then was received up again into heaven (Acts x. 11-16).

The partial veil of judicial blindness which has happened to Israel will also continue unremoved from the mass of the nation until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in ; although the Spirit of God may perform a gracious work in many of the Jews, as in these days.

The character in which the Spirit of God is now accomplishing His work is that of the Comforter, convicting the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment ; and baptising all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, into one body, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, bond nor free.

But when this work shall be completed, at the return of the Lord Jesus to receive His Spirit-perfected Bride, the symbol under which

the Holy Ghost will be then represented is that of the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth, acting with sevenfold energy, and throughout the whole world (Rev. v. 6).

Then the believing Israelite will be sealed as such, as belonging to one of the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev. vii. 4-8); and the believing Gentile will be recognised as a Gentile believer, out of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue (Rev. vii. 9).

The Gospel then preached will not be that peculiar form of it which Paul styles "my gospel," but "the everlasting Gospel," true from the Beginning, setting forth redemption through the blood of the Lamb, accompanied with a solemn warning, "Fear God," and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment is come (Rev. xiv. 6, 7), and with a superadded warning that whosoever receives the mark of the beast shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever (Rev. xiv. 9-11).

For such there is no pardon, so that the righteous will be taught to cry, "Be not merciful to any wicked transgressor" (Ps. lix. 5). There will no longer subsist the threefold division, the Jew, the Gentile, and the Church

of God; it will either be the believing Jew, the believing Gentile, or the unbelieving world.

“And sat down.”

When the elect of the present dispensation are gathered in, those who are now occupied in proclaiming the truth will have finished their work and entered into rest. After them others will be raised up to preach the everlasting Gospel to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people (Rev. xiv. 6).

“Collected the good into vessels, but cast the corrupt out.”

This collecting of the good fish into vessels and casting the corrupt out corresponds with the gathering of the wheat into the barn and leaving the tares to dry on the field, in the second parable; also with the wise virgins admitted into the marriage, whilst the foolish virgins are left outside (Matt. xxv. 10, 11).

It is, in fact, “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him” (2 Thess. ii. 1).

It is the taking away of the precious from the vile. At the close of the present dispensation, as the result of the increased activity in

the proclamation of the Gospel, there will doubtless be a vast increase in the number of outward professors of Christianity, many of whom, though having the form of godliness but destitute of its power, claiming the name of Christians but not having the Spirit of Christ, and in reality are none of His.

When the Lord Jesus comes to receive His own to Himself (John xiv. 3), those, and those only, who are quickened and indwelt by the Spirit of God will be changed and caught up to meet Him; those who have only the outward form and shell of Christianity will be left to that fuller corruption which will be developed in Babylon the great; or, according to the preceding parable, the pearl having been taken out, washed, and presented in its purity and beauty, the flesh in which it had been previously embedded will be left to perish in its own corruption.

“So shall it be at the end of the world [in the end of the age]: the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

Here we see the necessity and advantage of attending to that most important principle,

that the interpretation of a prophecy or parable often goes beyond and adds additional truth to the prophecy or parable itself. (For example, Dan. xii. 7-13; Matt. xiii. 40-42).

It is important to distinguish between the close of this present dispensation, when the fulness of the Gentiles will have come in, and that which is quite distinct—the end of the age, when the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled. After the Spirit of God has accomplished His present work in the formation of the Spiritual Body or Bride of Christ, the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy must run its course before the execution of that judgment which shall usher in the manifestation of the Son of Man and the establishment of His millennial reign, which will be the end of the age.

During the present dispensation the fishermen are occupied with the Gospel net. At its close the Lord Jesus will receive His own to Himself, thus taking to Himself the good and leaving the bad or the corrupt behind.

Afterwards there is angelic ministry brought in, and the action is totally the reverse: instead of the good taken and the bad left, it will be the

wicked taken out and the just left for the enjoyment of the kingdom.

The judgment executed at the end of the age will be complete, final, and everlasting. "The Son of Man will thoroughly purge His floor and burn up the chaff with fire unquenchable" (Matt. iii. 12).

"He will take out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. xiii. 41, 42).

"They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament: and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. xii. 3).

IX.

THE PARABLE OF
TEN THOUSAND TALENTS.

MATTHEW XVIII. 21-35.

Verses 21, 22. "Then came Peter to Him, *and* said, 'Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?' Jesus saith unto him, 'I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.'"

A BELIEVER in Christ, even though he be a little child, is to be RECEIVED in His name (verse 5): he is not to be OFFENDED or STUMBED (verse 6): he is not to be DESPISED however humble; for the angels in heaven minister to him, and the Son of Man came to save him (verse 10). If he STRAY, he is to be sought for and restored, for such is the will of the heavenly Father (verses 12-14). If he TRESPASS, he is to be dealt with privately,

with brotherly fidelity, or, if need be, in Church discipline, in order that he may be regained (verse 15), and if all fail, disowned as a brother; but if it be a matter of PERSONAL forgiveness, though faithfully to be dealt with, he is to be received with unlimited forgiveness. See Luke xvii. 3, 4—"Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him, and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times *in a day* turn again to thee, saying, 'I repent,' thou shalt forgive him." Not only seven times a day on his repentance, but seventy times seven, after the pattern of Divine forgiveness, and as disciples of Him of whom we sing—

"Unwearied in forgiveness still,
His heart could only love."

Verses 23, 24. "Therefore is the kingdom of heaven [the heavens] likened unto a certain king, which would take account of [with] his servants [bondservants]. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents "

This is a parable of the kingdom of the heavens, illustrative of Divine actings in the present dispensation.

The King is God in His sovereignty taking account with His servants, who are regarded

as His absolute property, and entirely at His disposal — His bondservants. This is the beginning of reckoning; it is not the final judgment of the Great White Throne, nor of the *bema*, or judgment seat of Christ, it is the judgment which begins at the house of God (1 Peter iv. 17, 18). One case is taken as a specimen of others, and as showing the indebtedness of man to Divine justice as a sinner against God in thought, and word, and deed. Gen. vi. 5: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

This indebtedness of man to the justice of God may be estimated in three ways:

First, If the talent be taken as a talent of silver; according to Roman calculation ten thousand talents would amount to more than one million pounds sterling. This may be regarded as the HUMAN estimate: such an estimate as civilised and educated man might form of sin.

Second, According to the Jewish calculation it would be more than three millions. This may be regarded as the LEGAL estimate: such

an estimate as the Jew under law might form of sin against his God.

Thirdly, But if the talent be taken to be a talent of gold, it would be upwards of fifty millions. This may represent the DIVINE estimate, or sin judged of in the presence of God, and secret sins in the light of His countenance.

Verses 25-27. "But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, *and* worshipped him, saying, 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.' Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, *and* loosed him, and forgave him the debt."

Man has nothing wherewith to meet the claims of Divine justice, and the folly of promising to meet these requirements by future reformation is forcibly illustrated by this parable. For abstinence from sin in the future, if possible, could not wipe off the old score. And no amount of outward religious observances could ever atone for sin.

The mode of exacting payment by the sale of the persons and families of slaves was in accordance with ancient customs. See 2 Kings iv. 1—"The creditor is come to take unto

him my two sons to be bondmen;" also Neh. v. 8.

Mercy alone can meet the case, and the ground on which God can be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly, is the atoning sacrifice of Christ: and thus alone can man be set free and forgiveness granted. On the ground of the sacrifice of Immanuel, the spotless Lamb of God, the victim provided and accepted by God Himself, infinite justice is satisfied, and pardon for all sins can be extended to the uttermost to every one that comes to God through Him.

Verses 28-35. "But the same servant [bondservant] went out, *and* found one of his fellow-servants [fellow-bondservants] which owed him a hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, *and* took *him* by the throat, saying, 'Pay me that thou owest.' And his fellow-servant [fellow-bondservant] fell down at his feet, *and* besought him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.' And he would not; but went *and* cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt [that which was due]. So when his fellow-servants [fellow-bondservants] saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came *and* told their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, 'O *thou* wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst [besoughtest] me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, *and* delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall MY heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from

your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.' ”

One hundred pence or denarii, at sevenpence halfpenny the denariüs, would be about three pounds two shillings and sixpence—out of all proportion with the debt which had been forgiven.

Grace bestowed lays the receiver under an obligation to manifest the same ; he should forgive as he has been forgiven. “Be ye kind,” says the apostle, “one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake [God in Christ] hath forgiven you” (Eph. iv. 32). Failure in thus manifesting grace may be an indication of one or other of two things—either of failure in grace by a child of God who is really a subject of Divine grace, bringing such an one under Fatherly discipline, as our Lord teaches in Matt. vi. 14, 15 : “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you : but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Such an one is left to the upbraidings of his own conscience, or to the assaults of Satan, until he is brought to act in conformity with the will of God ; the

former act of pardon is not annulled, although he may himself lose the consciousness and joy of it, but payment is required for what had been contracted.

On the other hand, the forgiveness of sins may be received intellectually, as a doctrine, apart from faith in God and in Christ, and not in the power of the Holy Ghost. The doctrines of grace apart from the Spirit of grace will leave the heart still hard, and the conduct and character unchanged, so that, whatever the profession, the conduct of the individual may prove that he has neither part nor lot in the matter, for his heart is not right in the sight of God. A Spirit-taught apprehension of the grace of God in Christ will lead to a corresponding character and walk. But the nominal reception of the doctrines of grace, unaccompanied by the grace of God in the heart, leaves sin unpardoned, and the sinner exposed to the retributive justice and judgment of God.

X.

THE PARABLE OF
THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD.

MATT. XX. 1-16

Verse 1. "For the kingdom of heaven [the heavens] is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard."

THIS parable is founded on what had just occurred, as recorded in the preceding chapter. The rich, young man having gone away sorrowful, the disciples were instructed as to the necessity for divine grace in order to full surrender, since that which was impossible to man was possible to God. Peter having called to remembrance their having given up all, asked the question, "What shall we have therefore?" The Lord by this parable teaches that the awards of the kingdom,

though apportioned on principles of strict justice, were, after all, rewards of grace, distributed in sovereignty, and beyond all proportion to the sacrifice or service rendered. This is not the Saviour calling sinners, but the Son over His own house, employing labourers in His own service. The early morn may suggest the idea either of the commencement of the dispensation, or of the time of conversion, or the period of a call to special service.

Verse 2. "And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny [denariüs] a day [the day], he sent them into his vineyard."

All who enter on the service of the Lord Jesus may enter with the full persuasion that their labour will not be in vain in the Lord; that they serve no hard master, but one whose principle is that the labourer is worthy of his hire; and that, when He comes, He will reward every one according to his works, so that not even the gift of a cup of cold water will be overlooked by Him.

The denariüs, or Roman penny, in value about sevenpence or eightpence halfpenny, was the ordinary remuneration at that time for a day's work.

Verses 3-7. "And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, and said unto them, 'Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right [just] I will give you.' And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, 'Why stand ye here all the day idle?' They say unto him, 'Because no man hath hired us.' He saith unto them, 'Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right [just] that shall ye receive.'"

Early in the morning would be at sunrise, say about six o'clock according to our reckoning; the third hour, nine o'clock; the sixth hour, twelve o'clock; the ninth hour, three o'clock in the afternoon; and the eleventh hour, one hour before sunset. The length of the period spent in the professed service of the Lord Jesus, although not overlooked by Him, may not always be the criterion by which He estimates the value of the service rendered; but, whether the time be long or short, every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour. The thoughts and intents of the heart, the motives, the measure of self-sacrifice, the opposition encountered, the obstacles to be overcome, the results of the service, all these will be taken into account by Him who trieth the heart and the reins, as

well as the length of time occupied in the service.

Verse 8. "So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, 'Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.'"

The day, according to the Hebrew calculation, ends at sunset ; when the even has come the day closes. The present dispensation, or day of salvation, which commenced at Pentecost, will come to its close at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering unto Him. One of the first actions of the Lord Jesus after His coming will be to take account of His servants. "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts ; and then shall every man have praise of God" (1 Cor. iv. 5).

Verses 9-16. "And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came they supposed that they should have received more ; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it they murmured against the goodman of the house, saying, 'These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.' But he answered one of them, and said, 'Friend, I

do thee no wrong [injustice]; did'st thou not agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way; I will give [it is my will to give] unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own [in mine own affairs]? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?' So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen."

In the distribution of rewards by the Lord at His coming, there will be a manifestation of three great and glorious principles—JUSTICE, SOVEREIGNTY, and GRACE.

THE HOUSEHOLDER (verse 1), when he engages the labourers, guarantees a full and just remuneration for service to be rendered; and to those sent into the vineyard subsequently he promises, "Whatsoever is just, that shall ye receive." No service, however humble, no work, however small, no sacrifice, however trifling, will be overlooked, but each will receive the due recompense of the reward.

THE LORD OF THE VINEYARD (verse 15) claims the sovereign right to do what he wills in his own affairs.

THE GOODMAN OF THE HOUSE (verse 11) retains to himself the privilege, the exercise of his goodness and grace, whatever might be thought of his generosity.

SOVEREIGNTY will not be exercised at the expense of JUSTICE or of GRACE; whilst the magnificence of the GRACE is manifested in the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, the recompense for light and temporary affliction and service, will be for the honour of the JUSTICE, and the glory of the SOVEREIGNTY displayed. So, then, if the last are first, and the first last, and some are chosen to especial service, and others chosen to peculiar privilege, all will be alike the subjects of DIVINE JUSTICE, SOVEREIGNTY, and GRACE; and the language of each and all will be, "Not unto us, O Jehovah, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy loving kindness, and for Thy truth's sake!"

XI.

THE PARABLE OF THE
SINGLE EYE.

MATT. VI. 22, 23; LUKE XI. 33-36.

Matt. vi. 22, 23. "The light [lamp] of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single [clear, unmixed], thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that [the] darkness!"

Luke xi. 33-36. "No man, when he hath lighted a candle [lamp], putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick [the lampstand], that they which come in may see the light. The light [lamp] of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single [clear, unmixed], thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light [the lamp by its bright shining doth give thee light]."

WHEN a clear, bright lamp is brought into an apartment and set upon the lampstand, the whole room will be filled with its

light; but if the lamp be covered with a bushel, or the ordinary corn measure, the light will be obscured and the room left in darkness, however brightly the lamp itself may shine.

What the lamp is to the apartment, the mental eye is to the whole inner man. If the mental eye be simple, clear, and unprejudiced, the whole understanding will be enlightened, and the truth under consideration will be rightly and fully understood. But if there be error, prejudice, or misconception in the mind, the mental eye not being clear, there will be more or less obscurity in the understanding, or a totally wrong view taken of the subject considered.

When our Lord here speaks of the "single eye" and the "evil eye," He is referring to the condition of the eye itself—whether the humours of the eye be clear and unmixed as in its natural condition, or whether the eye be diseased and the humours mixed as in cataract, &c.; it is not a question whether the eye be looking at one object or many, as is frequently understood. A person with a healthy eye, looking from a hill-top, may see a thousand objects distinctly; whereas another with a

diseased eye may have a difficulty in clearly discerning one single object.

When the Scriptures are read with some favourite prejudice fostered in the mind, some opinion adopted and pertinaciously adhered to, some perverted truth or erroneous doctrine continually present, the full, clear light of revealed truth is prevented from shining in its full brilliancy and clear conviction into the mind ; and however frequently the Scriptures are thus read the veil remains unremoved, and it may be the very light itself becomes darkness because the truth itself is thus perverted. Our wisdom, therefore, would be continually and prayerfully to be on our guard lest on Scriptural subjects we either form opinions of our own, or accept the opinion of anyone else. But with a simple, childlike mind let us ever come to the Word of God, prepared to receive its full, undimmed light, under the immediate teaching, revealing, and application of the Spirit of God, earnestly sought and followed.

XII.

THE PARABLE OF
THE BELIEVING LITTLE CHILD.

MATTHEW XVIII. 1-14.

Verses 1-4. "At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying: 'Who is the greatest [greater] in the kingdom of heaven [the heavens]?' And Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, 'Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven [the heavens]. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest [greater] in the kingdom of heaven [the heavens].'"

THE disciples inquire of the Lord Jesus concerning greatness in the kingdom of the heavens. The Lord calls a little child, who, it appears from verse 6, was a believer in Him, and set him in the midst of them, and having taken him up in His arms, according to Mark

ix. 36, He teaches them that, in order to enter into the kingdom of the heavens, conversion is absolutely necessary. Man is born in sin and shapen in iniquity. The carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be; therefore, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," or enter into it (John iii. 3-5). Greatness in the kingdom is measured by humility, emptiness, and subjection. The less of self and the more of Christ, the greater; none of self and all of Christ, the greatest.

