

Charles Andrew
COATES

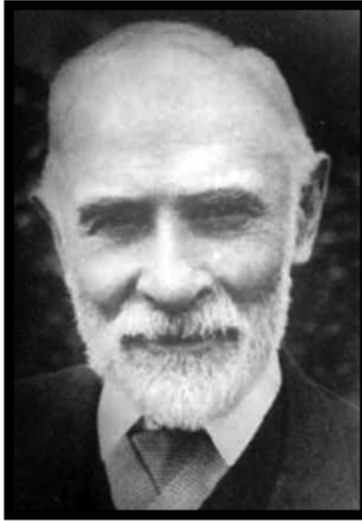
V10 Outline of Luke's
Gospel

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LUKE 1

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In Paul's closing words in Timothy he called attention to the fact that Luke was with him, which is a spiritual intimation that Luke's service was closely associated with Paul's. Luke's writings I present things which are essential to the understanding of Paul. He alone of the evangelists relates particularly the circumstances connected with the Lord being carried up into heaven. Paul was converted by seeing Jesus in heaven as the glorified One, but the Person whom he came to know as in heaven had been seen on earth by eye-witnesses, and we need the gospels, and particularly Luke, to give us the knowledge of the Person who is now in heaven. We need to learn Him as He was here that we may know Him where He is in heaven. The One who is now in heaven has trodden this earth as the lowly Man; He has been seen and heard and attended by a company of persons who became acquainted with Him. This gospel is written that we might have the supreme favour from God of seeing and hearing in a spiritual way what those saw and heard who were eye-witnesses and attendants on the Word. We have the privilege of sharing with them what they saw and heard in that blessed One. No greater favour could be shown us, and if we do not know what it is to study Him in His course through this world we shall not know Him as He is now in heaven. Our knowledge of Him in heaven is dependent On what was disclosed in Him down here.

Luke and Paul were both in the same position as ourselves in regard to the Lord as seen down here; neither of them had known Him thus personally, but Luke became accurately acquainted from the origin with all things concerning Him, and God had taken Luke up to communicate accurate knowledge and certainty as to these things. There are certain "matters fully believed among us". The believing company is still on earth, and certain matters are fully believed in that company. Thank God it is so! But that does not deprive us of the privilege of knowing the certainty of those things. The gospel of Luke is largely the unfolding of the glory of the Lord as the Mediator and as we contemplate it by the Spirit we shall be changed into the same image.

To Luke as to John the Lord was "the Word". I have often wondered why we do not speak more of Christ as the Word. It was evidently a common and well-known designation of Him, for both Luke and John use it as a well-known title. It conveys that God is now in full expression as to His mind and nature in a Man. We have to do now with matters that are far greater than creation. God could speak in power and creation came into being. John tells us that "without

him not one thing received being that has received being", but there was not in that any communication of the mind of God, or any disclosure of what He was in His nature and character. Now there is the full telling out of what God is in His nature, in His thoughts, in His heart, and this in One who trod this earth as Man, who was seen and heard and attended by men like ourselves. A man might make a watch if he was skilful enough; God could make one by a word; but there would not be any expression of God's thoughts or of His heart in making a watch, a world, or a universe. That would not bring out God's mind or His heart, but "the Word" does. Revelation is greater than creation. Men and women like ourselves were privileged to be eye-witnesses of and attendants on the Word. They were privileged to be in His retinue, and the Spirit of God would give us, through the gospels, the privilege of personal nearness to the Word. One would judge that the greatness of divine revelation was very much before the minds of the apostles and early saints. They thought and spoke much of "the Word". We think of Christ as Lord, as Saviour, as Head, and as Priest, and these are wonderful titles and characters, but how great and glorious He is as "the Word"! John and Luke had an immense sense of it. In the Word God expressed what was in His mind and His heart, what He is in His very nature. It bows one's soul to think of it. It was a necessity to God's love that He should speak out of His nature, His thoughts and His heart, and that He should have beings capable of appreciating it. It was not like a royal visit when some great personage comes, and there is reserve; everybody must be respectful; there are soldiers to keep the people back; all is in formal and stately splendour. There is nothing like that here. Peter says, "the Lord Jesus came in and went out among us". It was a lowly Man coming in and going out in all the ordinary circumstances of human life, but in those circumstances expressing the nature and character of God and the activities of God in boundless favour and grace towards men. He was "The Word". It says in Hebrews I that God spoke in the Person of the Son. We do not wonder that many took in hand to record it. How could they help it? "Many have undertaken to draw up a relation concerning the matters fully believed among us". What men saw and heard — what held them in attendance upon Him — was the wonder of the expression He was giving of God. Sinful men, for the first time, saw and heard "the Word". It would have been strange if many had not undertaken to draw up a relation concerning such matters. They are matters of such profound interest and importance to all men that to know of them kindles a desire to make them known. We can say with deep thankfulness that these matters are "fully believed among us".

