

THE
PARABLES OF OUR LORD
AND
WHAT THEY TEACH.

Anonymous

“He spake many things unto them in parables.”
(MATT. XIII. 3.)



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CONCLUSION.

THE PARABLES OF OUR LORD.

INTRODUCTION.

IN considering the subject of the parables of the New Testament, questions immediately arise as to what is a parable? and why did our Lord so often speak in parables?

The word "parable," in the New Testament, is a translation of the Greek word, *parabolee*, and is always translated "parable" in the Authorised Version, except in Mark iv. 30, where it is "comparison" (but "parable" would be correct); in Luke iv. 23, where it is "proverb"; and in Hebrews ix. 9; xi. 19, where it is "figure." The word is derived from *paraballo*, and signifies literally, "a placing one thing by the side of another," a "comparison;" and hence a "simile," "similitude," "parable."

A short narrative was related, with more or less of detail, but always complete in itself. Alongside of this ran, as it were, its interpretation; as we see beautifully brought out in the parable of the sower, and our Lord's own interpretation. The sower, the seed,

and the various sorts of ground, have that which answers to each.

This, in short, shews us what is a parable. It has often been said there are no parables given us by John in his Gospel. It is true that the above Greek word is not used by this apostle, but he uses another word (*paroimia*), translated "proverb," in John xvi. 25, 29, and 2 Peter ii. 22, and "parable," in John x. 6. Now, seeing that John omits all the parables given by the other Evangelists—in keeping with the character of his Gospel, for he once only uses the term, "kingdom of God" (chap. iii. 3)—the question arises, Is the passage in John x. 6 a "parable"? It is Christ as the Good Shepherd, and a little consideration will shew that it is not like any of the other parables, and partakes more of the character of an "illustration" than of a parable, and is rightly translated "allegory."*

Our Lord himself introduces His parables by a quotation from the Old Testament. He

* The "Revisers," in both the above-named passages in the Hebrews, have translated the word "parable;" but it is difficult to see how the Old Testament tabernacle can be "a parable for the time [now] present." (Chap. ix. 9.) Many of the things named are *in contrast* to what we now have, in and by the finished work of Christ. And in chapter xi. 19 we cannot see any trace of a parable. In the purpose of Abraham, Isaac was put to death, and he received him back from death, not really, but in a "figure."

spoke to the people in parables, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world." (Matt. xiii. 35.) This is generally marked as a quotation from Psalm lxxviii. 2. That reads (with ver. 3), "I will open my mouth in a parable, I will utter dark sayings of old; *which we have heard and known*, and our fathers have told us;" whereas our Lord speaks of things "*kept secret from the foundation of the world.*" What were these secret things He was about to explain to them? Our Lord Himself tells us. The disciples asked Him why He spoke to the people in parables. He replied, "Because it is given unto *you* to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to *them* it is not given" (Matt. xiii. 11), though some of the parables were so plain and pointed that we read the chief priests and Pharisees perceived that he spake of them. (Chap. xxi. 45.)

Why were only the disciples to know these mysteries? It was because of the judicial blindness of His once-favoured people. He spoke to them in parables, "because they, seeing, see not; and hearing, hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not under-

stand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." (Matt. xiii. 13-15.)

Thus it is plain *why* our Lord spoke in parables. His followers were to understand the mysteries of His kingdom, but the Jews were not; they had closed their eyes, and judicial blindness now enshrouded them. Christ had come to His own, and His own had not received Him. The Pharisees had already been guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost, by declaring that He cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. (Chap. xii. 24.) Some of the parables were given to the disciples only, and what He had spoken in public He explained to them in private.

There were "mysteries," then, revealed by the parables: things above and beyond what had been recorded in the Old Testament, and which no one could possibly have discovered: they must be *revealed*. Without this who could have known that Satan was busy catching away the seed sown by the Gospel? or that *he* was sowing tares among the wheat in the kingdom? Who could have

known that God was making a marriage feast for His Son, to which all were welcome? or that there was joy in heaven over one repenting sinner? Who could have conceived the manner of reception the Father gives to a returning prodigal? or could have imagined the dread scene of the rich man and Lazarus when they had quitted this world? These are some of the divine mysteries Christ would have His disciples know.

To us also—Christians in this day—it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom. Christ calls us friends, to whom He reveals what He is doing. (John xv. 15.) “We have the mind of Christ.” (1 Cor. ii. 16.) Happily, of several of the parables we have our Lord’s own explanation. May He give us, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, the true interpretation of them all.

On considering the parables of our Lord, it will be seen that they may be classified under a few general headings, shewing—

I. The condition of the people of Israel, and their being set aside as a testimony for God; such as the parables of the Wicked Husbandmen, the Fig-tree, and the Two Sons.

II. The setting up of the kingdom, and Satan’s opposition to it; such as the Sower, the Tares, and the Leaven.

III. The way of God in bringing into the

kingdom; such as the Great Supper, the Lost Sheep, and the Prodigal Son.

IV. The responsibilities of those connected with the kingdom; such as the Unmerciful Servant, the Talents, and the Ten Virgins.

Two of the parables—the Mustard Seed and the Leaven—shew clearly that there is a great similarity between the terms “ Kingdom of heaven ” and “ Kingdom of God,” seeing that these same parables are referred to the kingdom of heaven in Matthew and the kingdom of God in Luke. While “ kingdom of God ” is more general, “ kingdom of heaven ” is found only in the Gospel by Matthew, and that seems to give it an especial reference to Israel. They were looking for an earthly kingdom, it was important to turn their eyes to heaven, the place whither their Messiah must go before He comes to set up His kingdom in power on earth.

The parables have been used as the medium of much false teaching. Where our Lord Himself did not interpret, false teachers have been busy; indeed, we all need to be on our guard, or we may go astray, especially in interpreting the details of a parable.* We

* For instance, persons have attempted to prove from the Prodigal Son, that there is no need of the atonement. The son was received at once into his father's house, upon his confession, without any allusion to another having to die for him! entirely ignoring the many proofs of that

must remember that a parable is a "comparison," mostly of natural things (with which all are more or less familiar), with things of a deeper and spiritual meaning. The great thing is to gather the teaching of a parable as *a whole*, and then take up the details, as far as they are in agreement therewith, rather than to insist on every detail, which very few of the parables will allow. For instance, it will not do to conclude that, because in the parable of the Virgins there were five wise and five foolish virgins, there will be an equal number of professors lost and saved. This forms no part of the teaching of the parable. The fact is, that in the parables we need the teaching of the Holy Spirit, as we do in every other part of the word of God. Our Lord explained the parables to His disciples, in His own presence, privately; may we, in the same presence, seek to learn them also.

We have seen the solemn position of Israel in the days of our Lord on earth. They had not received Him, and were *not* to understand the mysteries of the kingdom. Let us not

doctrine elsewhere. From the parable of the Wheat and Tares it has often been contended that the wicked should not be put out of the church, because the tares are to be allowed to grow with the wheat until the harvest, overlooking that this is a similitude of the kingdom, and *not* of the church.

forget the great responsibilities devolving on Christendom in this our day. We see much error and evil around us on every hand. Surely the light that many had has become darkness, and, alas! how great is that darkness. Whereas God is faithful, and has promised that he that will do His will, shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God. (John vii. 17.) But if any shut their ears, and turn away from the truth, a time is hastening on when that Wicked shall be revealed, and God will send strong delusion that they should believe *a lie*. (2 Thess. ii. 8, 11, 12.)

May God bless our study of the parables of our Lord, and enable us to understand the mysteries of the kingdom; to see what His purposes are respecting His own beloved ones, and concerning Christendom, which, as a whole, is fast hastening on to apostasy; and, while we enjoy our privileges, which are many, may we seek grace to answer to our responsibilities, which are great, remembering that "unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required."



PART I.

THE SETTING ASIDE OF ISRAEL.

THE TWO SONS.

MATTHEW XXI. 28-32.

“What think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, 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 father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans 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 and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.”

We have our Lord's own explanation of this parable. The chief priests and the elders of the people had come to Him, demanding by what authority He was acting. He had entered the day before into Jerusalem in triumph, fulfilling the prophecy that said, “Behold thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt, the foal

of an ass." Garments were strewn in the way, and branches of trees; and the multitude cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest!" He then went into the temple, and cast out those that sold and bought, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers; but He healed the blind and the lame who came to Him. At all this the chief priests were "sore displeased," and in the morning they demanded of Him on what authority He did these things.

Our Lord then asked them a question respecting John; and because they could not, or would not, answer Him, neither would He tell them by whose authority He had done those things. "But"—He would tell them something—"what think ye? A certain man had two sons," &c.

The chief priests and elders were those who said, "I go, sir," and went not. The people were to observe what the scribes and the Pharisees *said*, for they sat in the seat of Moses (chap. xxiii. 2), but they were not to follow them—they "went not." They were blind leaders of the blind, and were not to be followed. He Himself would answer the question He had asked them: "John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not:" neither were they fol-

lowing Christ. On the other hand, those who made no profession—the publicans and the harlots—had believed John, and were entering into the kingdom of God before them. This parable is evidently spoken emphatically against the chief men of Israel.

Alas! we see the same great profession in these days. Men in high position in the so-called church assume to be God's priests on earth, but, alas! are not many of them blind? By profession they say, "I go, sir;" but when we contrast Christianity with Christendom, we find that many of them "go not," and they really mislead those that would know the way of life.

This parable may, indeed, have a wider application. Those who have heard the good news of salvation may be compared to those who say, "I go, sir," and to those who say "I will not." Alas! how many who say, "I go, sir," do not really go. They are satisfied with the lip service and the routine of observances, which, indeed, is but a solemn, but in many cases a fatal, way of saying, "I go, sir." But God knows the heart, and there is no deceiving Him. How important is that word of our Lord, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." Yes, how many say, "I go, sir," and yet go not; for in reality they have not life. It is *life* man needs before he can really go and work in God's vineyard,

however high his profession. This is only to be had of Him who is the way, the truth, and the life; and God, in His mercy, is blessing His message of salvation to the careless and ignorant, and they believe the Gospel of God (1 Pet. iv. 17), and are saved.



THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN.

MATTHEW XXI. 33-45; MARK XII. 1-12; LUKE XX. 9-19.

“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: and when the time 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. 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 on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. 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. 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, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I 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. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.”—MATTHEW XXI. 33-45.

Our Lord’s own words give us also the interpretation of this parable: “The king-

dom of God shall be taken from you [Jews], and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." This was the result, after constant and repeated failure of yielding fruit to the householder, and at last of open rebellion and murder.

The figure is taken from the East, where men do not generally pay rent for the land in money, but in fruits—a certain percentage of the increase of the land, according to the nature of the soil and other circumstances. In some cases it may have been paid in money, as we read in the Canticles (chap. viii. 11): "Solomon had a vineyard at Baalhamon: he let out the vineyard unto keepers: every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand pieces of silver." And verse 12 would seem to point out the proportion that was to be the keeper's share, and what paid to the owner: "My vineyard, which is mine, is before me: thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred." This would, doubtless, be, as in our parable, when the owner provided vines, winepress, tower, and everything but the labour; for when arable fields are let in the East, a percentage much less than this is paid as rent, the tenant having to find seed, implements, &c., as well as labour. It has been stated as about a tenth of the produce.

The owner providing *all things*, and calling for the chief part of the fruits, is the more applicable to what God did for Israel. He took them up as Syrians ready to perish (Deut. xxvi. 5), did everything for them, and then looked for fruit.