Verses 5, 6. "And whoso shall receive one such little child in My name receiveth Me. But whoso shall offend [stumble] one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a large millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

The Lord Jesus identifies the little child with Himself, which is expressed by His taking him up in His arms; so that whoever receives such an one in His name receives Him, while an offence committed against such a little believing one involves stupendous guilt, and exposes to the severest judgment.

The OFFENCE here spoken of consists espe-

cially in putting a STUMBLING-BLOCK in the way of the young believer, so as to turn his steps aside from the paths of righteousness, holiness, or of truth ; enticing him into sin, or away from the grand fundamental truths of the Word of God.

Verse 7. "Woe unto the world because of offences [occasions of stumbling], for it must needs be that offences come ; but woe unto the man by whom the offence [stumbling-block] cometh."

The Spirit speaketh expressly that in the last days perilous times shall come, and the Scriptures abound with warnings as to the departure from the faith and truth of God which is characteristic of the times of the end. Scriptural and Divine truth must needs be thus tested, but woe to the originators and propagators of doctrines which are subversive of the faith of the unwary and the young.

Verses 8, 9. "Wherefore, if thy hand or thy foot offend [stumble] thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee ; it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend [stumble] thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee ; it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire [the Gehenna of fire]."

There is an inseparable connection between

divine truth and life; between life spiritual and life eternal. Hence the vital importance of maintaining the truth of God, and the fearful danger of imbibing and maintaining deadly error. When vital truths are in question it is not a mere matter of opinion, or of following this or that leader, but a question of spiritual life and death. When it comes to this, no personal or relative considerations, dear and important as they may be, even as a right hand, or foot, or eye, are to be allowed to have a moment's weight. The consequences or results are eternal; for, whatever the false theology of the present day may affirm, there is eternal life for the overcomer, and there is a Gehenna of fire—and that fire is everlasting—for those who surrender the truth of God, and accept the lie of Satan.

Verses 10, 11. "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you that in heaven [the heavens] their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven [the heavens]. For the Son of Man is come [came] to save that which was lost."

To be a son or daughter of Jehovah God Almighty gives a dignity superior to anything earthly, whether of birth, rank, or wealth,

whether the child of God be old or young, rich or poor, of exalted or of humble rank. Such an one is born of God, regenerated and indwelt by the divine, eternal Spirit; and though by nature lost, the Son of Man came into the world to save him, at no less cost than by the sacrifice of Himself. The world may overlook and despise them, but those holy and mighty angels, which stand before the Majesty of heaven and earth, recognise in them the heirs of salvation and everlasting glory, and are sent forth to minister to them while sojourners on earth.

Verses 12-14. "How think ye? If a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of [over] that sheep than of [over] the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven [the heavens] that one of these little ones should perish."

There is a striking similarity between this parable and that in Luke xv. 3-7. There it is the LOST sheep sought and found; here it is the sheep that had GONE ASTRAY sought, found, and restored.

With regard to the expression, "one of these

little ones," it is important to bear in mind the words of the Lord Jesus, in verse 6, "One of these little ones WHICH BELIEVE in Me." Thus we learn that it is a young believer who has gone astray, over whom the Father's heart is yearning. One of these young or weak disciples has been corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ, the stumbling-block of false doctrine has been put in his way, his steps have been turned aside from the paths of piety and truth, and he has been driven out to wander in the dark mountains of doubt, delusion, and error; but the Good Shepherd who died for him is seeking his restoration.

The Church of God has need to seek, by the aid of the Spirit of God, the restoration of the wanderer; while the heavenly Father is waiting with outstretched arms to welcome his return, for it is not His will that one of those believing little ones should perish. The recovery of such from the error of his way is a matter of special joy to the Father, the Spirit, and the Son, and to all who are in fellowship with them (James v. 19, 20; Jude 22, 23).

XIII.

THE PARABLE OF
THE TWO SONS.

MATTHEW XXI. 28-32.

"But what think ye? A certain man had two sons [children]; and he came to the first, and said, 'Son [child], go, work to-day in my vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will not : ' but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir : ' and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his [*literally* the] father? They say unto Him, 'The first.' Jesus saith unto them, 'Verily I say unto you, that the publicans [tax-gatherers] and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans [tax-gatherers] and the harlots believed him : and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him."

IN the case of the first-mentioned son there is profession without obedience. John the Baptist came in the way of righteousness exhorting to repentance, and to fruit-bearing worthy of that repentance.

In some of his hearers, the natural enmity and rebellion of the heart having been manifested in actual practice, John's testimony was believed, and repentance followed.

In others, a vain profession and a religious garb keeping out of view the real condition of the heart, his testimony was rejected, and there was no repentance.

John also testified of Christ as the Lamb of God, the taker away of the sin of the world.

The convicted sinner having set to his seal that God is true in His condemnation of sin, goes on to confide in Him for His grace on the ground of redemption. There is repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ; and this faith, working by love and gratitude for sins forgiven, leads to obedience and fruit-bearing.

On the other hand, where there is self-righteousness and an outward religious profession, without a deep inward work of the Spirit of God, convicting of sin and of the natural enmity and rebellion of the heart to God, the need of repentance is not felt, and necessity for the atoning sacrifice of Christ is either overlooked or denied, and the obedience rendered is mere will-worship, and not loving

subjection to the will of a heavenly Father. It is as Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai, professing, "All that Jehovah hath spoken will we do, and be obedient;" but ere Moses was come down from the mount the law was broken in its essential requirements, and Moses shattered to fragments the tables of the covenant, thereby signifying that all hope of salvation on the ground of human obedience was at an end.

Sinners of the Gentiles, convicted by the Spirit of God of their sinfulness and rebellion, have been led to repentance, faith, and obedience. Whereas the nation of Israel, together with the moral, the self-righteous, trusting in a religious form and outward profession, have been stumbled by the humbling doctrines of the cross, and have rejected the grace of God through a crucified Redeemer, as testified by the Apostle Paul: "The Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at the stumbling-stone" (Rom. ix. 30-32).

XIV.

THE PARABLE OF
THE HUSBANDMEN AND VINEYARD.

MATT. XXI. 33-46. Parallel—MARK XII. 1-12;
LUKE XX. 9-19.

Verse 33—"Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country."

WITH this parable we may compare Ps. lxxx. 8-16 and Isa. v. 1-7.

In Isa. v. 7 we have the interpretation, "The vineyard of Jehovah of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant."

In Ps. lxxx. the VINE is contemplated, in Isa. v. the FRUIT, but in the parable the responsibility of the HUSBANDMEN.

The primary interpretation of the parable is to Israel, but the general principles may be applied to God's providential dealings with man. Retiring from manifest interference with human affairs, God gives man an opportunity to exhibit his real character as responsible to Himself, while laying him under deep obligations for gratitude and praise, and due acknowledgment of his many favours.

Verses 34-36—"And when the time [season] of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.

"And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

"Again, he sent other servants more than the first ; and they did unto them likewise."

Man under responsibility to the goodness of God, who is good to all, giving rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, has not rendered again according to the benefit received ; and Israel under the first covenant, and the law given on Sinai, utterly failed in responding to their high privileges, and those who have witnessed for God have been treated as represented in the parable.

Verses 37-39—"But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, 'They will reverence my son.' But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir ; come, let us kill him, and let

us seize upon his inheritance.' And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him."

Man in general, and Israel in particular, have been subjected to a threefold test.

First. Respecting God, and especially God the Father as Creator, providential Ruler, and Benefactor of mankind. Forgetfulness of God and idolatry have been man's response to this test, as it was also that of Israel up to the time of the Babylonish captivity.

Second. The second test was the coming of the Son of God into the world as God manifest in the flesh. This made manifest to the full the natural enmity of the human heart against God, when both Jew and Gentile united in rejecting and crucifying the only begotten Son of God who came in the fulness of grace and love.

Third. To the third test both Jew and Gentile are being subjected at the present time. The Holy Ghost, the Comforter, sent by the Father and the Son, is come to abide with and in the Church, and to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come. What reception does He meet with, whether from the Church or from the world?

Fourth. There remains yet a fourth test, to which the world will be subjected in due time: the manifestation of the Son of Man in glory, and the establishment of His millennial reign.

The final rebellion, when Satan is loosed at the expiration of the thousand years, will be the concluding and conclusive proof that "the flesh profiteth nothing," and that "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Verses 40, 41—"When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?' They say unto Him, 'He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.'"

The miseries of the Jews in the siege, and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under Titus, A.D. 70, seventy-four years after the birth of Christ, were the manifestation of the righteous judgment of God upon Israel for the rejection of His Son.

Verse 42—"Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing [this is from Jehovah], and it is marvellous in our eyes?'" (Ps. cxviii. 22, 23).

Israel having refused their own Messiah when He came in lowliness and grace, God is

now manifesting and accomplishing His secret purpose of uniting Jew and Gentile in one, by one Spirit baptising them into one body, in union with the risen Christ in heavenly glory, thus constituting Him the head of the corner, at once the foundation and the top-stone. The foundation is Christ in His humiliation and death. The top-stone is Christ Jesus in His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father.

Verses 43, 44—"Therefore I say unto you, The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

"And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken : but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder [scatter him as chaff]."

The nation that bringeth forth the fruits of the kingdom, may be explained as the Church responding to the grace of God in the Gospel ; or more probably it may refer to the nation of Israel under the covenant, when they shall be all righteous, and God shall be glorified in them.

Meanwhile, "What think ye of Christ?" is the test. Those who reject Him, taking offence at His lowliness, and thus "stumbling at the stumbling-stone," will perish ; but the day is

coming when the stone cut out without hands will scatter the kingdoms of the earth as chaff, and the kingdom of the Messiah will be established, which shall comprise the whole world (Dan. ii. 34, 35).

This will be "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. i. 7, 8). Then the Father shall give unto the Son the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession (Ps. ii. 8).

XV.

THE PARABLE OF
THE MARRIAGE FEASTS.

MATTHEW XXII. 1-14

THIS parable, in its outline, is clear as crystal, so that a child can understand it, yet it is unfathomable in its depths of spiritual truth; and while adapted to a variety of circumstances, it has a specific meaning of its own.

A good deal is said about the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. Who are they who object to it? Always those who have never realised its spiritual power, nor seen its Divine glories, and have never searched its wondrous mysteries. No one who has opened its treasures, explored its depths and heights, can

fail to discover its boundless riches, or be so blind as to doubt the beauties of its scenery, or so deaf as not to be charmed with the melody of its music. Those who consider the Scriptures in the light of human intellect alone do not feel their spiritual power; they lack the anointed eye and the prepared heart.

The wonders of the Scriptures are not disclosed to the carnal mind, for "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. ii. 14). If the teaching of the Spirit of God be neglected, all other helps are vain. If you draw down the blinds, and close the shutters, you cannot see the sun; so, if you shut out the Spirit of God, human reason is left to manufacture a god after its own ideas.

Verses 1-3. "And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by [in] parables, and said: 'The kingdom of heaven [the heavens] is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage [a series of marriage feasts] for his son, and sent forth his servants [bond-servants] to call them that were bidden to the wedding [marriage feasts]; and they would not come.'"

In the preceding chapter the householder let out the vineyard to husbandmen, and

required the fruits thereof—setting forth the DEMANDS OF THE LAW from Israel, to whom the law was given; but in this twenty-second chapter we have the PROVISIONS OF GRACE.

Who is the KING? God in His sovereignty; in the sovereignty of grace, not as on Mount Sinai, but on Mount Zion.

Who is the SON? It is the only-begotten of the Father, the co-equal, co-eternal Son.

Who is the BRIDE? She is only mentioned once in the Gospels. John the Baptist said: "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom;" He was the bridegroom's friend. But we can interpret this from other portions. The bride is the Church, the Lamb's wife.

The marriage feasts here spoken of are called, in verse 4, a "dinner." The word translated "dinner" signifies either the first meal, as when Jesus said, "Come and dine," or the noonday meal. It is necessary to distinguish between the marriage feasts (plural), public and open, made in honour of the approaching marriage of the king's son, to which many were invited and would not come, and the marriage supper, which takes place in private at the close of the day. What are the

marriage feasts? The provisions of the Gospel as first presented, in the sovereignty of God, to the Jew. The Lord sent out His disciples at the first with the command: "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. x. 5, 6). It was necessary that the Gospel should first be preached unto them, as it is written: "To the Jew first."

Verses 4-6. "Again, he sent forth other servants [bond-servants], saying: 'Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage [marriage-feasts].' But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: and the remnant took his servants [bond-servants], and entreated them spitefully, and slew them."

After the sacrifice on Calvary, and the provision of the Spirit at Pentecost, a second invitation was sent to the Jew, in all the plenitude of Divine grace, and fulness of mercy and love; but this was again rejected by the nation at large. The disciples were persecuted, and Stephen and James were slain.

Verse 7. "But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city."

In the destruction of Jerusalem by the

Roman armies under Titus, we see the fulfilment of this solemn prediction. Vast multitudes of the Jews were slain, numbers carried into captivity and dispersed, the city was devastated, and the Temple burned.

When the commandments of God's law are despised and broken, retributive judgment is sure to follow; but not less so when the provisions of Divine grace and offers of mercy are refused and rejected.

Verses 8-10. "Then saith he to his servants [bond-servants], 'The wedding indeed is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways [branch-roads of the highways], and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage [marriage feasts].' So those servants [bond-servants] went out into the highways, and gathered together all, as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished [filled] with guests [recliners]."

It was necessary that the Gospel should first have have been preached to the Jews; but seeing they put it from them, and judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life, the invitation has been sent to the Gentiles, and many have received it. The commission is large and wide: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." Go not only to the cities, but to the villages and hamlets; not only proclaim it in the

streets, but in the lanes and alleys—wherever fallen man is found; press home the invitation, use moral force, compel them to come in. The feast is spread, the bounties are rich, and open to everyone; bad or good, Jew or Gentile, none are refused, no, not one. There is not only bread for the hungry, but water for the thirsty: whosoever will may take of the fountain of the water of life freely, for the Spirit has been poured out from on high, the Comforter has come; there is wine and milk without money and without price, the consolations of the Holy Ghost, and those foretastes of eternal joys which He is waiting to communicate.

As the Lord predicted, many have accepted the invitation, and they which have believed do enter into rest. The guests recline: there are couches provided for their accommodation; there is rest for the weary as well as provision for the needy. The Saviour's invitation is: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. xi. 28).

Verses 11-14. "And when the king came in to see the guests [recliners], he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him:

‘Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment?’ And he was speechless. Then said the king to his servants [ministering servants]: ‘Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

All things are naked and open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Man looks at the outward appearance, God looketh on the heart. “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.” The lamp of profession may burn brightly, but if there is no oil in the vessel, no love to God shed abroad in the heart, no fellowship with Christ in the communion of the Holy Ghost, the soul will ultimately be left to the outer darkness. The guest found speechless, on the friendly expostulation of the king, evidently implies there was no excuse, that the wedding garment had been provided as well as the marriage banquet. The same grace which has provided for the salvation of the LOST in the cross of Christ, and the pardon and justification of the guilty in the blood of the Lamb, has also provided for the quickening and regeneration of the soul DEAD in

trespasses and sins, and the sanctification of the **SINFUL**, by the Holy Ghost sent down at Pentecost.

When the Lord Jesus comes, it will not be those who have outwardly accepted the provisions of grace, and taken their place amongst professors, but those who have the Spirit of Christ, who will be accepted. Those who received not the love of the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness will be given over to the bonds of strong delusion and to outer darkness.

The ministering servants who execute the sentence are not the bond-servants through whom the invitation was sent out, but the angels of God (Matt. xiii. 39).

Salvation is a three-fold cord. There is included the sovereignty of God, the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, and the regeneration and sanctification of the Holy Spirit; if one of these strands be missing the whole is incomplete.

“Many are called, but few are chosen.” Those who are accepted and complete, under the scrutinising eye of God, are not merely those who outwardly accept the Gospel call, but those

who are "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter i. 2 ; see also 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14).

These, and these only, rest in peace under the conscious smile of God the FATHER, satisfied with the rich provisions of grace in the SON, and realising the communion of the HOLY GHOST, who conforms them to Christ, and gives them the foretaste, and is Himself the pledge and earnest of those joys which are at God's right hand for evermore.