God has been particularly favourable to us in employing a Gentile to write this gospel. Luke was probably a Gentile and he was writing to a Gentile, whose

name means "Lover of God". That this wonderful gospel should be written to one individual shows the delight that God has in making Himself known to one man. Each individual reader can take it all to himself. God has been very favourable to us in enabling Luke to put these matters on record in a divine way. Other people had done their best, but that was not good enough for us; God took up Luke and made him the medium of these communications by the Holy Spirit, so that all these matters concerning the Word should be made known to us accurately and with method. It is the consideration of divine grace for us; we might well admire and adore the grace that has given us such a gospel.

Luke is writing to a lover of God, and it is only such who can appreciate his gospel in a spiritual way. He also calls attention to the fact that he writes "with method", he puts everything in order; so we have to notice in Luke not only what he writes but where and how he puts things. It is like a beautiful picture gallery, but the pictures are not hung anyhow; every picture is in its right place; everything is "with method". So we may not only admire Luke's pictures by looking at them in an isolated way, but we may see that every picture has its place in the series. Luke takes up incidents,

and puts them just where they are "with method"; he has an object in it.

The first feature of method which we notice is that Luke introduces us to what may be called a priestly atmosphere. It is as much as to say that the things he is about to write can only be entered upon in spiritual conditions. So he brings before us first priestly conditions and an atmosphere of prayer. He sheds the perfume of incense over the opening of his gospel, indicating conditions which are suitable to what God was about to introduce, and also that this gospel must be approached in a priestly spirit if we wish to apprehend the substance of it in spiritual reality. No doubt we are all familiar with the text; believers generally are as familiar with Luke as with any part of Scripture, but there must be suitable conditions if we are to enter into it with spiritual appreciation. So we find a man and his wife here, both of the priestly family, and both walking consistently with the light that God had given them up to that time. If we are not walking in consistency with the light that has been given to us we are not in a condition to get more. These two, Zacharias and Elizabeth, were in accord with the light that God had given to them, fearing Jehovah and walking blamelessly before Him, and Zacharias was engaged in the priestly service of offering incense. Incense in Scripture is typical of prayer (Psalm 141: 2), but of a special character. I have no doubt that this gospel has in view the setting up of priestly conditions. It ends by showing us a company of persons in the temple praising and blessing God. There is a praying company

in the temple at the beginning of the gospel, but all their prayers are answered at the end, so they are praising and blessing God. If our prayers have incense character they will surely eventuate in our praising and blessing God. The psalmist said, "Let my prayer come before thee as incense" — it should be an exercise with us whether our prayers have this character.

Incense according to Exodus 30 is very precious; it was composed of fragrant drugs and pure frankincense, but compounded according to the art of the perfumer; it was pure and salted and holy. That indicates a character of prayer that is delightful to God. Incense is prayer that is in accord with the mind of God. The most wonderful example of prayer that was truly incense is recorded in John 17; every grain of that precious prayer was indeed fragrant. If we read Paul's prayers for the Colossians and Ephesians we see in them prayers that had the character of incense; every grain of those prayers was fragrant to God as the expression of His own thoughts for His people. In the Lord's prayer we do not find the slightest allusion to any failure on the part of His saints. And in Paul's prayers there is no allusion to any failure on their part; he is entirely occupied with the thoughts of God about His people. That is incense. I have no doubt that Zacharias had prayed on that line. The angel said, "Thy supplication has been heard". It was many years before that he had prayed for a son, and the answer given showed the kind of spirit in which he had prayed. He had evidently wanted a son who should be in some way an expression of God's favour to Israel, and the angel said, Your prayers shall be answered; you shall have a son and his name shall be called John (meaning The favour of God), and many of the sons of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. Zacharias had longed that the sons of Israel should be turned to the Lord their God. That is the kind of prayer that is truly incense. Then in this chapter the fragrance of incense was going up inside the temple and the people were in accord with it; they were praying outside.