We read that when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them." They could not well fail to see the application of this parable, because of what they had read in the prophet Isaiah: "Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved, touching his vineyard. My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein, and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes." (Isa. v. 1, 2.)

The appeal is then very pathetic: "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" There was, alas! no remedy: the hedge was taken away, the wall broken down, and the vineyard laid waste. Neither could there be any mistake as to who this vineyard was: "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel,

and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry."

Now, in our Lord's day on earth, Israel had but to look back, and see that this prophecy had been fulfilled. Israel was not at that time the flourishing vine, nor the fruitful vineyard, it had formerly been—at least in measure. Now they were to hear that the guilt was brought home to *them*. They had ill-treated God's prophets, stoned the messengers, and now the Son was there: how would they treat Him? He was the stone that was to become the head of the corner, but which the builders rejected, for it would indeed set them all aside. He was the stone on which they stumbled and fell when He was here in grace; but when he comes in judgment, He will grind His rejecters to powder.

But though the chief men of Israel knew that our Lord spoke of them, and though they had seen the prophecy of Isaiah fulfilled in their very midst, yet it all had no effect on them: they wished to seize Him then and there, but feared the people. Thus they sought to verify the parable. The vineyard should be taken from them, and "given to a nation* bringing forth the fruits thereof."

* The word, "nation," need present no difficulty; it is quite in keeping with the rest of the parable, and in 1 Peter ii. 9 we read, "Ye are a chosen generation, a

How characteristic is the expression, "Let us seize on his inheritance"—"the inheritance shall be ours." Yes, man—and in this case religious man—desires to get rid of God's control, to seize on the inheritance, and fully follow out his own corrupt ways.

A useful lesson we may surely learn from this parable. God had asked what more could He have done for Israel? May we not ask, What more could He have done for His church? And when we look at what it was at the first, and what it still is in the mind of God—"the pillar and ground of the truth;" "the body of Christ;" "one body;" "His house," &c.—and now see its broken and corrupt condition, we can but sigh, and cry, by reason of its state, and lament that Christ will have to say to that which bears the name of His church, "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Thank God, He also says, "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.)

royal priesthood, an *holy nation*, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

THE BARREN FIG-TREE.

LUKE XIII. 6-9.

“A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.”

There were some present at that time who told our Lord of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. By our Lord's reply, it appears evident that those who related this, judged the sufferers to have been great sinners, or God would not have allowed such a dreadful thing. This, alas! is a conclusion men are always too ready to draw when any calamity happens: they think what sinners such must have been, rather than take warning to themselves.

They may also have thought that our Lord would now become a patriot and bring about their deliverance from the authority of the Romans. But no, He knew too well how they had brought the bondage upon themselves,

and how often it was their own sedition that brought such punishment as is here related.*

Our Lord turns it to their own individual profit. He asked if they supposed these Galileans were "sinners above all" others, because they had suffered such things? or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell? He said, "Nay; but except *ye* repent, ye shall all likewise perish." They should look to themselves: *they* were equally guilty. He knew how they despised the Galileans (see John iii. 41, 52), and prided themselves on their fancied superiority: *they* should also perish, unless they repented. Yea, more, He would give them a true description of themselves, and in a parable tell them their end.

They were compared to a fig-tree, from which fruit had been sought—sought, not once only, but for three years, answering, doubtless, to their probation under the law, under the prophets, and then under grace. Under the law the Master found no fruit—they broke it entirely; under the prophets, they heeded them not—He found none; and under grace He found none—they went about to kill our Lord. The Master ordered the fig-tree to be cut down.

* See an instance of this in Josephus, "Antiquities" xvii. 9, 3.

Still grace lingered: the "dresser" begged it might have one more trial—a *fourth* year, as we may say; and we know our Lord prayed for His murderers that their sin might not be laid to their charge; and in sending forth His apostles to preach "repentance and remission of sins," they were to *begin at Jerusalem*.

Alas! it was all in vain. Our Lord had wept over Jerusalem. He would often have gathered them under His wing, but they would not. Still they had one more trial. Remission of sins was preached to them, and the Holy Ghost was sent down, convicting the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. (John xvi. 8-11.) Still there was no fruit, and Stephen had to charge home their sin upon them, reminding them of the three former trials their nation had had—answering, as we have seen, to the three years of the parable, together now with the fourth year—"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist *the Holy Ghost*: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of *the prophets* have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which shewed before the coming of *the Just One*, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received *the law* by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it." (Acts vii. 51-53.)

The Master's sentence hung over the guilty people: "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" Why occupy the ground, if useless? Why be there to hinder others? This was the very thing charged home upon their rulers—they would not enter the kingdom themselves, and hindered those desirous of doing so. Yea, more: the apostle declared that the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles through them. (Rom. ii. 24.) The judgment, though long delayed, fell at last upon that guilty city, and more guilty people, once the fig-tree in the vineyard of God.

The same principle applies to the professing church as a whole, and to each one in particular. Where much is given, much will be required. The servant which knows his Lord's will, and does not prepare himself, nor doeth His will, shall be beaten with many stripes. (Luke xii. 47, 48.) Can we not almost hear our Lord saying, "why cumbereth it the ground?" The time hastens on when "judgment shall begin at the house of God." Let each that bears the name of Christ look around, and seek to get God's judgment as to the whole professing church, and then ask himself, What fruit am I yielding to my Lord? He has done much for me. Oh, His love, His death, for me!—His long-suffering, His patience, His care over me!

How do I requite it all? What fruit do I bear that is pleasing in His eyes?

It is perfectly natural that God should look for fruit. "Whoso keepeth the fig-tree shall eat the fruit thereof" (Prov. xxvii. 16), and thus we are exhorted to "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." (Col. i. 10.) May it be so, and to Him be all the glory!



PART II.

THE SETTING UP OF THE KINGDOM, AND SATAN'S OPPOSITION TO IT.

THE SOWER.

MATTHEW XIII. 3-9; MARK IV. 3-9; LUKE VIII. 5-8.

“Behold, a sower went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up, and choked them: but other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”—MATTHEW XIII. 3-9.

In the parables which we have already considered we saw the setting aside of Israel because they had utterly failed to produce any fruit towards God. This introduces us to an entirely new order of things: God now takes the character of a sower. Man had proved himself to be *fruitless*, and now pro-

bation had ceased, and God became a *giver*. This makes the parable of the Sower a sort of key-parable. Our Lord said to His disciples, "Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know *all* parables?" (Mark iv. 13.) And it is strange that to this day this is a point that many professing Christians do not see. They are busily looking for something in man, something that can be cultivated and improved and made fit for God. All a grievous mistake! Man had been tried in innocence; without law; under law; under the prophets; under Christ; but all ended in failure, and now a Sower must go out to sow His seed, and His servants sow it in the wide world.

The parable is beautifully simple. Who has not seen a sower, scattering his seed over the ploughed ground? And in places where there are no hedges some of the seed literally falls on the way side and is trodden down by passers-by, or picked up by the birds; and other seed falls where there is but little earth covering the hard rock beneath, and some among the choking thorns; all forming a scene often witnessed in Palestine by the "great multitudes" to whom this parable was addressed.

Happily we have our Lord's own explanation of this parable. The seed sown is "the word of the kingdom" in Matthew, and "the

word of God " in Luke—God's good news to man. And it very vividly brings before us the obstacles which lie in the way of man's reception of the preached word. The chief opponent is the arch-enemy Satan. He attends the preaching and catches away the seed lest it should take root. That enmity which began in the garden of Eden still exists with all its malignity and malice: he is not only God's enemy, but he is man's, though poor fallen man knows it not, yea, will not believe it when he is told. *Why* man feels not the chain of Satan by which he is led on to perdition is soon told. Satan knows what man's propensities are, and takes care to put the chain in the direction which man *likes* to go; so he feels not the pulling, but blindly follows.

The seed by the way side is when the hearers understand not the word, and Satan immediately catches away the seed, and none takes root.

A very solemn fact we find as to the stony-ground hearer. He is said to hear the word, and immediately he receives it with joy. But alas! there is no root, and so when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he is offended: the seed seems to spring up, but by the heat of the sun it is scorched and withered away. The hearer has indeed heard a lovely story—the story of

God's grace—and is pleased with it; but alas! that is all.

Now here are two “immediately’s:” he receives the word *immediately*; but when persecution ariseth because of the word, he *immediately* gives it all up. Surely this should teach us wisdom as to pronouncing hastily as to the results of the seed sown. The expressions used are strong: the word is received, and received with joy; and we might too hastily conclude that the work must be real. But, alas! the conscience may not have been reached, and thus the hearer is described as having “no root in himself,” and persecution arising he gives it all up. And we, if we have hastily pronounced it “a conversion,” are put to shame.

The hearer who receives the word among the thorns is one who “heareth the word,” but it is choked by the ordinary cares of life, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things. The heart is full of its own troubles; and this, combined with what the man is pursuing, renders the seed unfruitful: it is lost.

The last named is when the seed falls upon “good ground,” and it brings forth fruit in various measures. But how came the ground to be good? Is there any good ground in fallen humanity? We know from other scriptures that there is not: “the whole

world lieth in the wicked one." "There is none good; no, *not one*." Then we are sure it must have been "prepared" beforehand. Even in nature, the soil in this sin-stricken earth requires to be prepared for the seed: how much more then is it needed in that which is "shapen in iniquity." Thus we see how the whole work is of God, as we sometimes sing—

"Of all the gifts Thy love bestows,
Thou giver of all good!
Not heaven itself a richer knows
Than the Redeemer's blood.

Faith, too, that trusts the blood through grace,
From that same love we gain;
Else, sweetly as it suits our case,
The gift had been in vain."

Those who receive the word on good ground are, in contrast to the way-side hearers, said to understand it, and keep it (Luke); and now it is too deep to be caught away by Satan, or to be scorched by the sun; for we are God's husbandry. In Luke it is described as "an honest and good heart," whereas man's heart is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked."

This parable, in a wonderful way, draws aside the curtain between us and the unseen world. God has sent forth His servants to preach "the word;" but Satan, who is unseen, is busy to prevent its taking effect.

And it is worthy of remark that in none of the cases named does the word fail to produce fruit because of the sins of the hearers. In one it is persecution because of the word, and in another the cares of life and the deceitfulness of riches. In each case it is Satan. If he does not catch away the seed at once, he knows how to stir up persecution when the word has been listened to ; and then the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things (and that latter expression would include mere pleasure seeking) are powerful weapons in his hand for the destruction of souls. Yes, as we have said, the work of salvation must be of God from first to last ; and thank God, He does this and does it all. He prepares the seed, and sends forth His sowers ; He prepares the soil, and makes the seed take root ; and thus it brings forth fruit that shall abound to His glory for ever and ever.

THE WHEAT AND THE TARES.

MATTHEW XIII. 24-30.

“The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. 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.”

Here again we see how busy Satan is in seeking to mar the work of God in building up His kingdom. What Satan cannot hinder he will try to corrupt and spoil. We have our Lord's explanation of the parable. He Himself is the Sower; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one, called here *His* “enemy.”