XVI.

THE PARABLE OF THE
FIG TREE.

MATTHEW XXIV. 32-36.

“Now, learn a parable of the fig tree: When his branch is yet [already becometh] tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh; so likewise ye: When ye shall see all those things, know that it is [or He is] near, even at the doors. Verily, I say unto you, this generation shall not pass [in nowise pass away] till all these things shall be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My word shall not [in no wise] pass away. But of that day and that hour knoweth no man [no one], no, not the angels of heaven [the heavens] but My Father only.”

PRELIMINARY REMARKS.

IN the beginning of this chapter, the Lord Jesus, having spoken of the destruction of the Temple, when not one stone should be left upon another, the disciples ask Him when this should take place.

The Lord's answer to this question is not given in Matthew xxiv., nor in Mark xiii., but in Luke xxi.

In Matthew and in Mark the Holy Ghost records the Lord's prediction of the setting up of "the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet," in the latter day, which is yet future.

But in Luke xxi. is recorded the Lord's answer to the enquiry: What sign would be given when the temple and city should be destroyed?

The answer is: "When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh." "And they shall fall by the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." A prediction fully accomplished in the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, and in the present condition of Israel.

When God shall have taken out of the Gentiles a people for His name, then will He return in mercy to Israel. The last week of Daniel's seventy weeks of years will be accom-

plished, the last three-and-a-half years of which will be the time of the great tribulation ; immediately after that will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, to take His kingdom (Matt. xxiv. 29, 30).

The seven parables which follow these predictions present truths connected both with the LORD's return for the Church, and also His manifestation as SON OF MAN to the world, in their variety and perfection. Before considering these parables, it may be well to apprehend the position in which the disciples of the Lord then stood.

They formed part of the remnant of Israel then, who received Jesus as their promised Messiah, when the rest of the nation rejected Him. As such they represent the remnant of Israel in the latter day, who, after the removal of the Church, and previous to the manifestation of the Lord in glory, will confess Him.

But the Lord was about to build His Church (Matt. xvi. 18), and these disciples were to be among the first living stones built therein, and as such they represented the Church. Thus, personally, they receive instruction both for the remnant and for the Church.

We now proceed to the consideration of the first of these parables, that of

THE FIG TREE.

When, in early spring, the rising of the sap in the fig tree causes the branch to become tender, and the leaf to appear, this is an indication of the approach of summer.

In like manner, when the things predicted by the Lord appear, either in preparation or accomplishment, the evidence is given, either that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh to receive His Church (Luke xxi. 28), or, as in the case of the remnant, that the kingdom is about to be established.

The increasing spirit of enquiry in the Jewish mind, and the softening down of their ancient prejudices, together with "the signs of the times" among the Gentile nations, manifesting the ripening of principles, which will be fully developed in the last days, all these admonish the disciples of Christ to stand on their watch with lamps lit and loins girt, as men that wait for their Lord, because they "see the day approaching."

The word "generation" here, as in other

places, may be taken in a two-fold sense ; that is, either literally or morally. The things predicted by the Lord, in Luke xxi., concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the dispersion of Israel, took place about thirty-seven years after, namely, anno domini 70. This was literal fulfilment.

Also, it is here intimated that Israel, nationally, will continue the same unbelieving, Christ-rejecting generation, until they look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn for Him. Thus, morally, the generation will not have passed away until ALL these things be fulfilled.

The words spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ on earth bear upon them the stamp of Divine authority and eternal truth. He spake in the world those things which He had heard from His Father, who Himself had given Him commandment what He should say and what He should speak.

The heavens and the earth came into being through Him, the eternal Word ; by Him all things consist, and He upholdeth all things by the word of His power ; the heavens and the earth shall pass away, but His words endure for ever. They are words of infallible certainty,

more stable than the pillars of heaven, and more enduring than the material universe.

To the natural mind they are often mysterious, deep, and perplexing ; the divine, eternal Spirit can alone infallibly interpret them to the understanding and make them spirit and life in the experience of the soul.

One of the last utterances of the Lord Jesus to His disciples, ere He was taken from them and carried up into heaven, was : "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power ;" and the language of the Holy Spirit, by Paul, to the Thessalonians, was : "Yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord [that is of Jehovah] so cometh as a thief in the night." Whether it be the time when the Bridegroom will come to receive His Church, or when the Son of Man will come to establish His kingdom, both are alike secrets kept in the Divine mind, neither known to angels nor among the truths communicated to the Son of Man to make known on earth (Mark xiii. 32). Can it be right, then, to take certain prophetic predictions, first to turn days into years, thus changing the words of Scripture, and then

fixing on certain starting-points to calculate years and days and hours? As often as this has been done in the past, have not facts falsified the calculations?

The attitude in which the Lord left His Church was that of expectancy, with the command to watch, not for events and dates, but for *Himself*. To the Church, as His body and His bride, the one object of the heart's expectation and desire is the coming of the Bridegroom; and to the disciple, the coming of the Lord and Master, to estimate and reward his work. Hence the language of the Lord, speaking of His return, is ALWAYS in the present tense. He puts no interval between His going and His coming again. "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again"—not I will come again—"and will receive you unto Myself" (John xiv. 2, 3). "He that testifieth these things saith: Surely I come quickly. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. xxii. 20).

XVII.

THE PARABLE OF THE
DAYS OF NOAH.

MATTHEW XXIV. 37-42.

THIS parable has a two-fold application.

The word of exhortation given by the Holy Ghost, through Paul, to Timothy (2 Tim. ii. 15) runs thus: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth." True preparation for the ministry of the Word begins with first ascertaining the mind of God in the portion of Scripture under consideration in the presence of God, and in communion with Himself, and in so presenting it as to meet His approval. In order to this, a right division of the Word of truth is neces-

sary; that is, so keeping distinct truths separate and in their proper places as to prevent confusion of thought and erroneous interpretation.

There are many beautiful examples of this, as in Luke iv. 18-20, when the Lord closed the book at the precise point. The parable before us presents another instance of the importance and beauty of this right division. The remembrance of the distinction which we have already noticed between the coming of our Lord to receive His Church and the coming of the Son of Man to execute judgment on the world, as indicated by the Scriptural use of the two distinct expressions, "Coming of the Lord," "the coming of the Son of Man," will enable us to make the right division here, otherwise we shall get into confusion.

Verses 37, 38. "But as the days of Noe [Noah] were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe [Noah] entered into the ark."

Our Lord here divides the days before the flood into two periods. First, "Until the day that Noah entered into the ark," when Noah and his family were shut in. Secondly, "Until the flood came, and took them all away."

The first period closes with an act of loving-kindness—receiving the eight souls and securing them from judgment to come, like the wheat gathered into the garner (Matt. xiii. 30), and the good fish gathered into vessels (Matt. xiii. 48). We find from Genesis vii. 4, 10, that Noah and his family entered into the ark seven days before the flood came. Doubtless this is significant—this week of days being symbolic of the week of years intervening between the coming of the Lord to receive His saints and the manifestation of the Son of Man in judgment.

Up to the time that Noah entered into the ark everything in the world went on as usual; there were no signs of any approaching change; so when the Son of God comes there will be nothing especial to indicate His near approach; the course of this world will go on as usual, and the saints will be pursuing their daily avocations.

Verse 39. "And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be."

Mankind, generally, will not recognise that the fact of the sudden removal of all the

Church from the earth is the prelude and warning of approaching judgment, for "The day of Jehovah so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, 'Peace and safety,' then sudden destruction cometh upon them" (1 Thess. v. 2, 3).

When Noah and his family entered into the ark, by the command of God, and were shut in by Him, the righteous were taken and the ungodly left. But when the flood came, the judgment came upon the entire world of the ungodly, and the righteous were safe. Even so, at the end of the age, the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, but the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Matt. xiii. 40-43). For then : "The angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire" (Matt. xiii. 49).

Verses 40, 41. "Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken [received], and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left."

In these verses the Lord Jesus again refers to the time of His coming to receive His Church. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, both male and female, will be going on in

their ordinary manner of life, until, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, they are caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

Verse 42. "Watch, therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."

How important and valuable, then, is this exhortation, given by the Lord to the waiting saints in the present dispensation. And how cheering the word of promise: "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev. iii. 10, 11).

But His word to the faithful and persecuted ones, in the time of the Great Tribulation, will be: "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is He that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame" (Rev. xvi. 15).

XVIII.

THE PARABLE OF THE
HOUSEHOLDER.

MATTHEW XXIV. 43, 44.

Verse 43. "But know this, that if the goodman of the house [master of the house] had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up [broken through].

THIS parable, though definite in its teaching, has a two-fold application. It is a parable of the coming of the Son of Man, which, as we have seen, relates to His open manifestation as Son of Man to the world.

The language of the Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians v. is very distinct on this point, as showing the direct application is not to the

Church, but to the world and to the remnant of Israel: "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord [Jehovah] so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say "Peace and safety," then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day; we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night, and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us unto wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake [watch] or sleep, we should live together with Him."

All calculations of times or seasons by turning days into years, and fixing on certain

epochs of commencement, and so on, are not only unnecessary, but also unscriptural and misleading. The injury done to the cause of truth by such ingenious, but unwise speculations, may never be estimated till the clear light of eternity reveals it. "It is not for us to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power." Of the day and the hour when the Son of Man is manifested and the day of Jehovah cometh knoweth no man, neither the angels in heaven; neither was it given by the Father to the Son to communicate while He was here on earth: that day will come upon the world as a thief in the night, and find the world totally unprepared for it. The world is unbelieving on this point; its language is: "Where is the promise of His coming?" Not so with true believers now; their hope, expectation, and longing desire is for "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him." Though that coming and the taking up will be in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, it will not be an event unlooked for and undesired by the Church, but the fulfilment of the promise: "Surely I come quickly." And,

whether at the moment watching or sleeping, all who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and are sealed by that Holy Spirit of promise, will share with the Redeemer in His resurrection life and glory.

But, as we have said, there is an application of this parable to the believer and the Church, and this we find in Revelation iii., in the address to the Church in Sardis, where the Lord says : "If, therefore, thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." It is the duty, the privilege, and for the inestimable blessing of the believer to be found watching, waiting, and ready for the Lord's return ; but if this duty be neglected, and through worldliness, lukewarmness, or false teaching the believer refuses to watch, the coming of the Lord will be to him, as the coming of the Son of Man to the world, a surprise and a reproof, and a sudden breaking off of cherished plans and projects.

Verse 44. "Therefore, be ye also ready : for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh."

This exhortation, in its direct application, was addressed to the disciples as the represen-

tatives of the elect remnant of Israel and their fellow-believers, who, after the removal of the Church, will pass through the scenes of trial and tribulation previous to the manifestation of the Son of Man, to whom the exact day and hour of His appearing will be unknown, and to whom, unless thus watchful, His coming will be at an hour least expected.

This exhortation, as thus addressed, we find again recorded in Revelation xvi. 15, under the sixth vial, immediately preceding the battle of the great day of God Almighty. "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame."

Thus, whether it be the Church now, or the remnant then, there is a blessing pronounced on those servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching, with their loins girt and lamp burning, that, at His coming, they "may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless."

XIX.

THE PARABLE OF THE FAITHFUL
AND UNFAITHFUL SERVANT.

MATTHEW XXIV. 45-51.

Verse 45. "Who then is a faithful and wise servant [bondservant], whom his lord hath made ruler over [set over] his household, to give them meat [food] in due season?"

THIS fourth parable relates to the present dispensation alone, and is occupied with those who own the lordship of Christ, and profess to serve Him whether in truth, or in profession only. First, it is the faithful and wise servant whom the Lord is speaking of as acting in fidelity to Christ, and with wisdom, or prudence, in his affairs. Who, then, is he? The question is asked for conscience to give the reply. He is "set over" the Lord's household. But who has set him? He received

his authority, not from man, nor even from his fellow-servants; he is not his own, he is bought with a price; his own Lord, whose he is and whom he serves, has put him in this place of influence and responsibility. He rules as one who is himself under authority. One is his Master, even Christ; He who openeth, and no man shutteth. The servant must rule, not as a lord over God's heritage, but as an ensample to the flock.

He has this place assigned to him, not for his own private interest, but for the edification, nourishment, and prosperity of the household; and that which he ministers must be food in season—meat for babes, and strong meat for those of riper years; comfort in affliction, direction in perplexity, warning in danger, instruction in righteousness, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever the Lord hath commanded.

Verses 46, 47. "Blessed is that servant [bond-servant] whom his lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. Verily, I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler [set him over] all his goods."

When the Lord Jesus left His household, at the beginning, the next event to be expected was His return. His language was, "I go to

prepare a place for you. And . . . I come again." "Occupy till I come." He gave to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch, with the assurance, "Surely I come quickly," and, "Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching."

Diligence in labour, fidelity in service, and a watchful desire and expectation of the Lord's return, during the whole period of His absence, will doubtless have its due reward, even though the servants may fall asleep before His return. But who can describe the blessedness of that servant whom his Lord, when He actually comes, shall find doing His will and waiting for His return?

"Oh, happy servant he,
In such a posture found;
He shall his Lord with rapture see,
And be with honour crowned."

It is probable that the Thessalonians who were waiting for the Son of God from heaven, when they saw some of their company fall asleep, may have thought that their brethren had lost the special blessing here promised, and hence the consolation that the apostle gave them, that "the dead in Christ" would anticipate

those that are "alive and remain," in the first resurrection.

"Verily, I say unto you, that He shall set him over all his goods." All who are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb are made kings and priests unto God, and shall share the Redeemer's kingdom (Rev. i. 6).

But there is a connection between fidelity in service here and the position which will be occupied in the glory. Among the twelve patriarchs it was Joseph who had been faithful in his father's house, and in the house of his Egyptian master, and in the prison, who was set over Pharaoh's house, and ruler over all the land of Egypt. It is to the overcomer that special promises are made, and his reward will be in proportion to his fidelity and diligence. There is authority over five cities to one, and authority over ten to another.

The Lord Jesus, when He comes, will be glorified in His saints (those of the former dispensation), and also admired in all them that believe (of the present dispensation), "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory." For He shall come, and all His saints with

Him; but "They that are wise [make wise] shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars, for ever and ever." And yet, "One star differeth from another star in glory."

Verses 48-51. "But, and if that evil servant [bond-servant] shall say in his heart, 'My lord delayeth his coming,' and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken, the lord of that servant [bondservant] shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder [cut him off] and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

All through the present dispensation, among the professed servants of Christ, there may be found those who are faithful and true, and others who are unfaithful and false, and so it will be when the Lord comes. Then, the faithful servant, found doing his Lord's will, and waiting for His return, will be caught up to meet his Lord in the air, and to be for ever with Him. But the unfaithful and false servant, who has no love for the Lord's appearing, but who was living in self-exaltation and self-gratification, will be disowned, left behind, cut off from all the spiritual privileges of the kingdom; and, instead of having his part and portion with the Bride, the Lamb's wife, and in the kingdom

of the Messiah, will have his place in the false ecclesiastical system, Babylon the Great, and in the kingdom of the Antichrist, all hope of heavenly blessedness for ever gone, and an eternity of unavailing woe: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

XX.

THE PARABLE OF THE
TEN VIRGINS.

MATTHEW XXV. 1-13.

Verse 1. "Then shall the kingdom of heaven [the heavens] be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth [went out] to meet the bridegroom."

THE word "then" connects this parable with the preceding chapter, and especially with the fourth parable in it. "Then" —not at the coming of the Lord as Son of Man to the world and to Israel, but at His coming as Lord to the Church, or rather for the Church (John xiv. 3; 1 Thess. iv. 13-18). The Church in this parable is not looked at as servants waiting for their Lord, as in chapter xxiv. 45-51, but in a nearer and more tender

relationship—that of virgins expecting the bridegroom.

“The kingdom of the heavens.”

The terms “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of the heavens” correspond with the language of the Prophet Daniel, chapter ii. 44: “In the days of these kings shall the God of Heaven set up a kingdom.”

It is the kingdom of God in contrast with the rule of man, and the kingdom of the heavens contrasted with mere earthly kingdoms. In Daniel iv. 25 it is written: “Till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will.” This is the kingdom of God; and in verse 26, “After that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule.” This is the kingdom of the heavens.