Thus we get the distinct teaching that ungodly people are being associated with the

kingdom by Satan, and are there so mingled with the saints, the "children of the kingdom," that the instruction is to let both go on until the end of the age. Then the Son of man will send forth His angels and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity. These shall be cast into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Along with the fact here revealed that there are "children of the wicked one" associated with the kingdom of heaven, it is important to see that the instruction to let all go on together has nothing to do with allowing evil or wicked persons to remain in the assembly. Here it is in the world, and concerning the great outward profession called "the kingdom of heaven." There are other scriptures quite as distinct, shewing that evil is not to be allowed in the assembly. For instance, when evil had been made manifest in the assembly at Corinth, the injunction is, "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person." (1 Cor. v. 13.)*

* Notwithstanding that it has been pointed out long since that the parable speaks of "the world," and "the kingdom of heaven," and not "the church," yet Archbishop Trench argues that this parable expressly forbids all attempts to root out evil from the church, and treats the kingdom of heaven as synonymous with "the church,"

Another important point to see is that "the children of the wicked one" will continue in this connection until the end of the age, and at the last it will be God's instruments who will purge out the evil. This at once shows how vain and delusive it is to expect that the world will be converted by the means of Missionary, Bible, Tract and other Societies, together with the preaching of the gospel. God's messengers will not convert the world, but are sent to "visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name" (Acts xv. 14), and then to instruct and edify the same when called out. Now surely it is very important to have God's thoughts about what He is doing, so that our prayers and labours and expectations may be in unison and fellowship with the Lord Himself.

And this should in no way cool down our zeal. The gospel is to be preached fully and freely to every creature under heaven, and men are to be exhorted and invited with all the earnestness that the love of Christ and a love of souls can beget, *praying* men to be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. v. 19.) Yea, with all the more zeal, because we know from the parables that Satan is endeavouring to

quoting the words of Augustine, "not two bodies of Christ, but one body in which now are wicked men. but only as evil humours in the natural body."

hinder the work, and it was while men *slept* that Satan accomplished his purpose.

Before leaving this parable it may be well to see that it does not clash with the Christian's hope of the coming of his Lord. The parable does say, "Gather ye together *first* the tares," thus leaving the wheat; and some may not easily see how this agrees with the church being taken up first, leaving the wicked, according to the epistles to the Thessalonians.

The explanation, doubtless is, that here it is the *kingdom* that is under consideration, and not the church. We are now in both; but when we are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, according to 1 Thessalonians iv. 15-18, the kingdom will go on. And the end of the world, or age, is not till after the church is taken away. We know from scripture that there will be saints on the earth *after* the church is taken up. So that the order of events is

The taking up of the church.

The kingdom goes on, and others are brought into the kingdom.

The wicked are taken *first* at the end of the age.

God will establish His kingdom in righteousness.

Thus we see that this parable is concerning the kingdom of heaven, and not the church; that evil men will be in the kingdom to the end of the age—the direct work of Satan.

They shall be eventually gathered out and sent into perdition. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father"—a glorious portion surely, but not to be confounded with the glory that awaits those who will be caught up to meet their Lord in the air. May the Lord hasten it in His own time!



THE GROWTH OF SEED.

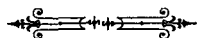
MARK IV. 26-29.

“So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.”

The teaching here is that the seed is completely fitted to produce fruit. The seed is placed in the ground by man, but *he* cannot make it grow, nor does he understand how it is that it does grow. He sleeps at night, and rises at day, and can see that the seed has taken root, and is springing up, but “he knoweth not how; for the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself.” Even in nature God has so ordered it that the seed should fructify: “first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.” Then the harvest, and the sickle gathers in the fruits of the earth.

So is the kingdom of God. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one

that is born of the Spirit.” (John iii. 8.) Thus it begins—takes root; and God is the Husbandman. A Paul may plant, and an Apollos water, but God must give the increase. And thus, as all must be begun by God, all is increased by God, and all will surely be gathered into His garner by-and-by. On the other hand, our Lord said, “Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.” (Matt. xv. 13.) While, of the Christian, we read, “Ye are God’s husbandry” (“tillage” in the margin). He sows the good seed; He waters, watches over, and tends the growing, that we may grow up into Him in all things. And a glorious harvest is approaching, when we shall be gathered into His heavenly garner. To Him be all the praise!



THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED.

MATTHEW XIII. 31, 32; MARK IV. 30-32; LUKE XIII. 18, 19.

“The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.”—Matt. xiii. 31, 32.

It has been found to be a difficulty to point out a “mustard-seed” that would grow large enough to answer the description in the parable.* This does not, however, affect the teaching intended to be conveyed. The kingdom of heaven began as a small, insignificant thing in the eyes both of the world and of those who claimed to be God’s people on earth. It has, however, grown to be like a tree, with “great branches.” The only difficulty is, as to who are pointed out by the “birds of the air.” We get the key to its meaning in the parable of the Sower. In that there are also “fowls of the air,” but they

* It is judged by most to be the *Salvadora Persica*, which (1) has a small seed; (2) it grows large enough for birds to lodge in its branches; (3) its berries are used as “mustard.” A tree has been found near the Dead Sea which answers the above description.

devour the seed sown by the wayside, and this, in the interpretation of our Lord, is said to be the work of Satan (Mark iv. 15); they must, then, be associated with that which is evil. (Compare also Acts x. 12; James iii. 7; Rev. xviii. 2.) Now, as we see plainly in the parable of the wheat and tares how evil men are introduced, so it is here: they take shelter among the branches of the great tree.* And, alas! we have only to look around at the professing church to see how many of the unconverted are sheltered under its branches. *These* too, are not simply those who come to quiet their consciences by becoming religious, but, alas! many are to be found in the higher branches of place and power, daring to take upon themselves the "cure of souls," and purchase the same as they would a mere worldly profession! Over their heads is said, in the Church of England, "Receive the Holy Ghost, for the office and work of a priest in the church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained," &c.; and forthwith

* The tree "with great branches" seems to point out in scripture a great public power, something that can be recognised by all. Thus Pharaoh and Assyria are compared to great trees (Ezek. xxxi.), and Nebuchadnezzar was "a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great." (Dan. iv. 10.)

they take shelter under the great tree. If the blessings connected with the kingdom were alluded to, doubtless we should read of the fruits to be gathered from the tree; but of this there is not a word. It is simply a tree with great branches, in which the birds take shelter; not, indeed, becoming actually a part of the tree but simply finding shelter among its branches—a type, surely, of the evil we see all around us. May God open the eyes of those who can see nothing but progress and blessing. Blessings we have, through mercy, but they are not what the parable teaches.



THE LEAVEN.

MATTHEW XIII. 33; LUKE XIII. 20, 21.

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.”

This follows the parable of the mustard-seed, and is similar in its teaching. Seeing that scripture uniformly uses leaven as a type of evil,* it is surprising that this parable is so repeatedly explained as teaching the “invisible working of *grace*.” It must be because Christians, who look for universal progress, improvement, and a converted world, are loth to see that our Lord, instead of this bright prospect, foretold evil first—evil in the kingdom of heaven, or the professing church which now answers to it. There will, indeed, be a time of universal blessing, as we know (Isa. xi. 9), but not until the Lord Himself comes, and *purges out* of His kingdom all things that offend, as is

* See Matthew xvi. 6, 11; Mark viii. 15; 1 Corinthians v. 6-8; Galatians v. 11; as well as leaven being forbidden in all the sacrifices by fire set forth in the Old Testament. (Lev. ii. 11.) Leviticus xxiii. 17 may seem to be an exception, but it is not, for there the church on earth is typified, and, alas! with this there is more or less of failure.

taught in Matthew xiii. 41, and other passages.

Without a doubt, then, leaven signifies evil *doctrine* (as "the tares," and "the birds of the air," pointed out evil *persons*), and, as its name implies, it works *secretly*, as yeast when mixed with meal. And can anyone be so blind as not to see how wide-spread are evil doctrines in this our day? The Bible, that was once appealed to by all, is now itself called in question, and assailed on every hand. Instead of *that* being their judge (John xii. 48), men, while calling it the word of God, are judging it! We must not wonder, then, that doctrines are thought little of amid the running wild of men's thoughts. "Damnable heresies" is God's own term respecting the evils that are associated with His professing people, and by "feigned words" many are drawn aside. (2 Pet. ii. 1-3.) How needful, then, to be able, by the word and the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to discern all that is not of God, and to turn away from such!

We must not overlook the words "the whole"—the whole will be leavened. Now we are all apt to think that, while there doubtless is a great deal of evil associated with the professing church, what a mercy it is that *we* have escaped. But have any escaped? Are any *not* a part of the whole? and the leaven



was to work until the whole was leavened. It is not meant that the evil has been allowed when manifested. It is to be hoped not, but that the instruction in 1 Corinthians v. has been regarded: "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened." (Vers. 6, 7.)

It is indeed "the kingdom of heaven" in the parable and not the church, but are we not in both? and while the whole of the great profession is leavened with evil, let us see to it that no evil is allowed in the assembly.

Still we are surrounded with it, and we are in danger of being involved in its contamination; and, alas! we see how Christians may be under its influence and yet be quite unconscious of it. Doubtless one reason is that it is not expected to be there. Christians who can put forth much truth on some points are not thought likely to be wrong on other points. And then how little real belief is there in the many plain declarations of scripture as to the presence of evil in the professing church. And here again comes in a delusion, for many will say, "Yes, no doubt it will be so in the last days, but that is a long way off yet; we shall not be here then." But are we not in them now? Listen to the word: "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 it is the last time." (1 John ii. 18.)

We are therefore exhorted to try the spirits, for many false prophets are gone forth into the world. It is our duty therefore to examine everything by God's word, and to hold fast to that which is the truth. May the Lord enable us to discern the good from the evil; to choose the good and avoid the evil.



THE HIDDEN TREASURE.

MATTHEW XIII. 44.

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

The interpretation commonly given to this parable, is, that when a man sees the value there is in Christ, he gives up and abandons all that he may possess Christ.

We doubt not that this is a mistaken view of the parable. When does any man ever sell “all that he hath”? and if he did, would it purchase Christ? The mere giving up is not enough. We read, “Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.” (1 Cor. xiii. 3.) Whereas the invitation of the gospel is, to buy, “without money, and without price.” (Isa. lv. 1.) Christians are, indeed, called to be loosed from all earthly ties. Our Lord said, “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke xiv. 26.) But that is not simply that

I may win salvation, but when I have that, I am called to forsake all that I have (ver. 33), that I may be Christ's *disciple*, or true follower. Philippians iii. 4-11 has also been quoted, but surely this was in consequence of the apostle possessing salvation that he desired to win Christ, and not that he might gain salvation by his self-denial.

We doubt not the parable points to Christ as the One who finds a treasure in His people, and for joy sells all that He has, that He may obtain possession of it; as, indeed, we read, "who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame." (Heb. xii. 2.) "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes *he became poor*, that ye through his poverty might be rich." (2 Cor. viii. 9.) Yes, as the parable says, He sold all that He had; and, as the passage from the Epistle to the Hebrews proves, He kept in view the *joy* that was set before Him, which joy our parable also speaks of.

We must, indeed, look at who Christ was, and the position He had as Creator (all things were made by Him, and for Him), and as God from eternity; and then look at our Lord in His humiliation, His agony in the garden, and His shameful death—being made sin for us, and enduring the hiding of God's face—before we can even get a glimpse of what it

cost Him to purchase the field in which lay hidden the treasure of His heart.

But there is another point in the parable. It says, not only that the man purchased the treasure, but also that he bought *the field* in which the treasure was hid. Now, in the same chapter, our Lord, in explaining the parable of the Sower, says, "The field is the world." Then our Lord bought the world—all mankind. And here lies an important truth. It is like a rich man going to a plantation of slaves, and after paying down a price for the whole of the slaves, he sends forth a proclamation, that whosoever will may be free. But, alas! the slaves like their plots of ground, and their earthly ties, and prefer to remain in slavery.

So our Lord bought, in His death, all mankind, and has sent forth His ministers, to beg men to be reconciled to Him. But, alas! men prefer the chains of Satan, and the baits he skilfully lays for them.

This illustrates also the difference between "buying" and "redeeming." Many are now deluding their fellow-men with the thought of universal salvation; whereas there is a wide difference between buying slaves and offering them liberty, and the actual bringing them out of their slavery. We read of some—lost souls—who deny the Lord who *bought* them (2 Pet. ii. 1), whereas, those

who are redeemed are actually translated *out* of the kingdom of Satan, and *into* the kingdom of God's dear Son." (Col. i. 13.)

Such then is the parable of the hidden treasure. Christ is the purchaser; His saints are the treasure; all men are the field. It is called the *hidden* treasure, for none could have discovered that Christ had a treasure where *all* was sin and wickedness. The doctrine of the church, too, had been long hidden; as we read, Paul made known "the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations." (Col. i. 26.) Then all were to see "what is the fellowship of the mystery which, from the beginning of the world, hath been hid in God." (Eph. iii. 9.) Christ had then endured the shameful death of the cross—having become poor, sold all that He had—but He will have the treasure with Him by-and-by—a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing! To His name be all the glory!



THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

MATTHEW XIII. 45, 46.

“The kingdom of heaven 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 parable is very similar to the last under consideration. Here the merchant-man sold all that he had to possess the prize. There is nothing said of buying the field: it is simply the pearl that is bought, the pearl of great price.

It is Christ who sought goodly pearls. Israel was, and will yet be, one of God's pearls, and He may have many others. But the church was the pearl of great price—the bride, the Lamb's wife—and our Lord sold all that He had, and bought it. Here also, who can tell what is included in that saying, “sold all that he had”? We must look at the *height* from which Christ came, and the *depth* to which He stooped, and then we can never fathom how much it cost our Lord in becoming poor. We can, indeed, only wonder, admire and adore!

Now, if Christ calls His church a pearl of great price—of such value, indeed, that to

obtain it He gave up all—what value should not we set upon it, and think of *every* saint as a part of that pearl of great price? And how anxious we should be to answer to that value He ~~set~~ upon us! It should, indeed, cause up to give up all, and count all but dung and dross, that we might win Christ. (Phil. iii. 8.) But this can surely be done only by those who already have Him as their Saviour, and who desire to have Him solely as the object of their hearts, though never fully realised till we see Him as He is and are with Him in the glory.



THE NET CAST INTO THE SEA.

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”—MATTHEW XIII. 47-50.

This parable is very simple. In the Old Testament the people had been compared to fishes of the sea, and the same large net is referred to, called a “drag.” (Hab. i. 14, 15.) It is the large net, called in Cornwall and elsewhere a *seine*, which covers a large space, and is then drawn to the shore, with the fish enclosed.

The gospel is the net, it gathers good and bad. It must be noticed, that the bad are not discovered until the net is drawn to the shore. The thought is not that the gospel finds some good, and some bad (though, of course, some are morally better than others); but, at “the end of the age,” some are found to be bad, though, of course, they were known to God to be that before.

Our Lord gives His own interpretation: "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."

The reader is referred to the parable of the Wheat and the Tares to see how this gathering the good into vessels, and casting the bad away, falls in with our looking for our Lord from heaven. In that parable, the wicked being among the good is pointed out as the direct work of Satan; here it results from the gospel being sent forth, far and wide, as a draw-net is spread in the sea. Doubtless, Satan here is also busy, as we see in the parable of the Sower. There he caught the seed away; here he is just as successful, when he allows his own to enter the gospel net, though really remaining *his*. Alas! how solemn to know that many gathered by the gospel into the various associations of Christians—it may be to attractive preachers, or to take part in a lifeless ritualism, anything, indeed, that will lull an uneasy conscience—but who are "wicked," and who come not to Christ, whose blood alone can cleanse from every stain.

The parable is, in short, a faithful picture of Christendom, and depicts the solemn doom of all who will be found gathered by the sound of the gospel to that which bears the

name of Christ. But the just—made just only by the transforming power of God—will be safely gathered into His vessels. Not one can be overlooked, or forgotten. To His name be all the praise!



THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

“Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. 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. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”—LUKE XVIII. 10-14.

We are told what was the occasion of this parable being given; it was spoken “unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.”

The prayer of the Pharisee is full of “I:” It was what *he* was, and what *he* did. He thanked God, it is true; but not a word of what God had done for him; indeed, not a word that he needed God to do anything for him. No, he prayed “*with himself*.”

The publican, on the contrary, had not a word to say in his own favour. He felt, as well as owned, what he was. He stood afar off; he was not worthy even to look up unto

heaven; but he smote upon his breast, owned he was a sinner, and cried for mercy.

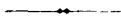
The result was, that the publican went to his house justified rather than the Pharisee. The teaching is not primarily the way of salvation, though the sinner took his true place, and went to his house justified; but it was spoken to those who justified themselves, and despised others; and thus our Lord says at the close, "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." These were, and are now, the principles of the kingdom of God. The two states are vividly portrayed in the first Adam exalting himself, and *falling*; and our blessed Lord humbling Himself, and being *exalted*.

It is to be feared that there are many in this day who answer to the Pharisee; they may, indeed, use very different language, but it is exalting self in some way, which can only end in shame and perdition; while the humble believer, who can take a low place, will surely be exalted by-and-by.

There are one or two points, however, that need to be guarded. A sinner has not now to call upon God with the thought of moving Him to be merciful. God is *waiting* to be gracious, and has sent His ambassadors, entreating men to be reconciled, and to accept salvation, full and free. But, as we have said,

this is not the interpretation of the parable. On the other hand, redemption has now been accomplished, and a Christian is brought into close association with Christ, and is told to come *boldly* to the throne of grace; and he should surely take the place God has given him as *a son* and as *a saint*, and not be content to be classing himself habitually with "miserable sinners." Still, he is a debtor to mercy all through his course, and in no way can talk, as the Pharisee did, of his good deeds. "Though I be nothing," is the true language of a Christian, and he has also Christ Himself as his example. He made Himself of *no reputation*, and is now exalted to the highest heavens. (See Phil. ii. 5-11.)

Alas how prone we are to like a *little* reputation! Surely many of us have yet to attain to counting ourselves as *nothing*, and making ourselves of *no* reputation; but "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."



THE TWO DEBTORS.

“There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.”—LUKE VII. 41-43.

This parable had been called forth by the remark of the Pharisee in whose house our Lord sat at meat. A woman, who had been forgiven much, came and washed His feet, wiped them with her hair, and anointed them with ointment. This led the Pharisee to say within himself, “This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him; for she is a sinner.”

Yes, she was a sinner, and our Lord knew it well; but the love and attention she bestowed upon Him was more precious in His eyes than all the cold hospitality of the Pharisee. And it was a lesson the Pharisee had yet to learn, that, though sin abounded, there was grace that much more abounded, and that could freely forgive the debtor that

owed the five hundred pence, as much as the one that owed but fifty.

Our Lord goes on to explain the parable. It was quite right to suppose that he who had been forgiven the more should love the more. The Pharisee had then to hear what he had *not* done, placed in comparison with what the sinful woman *had* done. One short sentence explained it all: "Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." She was not forgiven because she loved much, but, as is clearly stated, she loved much because she was forgiven much.

This brings out the power and value of grace in a wonderful manner; it exalts the forgiven one into a loving one, and the one who feels more deeply the many sins he has been forgiven, is given to love the more. Like Mary Magdalene at the tomb of Jesus: His disciples had gone away to their own homes, but her love binds her to the spot; she would take His dead body rather than be without Him she loved.

There is one sentence we must not overlook. There was something that equally characterised the two debtors: whether they owed much or little, they had *nothing* wherewith to pay. What a bringing down of the proud Pharisee to the level of the poor sinful

woman! For him to have *nothing*, when he thought he had so much that he could despise the woman as a sinner. Ah, this is one of the hardest lessons men have to learn, especially those who cannot take the place of lost ones, so well satisfied with themselves and their own righteousness, as to despise others—a lesson that we all need to learn—that the grace of God can cleanse the vilest, and can raise him up into a loving one now, and who shall by-and-by be a “jewel” in the Redeemer’s crown to all eternity.



THE UNJUST JUDGE.

“There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?”—LUKE XVIII. 2-8.

The context tells us that this parable was given to the intent that “men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” And this is an important lesson in more respects than one. There is force in the word *always*. Some can pray, and be at peace, when things are smooth and easy-going, but who are disconcerted when troubles arise—it is then that they faint. Others are too apt to neglect prayer when things are easy; they become indifferent and slothful, but are roused unto prayer when dangers arise. The parable was related, that men might learn to pray always, and never faint.

The parable is enforced by contrast, rather

than by example. An unjust judge, one who fears not God, nor has respect for his fellow-men, will listen to an importunate widow, rather than be worried by her perpetual appeal. And then comes the conclusion. If an unjust judge can be thus moved, what may we not expect from a just and merciful God? He will avenge His elect speedily, though He bears long with them.

But who are the "elect"? Israel was of old God's elect nation (Isa. xlv. 4); and then there are those chosen of God to eternal life, as we see plainly in Romans viii.; Colossians iii. 12; 2 Timothy ii. 10; Titus i. 1. And this brings out the contrast still stronger. There was no relationship between the widow and the unjust judge, and still she got what she required. But God has chosen His elect, brought them into relationship with Himself; how much more, then, will He hear and answer their cry? Yea, in Romans viii. He asks, "Who shall separate us from the *love* of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him that *loved* us." Neither can anything separate us from the *love* of God. Then we see that God loves those He chooses, and He will surely answer those He loves, and will do it "speedily," in His own time.

Still we doubt not that the "elect" in the parable refers primarily to Israel, as well as the sentence that follows: "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Here our Lord is referring to His earthly people. The church will have been taken up, but His elect nation will still be on the earth. Will He find them exercising faith in their God, and at peace; or will there rather be a cry of distress, when their Messiah appears? Many passages point out the distress of God's ancient people at that time (Zech. xii. 10), and it will be only such as can by faith enter into the spirit of this parable that can be at peace. What power will these words have then—"Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him?"

"How long, O Lord?" will be one of their bitter cries. (See Psa. lxxix. 5, &c.) Though He bears long with them, I tell you "He will avenge them speedily." Though sore judgments await unbelieving Israel, God's chosen remnant will be heard, and be avenged.

And as surely will He hear *us*. The parable speaks of *a widow*, and in the East none are more forlorn and despised than a widow. It reminds one of our Lord's words: "The days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast." (Matt. ix. 15.) She had an adversary, too,

and so have we—a subtle and dangerous foe. Let us, then, pray *always*, and faint not, for we have One who can deliver us from our adversaries, and who is more ready to answer than we are to ask, and who bids us open our mouths wide, and He will fill them.



THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD.

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. 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 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, that shall ye receive. 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. 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: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? 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.”—MATTHEW XX. 1-16.

There is one passage in this parable that

explains it: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own?" It is God, in His sovereignty, dispensing His gifts as it pleases Him. What was given to the last in no way infringed upon the rights of the others; for of those first employed, we are told, an agreement was made for "a penny a day." To the others it was said that they should receive what was right, and it was a simple act of benevolence to give the last more than they had earned.

It vividly brings out the discontent of man. They who had agreed for a penny, received a penny, and therefore could have no just cause of complaint; and yet they could not bear to see others receive as much as themselves. To such it was said, "Is thine eye evil because I am good?" Yes, the very goodness of God calls out the evil in man, who is, in many ways, ready to charge God with injustice. But the God of all the earth will surely do what is right; but He is a sovereign, and will dispense His gifts when and where it pleaseth Him. In His grace He calls some at the eleventh hour, and gives to them the same as those called much earlier.