This term, “the kingdom of the heavens,” which is peculiar to Matthew’s gospel, connects the saints of the heavenlies with the exercise of rule. Daniel vii. 18: “The saints of the Most High [high places, or heavenlies] shall take the kingdom.”

Jesus was born “King of the Jews.” Israel crucified their King. But the Stone which

the builders refused, the same is made the Head of the corner.

Jehovah said unto Him, "Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thy foes Thy footstool."

Jesus, having been refused the throne of His father David on earth, is seated on the throne of His God and Father in heaven, having not yet taken His own throne (Rev. iii. 21). Meanwhile, the kingdom of the heavens takes a peculiar character ; and Matt. xiii. contains a series of seven parables in which are set forth "the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens ;" and this parable of the virgins is another parable of the kingdom.

"Ten virgins."

The Church is not here seen in its entirety as the bride ; in fact, the mystery of the Church as such was not yet fully made known, as subsequently to Paul and to the Apostle John (Eph. iii. 3-5). Believers are regarded individually and collectively as virgins expecting the Bridegroom.

In 2 Cor. xi. 2 Paul contemplates the Church at Corinth in this virgin character. "I am jealous over you," he says, "with godly jealousy,

for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."

"Which took their lamps."

Both the wise and the foolish virgins took their lamps. To the wise it was the lamp of true confession ; to the unwise it was the lamp of outward profession only. In either case, it was the profession of Christ as the Bridegroom, and of the hope of His coming.

"And went forth," or "went out."

Those from among the Jews going forth from Judaism, and those from among the Gentiles going forth from heathenism, both standing apart from corrupted or human systems of religion, and going forth to Jesus without the camp, bearing His reproach.

"To meet the Bridegroom."

This was the Church's first and virgin hope ; her first simple expectation, before she was corrupted from the simplicity which is in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. xi. 1-3).

They were "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven" (1 Thess. i. 9, 10). And to wait for Him in this character as the Bridegroom ; not expecting the conversion of

the world before Jesus comes ; not looking for death as though that were inevitable ; but waiting for the fulfilment of John xiv. 2, 3, "I come again, and will receive you unto Myself."

Verses 2, 4. "And five of them were wise [prudent], and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them ; but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps."

The Lord Jesus, foreseeing the corruption of Christianity, in most of His parables of the kingdom, foretells the mere profession of His name, as well as the genuine confession of real faith and love towards Him. Jesus here exposes the folly of making a profession of Christianity and of the doctrines of the Second Advent without the possession of Divine grace and without being born again of the Spirit of God, taking a name to live when spiritually dead. With the foolish, the lamp was the first and only thing ; but with the wise the oil was the first, though the lamp was not omitted.

To the wise the new birth is the beginning of a new life. They know that it is the Spirit that quickeneth, and the flesh profiteth nothing ; that to be a tare in the wheat-field is a dangerous thing, and that it is the work of the

enemy of souls to sow them there ; that mere carnal religion is one of the main barriers to prevent the soul's entrance into the kingdom.

Oil, in the Scriptures, is the emblem of the Spirit of God ; it is true wisdom to recognise the importance of the Spirit's work.

Saving and sanctifying truth is threefold. It is God's testimony concerning Christ, and revealed to the soul by the Holy Ghost. It is the manifestation of Divine love in the person and work of Christ, but that love shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost.

By "the vessel" here we may understand the heart, in which, strengthened by might by God's Spirit, Christ dwells (Eph. iii. 16, 17); or the body of the believer, according to that word, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?" (1 Cor. vi. 19).

Apart from this, the profession of Christianity and the knowledge of Christian truth, however extensive, will avail nothing, for "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."

The "lamp" here represents the profession of Christian truth, and especially the truth con-

nected with the return of the Lord Jesus to receive His blood-bought Bride. Yet it is not wise to be contented with the possession of Divine grace, nor with right and lively affections towards Christ. We are also to let our "light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven." The confession of Christ outwardly should follow the possession of Christ, and of love to Him inwardly.

Verse 5. "But while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered [grew sleepy] and slept." The word "but" is omitted in the Authorised Version, yet it is in the original, and this is important.

The language of the Lord Jesus is, "Behold, I come quickly."

As year after year passes away, and He still continues absent, it might seem that He was slack concerning His promises.

But no ; He speaks of time as it appears to Him, and with Him a thousand years are as one day. And yet, in condescension to our infirmity, He notices the delay.

"The bridegroom tarried," as He says also in the next parable, verse 19 : "After a long time the lord of those servants cometh and reckoneth with them." Before the Bridegroom

cometh to receive His Bride, she must arrive at her full stature, every member having been added, and the whole body complete (Eph. iv. 12, 13).

The early Church soon lost the brightness and the fervour of her first hope and of her first love—the love of the chaste virgin to the Bridegroom who was coming to claim her for Himself.

Preparation for death has been allowed to take the place of preparation for His return. Of late years Antichrist has been expected before Christ, and the prospect of the great tribulation has been allowed to throw into the shade the brightness of the hope of His coming. She has believed in “Him who is set down at the right hand of God the Father in heaven, from whence He is coming to judge the quick and the dead ;” but she has left out of her creed the expectation of His coming as Bridegroom.

Latterly there has been the revival of long-neglected truths, such as that Israel’s true Messiah will come again, and they will be restored to their own land ; that the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven in flaming

fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God ; that "The Son of Man will come and sit upon the throne of His glory, and wear His "many crowns" as King of kings over the whole earth.

But all this, blessedly true as it is, and awfully solemn or gloriously bright as these prospects are—all this is not the coming of the Bridegroom : He will come to receive His Church before He is manifested to take His kingdom, and, according to Daniel ix. and the Book of Revelation, a period of at least seven years will intervene between the two.

Sound as the Church may have been as to the fundamental truths of Christianity, it is manifest that for centuries, as to the Church's proper hope of the return of the Bridegroom, she had fallen sound asleep.

Verse 6. "And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh ; go ye out to meet him."

At midnight, when as to the Church's proper hope and expectation the last traces of the light at eventide had faded, when knowledge on this subject was most obscure, and the Church was in her profoundest slumber, a cry

was made. Whence came this cry? It was the voice of the eternal Spirit awakening the Church to recover her long-lost hope and to take up her true position. It was, indeed, the response of the Spirit to the language of the heavenly Bridegroom, "I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and the Morning Star."

"Behold, I come quickly:" to which the Spirit and the Bride reply, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Compare, also, the language of the Bride in the Song of Solomon, chapter ii. 8-10 :

"The voice of my beloved!
Behold, He cometh leaping upon the mountains,
Skipping upon the hills.
My beloved is like a roe or a young hart;
Behold, He standeth behind our wall,
He looketh forth at the windows,
Showing Himself through the lattice.
My beloved spake, and said unto me,
Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away."

It is not, Behold, the Judge is coming to judge, nor the King is coming to reign; but, Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, to receive His blood-bought, Spirit-perfected Bride, in fulfilment of His own word, "I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you

unto Myself" (John xiv. 2, 3). So that the Lord, when He comes, may find many of His redeemed ones waiting and watching for His return, ready to receive and welcome Him, in such a state that they may be found of Him in peace, and in such a position that they may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him, at His coming.

Verse 7. "Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps."

It is within the present century that the Church universal has been aroused in an especial manner to the consideration of what is known as dispensational truth. That is, to see the Church's unique and special calling from Pentecost to the return of her Lord, as the revelation of a mystery previously kept hid, and as to the Church's proper posture waiting for the Son of God from heaven. This trimming of the lamp may not have been at all times wise, nor at all times successful; nevertheless, the result has been, when the teaching of the Spirit has been sought and relied on, that there has been a precious recovery of long-lost hope, and most glorious light has been shed upon prophetic truth.

Verses 8, 9. "And the foolish said unto the wise, 'Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out [go out].' But the wise answered, saying, 'Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you ; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.'"

The trimming of the lamp may lead to its brighter shining for a time, but without a supply of oil this brightness will not last. Sermons, lectures, conferences may revive the hope, but, apart from the Spirit's power, it will be but transitory. Clearer views and intellectual instruction may be sought and imparted from one to another, but the unction from the Holy One by which we know all things must be obtained from a higher source.

The experience of those who have only doctrinal truth and intellectual light on the Lord's coming is, not that their lamps are gone out altogether, but that they go out (the word is in the present tense in the original). They cannot keep them burning ; the flame is unsteady, and vacillates with every wind of doctrine. Steadiness and steadfastness can come alone from the Spirit of truth, light, and might. The wise turn the foolish away from expectation of supply from themselves to Him from whom all blessings flow : to God the Father,

who is the source ; to the Son, in whom all fulness dwells ; and to the Eternal Spirit the Comforter, who can alone direct our hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

Though the oil, like the water of life, is given freely, without money and without price, nevertheless it must be bought—a price must be paid ; tradition, reason, speculation, imagination, mere human opinions, must be laid aside, in order that heaven's clear light, the Spirit's holy ray, may shine upon the sacred page, and thence be reflected and transferred to the prepared heart.

Verse 10. "And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came ; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage [marriage feasts] : and the door was shut."

We learn from this that at the very moment of the Lord's return there will be those who, conscious of the lack of spiritual life and power, will be on their way to obtain it. We learn, also, that no amount of doctrinal knowledge or of earnest desire will secure an entrance apart from the personal indwelling of the Holy Ghost.

We also learn from Romans viii. 11 : "But

if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you." The possession of the oil in the vessel is the main thing, whether the trimming of the lamp be completed or not. Those in whom the Spirit of God dwells when the Lord comes will be caught up to meet Him, and will go in with Him to share His joy, whether they are found watching or sleeping, because Christ died for them (1 Thess. v. 9, 10).

The word rendered "marriage" here is not in the singular number, as indicating the marriage supper of the Lamb, but is in the plural, to express those pleasures which will precede the full consummation, when, His wife having made herself ready, the marriage of the Lamb will be celebrated and the marriage supper kept.

The Holy Ghost came down at Pentecost to baptise, from henceforth, into one body all believers in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, in union with the risen Head, members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones—members in particular, and together one body in Christ; to constitute, when completed and

perfected, His blood-bought Bride. When this body shall have arrived at its full stature—the last member added, all whose names are written in God's book—then the Lord will come as Bridegroom to claim His Bride, and the Holy Ghost will present her to Him, even as Eliezer presented Rebekah to Isaac.

This work completed, the door will be closed—not the door of mercy, but the door that admits the Bride into the presence of the Bridegroom. Those, indeed, who had wilfully rejected the truth because they had pleasure in unrighteousness, will be given over to believe the lie of antichrist (2 Thess. ii. 10, 11), but there will be hope and mercy for thirsty and anxious souls. The promise remains true to the last, "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely" (Rev. xxi. 6). And we find that after the present dispensation closes there is a multitude which no man can number, out of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue, who, having washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, will stand before the throne of God.

Verses 11-13. "Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' But he

answered and said, 'Verily, I say unto you, I know you not.' Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour."

Afterward come also the other virgins, but they seek in vain an entrance through the closed door—that dispensation in which God was taking out from the Gentiles a people for His name and the Spirit was preparing a Bride for the Lamb was ended. Henceforth the action of the Holy Ghost is not represented as that of the Comforter, but as "the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth" (Rev. v. 6) with sevenfold energy and power, diffusing the everlasting Gospel among every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people (Rev. xiv. 6).

The answer of the Lord evidently teaches that, apart from the indwelling, teaching, and revealing of the Holy Spirit, there is no mutual knowledge between Christ and the soul; but the Lord does not add here, as in Matthew vii. 23, "Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity."

There is a difference between the mere profession of truth coming short of the actual possession of grace divine and the false profession of such who pretend to be the servants

of Christ when, in fact, they are not, having no real, personal acquaintance with Him.

The words added in the Authorised Version, "Wherein the Son of Man cometh," have evidently crept in from the margin, and probably is almost the only instance in which the context shows that the words found in some manuscripts may be safely omitted. The whole construction of the parable proves that if any words were wanting they might have been, "Wherein the Bridegroom cometh."

The exhortation remains, "Watch, therefore." It is not for us to know the times nor the seasons, which the Father has put in His own power. The turning of days into years, and then computing times and seasons, is not only vain but presumptuous. Were the actual day and hour of the Lord's return foreknown it would, in the meanwhile, put the soul out of its true attitude, and prevent the possibility of watching till the day came. The command of the Lord Jesus through the whole of this dispensation has been, and is, "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." "Behold, I come quickly." "Blessed is he that watcheth."

XXI.

THE PARABLE OF THE
TALENTS.

MATTHEW XXV. 14-30.

Verses 14, 15. "For the kingdom of heaven [the heavens] is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants [bond-servants], and delivered unto them his goods." "And unto one He gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man [each one] according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey."

THE Lord Jesus, who came forth from the Father, and came into the world, has again left the world, and returned to His Father.

During His absence there are those in the world who acknowledge Him both as Saviour and Lord, some in profession only, and others in reality and truth.

These are represented in the parable by the bond-servants.

During the present dispensation there are

important trusts committed to the responsibility of those who acknowledge Christ, such as the Gospel preached to every creature, the faith once committed to the saints, the presence of the Comforter, and the gifts of the Spirit sent down from the ascended Lord : these are characterised as " His goods " ; not ordinary providential benefits, or mental endowments, but things pertaining to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We may regard the one talent as representing the outward privileges of Christianity, as including a preached Gospel, an open Bible, the Lord's Day, the example and influence of godly souls, &c.

By the two talents we may understand not simply the outward means of grace, but also the gift of Divine grace (Eph. ii. 8, 9). " For by grace are ye saved through faith ; and that not of yourselves : it is the gift of God : not of works, lest any man should boast."

In the five talents may be included not only the outward means and the inward grace, but also the gifts of the Spirit for special service, such as the gift of the evangelist, the pastor, and the teacher.

And these privileges and gifts are distributed not only in Divine sovereignty, but also in wisdom, and with due consideration of the character and capabilities of the receiver.

Verses 16-18. "Then he that received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money" [silver].

Spiritual gifts may be stirred up and exercised, the servant become in labours more abundant, whilst his own individual piety may be cultivated at the same time. Thus the five talents may become ten. And the receiver of the two talents, by growing in grace, and by the diligent use of the means of grace, may so profit as that the two talents may become four.

On the other hand, through worldliness, formality, and sloth, the privileges of Christianity may fail in producing any spiritual results, leaving the individual unregenerated, unsanctified, unsaved. The one talent may be buried in the earth. But as the silver belonged, not to the servant, but to his lord, he will be called to account for his unfaithfulness in neglecting his responsibility.

Verses 19-23. "After a long time the lord of those servants [bond-servants] cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, 'Lord, Thou deliverest unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more!' His lord said unto him, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant [bond-servant]; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over [set thee over] many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord! He also that had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, thou deliverest unto me two talents: 'Behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.' His lord said unto him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant [bond-servant], thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over [set thee over] many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.'"

Although the return of the Lord Jesus from the time of His departure was the next event to be expected, yet the Lord saw a lengthened period would elapse before His coming, and in measure He prepared His disciples for it.

Hence He says, "AFTER A LONG TIME, the Lord of those servants cometh." They were to watch, as not knowing the day nor hour of His return; but they were also to wait, and though He tarried, continue to expect Him.

Thus we have the prayer in the 2nd Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians, third chapter, verse 5, "The Lord [that is the Spirit] direct your heart into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."

Between the coming of the Bridegroom to receive His Church and the manifestation as Son of Man in kingly glory, two events are predicted : the judgment-seat of Christ at the commencement of Daniel's seventieth week and the marriage supper of the Lamb at the close—for the judgment-seat of Christ is connected with His coming. "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts : and then shall every man have praise of God " (1 Cor. iv. 5).

So, also, the marriage supper is connected with His manifestation, as immediately preceding it (Rev. xix. 7).

When the Lord Jesus shall come for His saints, it is first to take account of His servants, "for we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ ;" and then, when the secrets of all hearts are made manifest, He will reward everyone according to their works.

In the parable he that had received the five talents acknowledges his indebtedness and responsibility in its full extent : "Lord, thou deliverest unto me five talents ;" and he is

able also to point out the results, and received his lord's approval.

The fidelity had been in a few things, and for a short time ; the recompense is far more exceeding and eternal. There is an entrance on the joy, but no departure from it, and no end. And the enjoyment is not of the highest creature good, but participation in the Lord's own joy: "He will make him drink of the river of His pleasures."

So, also, he that had received the two talents, he having been faithful in his measure, is commended of his lord, and enters on his joy.