We doubt not there is another lesson to be learnt from this parable, because of the last sentence: "So the last shall be first, and the first last; for many be called, but few chosen." God is the dispenser of grace, and

He dispenses it as, and when, and where it pleases Him. The Jews were first, now they are last. Paul was as one born out of due time, and yet he became a chief apostle. God will not be unjust to any, but He calls whom He will, and of them He chooses whom He will, and makes them, in His grace, *what* He will. Let each be content to fill the place in which God has put him, counting it all grace to be sent by God to work in His vineyard, and then seek to be faithful therein; and, while enjoying the grace thus given to himself, be happy in recognising the grace given to others whom God may please to choose, and endow with greater gifts than he possesses. Let not our eye be evil because God is good.



PART III.

THE WAY OF GOD IN BRINGING INTO HIS KINGDOM.

THE LOST SHEEP.

MATTHEW XVIII. 12, 13; LUKE XV. 4-7.

“What man of you, having an hundred sheep, 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, 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.”
—LUKE XV. 4-7.

It helps us to understand this parable, and the two others in Luke xv. (if indeed the three are not one parable, see ver. 3) to see that they immediately follow the accusation of the Pharisees and scribes who said, “This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.” Yes, blessed be God, He receiveth sinners, or you and I could not have been saved;

yea, and He eateth with them. (Rev. iii. 20.)

This parable is beautifully simple. The people had been compared to sheep long before. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isa. liii. 6.) But in the parable it is not the sheep who are so much in question as the owner: the one who had lost the sheep. He calls together his friends and neighbours, saying, "Rejoice with me." No doubt the sheep that had been lost and found again was in very happy circumstances now; but not a word is said of that; it is the owner, and his joy that comes out so prominently.

It also shews the value the shepherd, whose own the **sheep** are, attaches to a single sheep. It is one in a hundred: only one per cent., as we say, and not of much consequence. But one of *such* sheep must not be lost. A place vacant in the glory would never do; a void in the heart of the Good Shepherd could not be possible. The sheep must be sought and sought *till it was found*. No such thought is allowed for a moment that it might be lost finally and never found. "My sheep shall never perish," said our Lord: no, not even one.

But, as we have seen, it is the Shepherd who is before us: it is *His* love—*His* search

—*His* joy. And the interpretation is as unmistakable as it is plain; there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over the ninety and nine just ones.

There is also another word that demands our attention—the sheep was *lost*. What a volume there is in that one word—lost! Our Lord said He had been sent to the *lost* sheep of the house of Israel. (Matt. xv. 24.) Yet, Israel with all their privileges, and with the scriptures in their hands, are described as lost. And if this were true of Israel, surely it was and is true of those without God and without hope in the world. Yet this is really one of the last things a man receives respecting himself. Many a one can see and own that he is not quite what he ought to be; there is room for improvement, a need for turning over new leaves, &c. But it is so degrading to be told that he is a lost sinner, and needs an almighty Saviour! And yet everything short of this is speaking smooth things that only deceive and ruin souls.

And whence, indeed, have not men wandered? Alas, they have gone to the very depths of degradation, to every imaginable height of infidelity, to all the crooked places of profane imagination. No other word will tell out their state by nature, as to all their wanderings, than the word *lost*.

And this needs one to seek them. The

Good Shepherd of our parable “ goes after ” the lost one. A cold professional gospel (if such it can be called) may think all that is needed is to call after the lost one ; tell him of his wandering ; and exhort him to acts of charity and devotion *where he is*—in the vain hope that he will find himself right at last.

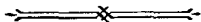
Not so the Good Shepherd: He “ goes after ” the lost one—goes till He find it. And even then He does not trust it to follow ; but He lifts the sheep on to His shoulders and brings it home rejoicing. He does not set the sheep in the right road, and leave it to do the rest. No, He brings it, not even to the ninety and nine, but right *home*—safe and sound ; and then calls His neighbours to rejoice with Him over His once lost sheep.

Ah, but you will say, our Lord, in His application, says there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. If the above is true, where is there room for the repentance ? There will surely always be repentance, for the *goodness* of God leadeth to repentance ; and it in no way clashes with what we have said. In the parable, as we have seen, it is what the man did who lost his sheep, and *his* joy when he had found it.

But who are the ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance ? Scripture is quite plain that in and of themselves there is none righteous—no, *not one* ; but there were

and are many who consider themselves as such, and who judge that they need no repentance. Such were those who brought the accusation against our Lord that called forth this parable : “ This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.” We get similar expressions elsewhere: such as, “ the whole need not a physician ; ” not that there really are any who have no need of Christ ; but they take the ground of being such, and are so treated. It is the sick who value the treatment of the physician, and it is the lost who need a Saviour.

Thus this parable shews how our Lord receiveth sinners, and eateth with them ; yea, He rejoiceth over the recovery of each one. The work of salvation is *His*—He does it all. He puts the lost sheep on His own omnipotent shoulders, and brings it *home* safe and sound. To Him be all the praise !



THE LOST PIECE OF MONEY.

LUKE XV. 8-10.

“Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, 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.”

The sinner is here compared to a piece of silver. It reminds one of “the treasure hid in a field,” and “the pearl of great price.” It is too valuable to be lost. A candle must be ignited and the search continued until it is found. But here, as in the last parable, the piece of money does not come into prominence. It is the one who had lost it. The search is hers, and the joy is hers. “Rejoice with *me*,” she said, “for I have found the piece which I had lost.”

Attempts have been made to shew that there is an analogy between a piece of money bearing an image and superscription, and man still bearing the image of God from Genesis i. 27, which says that “God created

man in his own image;" and James iii. 9, "men which are made after the similitude of God"—however much the piece may have been damaged and the image disfigured. But the coin actually named here is "a drachma" (valued about $7\frac{1}{2}d.$), and this generally bore the image of an owl, a tortoise, &c. It was a Greek coin belonging to the kingdom then passed away, so that if there is any allusion in the money used, it would seem to point out that man had lost his moral likeness to God, and now bore the impress of the unclean.

May there not be an allusion to the professing church in this parable, seeing that the piece of money was lost in "the house;" and alas! we fear there is many a lost one hidden away in some dark corner of the professing church. But it must not be lost. The candle must be lit and the house searched. Here again there may be allusions to the darkness and to the dirt and dust. As to darkness, nothing is more manifest. The very doubts and questionings once used by the openly sceptical are now adopted by many who bear the name of Christ. Truth is undermined, the scriptures torn into shreds, and philosophy and reason installed in the place of reverence and faith. This, not in the world merely, but in Christendom.

And surely many a one of God's own is

hidden amid the darkness, and must sooner or later be found. But what a process! a light must be brought where all should have been light; and the house must be swept. Oh the dust that has accumulated in that beautiful house erected in the beginning of the Acts—a house in which everything should have been safe and should have been an ornament. But now it is where a piece of silver may be lost. Alas! how wonderfully true is this picture.

And the woman had to search “diligently,” or “carefully,” till she found it. In the case of the sheep it was lost in the wilderness, and there could be no difficulty in discerning the sheep from any other animal; but in a dusty house—and it *is* dusty or there would have been no need of its being swept—how easily a small coin may be overlooked! But, thanks be to God, it must be found: the search is “till she find it.” When we look at the many ‘apartments’ in that house, and see the dreadful darkness and evils in many of its corners—how needful the light, the sweeping, and the careful search!

But it is found, and the woman calls together her friends and her neighbours, saying, “Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.” Who is the woman? May it not be the church in distinc-

tion from the house? * Notice she does not say, "*My* piece of money." The Shepherd called the sheep he had found "*my* sheep:" but the woman says, "the piece which I had lost," as though it had been her carelessness or want of watchfulness that had caused the loss of the piece of silver that had been committed to her care. In like manner the enemy sowed tares in the field *while men slept*, in the parable of the Wheat and Tares.

And this brings out an important truth that we should have the same care one for another, seeing we are all members of the one body. Doubtless there are some gifted to be pastors and who watch for souls—to whom we do well to take heed—but in the divided state of the church, it surely devolves upon all to have the same care one for another, as the whole of our body feels the pain in any part, and when one part is honoured, the whole rejoices.

And when a poor straying one is "lost" amid the evils of the professing church, God

* Israel was many times compared to an unfaithful wife; and the apostle says, "I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." (2 Cor. xi. 2.) The church is the bride, the Lamb's wife. (Rev. xxi. 9.) This parable is often taken to refer to the Holy Ghost, as that of the Lost Sheep to the Son, and the Prodigal to the Father. But in this, would not the Holy Ghost answer to the *light* rather than to the woman.

is often pleased to bless the means used by throwing His light on some portion of His word—it may be by a simple tract—and the lost one is found, and restored first to Christ, and then brought to the communion of God's saints. And then there shall be joy and rejoicing. Oh that our poor cold hearts might enter more into the joy there is in heaven and before the angels of God* over one sinner that repenteth. It is one more snatched out of the kingdom of Satan or out of the great house of lifeless profession, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, that shall be to His praise and glory to all eternity. But there should be *present* joy—joy down here as well as in the presence of the angels of God.

* In the case of the lost sheep the joy is said to be “in heaven;” here it is “before the angels of God,” if we had wisdom to see the distinction. Order is to be maintained in the house “because of the angels.” (1 Cor. xi. 10.)



THE PRODIGAL SON.

LUKE XV. 11-32.

“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 his 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 as 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. Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick 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 intreated 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, 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."

This parable is so full, and so exquisite, that one hesitates to add anything to it by way of comment. One can only admire it. What a picture of one throwing off all restraint! He goes *away from* his father, yea, far away, where he can indulge in his evil ways, unhindered and unchecked. But God knows how to bring back all such: the prodigal began to be in want. And then what had become of all those with whom he had spent his substance? Nothing met him but a cold world which had nothing to give. But he will not give up. He will try and earn **his** living, and becomes a swineherd, but even here he could not get what would satisfy him. He would have eaten the food of the swine, but could not. "And no man gave unto him."

No, all this was exactly as it should be: for thus God brings man to the end of all his own resources, that he may turn his eyes heavenward.

And then we read that remarkable expression, "When he came to himself." May we not ask, What—who had he been all this time? A profligate spendthrift. But now he remembers his father's house, and the servants, and how well they were fed; and he was perishing with hunger!

How many a person is brought to this! One tries the world's honours; another, its riches; another, its pleasures. But all these leave the person perishing with hunger. And thank God it does, that then they may turn to Him.

The prodigal resolves to go to his father, confess his sin, own he was unworthy to be called a son, and ask to be made a servant. All very right and proper from the prodigal's point of view; but, as we shall see, it was not to be thus from the father's side. But off he starts.

While he was yet a great way off his father caught sight of him, and *ran*, and fell on his neck, and *kissed* him. What a reception for such a sinner! It was all measured from what the *father* was, and his love to the son.

Rightly, surely came the confession of sin,

but note that it came not till after the kiss—it did not produce the kiss—and the owning of his unworthiness to be called a son. But his reception stopped his asking to be made a servant. Indeed the father said, “my son.” And he called to the servants for the *best* robe (Zech. iii. 4)—a ring (2 Cor. xi. 2)—and shoes (Eph. vi. 15): he must be clothed like a *son*. And the fatted calf must be killed, he must be entertained like a *son*.

And they began to be merry: *they*, the father receiving his son safe and sound; and the son received after such a fashion as his scanty thoughts had never reached to.