There is an evident connection between the "few things" of the fidelity and the "many things" of the kingdom. While both servants enter on the kingdom and the joy, the extent of the dominion of the one may be wider than that of the other.

So, in the corresponding parable in Luke xix., he whose pound had gained ten pounds had authority over ten cities, whilst he whose pound had gained five pounds was set over five cities. For the word of the Lord is, "Behold, I come quickly ; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be."

Verses 24-30. "Then he which had received the

one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed ; and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth : lo, there thou hast that is thine.' His lord answered and said unto him, 'Thou wicked and slothful servant [bond-servant], thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed ; thou oughtest therefore to have put my money [silver] to the ex-changers [or bankers], and then at my coming I should have received [received back] mine own with usury [interest]. Take, therefore, the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance ; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the un-profitable servant [bond-servant] into outer darkness : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

When the Lord Jesus comes to receive His own the possession of the outward privileges of Christianity will avail nothing apart from the possession of Divine grace. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John iii. 3).

"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His" (Rom. viii. 9). The foolish virgins who had no oil in their vessels were left outside the door.

Apart from the teaching of the Holy Spirit there is no real acquaintance with Christ, but only a false estimate of His character, and, instead of confidence and love, a distrust and fear.

Such are among "the fearful and unbelieving" described in Rev. xxi. 8. From these,

when the Lord comes, the outward privileges of Christianity will be taken away, and they will be given over to the outer darkness of the delusion of Antichrist, and afterwards to endless remorse and woe. It is not only with neglect the Lord charges the servant here, but with wickedness and sloth, as utterly unfaithful and unprofitable as to the trust confided to him.

He might have applied to the God of all grace for grace divine ; he might have applied to the Lord Jesus, who refuses none who come to Him, and He would have given him the living water ; he might have applied to the eternal Spirit for His convicting, quickening, sanctifying grace and power, and thus, as it were, put his money to the exchangers, so that the Lord at His coming might have received the glory and the joy.

On the other hand, to those who have valued and improved the means and privileges of the Gospel on the earth, how rich the recompense and the eternal reward.

“ If such the sweetness of the streams,
What will the fountain be ! ”

when they enter on the eternal Sabbath, serving God day and night in His temple, and going out no more for ever !

XXII.

THE PARABLE OF THE
SHEEP AND THE GOATS.

MATTHEW XXV. 31-46.

Verse 31. "But when the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory."

THE word "but," though it occurs in the original, has been omitted in the translation ; it is, however, important to notice it, because it distinguishes and contrasts the following scene from those which preceded it.

We have not here the coming of the Bridegroom to receive His Bride, as in verses 1-13, nor the coming of the Lord to take account of His servants before His judgment-seat,

as in verses 14-30 ; neither is He here seen as Jehovah calling to the heaven above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people Israel (Psalm 1.); far less is He here seen as sitting upon the great white throne, with the dead, small and great, standing before Him after that the heavens and the earth had fled away (Rev. xx.). It is as the Son of Man coming in glory, and sitting upon the throne of His glory, that He here appears. Hitherto He had been sitting on the right hand of the Majesty on high, expecting, till His enemies be made His footstool (Ps. cx.). But here He comes as the Root and Offspring of David, the Heir of David's throne, the true Solomon in all His glory, to take and establish His millennial reign in righteousness and peace.

He will probably be accompanied by the glorified redeemed of every age, and by His blood-bought Bride, for they share with Him His kingdom ; but they are not introduced into the parable. The prominence is given to the holy angels of His power, who are here present as witnesses of His righteous judgment, and are the administrators of His just decrees. As Son of Man He is not only the Messiah of

Israel, He is King of kings and Lord of lords ; the nations will be given to Him for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession.

“The government is upon His shoulder.” In parabolic language, all the living nations of the earth are seen as present before His omniscient eye ; not, indeed, as gathered together into one place, but the secrets of all hearts naked and opened beneath His searching glance, and every conscience and heart within the reach of His all-penetrating and powerful voice, whether for conviction or approval.

Verses 32, 33. “And before Him shall be gathered all the nations, and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats : and He shall set indeed the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.”

There are many points of similarity between sheep and goats—in many respects they are much alike. But the shepherd's eye can easily distinguish the one from the other. Man, looking on the outward appearance, may easily mistake the form of godliness for its reality and the profession of subjection for true loyalty ; but the Lord looketh on the heart.

There is an essential distinction between the

spiritual and the carnal, between those who are quickened by the Spirit of God and those dead in trespasses and sins. The Son of Man knows how to separate them, placing the one on His right hand—the place of approval, acceptance, and favour—and the other on the left hand, the place of disapproval, rejection, and shame.

Verse 34. "Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"

This is the language of the Son of Man come in His glory, and seated on the throne of His millennial kingdom. He invites the just to inherit with Him the kingdom prepared for them FROM the foundation of the world—that is, the earthly kingdom, in distinction from the heavenly and eternal kingdom which the saints in resurrection will enjoy in accomplishment of the eternal purpose purposed in Christ Jesus BEFORE the world began.

They are pronounced by Him as the blessed of His Father according to the word in Psalm xxxvii. 22: "For such as be blessed of Him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of Him shall be cut off."

Verses 35-40. "For I was a hungered, and ye gave Me meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink : I was a stranger, and ye took Me in : naked, and ye clothed Me : I was sick, and ye visited Me : I was in prison, and ye came unto Me. Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, ' Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee!' And the King shall answer and say unto them, ' Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.' "

We must remember that this judgment of the living nations of the earth by the Messiah King follows immediately upon the great tribulation spoken of by Daniel the prophet (Matt. xxiv. 29, 30), the details of which are fully given in the Book of the Revelation, extending over a period of three years and a half. At the commencement of this period those who openly resist the claims of antichrist are slain, and afterwards those who refuse to receive his mark ; others of the faithful are, as we should say, "boycotted"—that is, they are not permitted to buy or sell ; others are scattered among the nations wherever they can find a refuge from the tyranny of the beast. Like those scattered abroad at the persecution which arose about Stephen, they

will carry the gospel of the kingdom with them.

These are they whom the King recognises as His "brethren." Thus we are enabled to understand the meaning of the King's words when He says, "I was a hungered, and ye gave Me meat ; I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink ; I was a stranger, and ye took Me in ; naked, and ye clothed Me. I was sick, and ye visited Me ; I was in prison, and ye came unto Me," acknowledging what was done to these persecuted ones as done to Himself.

This time of the great tribulation will be the final test of man previous to the millennial reign. On the one hand is God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit ; on the other hand, Satan, antichrist, and the false prophet.

The question is, Which side will a man take ? Under which banner will he be enrolled in this great conflict ? His eternal destiny depends upon his choice. On this battlefield no neutrality is allowed ; here it is either death, persecution, or banishment for those who take the part of God, of Christ, and of the Holy Ghost, with the prospect of everlasting life ; or, to those who take the part of Satan, present im-

munity under his patronage, and to share with him his everlasting doom.

The same test is applied to the living nations on the earth whithersoever the persecuted followers of the Lamb are scattered. The Lord here acts upon His own principle: "He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth Me, and whosoever receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me."

Verses 41-45. "Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was a hungered, and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in: naked, and ye clothed Me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not.' Then shall THEY also answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee?' Then shall He answer them, saying, 'Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me'."

Those who among the nations of the earth will take part with the dragon, antichrist, and the false prophet in this decisive conflict between God and Satan will show neither sympathy nor fellowship with the followers of the Lamb who by persecution will be scattered among them; and this neglect of His brethren the Lord will regard as the rejection of Him-

self and of His Father, and will judge and reward it accordingly.

Compare with this Matthew x. 14, 15 : "Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city." Thus the Son of Man will thoroughly purge His floor, and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Thus He will take out of His kingdom all things which offend, and them which do iniquity ; and thus, like Solomon's, His throne will be established in righteousness.

Verse 46. "These shall go away into everlasting punishment : but the righteous into life eternal."

Fellowship with Satan in time involves fellowship with him in eternity ; the rejection of God in time is to be rejected of Him in eternity.

The echo of that word, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways," will be then, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." On the other hand, the reception of God's testimony of His Son, in the

power of the Holy Spirit, is to receive the Father's blessing, participation with the Son in His kingdom, and the reception of eternal life from the Father and the Son, communicated by the quickening Spirit.

Those amongst the nations of the earth who will take part with God, and manifest the same by the reception of Christ's brethren, will, by the eternal Spirit, be made partakers of everlasting life, and in possession of it will share with the Messiah the blessings of His millennial reign.

XXIII.

THE PARABLE OF
THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

LUKE X. 25-37.

Verse 25. "And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted Him, saying, 'Master [Teacher], what shall I do to inherit eternal life'?"

"**B**EHOLD," mark well. These "beholds" demand notice wherever they occur; they call special attention to what follows as containing truth not always apparent on the surface, but requiring careful investigation and prayerful pondering, truths to be sought for as for hid treasure. "A certain lawyer," one who by his profession was called to be occupied with the Mosaic law, "stood up and tempted Him." He does not come to the Lord Jesus as

a worshipper beseeching Him, nor does he take the place of a disciple at His feet to learn of Him; but he stands up to tempt or test Him, to put Him to the proof, perhaps with a design, if possible, to entangle Him in His talk. But let us hear his question. "Master [or teacher], what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He gives Christ the title of teacher, but it is not in the spirit of Nicodemus, "We know that Thou art a teacher come from God;" it is not the inquiry of a convicted sinner, "What must I do to be saved?" nor the language of a proud rebel become an obedient disciple, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" It is the language of a self-satisfied legalist, "What shall I do?" confident that he had only to know what was to be done, and he had the power to do it; putting such a value on his good deeds as to suppose that they could purchase for him a title to eternal life, taking it for granted that life eternal was to be earned by doing.

Verse 26. "He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?"

Two most important questions. "What is written," for "it is easier for heaven and earth

to pass than one tittle of the law to fail" (Luke xvi. 17), and "the Scriptures cannot be broken." The spirit in which the Scriptures are read is equally important, "How readest thou?" The law contains "a shadow of good things to come," and while "the letter killeth, the Spirit giveth life." The object of the giving of the law is twofold: to convict man as a guilty sinner before God, and to lead him to Christ, who fulfilled the law, for forgiveness and salvation. To one who reads it legally, it is a heavy yoke, a grievous bondage; the eye of faith looks beyond the shadow to the substance, and under the teaching of the Spirit discovers thereby the wonders of redeeming love.

Verses 27, 28. "And he answering said, 'Thou shalt love the Lord [Jehovah] thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself.' And He said unto him, 'Thou hast answered right; this do, and thou shalt live'."

This is a quotation from Deut. vi. 5, with the addition of the words, "and with all thy mind," also Lev. xix. 18; and this summary of the law coincides with the Lord's own words (Matt. xxii. 35-40).

Hence Jesus says: "Thou hast answered right; this do, and thou shalt live."

But observe, the Lord does not say, "And thou shalt inherit eternal life." The law promises a continuance of life, or length of days, to those who keep its precepts (Ex. xx. 12); and "If there had been a law which could have given life, verily, righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."

National and temporal blessings were promised to Israel on condition of their observance of the outward law, and this in recognition by them of their peculiar privileges and advantages as a nation redeemed from Egyptian bondage, and in possession of the land of Canaan, having Jehovah Himself for their God, and being His people. But the inheritance of eternal life rested on another foundation.

God's principle from the first was this: "The just shall live by faith." (See Gal. iii. 10-14; Rom. x. 5-9.) Faith received God's testimony to His beloved Son, by the Spirit,

embraced His promises, and thus laid hold upon eternal life.

Verse 29. "But he, willing [wishing *or* desiring] to justify himself, said unto Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour'?"

Conscience was doing its work, and convincing him that his title to eternal life on the ground of law-keeping was defective. This he was conscious of, that he was not prepared to love the Samaritan and the Gentile as he loved himself, hence the inquiry, "And who is my neighbour?"

Verse 30. "And Jesus answering [taking him up] said, 'A certain man went down [was going down] from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves [robbers], which (also) stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.'"

In this marvellously comprehensive parable the Lord Jesus goes back to the original fall of man, and fills up in outline the whole interval, until He shall return again, bringing His reward with Him.

Jerusalem (signifying the vision of peace) was the place of blessing, the city which God had chosen to place His name there, the centre of worship and communion with Himself.

Jericho was the city of the curse. (See Joshua vi. 26.)

Man at the commencement of his downward course fell into evil hands, even into the hands of Satan and his associates, who stripped him of his innocence, and left him consciously naked, and unfit for the fellowship of God (Gen. iii. 7-10)—mortally wounded, for from that hour his body became mortal, and his soul ceased to breathe the breath of life in communion with his Maker.

Verses 31, 32. "And by chance [coincidence] there came down [was coming down] a certain priest that way, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. And likewise (also) a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side,"

By these striking similitudes the Lord Jesus forcibly shows that the law utterly failed to meet the need of man in the condition in which he was left by Satan at the fall. The law, by its ritual, ceremonies, and sacrifices, just left man where he was, for the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin.

This truth is taught by the priest passing by on the other side. Neither by the deeds of the law could any man living be justified. The Levite appeared to take more interest in the

case, but he, too, failed to afford the needed help. It will be observed that both the priest and the Levite were travelling on the same downward road. All men being in the same lost condition, "none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him."

Verse 33. "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him he had compassion on him."

Although the Lord Jesus was of the tribe of Judah, yet He came to seek and to save that which was lost, whether Jew or Gentile, hence He Himself, at the well of Sychar, gave the water of life to a woman of Samaria. It is not said he was "coming down," like the priest and the Levite, but "a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was." It was the visit of the heavenly stranger to this world of sin and woe, taking His place with the homeless and the needy, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," seeing with His own eyes man's ruined and helpless condition, and having "compassion on him." Truly,

"This was compassion like a God,
That when the Saviour knew
The price of pardon was His blood,
His pity ne'er withdrew."

Verse 34. "And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him."

The Saviour coming where man was is a symbol of His incarnation, for "The children being partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same" (Heb. ii. 14); but this was a means to an end. "He went to him." He came to die; on the cross He came nearer still, for there "He was made sin for us, who knew no sin," bore the curse of the violated law, and "destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." There "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed" (Isa. liii. 5). And thus it was He bound up the wounds which sin and Satan had inflicted, and having been raised again from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father, from thence He sent down the Comforter, thus "pouring in oil and wine," the consolation and joys of the Holy Ghost, into the troubled breast and wounded heart of the pardoned sinner. By the indwell-

ing Spirit the redeemed believer is one in Spirit with his risen and exalted Lord, thus "raised up together and made sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus ;" this is symbolised by the Samaritan setting "him on his own beast," in the seat which he himself occupied.

After bringing him to the inn, the Palace Beautiful as described by Bunyan, he is still the object of his tender care.

Verse 35. "And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, 'Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay thee'."

The Lord Jesus, when He left this world to go to the Father, having ascended up on high, received gifts for men, and has given gifts to men, such as evangelists, pastors, and teachers, and the abundance of grace and all necessary gifts are provided for the edification and comfort of sinners saved by grace, every one of whom is to be received into the Church with this note of recommendation from the Lord : "Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay thee." And to those who bear office in

the Church as the under-shepherds, this word of exhortation and promise is especially applicable ; while each individual member is admonished to "have the same care one of another" (1 Cor. xii. 25).

Thus we have seen that this beautiful parable of the Lord Jesus takes a comprehensive view of the history of man from the fall of our first parents to the return of the Lord Jesus, when He will reward every one according to his works, filling up the outline by noticing the giving of the law with its ceremonies and commandments, all failing to meet the need of the ruined man ; the incarnation and atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus ; the gift of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost ; the Church, with its provisions and responsibilities ; cheered with the prospect of His glorious return. Truly we may say, with the astonished officers of the Jews, "Never man spake like this man."

Verses 36, 37. "'Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves ?' And he said, 'He that shewed mercy on him.' Then said Jesus unto him, 'Go, and do thou likewise'."

We have here the application of the parable to the conscience of the lawyer. In the light

of this clear presentation of the truth his Pharisaic prejudices were all destroyed, and with it, too, all hope of inheriting eternal life, on the ground of law-keeping, perished. The concluding words of the Lord Jesus, "Go, and do thou likewise," may be regarded as designed to complete the work of entire self-distrust, leading to the conclusion that apart from divine assistance and the grace of the Lord Jesus he could do nothing. In order to act like Christ it is necessary to have the Spirit of Christ. To those who are weary through labouring under the law, and whose conscience is burdened with sin, the words of the Lord Jesus, the true Good Samaritan, are, "Come unto Me and I will give thee rest," and then comes the exhortation, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me."