And this is a picture of what? Of how God receives sinners, and how He *rejoices* over them. Oh that we might better understand “our reception” by the God of all grace. There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. What an answer is all this to those timid ones who think of being just inside the door, content to share with the servants if only in at all. Ah yes, this may suit *their* thoughts; but not the Father’s. He must receive according to his own heart as to what a *son* should have. “They began to be merry.”

But we must not forget the elder brother—the self-righteous one who never had transgressed, but who could not understand grace. And though his father came out and entreated

him, he would have no part in the joy that only grace can give.

Yea, more, he upbraids his father that he had not even a kid given him, much less a fattened calf. But note, he does not say, "that *we* might make merry;" but "that I might make merry with my friends." To be merry with his father was not in his thoughts; he had friends more like himself.

The father said he was always with him—was not the father better than all the friends he was thinking of? and all that he had was his. But it was *meet* to rejoice over a dead one now alive again.

It has been a difficulty with many to know whom the elder son could represent, and chiefly because of the father's saying "all that I have is thine." This is an illustration of how a parable cannot be interpreted in all its detail. The simile is that of two sons: one asks for "his portion of goods," and we read the father divided to *them* his living, and the younger son having had his portion, what was left would fall to the other son. This fully explains the expression, "all that I have is thine."

There can be no question but that the elder son represents the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees. It was *they* who objected, as we have seen, to our Lord because He received *sinners*. Yes, He did; and the three par-

ables as one in this chapter shew *how* He received them—how God received them; and how there was *joy* in receiving them which the self-righteous ones to whom He spoke could not understand, and in which they would not partake.

These words are very significant: “he would not go in.” When our Lord was on earth, preaching the kingdom, they would not go in, yea, they hindered those who would. And after He was risen, other appeals were made to them again and again, but alas! as to the mass of them, all ended in failure; they would not go in. Ah, are there not any such self-righteous ones now, going on, it may be, with all their observances as religionists, but who understand not, nor have any heart for God’s way of receiving and welcoming sinners in His grace, and eating with them? May God open their eyes to their sad delusion.



THE MARRIAGE FOR THE KING'S SON.

MATTHEW XXII. 2-14.

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other 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. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, 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 the 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."

Here God is the King, and Christ is the

Son for whom He makes a marriage feast. The guests first invited were the Jews; the proclamation of the gospel was to begin at Jerusalem; but those invited in perfect indifference made light of the invitation. One went to his farm, another to his merchandise; others arose in rebellion and ill-treated the messengers, precisely as we find in the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen. Only *there* it was God seeking fruit because of their privileges; *here* it was an invitation to the feast. But in both they were equally wicked. Our Lord came to His own, and His own received Him not.

And yet what a message it was—sent again and again, “I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come unto the marriage.” But there was indifference, refusal, rebellion!

The King was angry at the treatment received by his messengers, and he sent forth his armies and destroyed those murderers and burnt up their city. This we know literally took place in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

But God will not have His Son to be without a wedding feast, His servants are sent into the highways and they gathered as many as they found—moral and immoral, and the feast was furnished with guests. In a word, it is God going out in grace to the Gentiles.

But alas! there was one who had accepted the invitation, but who had not on a wedding garment. A little difficulty arises as to this part of the parable, inasmuch as it has not been ascertained that it was at all customary for a host to supply garments to his guests. But it was customary for persons to appear before royalty in a suitable dress, and here it was *the king* who had made the feast.

In the interpretation all is plain. Persons brought in from the highways were certainly not expected to have on a wedding garment. There were bad as well as good. They might be well dressed or be in rags—one would be as unsuited as the other, because neither would be a garment suited to such a wedding. One is at once reminded of Joshua in Zechariah iii. He was clothed in filthy garments—and all man's righteousness in God's sight is as filthy rags—but these were taken away and he was clothed in a garment of God's own providing. So it must be at God's marriage of His Son. He provides all, for surely nothing that man could provide would be suitable for such a glorious feast. But how solemn to think that one had neglected or refused the suited garment! He had accepted the invitation *nominally*, but that was all. In a word, it points out *a religious man without Christ*. Oh, is it not enough to make one's heart ache to contemplate how many

there are in this highly favoured land in a like condition. They have accepted the gospel invitation *in name*; they are enrolled with God's people—meet with them, pray with them—but alas, will one day be found to be naked—without salvation, without Christ. O that God would open their eyes; for religion without Christ will only lead to outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.



THE GREAT SUPPER.

LUKE XIV. 16-24.

“A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. 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. So that servant came, and shewed 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. 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.”

This parable is very similar to the marriage for the king's son, in Matthew xxii., and has been thought by some to be the same parable differently recorded. On the other hand, it has been judged, that, whereas this was given in the Pharisee's house, the one in Matthew was related in the temple; but this may not have been the case, as the discourses of our Lord are often grouped in a moral order,

rather than as they were actually spoken. The teaching in the two instances is the same, though the details differ.

In Matthew it was "a king;" in Luke "a certain man." In Matthew it was for the marriage of the king's son; in Luke, it is a great supper. Those first invited are the same; and they *all* excused themselves from coming. Here it is added, that one had married a wife and could not come. And it is well to notice, that in their excuses there is nothing gross or evil. One went to his farm—his piece of land; another, to his merchandise—his five yoke of oxen; and the third had taken a wife. All were things quite natural for men to be doing; but, alas! they were perfectly indifferent as to the invitation to the great supper.

In Luke we do not get the ill-treatment of the messengers, nor the punishment of those who ill-treated them, nor the burning of their city; all beautifully in place in Matthew, but not named in Luke, where Christ is most known as the Son of man.

On the other hand, the invitation here goes out wider—into the streets and the lanes, the highways and the hedges; and the poor and the maimed, and the halt and the blind, were all brought in to the great supper. But we do not get the guest without a wedding-garment, which seems to confirm the thought,

that this garment was named because, in Matthew, it is the king who makes the feast.

The teaching in both gospels is the same. One had said to our Lord, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." But Christ told them of a *present* feast. God has made a feast of grace, and His servants are still inviting poor sinners—good and bad—to "Come, for all things are now ready." The great supper, too, may be looked at as a continuous feast, for we do not read of the supper being ended. And Christ, who is the Alpha of all our hopes and all our joys, is also the Omega and end of all our blessings even when we shall be with Him, and like Him for ever.

How cheering is that one word, "great;" it is truly a *great* supper, without limit as to provisions, without limit as to the invitation. Yes, what a word was that to the servants!—listen, all ye evangelists!—"Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." There is to be glory to the Lord Jesus; He is to see of the travail of His soul, and be *satisfied*. Will a FEW satisfy Him who paid such a redemption-price? Ah, no; His house must be filled. Publish it abroad, then; be instant in season, and out of season; cry aloud, "Come, for all things are now ready." His word shall not return unto Him void.

PART IV.

RESPONSIBILITY OF THOSE CONNECTED WITH THE KINGDOM.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

LUKE X. 30-37.

“A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, 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. 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. 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.”

This parable is beautifully simple, and easily understood if taken with its context.

A certain lawyer, tempting our Lord, asked what he should do to inherit eternal life. Our Lord referred to the law, and asked what that taught. It enjoined love to Jehovah, with all the heart, and soul, and strength, and mind; and to love his neighbour as himself. All quite right; and the lawyer was told, "Do this, and thou shalt live." He, wishing to justify himself, asked, "And who is my neighbour?" The above parable was the Lord's reply.

Now this parable is constantly referred to as setting forth Christ as the Good Samaritan, and this is, doubtless, a correct application of it; for who, like Christ, has taken upon Himself the sorrows and calamities of His people, and provided a full remedy for all their needs? and this is the more striking when He stands in contrast with the priests and Levites, who should have sympathised and helped those in distress. The priest saw the poor man, and passed by on the other side. The Levite looked on the helpless one, but he, too, passed by on the other side. This shews that those who should have been zealous to obey the law fell far short of its requirements; for the law enjoined, that if *an ass* fell down in the way—and if it even belonged to a person that *hated* you—you must not forbear to help the poor ass. (Exo. xxiii. 5.) And yet, here was a fellow-creature

in great danger passed by unheeded. Yes, it was only the otherwise despised Samaritan that had compassion on him, and did all that was needful to heal and help him. He bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine—that which was curative, and that which was invigorating—and took him to a place of safety.

While the parable is a beautiful picture of how man became a victim to Satan and his emissaries, it is also an exquisite exhibition of how Christ comes to the one thus left half-dead, and does not call on him to do his part, and then He will do the rest. No; the man is so entirely helpless, that Christ must do it all, if the man is to be rescued and saved; and, in His mercy, *He does it all*, and leaves the poor man provided for.*

And this was not all; for the good Samaritan spoke of coming again, and he gave the host twopence, to last until he came again. But why *only twopence*—about sixteenpence? Would it not convey the thought—silently, but surely—that he would *soon* be coming again? Yes, the good Samaritan's own words were, "Surely I come quickly." He

* Some have laid stress upon the words, "went down;" the man went down from a place of safety (Jerusalem) to the accursed city (Jericho). Well, there *may* be something in this, but the good Samaritan was also in the same road; and a person is not safe from Satan's craft and enmity on any spot in this sin-stained earth.

will come, and take home all His poor down-trodden ones to be with Him for ever.

Now, while all this is true as to Christ Himself, the lesson is to *us*. *We* are to be like this merciful one; *we* are to be good Samaritans. How better could the Lord teach us who is our neighbour, than by giving us a picture of Himself? Our Lord demanded of the lawyer, Which of the three was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves? Even the lawyer could answer that—it was the good Samaritan. “Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.”

Now the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, and yet the good Samaritan could not see this wounded one, and leave him in his misery. He was his neighbour; and thus we are exhorted to do good unto *all* men, but especially to those who are of the household of faith. All men are our neighbours, all Christians our brethren. Man is an *injured* being, as well as a sinful one, and we see all around us those who have been the victims of Satan, and who are left in their misery. Through mercy, we have the Balm of Gilead, and if we have not this world's goods to relieve his bodily wants, we can tell of that which will both heal his sin-sick soul, and give him a new life that shall sustain him here, until the Good Samaritan returns to call us all above. “Go, and do thou likewise.”

THE FOOLISH RICH MAN.

LUKE XII. 16-21.

“The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow 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. 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. 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.”

What precedes this parable, and the last sentence of it, explain its meaning. One had come to the Lord Jesus, requesting that He would speak to his brother, that he should divide the inheritance with him. Our Lord would have nothing to do with the matter, but cautioned His hearers against covetousness: “for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” And He then spoke to them the parable of this foolish rich man, whose thoughts did not reach beyond present enjoyments. “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat,

drink, and be merry." But *that night* his soul was required of him, and he neither enjoyed the things he had laid up, nor had he anything beyond this present life.

The Lord adds this salutary lesson: "So is he that layeth up treasure *for himself*, and is not rich toward God." This rich man had *self* as his object: he said, "my" goods, "my" fruits, and had no thought of being God's steward, and was influenced by just what a natural man would call wisdom and prudence. He had acquired a nice, snug independency, and was now going to enjoy himself. Ah, but God called him "a fool," and said to him, "this night," in answer to his "many years."

Thus we see there are two objects before the souls of men—self, or God. Those in the kingdom profess to have God before them; then they must not have self as their object. Our Lord follows the parable with the exhortation to consider the ravens, to consider the lilies: God feedeth the one, and careth for the other. He knoweth that we have need of such things. We are rather to seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to us. And then He goes on to say, "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth cor-

rupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Luke xii. 33, 34.)

How necessary a lesson for us all! While professing to have no treasure *here*, our treacherous hearts may lead us to be too much engaged with our earthly blessings, our comfort, and our ease, rather than with being "rich toward God."

THE UNJUST STEWARD.

LUKE XVI. 1-13.

“There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest 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. 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 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 of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, 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? No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

Of all the parables, this has generally been

looked upon as the most difficult of interpretation, because of the apparent praise of that which is dishonest; but we hope a careful consideration of its detail will tend in a great measure to remove the difficulty, and help us to arrive at what is intended to be taught by the same.

It should first be noticed that it is not our Lord who commended the unjust steward (the very reverse is pressed in the application of the parable), but it is 'the lord' of the parable—the "certain rich man." He thought the steward had acted 'wisely' or 'prudently,' seeking to make friends of others when being turned out of his lord's service: indeed, it was, what appears to be the teaching of the parable, sacrificing present for future advantage. In this sense "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

Our Lord adds His own interpretation, or perhaps we should say 'application: ' "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." Here another difficulty presents itself, as to who are the 'they' here spoken of. But it is judged to be customary for the evangelist Luke to word sentences in this way, when the sense is made passive or impersonal;* thus

* See Luke vi. 38, 'shall men give.' in the sense of

here it would read that 'ye may be received,' and the sense would be, 'Make to yourselves friends *by* the mammon of unrighteousness [worldly possessions], that ye may be received hereafter into everlasting habitations;' similar to the words, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven;" "He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord," &c.

Then follows the assertion that the faithful and the unjust in little things will be so also in greater things. And then, "If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" That is, who would trust a professed Christian with any spiritual mission that had not been faithful in worldly matters? Thus a bishop "must have a good report of them which are without." (1 Tim. iii. 7.)

Again, "And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own." As Christians we are supposed not to have earthly possessions (still keeping up the character of "stewards"), so the goods are here called 'another man's;' and if we are not faithful in these temporal things, how can

'it shall be given;' verse 44, 'men do not gather figs,' for 'figs are not gathered.' Chapter xii. 20, 'thy soul shall be required,' literally 'they shall require thy soul;' and chapter xiv. 35, 'men cast it out' for 'it is cast out.'

we expect the heavenly things which belong to us?

The parable is summed up by shewing the impossibility of serving God and mammon. We are to serve God, and in serving Him we are to be strictly faithful in dealing with that which belongs to others; and also to use what we have, not to seek present ease or advantage in this world, but to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt.

It will be seen then that this parable has not a gospel character, but it was addressed to the disciples, and is rather a call to faithfulness and devotedness in the Christian—in imitation indeed of that One who ‘emptied himself,’ and who became poor that we might through His poverty become rich. As we sow so shall we reap (see 2 Cor. ix. 6), and it may be that some of us have not that measure of heavenly blessing that we should have were we better stewards in earthly matters: we have not that which is ‘our own,’ because we have not been using the things entrusted to our charge as stewards, as God would have us. May the Lord make us more faithful, spending and being spent for Him.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

LUKE XVI. 19-31.

“There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar 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. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell 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. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. 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 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 the dead.”

This parable has been discussed more than any of the others. What can be its interpretation? Nothing is said about the rich man

being a wicked man, and nothing about Lazarus being a righteous man. The one is a rich man, who was well-dressed, and lived well, as we say; and the other was a beggar, apparently helpless, for he "was laid" at the gate of the rich man, and was full of sores. He desired to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table, but, unless the word, "desiring," might seem to imply that his wish was not granted, nothing is said as to how far the rich man supplied his need.

Now, though the above shews plainly that the rich man did not love the poor beggar "as himself," which the law required, yet, in the conversation between the rich man and Abraham, nothing is charged on him as to breaking the law, but simply that he who had received in his lifetime good things was now tormented; and he who had received his evil things was now comforted. From which some have tried to make out a sort of doctrine of future 'compensation' for those who are poor and wretched in this life, whereas there is no such doctrine in scripture.

There are many passages of scripture that plainly put forth the grounds on which the future happiness and misery of mankind rest. "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be condemned." "All that are in the graves shall hear his voice,

and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." (John v. 28, 29.) Besides, we read in Revelation xx., that the wicked dead will be judged out of those things "written in the books, according to their works." It is then that their sins will be brought to light, before the great white throne. This has no place in the parable, and Abraham is not the judge.

It is clear, therefore, that this parable is not intended to teach the grounds on which our future destiny immediately rests. Doubtless, the parable teaches us that riches are no longer to be viewed as a sure blessing of God, nor poverty the reverse; for the rich man went to a place of torment, and the poor man to a place of blessing.

But it may be asked, Was any parable needed to teach this? Yes; for if we look to the Old Testament, we find much made of earthly blessing. "Wealth and riches shall be in his house." (Psa. cxii. 3.) And the psalmist had never seen the seed of the righteous begging bread. When our Lord declared that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom, even the disciples were astonished, and asked, "Who, then, can be saved?"

It was a new thing, then, for a rich man to look upon their riches rather as a hindrance than as a help or a necessary blessing. That young man who had kept the law from his youth, of whom it is said, "Jesus beholding him loved him," when told to sell all that he had and give to the poor, and come, follow Christ, went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

This, too, accords with how often the rich are warned. "Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation." (Luke vi. 24.) "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. . . . Ye have heaped treasures together for the last days," etc. (James v.) "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy." (1 Tim. vi. 17.)

Surely, then, there was the important lesson to be taught, that riches were to be no longer an indication that the owners were especially under the blessing of God, which was a right thought in a former dispensation. The poor had now the gospel preached to them, and the rich were sent empty away; yea, and the rich man might (as in the parable of the foolish rich man) be suddenly called away from his riches; and, as here, he might find himself in

torment in a future state. Can you conceive of a more pitiable case, than a rich, moral man, proud of his riches, and trusting in his good morality, suddenly called away to a place of torment?

The parable also plainly teaches a future state. The rich man *died*, and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes. Though he had died, and had been buried, he was still alive. This is not simply life after death for the saved, but existence after death for those who are to be in torment.

A great gulf, too, was fixed, so that none could pass from where Abraham was to the rich man. Neither any relief!—not even the tip of a finger dipped in water to cool the parched tongue! Alas, how dreadful! Surely such a picture is not drawn by God to harrow up the feelings of the reader: it is to *reveal a fact*, that there is a place of future torment for the wicked, as well as a place of blessing for the redeemed; and there is no possibility of any ever passing from the one place to the other, as the Universalists would fain teach. Oh, that men might take warning from such a revelation, and accept that grace so freely offered, and thus surely escape from the wrath to come.

There is still another lesson. When the rich man hears that his own condition is sealed, he is then anxious that his five breth-

ren should be warned, lest they also come to the same place of torment. Would not Abraham send Lazarus to his father's house with a solemn warning? Surely they would hear one who had risen from the dead!

Abraham said it was useless: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." And surely Abraham was right. Only consider, if such an one appeared on earth, who would credit that he had really come from the dead? All would declare him to be an impostor.

Another important principle also comes out here—whether it is Moses, or the prophets, men were called to hear; in either case it was God's message. Moses and the prophets were merely the messengers, and if men would not receive God's message through Moses, it was rejecting God; and such would also reject, not only Lazarus—had he risen from the dead—but even our Lord Himself. Thus He tells the Jews, who did profess to believe Moses: "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John v. 46, 47.)

And we may go a step further, and say that the same applies to all the messengers God sends. "Verily, verily," said our Lord, "I say unto you, He that receiveth *whom-*

soever I send, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." (John xiii. 20.) How great, then, the responsibility of those who hear any of God's servants, if they reject the message God has sent! May we not say, "neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

Thus we see how full of instruction is this parable; how great the change from a life of ease and luxury to one of "torment;" while the poor in this life may enter into eternal joys. Men say that it is all a figure. Well, and if it is, of what is it a figure? It is that there will be life *after death* to both the righteous and the wicked. There their doom will be fixed, and fixed for eternity. Instead of criticising and questioning, oh, that men would take warning, and believe the record of God's grace, so freely proclaimed in this day, and they would then surely find themselves along with those who have believed Moses and the prophets, our Lord Himself, and those whom He has sent. Bût, alas! if they turn away from such grace, even though it may be proclaimed by some feeble instrument, let them know surely, that if they persist in such rejection, their case is altogether hopeless; for neither would they believe, though one rose from the dead.

THE POUNDS.

LUKE XIX. 12-27.

"A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities. And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: for I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and

from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me."

The context of this parable tells us why our Lord spoke this parable. It was "*because* he was nigh to Jerusalem, and *because* they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear." Christ is the nobleman, and He is still away, waiting till the time arrives to receive His kingdom in its manifestation.

This must not be confounded with the hope of the coming of our Lord. The parable refers to Christ receiving the kingdom, and is spoken of in connection with Jerusalem, which is subsequent to the saints being caught up to meet the Lord in the air. It is, however, worthy of note, that the parable represents the *same* persons who receive the pounds when our Lord went away, as being alive when He returns and calls those servants to give an account of their stewardship, though ages may, indeed, roll on between His going away and His return. All were to be faithful while they await His return, and all must give an account.

No doubt, every one has been struck with the similarity between this parable and that of the talents, in Matthew xxiv. The chief difference is, that there each received a dif-

ferent sum—one, ten; one, five; and one, one; whereas here, all receive the same amount—one pound. May not its application to us be, not so much to specific gifts, as to what simply attaches to a profession of Christianity. Not natural gifts, but gifts connected with our profession. Here the persons are described as servants, and, as in many other places, those who profess to be servants are accounted as such, and made responsible accordingly.

There is another class spoken of—citizens. These sent a message after Him, saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us." And of these we read: "Those, mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me." These are, doubtless, primarily the Jews: they are *His* citizens, though the language of defiance is the language of man universally.

But the others are servants, and two of them made a good use of their pound, and received a "Well done," and a reward, according to the increase gained. But the other returned his pound, and insolently charged evil on his master. He had laid up the pound "in a napkin," instead of trading with it. He, however, owns his master as "lord," and was surely bound to do his best for his master; and even if he had thought him

an austere man, he was none the less responsible to do *his* duty; for the other was his master.

The rewards—ruling over cities—point out its more immediate connection with Israel by-and-by; nevertheless, it strikingly illustrates our duty as servants of Christ. We call Him Lord and Master; and so He is; and we, as His servants, are bound to serve and obey Him. A mighty privilege indeed it should be counted by us to do anything for such a Lord, to whom we owe all we are, and all we have. But here it is our responsibility. A pound is given to each of us, with the injunction, “Occupy* till I come.” Use what gifts you have, not for yourself, but for your Master; your reward will be by-and-by.

The pound which the unfaithful servant had is given to him who had gained ten pounds, which brings out the important principle, that he who uses his gifts, has more given to him; while he who does not, loses even that which he had. How similar this is to that solemn word: “If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” May we all be found faithfully using the gifts God has given us. It will surely be for our good; for if we take His

* Or, “Trade ye till I come.” The word does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament.

yoke upon us, we shall find rest to our souls, and it will be for His glory. How good it would be for some to be using the gifts they have, rather than to be lamenting over the want of gift, remembering the word that "he that watereth, shall be watered also himself."



THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT.

MATTHEW XVIII. 23-35.

“Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. 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. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow-servant 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. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto 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 me: shouldest 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.”