XXIV.

THE PARABLE OF THE
RICH LANDLORD.

LUKE xii. 13-21.

Verses 13-15. "And one of the company said unto Him, 'Master [or Teacher], speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me.' And He said unto Him, 'Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?' And He said unto them, 'Take heed, and beware of [keep yourselves from] covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.'"

CHRIST was born King of the Jews, and He came a Light into the world, to communicate among men the mind and will of God. But He took no official place under the existing government of the world, nor in the general affairs of men. Hence He refuses to interfere in this matter. But He

gave to the company, or multitude, a solemn word of warning concerning covetousness. He reminded them that there was something more worth living for than the accumulation of riches.

Verses 16-18. "And He spake a parable unto them, saying, 'The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully. And he thought [was reasoning] within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow [gather together] my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.'"

Human reason was consulted, but there is here no inquiry of the mind of God for Divine direction, and human will is acted upon and human policy followed. Treasure is laid up on earth, and there is no provision, or desire, for heavenly riches.

Verse 19. "'And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.'"

What intense selfishness is here! All the thoughts of this man are centred in self. His ground had brought forth plentifully, yet it was God who had given the rain and the fruitful seasons, but there is no recognition of God, or grateful return to Him.

We read in Psalm xlix. 6, "They that trust

in their wealth and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches (verses 11-13), their inward thought is that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations ; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless, man, being in honour, abideth not : he is like the beasts that perish. This their way is their folly, yet their posterity approve their sayings."

God created the soul for Himself, and nothing but Himself can satisfy it. The soul is destined for an eternal existence, and neither the riches of earth nor the things of time can fill its boundless capacities. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow," said the wise man, much less of a long succession of to-morrows, lasting for many years, "for thou knowest not what a day," or night, "may bring forth."

The rich man, with Lazarus at the gate, fared sumptuously every day, "but the end of that mirth was heaviness." It is generally found that those who share their wealth with the needy enjoy their own portion far more than those who spend all their riches on themselves.

Verses 20, 21. "But God said unto him, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?' So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

Though this man had nothing to say to God, yet God had something to say to him, for the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. The folly of human wisdom is strikingly shown in this parable in five particulars:

1. The substitution of human reason for Divine direction.
2. The will of man for the will of God.
3. In preferring the riches of the world to laying up treasures in heaven.
4. In desiring things which are seen and temporal rather than those things which are unseen and eternal.
5. In seeking satisfaction in selfish enjoyment rather than in the favour and love of God. As Christ expressed it, "So is every one that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

XXV.

THE WATCHFUL AND
UNWATCHFUL SERVANT.

LUKE XII. 35-48.

Verses 35-37. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights [lamps] burning, and ye, yourselves, like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from [depart out of] the wedding [wedding feasts]; that when he cometh and knocketh they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the lord, when he cometh, shall find watching: Verily, I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat [recline at table], and will come forth and serve them [minister to them]."

THE proper attitude of the faithful servant of the Lord Jesus is that of watchfulness.

The return here spoken of is not from the marriage supper of the Lamb; this must be kept distinct. It is rather the Lord's return at the close of the present dispensation of Gospel grace, which is set forth under the emblem of

a series of wedding feasts, given in honour of the approaching marriage (see Matt. xxii. 1-14; Luke xiv. 16-24).

There is a special blessing pronounced on those servants whom the Lord, when He comes, shall find watching, waiting, and prepared to welcome His return.

When here on earth, the Lord Jesus was the faithful Servant of His Father, ever ready to do His will; now He is the girded Servant, sanctifying and cleansing by the washing of water (typical of the Holy Spirit), through the Word, those whom He hath redeemed unto God by His blood (John xiii. 4, 5; Eph. v. 25, 26). After the pattern of the Hebrew servant, whose ear had been bored, love will keep Him, even in the glory, a servant, still ministering to their everlasting blessedness (Ex. xxi. 5-7; Rev. vii. 17).

Verses 38-40. "And if he shall come in the second watch, or [and] come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants [bond-servants]. And this know, that if the goodman of the house [master of the house] had known what hour the thief would come he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be YE, therefore, ready also, for the Son of Man cometh at an hour when ye think not."

According to the reckoning of the Jews,

their night was divided into four watches—the first from sundown to nine o'clock, the second from nine till twelve, the third from twelve till three, and the fourth from three till six in the morning, or sunrise.

The Lord Jesus will come at the close of the present dispensation to receive the Church to Himself. This is described as "The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him" (2 Thess. ii. 1).

At the end of the second watch of the night, or at midnight, the cry went forth, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh." The Lord does not say He will come in the second watch, but *if* He come, inciting to watchfulness. After the marriage supper of the Lamb, He will come with clouds, and every eye will see Him, and His risen saints will appear with Him in glory; this always is distinguished as "the coming of the Son of Man." These two aspects of His coming must never be confounded together, and, in either case, watchfulness is enjoined, and an especial blessing pronounced.

His coming as a "thief in the night" is expressly said, in 1 Thessalonians v. 1-6, not to apply to the Church.

The day spoken of there is the day of Jehovah ; the title employed is "Lord" (without the article). It is "The day of vengeance of our God," which will take the world by surprise, but still a welcome surprise to those faithful ones who, in the time of the great tribulation, will be found waiting for Him (Rev. xvi. 15).

To those saints of the present dispensation who refuse to watch He will come unexpectedly, as a thief (Rev. iii. 3), but this word is here addressed to them, not so much as a promise, but as a warning. Our true happiness is to be found watching.

Verses 41-44. "Then Peter said unto Him, 'Lord, speakest Thou this parable unto us, or even to all?' And the Lord said : 'Who then is that faithful and wise [prudent] steward whom his lord shall make ruler over [set over] his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you that he will make him ruler over [set him over] all that he hath.'"

The apostles stood in a twofold representative place. They were at that time the faithful remnant of Israel, who had received their Messiah, while the rest of the nation were rejecting Him, and as such they received

instruction suitable to those who, in the time of the great tribulation, will confess Christ. But, at the day of Pentecost, these apostles were among the first living stones of which the Church of God was built, and were instructed accordingly. In His reply to the inquiry of Peter, the Lord Jesus applies His teaching to the present dispensation, and shows the connection between the fidelity in stewardship now and the awards of the kingdom in eternity. In 1 Corinthians iv. 1, 2 the Apostle Paul thus writes: "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers [official ministers] of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." Even so, there are those who, not content with testifying the ordinary and fundamental truths of the Gospel, seek, under the teaching and revealing of the Holy Spirit, to search into the deep things of God, and to bring forth, for the edification of the spiritually-minded and instructed believer, those higher and fuller truths which tend for the establishment and progress of the soul. Such service will receive a suitable recompense of reward.

Verses 45, 46. "But, and if that servant [bond-

servant] say in his heart : 'My lord delayeth his coming ;' and shall begin to beat the men-servants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken ; the lord of that servant [bond-servant] will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware [knoweth not], and will cut him in sunder [cut him off], and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers."

As in the field there are tares as well as wheat, and both grow together until the harvest, so also in the "great house" there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth, and some to honour and some to dishonour (2 Tim. ii. 20). Where there has been no regeneration, and where there is no indwelling of the Holy Ghost, official position in the outward Church is no guarantee for ultimate security. When the Lord Jesus comes those who are not truly His will be cut off, and have their portion with the unbelievers.

Where the heart of the professed servant is not set on the Person of the Lord Jesus, and with the hope and expectation of His return, but on present things, and pre-eminence in the professing Church, the coming of the Lord will be an unwelcome and disastrous surprise.

Verses 47, 48. "And that servant [bond-servant] which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself,

neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of [from] him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."

Whether for good or for evil, the measure of privilege is the measure of responsibility.

Those who in the fulness of Gospel light have walked unworthily will be cast out into outer darkness; the faithful servant found with girded loins will be ministered to by the Lord of glory; and the steward found faithful over a few things will be made ruler over all, and will enter into, and have fellowship with, the joy of his Lord, and share with Him His kingdom and His glory.

XXVI.

THE GREAT SUPPER.

LUKE XIV. 15.

Verse 15. "And when one of them that sat at meat with Him heard these things, he said unto Him, 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.'"

IF we would enjoy the blessings of God in glory, in the future kingdom, we must avail ourselves of the provisions of His grace in time. It is in vain to look forward to the joys of eternity if we neglect the offers of the Gospel in the present time.

Verses 16, 17. "Then said He unto him, 'A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent his servant at supper-time to say to them that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready.'"

Thus the Lord Jesus avails Himself of the opportunity for giving a present application to these words of one of the guests.

This parable sets forth the abundant provisions of God's grace in the Gospel, and the largeness and freeness of His invitation. We here notice that it is not to the DINNER, as in Matthew xxii. 4, that the guests are invited, but to a SUPPER, and it is AT SUPPER-TIME, for "behold NOW is the accepted time, behold NOW is the day of salvation. In Matthew xxii. the parable especially contemplates Israel, to whom at the beginning the Gospel invitation was given. But Israel having rejected the provision made for them, the exhortation is extended to the Gentiles, as in this parable of Luke xiv. And this, according to Isaiah lxi. 2, will be followed by the day of vengeance of our God. For those who reject it there is no after provision. How then shall they escape who neglect so great salvation?

Verses 18-20. "And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it; I pray thee have me excused, And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come."

There are other things beside the love of sin which prevent the ready acceptance of the

Gospel. Our Lord enumerates three of these hindrances, which are very general.

First, The possession of wealth and large estates, which are thought to necessitate much attention, for, said the Lord, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter the kingdom."

Secondly, Absorption in agricultural or mercantile occupation, leaving but little leisure or opportunity to the concerns of the soul, being busy in laying up riches on the earth rather than treasures in heaven.

Thirdly, Domestic enjoyments, cares, and family anxieties, and making provision for the future.

These are thought sufficient reasons by many for not accepting the invitation, and the reply is given, "Therefore I cannot come."

Verse 21. "So that servant came, and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.'"

Those who preach the Gospel are under an obligation not only to deliver their message faithfully and fully, but they have also to give an account to Him who sent them as to what they have done and

what they have taught, and also the manner and extent of the reception of their message.

Not only does rebellion against God's authority provoke His anger, but also, and much more, the rejection of His mercy, and undervaluing the boundless provisions of His grace and love, in the gift of His Son, the aid of His Spirit, and the instruction of His Word. Thus they show that they prefer their own things to the things of God, earth to heaven, and the pursuits of Time to the joys of Eternity. Transgression is an offence against His holiness, but the rejection of the Gospel is doing despite to the Spirit of Grace.

In this parable the Lord divides the family of man into three classes—the higher, the middle, and the lower.

FIRST.—The higher class, contemplated in the landowner, the business man, and those involved in family cares.

SECOND.—In the inhabitants of the streets and lanes of the city, known as the working-classes, among whom are to be found the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind, not as to the body only, but also as to the soul.

THIRD.—The third class comprises the very poor, destitute, and the outcast.

Verses 22, 23. "And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the Lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper."

Not only are the respectable, the moral, the religious, and the majority of men invited and welcome, but the despised, the rejected, and those that count themselves unworthy, undeserving, and too sinful to hope for mercy, are to be urged and encouraged to accept the offers of God's grace.

In the first case the invitation is simply, "Come" (verse 17).

In the second, assistance is to be rendered, "Bring in" (verse 21).

In the third case a kind of moral compulsion is frequently needed, "Compel them to come in." So long as there is a sinner to be saved, a spiritual want to be supplied, or an outcast to be brought in, "still there is room," and not until the house is filled, all who are given to the Son by the Father, and for whom Jesus died, are regenerated, and baptised by

one Spirit into one body, will the present invitation of the Gospel cease. But those who now reject so great salvation, and despise God's present mercy, are left without hope of any further provision.

XXVII.

THE PARABLE OF THE
LOST SHEEP.

LUKE XV. 1-7.

“ Then drew near unto Him all the publicans [tax-gatherers] and sinners for to hear Him, and the Pharisees and scribes murmured [were murmuring], saying, ‘ This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.’ And He spake this parable unto them, saying, ‘ What man of you, having an hundred sheep, and if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home [into the house] he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.’ I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.”

I N this chapter we have the Trinity of Grace
—the Grace of the SON (verses 1-7); the
Grace of the SPIRIT in the Church (verses
8-10), and the Grace of the FATHER (verses

11-32). But it is the Grace of the One True God in its threefold character of manifestation.

First, the Grace of the Son, for it was His Grace in receiving sinners, and having fellowship with them, that was found fault with.

In this parable there are five particulars: 1st, the possession; 2nd, the losing; 3rd, the seeking; 4th, the finding; fifth, the home-coming and rejoicing; for it is the joy of Grace which is the keynote of the chapter.

Each of these three parables may be looked at in a threefold point of view: 1st, as considered by the Evangelist; 2nd, by the Pastor; 3rd, by the Teacher.

First, the EVANGELIST'S view. The hundred sheep may be regarded as the elect of God, given by the Father to the Son before the foundation of the world. And the lost sheep as a sinner yet unsaved, and still in the world. Then, as to the seeking, the Son of God came into the world to save sinners. He came forth from the Father, and came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost. The lost sinner finding a Saviour is one view of the case; it is in reality the seeking Shepherd finding the lost sheep; and when once found,

He will never leave him nor forsake him. And just as the good Samaritan came where the wounded man was, and first brought him to the inn, and took care of him, so the Good Shepherd brings the saved sinner into the fellowship of the saints on earth, that they may share with Him His joy in the salvation of the lost—a joy in which heaven has fellowship, and which joy will ultimately be universal and everlasting. In this solicitude of the Good Shepherd over the lost sinner—in His patient, persevering efforts for his salvation, and joy in the finding—the evangelist has full fellowship.

Secondly, the PASTOR's apprehension of the parable. The lost sheep may be regarded as one belonging to the flock, but having "gone astray," according to the corresponding parable (Matt. xviii. 12-14), is in this sense lost, and needs to be reclaimed to the fellowship of the saints; and the pastor is in full sympathy with the Chief Shepherd for the recovery of such. And when restored to full communion there is joy on earth and joy in heaven, for the sheep that was going astray has now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of souls.

Thirdly, the TEACHER's application. The

sinner may be saved, and the saved sinner may be in the full enjoyment of Church privileges, and yet the soul may come far short of the full realisation of his standing, privileges, and blessings. Like Job before the happy result of his discipline (Job iii. 26), or like the cleansed leper (Lev. xiv. 8), who, though he be clean and allowed to come into the camp, yet is required to "tarry abroad out of his tent seven days," he is not yet in possession of perfect rest. Further instruction may be needed before the believer is able to say with Paul, "I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. ii. 20). It has been aptly said that at the first there were six footprints on the sand, on the mud, or the snow—four of the sheep going astray, and two of the shepherd going after him ; but when the sheep has been found, there will be but two footprints on the return journey, for the shepherd having put the sheep on both his shoulders the four feet will be firmly clasped in the hands of the shepherd. The Lord Jesus having full control of all the ways of him who truly abides

in Christ, his life on earth will be the living out of that life which, as one Spirit with the Lord in glory, he draws down from above in fellowship with Him ; and this will lead to the fullest and highest joy in time and for eternity.

1st. The lost sinner brought into the fellowship of God's saints rejoices in the sense of his privileges and security.

2nd. The restored backslider is brought into a fuller realisation of his indebtedness to Divine Grace and of his safety, so that none can pluck him from the hand of the Great and Good Shepherd, while the Father who gave Him to the Son is greater than all, and none can pluck him from the Father's hand.

3rd. The believer, led into a higher and fuller acquaintance with Grace Divine, realises his position as borne upon the shoulders of the Almighty Shepherd and Great High Priest, who has entire control over his walk and ways, and by whom he is being safely carried onward to his heavenly and everlasting home.

XXVIII.

THE PARABLE OF THE
LOST PIECE OF SILVER.

LUKE XV. 8-10.

Verses 8-10. "Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle [lamp], and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?

"And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, 'Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.' Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

THIS parable illustrates the operation of the SPIRIT of God in and through the CHURCH. The application of the parable may be threefold.

First, the lost piece of silver may represent one who, though belonging to the Church in the sovereign counsels of God, may as yet be UNCONVERTED.

The LIGHTING OF THE LAMP represents the use of those means whereby the testimony of the Gospel by the EVANGELIST is caused to be proclaimed openly, in order to the salvation of sinners; and the Church is responsible for this.

~ THE SWEEPING OF THE HOUSE signifies the removal, putting away, and purging out all those inconsistencies and scandals of profession in the Church which are obstacles to the conversion of souls.

And the DILIGENT SEEKING, that patient, persevering, and personal effort which ceases not till the object is accomplished.

An unconverted soul is in darkness, but when the light of the glorious Gospel shines upon it, that light is the light of life, and that soul is turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God (2 Cor. iv. 3, 4). The preaching of the Gospel of Christ in the power of the Holy Ghost is the means by which the counsels of God in eternity are accomplished in time, and those chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world are in due time made manifest and become the children of God.

Secondly, the lost piece of silver may be

regarded as representing one who, though belonging to the Church, and having once been received into its fellowship, has GONE ASTRAY, and practically is lost to it. The recovery of such is especially the work of the PASTOR who through the manifestation of the gift of the Spirit, and by the presentation of the truth, and the removal of difficulties and obstacles, by diligent perseverance brings back the wanderer from the error of his ways, to become a treasure and a joy to the Church of God.

Thirdly, the operation of the Spirit of God, by the instrumentality of the TEACHER, may accomplish another and higher result, whereby the value and efficiency of the individual believer to the Church may be greatly enhanced ; namely, by such a presentation of the truth of God as may enable the believer, divested of all hindrances, fully to apprehend his standing in Christ, security, and future prospects. So that walking in the sunshine of the Divine favour, abiding in Christ, and living and walking in the Spirit, he may bring forth fruit to God, and glorify Him in his spirit, soul, and body, which are God's.

When these results are accomplished, either in the salvation of the sinner, the restoration of the backslider, or in the fulness of blessing as realised by the believer, provision is made for the purest, richest, and deepest joy in the assemblies of God's saints on earth ; and in the heaven above there is not only joy to the eternal Three, and to the angels which surround His throne, but also joy in their "presence" to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to those loved ones who have gone before, to whom by angelic ministry the glad tidings may be communicated.

XXIX.

THE PARABLE OF THE
PRODIGAL SON.

LUKE XV. 11-32.

Verses 11-24. "And He said: A certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father: 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.' And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into the fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself he said: 'How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son, make me one of thy hired servants.' And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off his father saw him, and had compassion,

and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him : ' Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.' But the father said to his servants : ' Bring forth the best robe and put it on him ; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet ; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry, for this my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to be merry."

IF any proof were required that " All Scripture is given by inspiration of God " I believe this chapter affords abundant evidence. It stands unique, towering in magnificence and beauty, pre-eminent above all human composition, ancient or modern. We have in these parables Divine grace in trinity of action and fulness of joy—a threefold provision for sinner, backslider, and child of God.

In the opening parable the grace of the Son of God, the Good Shepherd seeking the lost sheep, appears. In the next the grace of the Divine, Eternal Spirit, in and through the Church, is shown in recovering the lost, and the joy of that recovery. In the third the grace of the Eternal Father is seen in a picture drawn with a master-hand, as He alone could who was the well-beloved Son, and painted by the Eternal Spirit, who searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God.

We may look at this parable from a threefold point of view.

1st. As it would appear to an EVANGELIST, who is sent out "into all the world" to preach the Gospel "to every creature." Here the universal Fatherhood of God, as Creator, is recognised, for He is the Father of spirits, and "we are His offspring" (Acts xvii. 28). Dispensationally, the elder son is the Jew, or he may be looked at as the type of the moral and religious man, the one who kept the clean side of the broad road—the Pharisee. The younger son may be regarded as the Gentile, or the sinner gone, more or less, into deeper degradation, and to remoter lengths of sin and profanity, at length come to himself, awakening to a sense of his position. This is the work of the Holy Spirit bringing him to see his real condition in the sight of God, convicting of sin, righteousness, and of a judgment to come. Now the remembrance of what he had lost, and his ruin, is pressed home to his heart; he had been like Jonah—down, down; but he takes the first upward step, he takes with him words, and the Spirit teaches him to pray: "I have

sinned," but I will call him "Father." There are many ways on the downward road that leadeth to destruction—many by-paths—but there is only one way back to God, to be entered by "the wicket gate." Jesus has said: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me."

HOW WAS HE RECEIVED?

The woman in the second parable puts the recovered piece of silver, some would tell us, among the coins as a diadem of grace around her BROW. The shepherd puts the lost sheep, when found, upon his SHOULDERS—the place of power. But the father folds him to his BOSOM—the climax of grace, the climax of love.

In this picture the canvas glows with warmest tints; the Spirit lays them on lavishly. There are the robe, the ring, and the shoes on the feet; the fatted calf, the feast, and the beginning of joy—which joy rises higher and higher till it reaches the throne of God, continuing throughout eternity.

2nd. The PASTOR'S view. Here the prodigal is looked at as one in the family, but wandering from the father's house—the back-slider, the one who has tasted that the Lord is

gracious, but gone after the husks; left the father's house and family, the society of saints, to dabble in the world's dirty waters, to better himself in the far-off land, to try what the citizen of that country can do for him. But the gentle, dove-like Spirit whispers: "What doest thou here, Elijah?" You, a child of God, how camest thou here? Oh, the deep conviction; the penitential tears that flow! He sighs:

"What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still;
But they have left an aching void
Not all the world can fill.

"Return, O holy Dove! return,
Sweet Messenger of rest;
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,
And drove Thee from my breast."

To such the language of Scripture is especially encouraging: "Take with you words and turn to Jehovah; say unto Him: 'Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously.'" To which the Father replies: "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely" (Hosea xiv. 2, 4). There is a warm welcome from the family awaiting the return of such, and a deeper realisation than ever before of the privileges, comforts, and joys of home.

3rd. The aspect in which the TEACHER may regard this parable. To him the prodigal son may be considered as one who, though instructed in the way of truth, and whose outward character and conduct is irreproachable, has never learnt, by experience, under Divine teaching the hidden evils of his heart, and the tendency of his nature to go astray from God. He needs, it may be, some painful experience, some protracted trial, some walking in darkness without any light, in order to bring him to a due sense of what he really is in the sight of God. It is Job's experience over again. As in the case of Job, Satan may be challenged: "Hast thou considered my servant Job?" He himself may be unconscious of iniquity, but the Spirit of God comes and does a deeper work, reminding us of John Newton's hymn:

"I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith, and hope, and every grace,"

expecting to be led on in peace;

"Instead of this He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart,"

But, brought like Job at length to the dust, he no longer holds fast to his integrity. The Holy Spirit turns the concave mirror of the

sacred Word in full light on his soul, and that God who shines out of darkness sends a ray of light into it. What does he discover? Oh, the hardness of heart! The revelation of the Spirit showing the matchless Son of God, convinces him how far he has fallen short of conformity to Him. He now says: "I have heard of Thee with the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Though I might have been kept from outward transgression, I am nothing but sin in myself; this will of mine is not subject to the law of God, neither, indeed, can be.

When the Eternal Spirit is thus dealing with the soul, showing him his sins in the light of the Divine countenance, he will not say with the elder son: "I have been perfect all these years;" but rather he will say: "Father, I have sinned. Oh, reveal Thy Son in me, and by Thy Spirit's mighty power, on the ruins of self, establish Thy kingdom of joy and love Divine." To him the Lord Jesus will not only be the way back to the Father from the far-off land, or the *door into the sheep fold*, but the way into the sanctuary, where, in the light of the lamp-

stand, he may feed on the showbread and worship at the golden altar. But more, He will be to him the new and living way into the holiest of all, where, under the shadow of the Almighty and in the secret place of the Most High, he may feed on the hidden manna and drink at the fountain-head of the river of His pleasures—a foretaste of everlasting joy.

In verses 22, 23 we have a word to the SERVANTS. “The father said to his servants, ‘Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him ; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet ; and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and be merry.’” There are servants in the household still who need to hear the word from the Master of the household and Father of the family, “Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him.” Show the believer his privileges as child of God and heir of eternal glory. “Put it on him.” He may not have faith to appropriate these blessings unto himself. Make him know clearly and distinctly they belong to him, and that he is at full liberty to take home to his heart all the consolation and the joy. Put on his finger the signet-ring, and see to it that his feet are shod

with the preparation of the Gospel of peace to spread the glad tidings far and wide. "Bring hither the fatted calf"—into the presence of the Father, and into the midst of His family, as the sacrifices under the law were brought before Jehovah, and to the door of the tent of the congregation, where the people were assembled. Present Jesus to the eye as the fatted calf in all His life-long service, and in all His suitability for sacrifice. "Kill it." Present Him in His sufferings in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the Cross of Calvary. "Let us eat and be merry." Marvellous words! At the Passover the father of the family sat at the table, and partook of the feast with them. In the peace-offering God the Father had His portion; the fat of the inwards was the food of the offering made by fire unto Jehovah—the sweet savour or savour of rest unto God. Aaron and the priestly family had their portion—the heave shoulder and wave breast—while the offerer who presented it fed upon the rest, thus setting forth fellowship together in joy and peace on the ground of the atonement and reconciliation. The Father invites His family to have fellowship with Himself in the joy of

grace, and in the foretaste of eternal joys to come.

Verses 25-32. "Now his elder son was in the field, and as he came and drew nigh to the house he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him: 'Thy brother is come, and thy father hath killed the fatted calf because he hath received him safe and sound.' And he was angry and would not go in, therefore came his father out and entreated him. And he answering, said to his father: 'Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment, and yet thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends; but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.' And he said unto him: 'Son [child], thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine; it was meet that we should make merry and be glad, for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.'"

In like manner this portion of the parable may be regarded in three aspects. First, That of the EVANGELIST, who would naturally speak of the elder son as an unconverted man, or a self-righteous, religious Pharisee, occupied, it may be, with externals, but having little fellowship with what is going on within the household.

In the second place the PASTOR might regard the elder son as a consistent professor of religion; irreproachable in walk and conversation, active and diligent in outward services,

and though undoubtedly a child of God, yet lacking in sympathy with earnest efforts for the conversion of sinners, and the reclaiming of the wanderers.

In the third place, to the TEACHER there is something inexpressibly tender in the earnest entreaties of the Father who has gone out to bring His child into closer communion with Himself and into fuller fellowship with His gracious and loving heart. The Father acknowledges his relationship as His Son or child, and also the closeness of His walk with God, "Child, thou art ever with me." Also the riches of his inheritance, "And all that I have is thine."

It is true that the Father gives no encouragement for party and sectarian enjoyment out of the presence of God, and apart from the whole household of faith. For those that would thus make merry with their own friends not even is a kid provided. But where, under the leading of the Spirit of God, there is a desire "to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of love Divine, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge," for such the

feast of love Divine is provided, that, filled with all the fulness of God, there might be a commencement in time of the realisation of those eternal joys which are at God's right hand for evermore. If so, we may add to this last portion of the parable the words, "And they began to be merry."

XXX.

THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD.

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LUKE XVI. 1-4.

Verses 1-4. "And He said also unto His disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted [was wasting] his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it [what is it] that I hear this of thee? Give [give in] an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest [canst] be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship; I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses."

THE possession of wealth, and the privileges and opportunities which wealth brings, is a stewardship for which an account must be rendered to God hereafter.

Riches and influence may be so employed that, should a reverse of fortune come, those

who have been helped and benefited in the time of the steward's prosperity may be disposed to act as friends in the days of his adversity. But the claims of God, and the account to be rendered to Him, must not be overlooked ; for He requires truth and uprightness in all the dealings of His servants and stewards.

Verses 5-8. " So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord ? And he said, An hundred measures [baths] of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou ? And he said, An hundred measures [cors] of wheat. And he said, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely [prudently] ; for the children [sons] of this world [age] are in their generation wiser [more prudent] than the children [sons] of light."

This transaction shows the character of the steward, and his utter want of integrity and fidelity in his office.

Two examples are given as a specimen of his conduct, in seeking to ingratiate himself with his fellows by lowering their estimate of the claims of his master upon them. And this may be done by lowering the claims of God in regard to holiness and truth, by giving a false estimate of what God requires.

In all this he has no regard to the interests of his lord, and his just claims on them.

We here notice that it was not the Lord Jesus who commended his conduct, but the person spoken of in the parable.

There is much that is highly esteemed in the world, "for men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself," which, from its want of principle, may be an abomination in the sight of God.

Verse 9. "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon [by means of the riches] of unrighteousness, that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations [tabernacles]."

The advice of the Lord Jesus to His disciples is, that they should learn a lesson from the prudence and foresight often exercised by men of the world, but at the same time carefully avoid acting upon their principles of conduct. The possession of wealth, influence, position, leisure, or opportunity, may be so employed during the short span of human life as never to be forgotten in the eternal state. The pecuniary assistance rendered to the poor and destitute in the court, garret, cottage, or the poorhouse, may fade from the memory of the

donor in a very short time ; but when the heirs of glory meet in the inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, no gift will be forgotten, no cup of cold water administered will lose its reward.

Then the children of God in the everlasting habitations of the blessed will welcome with gratitude and love those from whom, while on earth, they have received the manifestation of Christian love, even though it might then have assumed the form of some temporal gift.

What a thought ! Friends for eternity may be secured by the employment of temporal means in the spirit of Christian love. Meanwhile we must never forget that we are responsible to a Divine and Heavenly Master for whatever gifts, whether temporal or spiritual, He has committed to our stewardship.

Verses 10-12. " He that is faithful in that which is least [a very little] is faithful also in much : and he that is unjust in the least [a very little] is unjust also in much. If, therefore, ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon [riches], who will commit to your trust the true riches ? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own ? "

The children of God are to act at all times as under a responsibility to a Divine Master in

the smallest matters as well as in the greater, and not only with regard to spiritual gifts, but also in the management of their temporal affairs.

It has often been found that a course of patient perseverance and conscientious exactness in the discharge of duties connected with some secular situation has been over-ruled by God as an effectual means of training for the discharge of spiritual service of the most important, extensive, and enduring character ; whereas persons of dilatory and uncertain habits are little fitted for spiritual and important work.

So, also, the gifts of the Spirit, such as those of the evangelist, the pastor, and the teacher, bear fruits lasting as eternity. The spiritual children of the evangelist will in the ages to come rise up and call him blessed. Those who have benefited by the labours of the pastor and teacher will be their joy and crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus. "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever."

In the Church of God there is not only gift, but grace, and the grace of God may be so exercised and manifested in time as to leave its fruit, or memorial, on the ages to come.

XXXI.

THE PARABLE OF THE
RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

LUKE XVI. 19-31.

Verse 19. "Now there was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously [*literally*, making merry, splendidly] every day."

THIS rich man, instead of making friends by means of the mammon which he possessed, in the prospect of eternity, which our Lord recommends His disciples to do, spent his wealth on himself, and in self-indulgence, in luxury, and splendour, living only for time, and neglecting the eternity beyond. We do not find any vices or crimes laid to his charge; no doubt he had his

friends and companions who shared in his entertainments. He was not wicked in the ordinary sense of the word, but he was worldly. Not cruel, it may be, but living in the neglect of the poor and the suffering. Living and walking in the flesh, and not in the Spirit.

This appears to have been his daily and habitual course: the choice of this present world for his portion, the enjoyment of the gifts of Providence, but living in forgetfulness of God, the good and bounteous Giver.

Verses 20, 21. "And there was a certain beggar [poor man] named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores."

The same Providence which gave the rich man his riches, with an opportunity for employing them for the glory of God, and to his own eternal gain, placed the poor man at his gate, in affliction and suffering, with an opportunity for patient endurance and acquiescence in the will of God, by fixing the eye on the things unseen and eternal, and by enduring as seeing Him who is invisible.

The Greek word does not convey the idea of begging, but of poverty.

His trust was in God. This his name implies. "Lazarus" is the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Eliezer," the meaning of which is, "God, my helper": his hope and trust were in his God. Probably his friends laid him daily at the rich man's gate, thus bringing him under his notice, and the notice of his friends and companions. In his poverty he had learned contentment. He was not desirous of the rich man's dainties, but simply that his bread might be given him and his water might be sure; and this the promise secured him, for he was a pensioner upon Divine bounty. He was a son of Abraham living by faith, walking in the Spirit, the heir with Abraham of the same inheritance, looking for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God.