This parable commences with the word,

“therefore,” and is thus joined on with what precedes. Peter had come to our Lord, and asked how often he was to forgive an offending brother: till seven times? “Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, until seventy times seven”—that is, in perpetuity. “Therefore” was the above parable spoken to them, and this, indeed, explains its meaning. We who have been forgiven our many sins—the ten thousand talents—ought to forgive our brother his hundred pence.

The proportion of the two sums mentioned is surely not without significance. Ten thousand talents would be about £3,420,000, and a hundred pence about £3. How small is anything we can be called upon to forgive in another, in comparison with that which God has to forgive us.

In this parable is a principle, often overlooked by Christians, namely, that, according to what we measure out to others, such will be measured out to us. (Matt. vii. 2.) God, in His government, brings this about in His dealings with His people, notwithstanding their being Christians. God’s *grace* does not do away with His *government*.

Some may feel a difficulty as to how the unmerciful servant could be punished after he had been forgiven, as if the forgiveness of God were a sort of conditional pardon, that

could be withdrawn, if we were unfaithful afterwards. But there is no such thought in scripture, and the parable does not say that the servant was punished for *the same* debt he had been forgiven. He was forgiven *that* debt, and then punished for what was afterwards due. Man is such a failing creature, that, if he were forgiven to-day, he would owe another debt to-morrow. This we see exemplified in Israel. On the day of atonement the Jew's sins were atoned for, and forgiven; when he again began to sin, and there was, of necessity, a remembrance made of sins every year (Heb. x. 3), and a new atonement made, and forgiveness given. Now the one sacrifice of Christ perfects the believer for ever, but the parable does not enter into the subject of justification, nor was atonement then wrought.

The last part of the parable has also presented another difficulty to some, because it seems to imply the loss of the soul. The unmerciful servant was delivered to the tormentors, until he should pay all that was due; but in scripture, persons are taken up in the character they assume. Here the persons spoken of are "servants," and the parable must not be taken out of its connection. Professed servants may be thus unmerciful, and may be lost eventually; and the parable may also apply to those Jews who had been

forgiven their "ten thousand talents," but who would not forgive their Gentile fellow-servants their "hundred pence."

Still, it has a lesson for us all. Let us not forget the mighty debt we have been forgiven. The unmerciful servant "went out" from the presence of his lord, or he could not have dared to seize his fellow-servant; and so we may forget what we have been forgiven, and fail to forgive our brethren seventy times seven. As we have seen, God, in His government, will measure to us according as we have measured to others. The merciful shall obtain mercy, and we surely need this to the journey's end.



THE TEN VIRGINS.

MATTHEW XXV. 1-13.

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, 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. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone 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. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. 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 wherein the Son of man cometh.”

With this parable we all are, happily, more or less familiar, however short we may come of being practically in its spirit. It is the normal condition of the Christian, like the saints of Thessalonica, to be waiting for the

Lord from heaven, to be going out in spirit to meet the Bridegroom.

It may be a question as to *when* the parable more definitely applies. It is introduced by the word, "then." In the previous chapter we have, "Watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." (Ver. 42.) And in Luke we are exhorted to be like unto men who wait for their Lord, that when He cometh, we may open to Him immediately. All of which well agrees with the thought, that, from the beginning of the church, the true position of the Christian has been to be going out to meet the Bridegroom.

It is true that, some fifty years since, there seemed to be a definite cry raised, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh;" which was followed by much searching of the scripture on the subject, and a general revival followed as to the hope of the coming of the Lord in the hearts of His saints.

Along with this many grave mistakes were made, by attempting to fix dates when our Lord would come, in direct conflict with the assurance, that we know not the day nor the hour; and this agrees well with our parable. And as these various dates, one after another, passed by, and our Lord came not, we fear that many a one dozed off again, and slumbered and slept, though we trust a few still are really looking for and expecting their

Lord, with their lamps still burning; while the foolish fixing of dates, and the inevitable failure, estranged many an earnest Christian from the after study of the prophetic books of scripture.

Sad indeed it is to read in the parable that they *all*—wise and foolish—fell asleep, after having once gone out to meet the Bridegroom. And this agrees with the fact, that, until comparatively recently—as just referred to—there is scarcely a trace to be found of any Christian looking for his Lord as a present hope before his soul.

Does not the call yet continue? And may it not yet wax louder and louder—"Behold, the bridegroom cometh"—as, in many prophecies, there would seem to have been a partial fulfilment before the full and final one? In the parable we do not read of the virgins *again* going to sleep after they were once awakened by the call; while we fear many who once heard it have given up the hope, and, in this respect, have slumbered again. The cry, too, is at *midnight*; we know not whether the darkness is quite at its full, though alas! it seems hardly possible to be worse than it is.

As in other parables, the virgins are taken up on their profession. They all profess to go forth to meet the Bridegroom, and they are all furnished with lamps—the lamps of

profession. But only the wise have oil in their vessels: the foolish have their lamps, but no oil—a *profession without Christ*. Alas! it is the state, we fear, of many thousands in this day of nominal Christianity.

Well, as they all slept, so they all awoke at the cry, and trimmed their lamps. And now it is on the approach of the Bridegroom that the foolish find they need something they do not possess, for they find their lamps are “going out” (as it should read, not “gone out”).

The wise virgins cannot supply *their* need. They must go and buy for themselves. In the meantime the Bridegroom arrives, and they that are ready go in with him to the marriage; and—awful words!—“the door was shut.”

But the foolish virgins now appear. It does not say that they have procured any oil, but they come, and are represented as crying, “Lord, Lord, open unto us. But he answered, and said, Verily, I say unto you, I know you not.”

What words of warning are these to the professors of this day! Will you still be deceived? Will you still profess to be God’s people? Here you are represented as *deceived* up to the very gates of heaven, as it were; but then to hear those fatal words, “I know you not.” Alas! one trembles to

think of the responsibility of any who help on, with ritualism, or any other means, the fatal delusion, that a mere human religion is all that is needed. May God open the eyes of all who are being led astray by the delusions of Satan. The exhortation is still, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." (Isa. lv. 1.)

All closes with these seasonable words: "Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." With oil in our vessels, we can look forward with joy to that happy moment, when we shall hear "the voice of the archangel and the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive, and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

THE TALENTS.

MATTHEW XXV. 14-30.

“For [the kingdom of heaven is] as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had 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. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst 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: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents; behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an 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, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. 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 unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

This parable is very similar to the one of the Pounds (Luke xix.), only here one receives five talents; one, two; and another, one, "according to their several ability;" whereas, in Luke, each received one pound. Here the wicked servant buried the talent "in the earth;" in Luke it was wrapped "in a napkin." Here the faithful servants are made rulers over "many things," and "enter into the joy of their Lord;" in Luke they were put over "cities."

This parable shews that all have not the same ability, but all have the same Lord to serve, and all should have the same zeal in their Master's service. Each is to use the gift; and this implies it is not something already possessed in nature, it is bestowed by the Lord, to be used for Him. It will be seen the words, "kingdom of heaven," have been added. It is the faithfulness of His servants, rather than the kingdom.

Here the sovereign goodness of the Lord comes out. Surely it would be more than an ample reward to rule over 'many things;' but it is added, they are to enter into the joy of their Lord—to be brought into immediate association with Himself. Who can estimate what this will be?

Thus we are called upon to be using our talents for the Lord in His absence. It follows the parable of the Ten Virgins. We are to use our talents, not to sleep. When He returns, He will ask us as to how we have used these talents. It may be that the reader has but one—let him use that faithfully, and not, as is the temptation to many, wish he had more or different gifts, and thus be neglecting the one he has; and our Lord will accord to him His divine approval on His return, and make him a sharer of His own joy.

We feel the especial danger is, as in our parable, to those who have but *one* talent. It may seem so small in comparison with the gifts of others, and it may be for our doing things unseen by mortal eyes. Ah, but *God sees*; He has given the talent, and the *one* talent is given according to "ability," even as to those who have more. Then such could not use two if they could get them; their work is to use the one they have. May God arouse all to use the gifts He has given

in dependence upon Himself, the living God.

As in the parable of the Pounds, so here, *all* receive gifts. This agrees with Ephesians iv. 16, where, under the figure of a body, there is that which *every* joint supplies—*supplies*, mark, not receives, though that is true also; but every part has its office to fulfil, and each has to do that which specially belongs to it; and no one is so insignificant, that the most advanced can say, “I have no need of thee.” Yea, the parts that we think to be less honourable, have the more abundant honours. All is so beautifully fitted, that there should be no superfluous member, and no lack. (See 1 Cor. xii.)

We doubt not many of the complaints of the lack of gift would cease were each using faithfully, as to the Lord, what he has. We are also told to “covet earnestly the best gifts;” but he that is not faithful in a little, cannot be entrusted with that which is greater, while the talent of the slothful servant is given to the one who had received the ten. Let us not forget, also, that even a Timothy needed the exhortation to *stir up* his gift (2 Tim. i. 6), or it might lie dormant and unused.

There is much need in many places, but who can tell the amount of talents there are buried in *the earth*, or earthly things?

May God arouse us to the sense of need, and to our individual responsibility.

The Master will return, and we shall have to give an account of our stewardship. "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (2 Cor. v. 10.) But the apostle joins with this—"We labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of [or acceptable to] him."

As in the parable of the Pounds, all who take the place of servants will be judged as such. The unprofitable servant said he knew his master was a "hard" man; yea, more, that he took what did not rightfully belong to him; and he was afraid, and went and hid the talent in the earth. All a tissue of excuses to cover up his unfaithfulness; but it shews how man, and even those who profess to be God's servants, may regard their Master in heaven. All is *hard* work to the slothful, and it is wicked to charge injustice to God. So he is called a slothful and wicked servant, and is consigned to the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But the faithful enter into the joy of their Lord, a rich compensation, surely, for any little service we can do here for that One to whom we owe all we have, and all we are,

though nothing is little done for such a Master. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Cor. xv. 58.)

CONCLUSION.

We have looked at the various parables in the New Testament. It will be seen that they embrace a wide range, even from Christ seeking fruit in His vineyard (Israel), until He comes again, and receives those waiting for Him, and calls His servants around Him, to hear how they have been engaged for Him while away. We have also seen there are some *fundamental* truths taught in the parables, such as Christ becoming "a sower," because man is too bad to be able to render any acceptable fruit to God. Also life after the death of the wicked, in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, and an impassable gulf which prevents intercourse. Also the wonderful *grace* of God, in the way in which He seeks the lost, and receives the prodigal to His bosom; but nothing more, or different, is to be expected from God as good news. In the Old Testament there were Moses and the prophets; *now* there is the gospel of the grace of God. If men reject

this, neither would they believe though one rose from the dead.

We have also the wonderfully true pictures of the professing church—not its glory and beauty, for, as a whole, here it has none; but of the evil mixed with it—evil in doctrine, and evil in person, true pictures indeed, which could only have been drawn by the finger of God.

All this throws light upon what our Lord said to His disciples, after He had been relating some of His parables. He said, “Have you understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord. Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man which is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.” (Matt. xiii. 51, 52.) Thus the parables embrace things of the old dispensation, and things of the new: and a man instructed in these has *a treasure* from which he can draw. And, as we have seen, in several of the parables are the very truths Christians need in this day, that they may see things as God sees them, and be looking for only that which He has said is to be expected. But every truth taught in the parables is confirmed, again and again, by other parts of scripture, so that none can say, “It is only in a parable.” No, all God’s truth is one.

But God Himself has stamped an importance upon the parables, so that a man instructed in them shall have a treasure out of which he can bring things new and old.

May God enable us, each and all, to do this, to His glory and our own blessing ; and to Him be all the praise.