Of such the world is not worthy, and the world overlooks them, or passes them unheeded by; even to such the animal creation may prove more friendly than their fellow-men.

Verse 22. "And it came to pass that the beggar [poor man] died, and he was carried [and he was carried away] by the angels into Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died, and was buried."

The patience of the poor man having had its perfect work, the trial of his faith came to an end, but that ending was the beginning of a brighter day. Those ministering spirits which had been sent forth to minister unto him as an heir of salvation, unseen by him during his lifetime, now fulfilled their mission by bearing him away from the scene of his suffering and sorrow to join the spirits of the just made perfect in the heavenly Jerusalem, to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God.

In the present dispensation the believer departs to be with Christ, which is far better.

The soul, also, of the rich man was required of him; his worldly enjoyment, also, had an end. The attendance on his splendid funeral might have been numerous, his body might have been conveyed to the tomb with due honours, but his soul on departing from the earth was solitary; no angel convoy awaited him to convey him to the regions of the blest. The fool may prefer to be

without God in this world, but to be without God in eternity is terrible indeed.

The remembrance of pleasures enjoyed without God in this life will afford little satisfaction in the world to come.

Verses 23, 24. "And in hell [hades] he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom; and he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.'"

Hades is the place, or state, of separate spirits. It expresses the condition of the soul as separated from the body. It is a state of conscious existence; the body alone slumbers in the tomb. It is also a place of spiritual intelligence; the realities of the unseen world are apprehended and realised. To Lazarus it was a place, or state, of highest enjoyment and heavenly communion. To the rich man after death it was the place, or condition, of suffering and woe. The scene of heavenly enjoyment and fellowship was beheld, but it was seen afar off.

According to the flesh Abraham was his father, but not being a partaker of Abraham's faith, they are now for ever separated. What he asks is some little alleviation of his suffer-

ings; he evidently entertains no hope of entire deliverance. Even now there is no turning of the heart to God; it is Abraham, and not God, he appeals to.

Of course, the terms "finger," "water," "tongue," "flame," are symbolic, figures drawn from things natural to express what is spiritual. In the parable "hades" is contemplated, and not the resurrection state.

Verses 25, 26. "But Abraham said, 'Son [child], remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now here he is comforted and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf [chasm] fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us that would come from thence.'"

In this world and in this life man is placed in a state of probation; a choice has to be made, and the results of that choice are eternal. On the one hand, the world without God; on the other hand, God, and leaving God to give, or to withhold, worldly goods. The choice of this world without God involves the loss of God, and separation from Him throughout eternity.

But when God is chosen as the portion of the soul in time, He becomes the satisfying

portion of the soul throughout the ages to come. In the unseen state the broad line of demarcation between the children of this world and the children of faith is fixed, immovable, and eternal; the gulf, or chasm, is impassable.

Solemn truth! This leaves no room whatever for any "larger hope."

"Verses 27-31. "Then he said, 'I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify [earnestly testify] unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' Abraham saith unto him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'Nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.' And he said unto him, 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from [from among] the dead'."

"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

The belief of doctrines, creeds, or the testimony of men, apart from faith in God, availeth nothing to the saving and sanctifying of the soul, whether that testimony be borne by men, by angels, or by men risen from the dead. It is God's testimony to His beloved Son, as recorded in the inspired Word, brought home to the soul by the

Holy Spirit. This is the life-germ of immortality to the soul, the Word of God living and abiding for ever. The resurrection of Lazarus of Bethany from the dead did not convince or convert the Pharisees or scribes; they consulted that they might put him to death a second time.

And the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, though borne witness to by the men who had eaten and drank with Him after He had risen, failed to convince the Jews that He was their Messiah.

The salvation of the soul is threefold. It is the result of the sovereign love of the Father, the atoning work of the Son, and the regenerating, sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost.

XXXII.

THE PARABLE OF
THE PHARISEE AND THE
PUBLICAN.

LUKE XVIII. 9-14.

Verse 9. "And He spake also this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others."

IN the former verses of this chapter, the Lord Jesus had spoken a parable unto this end—that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; a parable full of encouragement to believing and expectant prayer, although appearances may be disheartening, and the answer long in coming. The prophetic interpretation of this parable may apply to Israel, who are apparently so long

forsaken of their God, but on whose behalf, when the Son of Man appears, God will speedily execute judgment.

The Lord now adds another parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.

Verses 10-12. "Two men went up into the temple [outer temple] to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican [tax-gatherer]. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican [tax-gatherer]. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess [acquire].' "

These two men, so different in character, creed, and self-estimation, go up to the outer court of the same temple to pray; and both present themselves before the same holy, holy, holy God. Within the court of the priests, where they dare not enter, stands in full view the altar of burnt offering, whereon the fire was ever burning, the sacrifice ever consuming, and from which the sweet savour of the ascending offering was ever going up to God, and where also stood the brazen sea with its abundance of water for cleansing and sanctification—gloriously presenting before the eye of faith God's provision for the putting away of sin through the atoning

sacrifice of His own spotless Lamb, and God's provision for the sanctification of those who drew near unto Him and worshipped before Him through the regenerating and sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost. All this is unheeded and overlooked by the Pharisee in his self-occupation and self-esteem; he stands and prays "thus with himself." He ventures to approach a righteous and holy God without sacrifice, like Cain, and to pray before Him without the sanctification of the Spirit. Being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish his own righteousness, he pleads only what he was not, what he did, and how much he considered himself better than others.

Verse 13. "And the publican [tax-gatherer], standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, 'God be merciful [*literally*, be propitious on the ground of reconciliation, or atonement made] to me a sinner [the sinner].'"

To the eye of faith the ordinances of the law presented a shadow of those grand and glorious truths which have their reality and substance in Christ. Taught by the Spirit of God, the publican saw in that fire of the

altar ever burning, the righteousness and justice of God, who is a consuming fire. In this light he saw himself a sinner, guilty and condemned, and, without comparing himself with others, he confessed himself "the sinner," as though he stood alone before God.

But the same Spirit which convicted him of sin led him to plead before God the sin-atoning sacrifice. "God be propitious to me the sinner"—not simply merciful, on the vain supposition that a holy and righteous God could pass by sin without a satisfaction being made for the breach of His holy law, and in vindication of His holiness, justice, and truth. Apart from a personal interest in the sacrifice made for sin, he dared not approach to God. In the consciousness of the sin which lurked within his breast, on which he smote, he dared not lift up his eyes in worship before God. The language of his inmost soul may be best expressed in those inspired words, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Verse 14. "I tell you, this man went down to his

house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased [humbled]; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

The one goes down to his house self-justified, but God-condemned; the other self-condemned, but by God-justified. The one exalts himself, and God must abase him; the other humbles himself, and God for His own glory will exalt him.

XXXIII.

THE PARABLE OF THE
TRUE AND GOOD SHEPHERD.

JOHN X. 1-18.

Verses 1-6. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable [similitude] spake Jesus unto them, but they understood not what things they were which He spake unto them."

THAT which apparently gave occasion for this parable of the Lord Jesus was the decision of the Jews that if any man did

confess that Jesus was the "Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue" (chap. ix. 22).

The Lord shows that these professed shepherds of Israel were exercising an authority which they had usurped, and which had not been given them of God, in casting out of the Jewish fold one of Christ's sheep, who up to his present light had confessed Christ, and who was brought into the clear apprehension of His Divine glory as the Son of God (chap. ix. 34-38). Israel, nationally, were the sheep of God's pasture and the flock of His hand, parted off from other nations by the law of commandments contained in ordinances, a separate and distinct people, and this separation was of old designed by God for all-wise purposes.

But they were not all Israel which were of Israel. All were not able to adopt the language of Psalm xxiii. in the faith and assurance of the psalmist who wrote it. Jehovah was the great Shepherd, and the sheep of His pasture were those who, through faith in His promise of a coming Messiah, were enabled to confide in Him. And they

were partakers of His Spirit, having been anointed with that oil (Ps. xxiii. 5).

In due time the Son of God, Jehovah's Shepherd, came in the way of God's appointment, sent by Him, sealed, anointed, and acknowledged of God. And when He came to Calvary Jehovah of Hosts could say of Him: "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the Man that is My fellow; smite the Shepherd" (Zec. xiii. 7), and whom He brought again from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant, as the great Shepherd of the sheep (Heb. xiii. 20).

He came into the Jewish fold—for He was made under the law—to redeem them that were under the law. But He brought His sheep out from under the yoke of legal bondage into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. He had other sheep, even from among the Gentiles, who were not originally of this Jewish fold (verse 16). These also He brought and united into one flock, under one Shepherd, having broken down the middle wall of partition, and He Himself went before them and led them out.

There is doubtless a significancy in the words recorded in Matthew xxviii. 7: "Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee," and referred to again in verses 10, 16.

Verses 7-18. "Then said Jesus unto them again: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the Door of the sheep. All that ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the Door; by Me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture. The thief cometh not but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth; and the wolf catcheth them and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the Good Shepherd and know My sheep, and am known of Mine. As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one fold [flock] and one Shepherd. Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power [authority] to lay it down, and I have power [authority] to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father.'"

In this second parable the Lord Jesus, having entered through the door into the sheep-fold, represents Himself as the Door by which the sheep enter in and are saved,

with liberty to find pasture within the Jewish fold or without.

Having laid down His life for the sheep, and having redeemed them by His blood, He gives them life abundantly, even eternal life, and everlasting security, they being kept in His own hand, and in His Father's hand, from whence none can pluck them.

When the present dispensation closes by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him, Israel will again come under the shepherd-care of Jehovah, their covenant-keeping God.

Then a hundred and forty-four thousand will pass under the rod, sealed for especial protection, and in the cloudy and dark day the eye of the Divine Shepherd will be over His persecuted and scattered flock.

And when the millennial morning dawns the sheep of Jehovah's pasture and the flock of His hand, brought back from all places whither they have been scattered during the cloudy and dark day, will again feed upon the mountains of Israel under one Shepherd-King, the Root and the Offspring of David.

And when the heavenly fold will enclose

within its ample circuit the spirits of just men made perfect, the Church of the first-born written in heaven, and the redeemed out of every nation, kindred, people, and tongue, the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them [feed them as a shepherd], and lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. Thus we see the shepherd character of Jehovah and of Christ brought out in a five-fold aspect :—

1. Israel, nationally, the sheep of Jehovah's pasture.

2. The Church in this present dispensation, composed of Jew and Gentile, elected of God, redeemed by the blood of Christ, quickened and sealed by the Spirit of God, formed into one flock under one Shepherd.

3. The elect of Israel and saved from among the Gentiles, during the times of the man of sin and the great tribulation, the objects of Jehovah's shepherd-care.

4. During the millennial period then the Root and Offspring of David will be the one Shepherd of the whole earth.

5. In the eternal state, when the Lamb of

God shall be the Shepherd, leading the
redeemed into pastures of unfailing verdure
and beside waters of unruffled rest within
the heavenly fold.

"Blessèd fold, no foe can enter,
And no friend departeth thence;
Jesus is their sun, their centre,
And their shield omnipotence."

XXXIV.

THE PARABLE OF THE
VINE AND ITS BRANCHES.

JOHN XV. 1-11.

Verse 1. "I am the true Vine, and My Father is the Husbandman."

WE first notice the time when this parable was spoken, and the place.

It was in the upper chamber at Jerusalem, where the Lord Jesus had partaken of the Passover with His disciples, at the commencement of the fourteenth day of the month Abib, which began at sundown of the thirteenth; as an immediate foreshadowing of the fact that, on the same day and before the next sunset, He Himself, as

the substance of the type, should become the true Paschal Lamb—"Christ our Pass-over, sacrificed for us." It was also after He had instituted the Lord's Supper, the standing memorial during the present dispensation of His sufferings and death.

John xiv. had been spoken whilst sitting at the table, after he had washed His disciples' feet, and taken His garments again. Now He calls upon His disciples to "arise" and follow Him, as He went forth to give the world this proof of His love and obedience to His heavenly Father.

But ere He closed this season of communion with His disciples by the wondrous prayer of John xvii., He gave them this parable of the Vine.

These five chapters of John's Gospel, from the thirteenth to the seventeenth, constitute a peculiarly sacred portion of Holy Scripture.

From the commencement, the Lord Jesus realised "that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father," "that He was come from God, and went to God"; so that IN SPIRIT He takes

His place beyond death, and enters as the High Priest of our profession in the value of His atoning blood within the veil.

He had taught His disciples that except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, so that union with Himself must be in the power of the Holy Ghost in resurrection life, and the abiding in Himself which is spoken of in this chapter must be by faith in a risen Christ.

In the former dispensation under the first covenant, Israel nationally was the vine, and Jehovah, the triune God, was the Husbandman. (See Psalm lxxx. 8 to end.)

In Israel the flesh of man was put to the test to see if, under the most favourable circumstances, it was capable of bringing forth fruit unto God; but here, as in every other case, man under responsibility failed. (See Isaiah v. 1-7.) Under the new covenant, Messiah, as Son of God, is the "ROOT," and as Son of David He is the OFFSHOOT, "the BRANCH," the "SON OF MAN," whom Jehovah made strong for Himself (Psalm lxxx. 15-17), on the ground of whose atoning work and prevalent intercession Jehovah will

plant Israel again with His whole heart and with His whole soul (Jeremiah xxxii. 41), and then "Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit" (Isaiah xxvii. 6).

During the present, or Church dispensation, Jesus Himself takes His place as the true Vine, and His Father is the Husbandman; not Jehovah, as of old, the Sovereign dealing with the nation, but God the Father dealing with those who, through faith in Christ, have become His children (John i. 12).

There are three beautiful Scriptural figures in some points similar, in others different—the lampstand in the Tabernacle, the shaft in the centre representing Christ as the source, centre, and subject of testimony, in the power of the Holy Ghost, associated with the six branches in **LIGHT-GIVING** before God.

Secondly, The head and the members, Christ and those who partake of His Spirit manifesting the **LIFE** of God before men.

Third, The vine and the branches, emblematic of Christ and His disciples in **FRUIT-BEARING** to God.

It is with this last we have now to do.

Verses 2-11. "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the Vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without Me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples. As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye in My love. If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

In order to fruit-bearing, two things are essential—First, Living union by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. Second, Continuous abiding by faith.

It is not enough that a branch should be to all appearance a part of, and in, the vine, except the sap of the vine flows into the branch; so, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. viii. 9), however apparently consistent in character

and fair in profession. The scion may be grafted into the stock, but unless the sap of the stock flows into the scion there will be no fruit-bearing from the graft.

A time is coming when nominal profession will be tested for eternity, and even now probationally those not bringing forth corresponding fruit may be removed from places of responsibility (1 Cor. xi. 30; Rev. ii. 5).

This twofold, living union is expressed by Christ thus: "He that abideth IN ME, and I IN HIM, the same bringeth forth much fruit" (John xv. 4, 5).

Secondly, Continuous abiding. It is on this point the teaching of the Lord Jesus in this chapter is so emphatic and important. It is essential for LIFE that the living sap of the vine should flow into the branch, and this is by the indwelling Spirit of God; but in order to FRUIT-BEARING there must be a continuous supply of the living sap, and this is received by faith.

In fruit-bearing there is development—first the blossom, then the fruit, then the maturity of the fruit. For this a continuous, an ever-fresh, supply of sap is needed.

The secret of continuous and mature fruit-bearing is threefold :

“ If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, YE also shall continue in the Son and in the Father ” (1 John ii. 24).

“ That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith ” (Eph. iii. 17).

“ The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God ” (Gal. ii. 20).

Second, The obedience of LOVE :

“ If a man love Me, he will keep My words : and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with Him ” (John xiv. 23).

“ If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love ” (John xv. 10).

Third, The COMMUNION of the Holy Ghost :

“ In that day [when the Comforter has come] ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in ME, and I in you ” (John xiv. 20).

“ He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you ” (John xvi. 14).

It is as strengthened with might by God's Spirit in the inner man that Christ dwells in the heart by faith (Eph. iii. 16, 17), and the fruits which are the result of this living and abiding union are "the fruits of the Spirit," "which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God" (Phil. i. 11).

For life, growth, and fruitfulness three things are essential :

First, Living and walking in the presence of God, in the light and sunshine of His smile and favour.

Second, In living fellowship with the Person of Christ as branches of the Vine.

Third, The power of the Holy Ghost, as the shower that falls, the dew that distils, and the rivulets of living water that nourish and refresh the roots.

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