If we are to profit from Luke's gospel we shall have to pray in our chambers, in our households, and in our meetings. It is no good to think of reading the gospel of Luke without prayer. The Lord is specifically presented as the Man of prayer in this gospel; there are at least seven instances of His praying. We have the privilege of caring for the interests of God in our rooms and households. If we pray in our own rooms we shall find it so sweet that we would not like to deny ourselves the privilege of praying in our households, and we shall find that so sweet that it would lead to our taking up the privilege of praying in the assembly. God would not have dumb priests; such a one is not equal to his own desires. We often have holy and spiritual desires, but we are not equal to them, and so we come under some expression of God's displeasure. God was displeased with the unbelief of Zacharias, and He

is displeased with us if we are not equal to our prayers. We have perhaps often had to confess that when we have got off our knees we have been characterised by something quite contrary to what we have been praying about.

This chapter brings out the fact that God will move on in His grace in spite of the unbelief that will not trust Him to do it. The angel says, "the which shall be fulfilled in their time"; that is, faith or no faith, God says, 'I am going on with My thoughts of grace'. What we see in this gospel is an irresistible and unquenchable grace, so that, even when a man prays and is not equal to his own prayers, God says, 'I am equal to them, and I am going to answer them, I am going to carry out not only what was in your heart, but all that is in My heart!' God is going to do it in His persistent grace, He reaches the fulfilment of His own thoughts in spite of unbelief. I suppose everyone who has read these early chapters of Luke has been impressed by the nearness of heaven which is disclosed in them. In Matthew the communications from heaven are in measure veiled; an angel appears to Joseph but it is in a dream; there are no dreams in Luke. There is a certain suggestion of distance about a dream, but what strikes one here is the personal and intimate character of the communications from heaven.

Zacharias was a priest morally as well as officially; he had known what it was to draw near to God in private. And, as we have noticed; he had desired some mark of God's favour to Israel. We have referred to his unbelief, but it is well to bear in mind that his exercises before God had been very genuine, and had been regarded by God, and they were answered by glad tidings from heaven. The very mind of God as known in heaven was revealed in glad tidings to a man on earth. A heavenly personage appeared to Zacharias. It is interesting to see that angels have names which are expressive of what God is: Michael means, "Who is like God?" and Gabriel means, "God is mighty". Gabriel's accustomed place was to stand before God; he was sent to Zacharias as one conversant with the mind of God as it was known in heaven.

The angel appeared "on the right side of the altar of incense". It was not at the brazen altar, though no doubt the morning or evening lamb had been offered there, nor would we forget that the blood of the sin offering had been put on the horns of the altar of incense. But Luke does not introduce the sacrificial side; the altar of incense is the point at which the communications from heaven come in. It does not speak of dealing sacrificially with sin in the way of atonement — deeply essential as that is — but the burning of holy fragrance before God in which He could find delight. It suggests that the favourableness of God to men is according to Christ; His thoughts of favour

manward have found expression in Christ, and they are a delight to God as expressed in Him. God was about to have One on earth in whom He could delight as the full setting forth of His favour to men. There was sweet fragrance in this for the heart of God.

"The right" is the favourable side; the Lord sets the sheep on His right hand, and when Bathsheba came to Solomon he caused a throne to be set for her on his right hand; it is the place of favour, and here in Luke I it is expressive of the favour of God to men. The birth of John was announced there, John means "The favour of God". The great thought in Luke is the favour of God to men; heaven draws near at the right of the altar of incense. Luke does not dwell on the sacrificial side, but the side of divine favour to men. So the death of Jesus in Luke is not presented from the sacrificial side, but rather as in Hebrews 2, "that by the grace of God he should taste death for everything". It is the extreme favour d to men set forth in the death of Jesus. All the grace been brought near to men in this world; the of it came by a great and heavenly personage, to Zacharias or to Mary; it was by one whose name set forth the might of God, but whose service revealed that the might of God was acting in favourableness to men. The greatness of God in His grace to men is what is magnified in Luke. We might well say with David, "Great is Jehovah, and exceedingly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable", Psalm 145:3. Later in this gospel we read that "all were astonished at the glorious greatness of God", chapter 9: 43. It is not a question in this gospel merely of meeting man's need but of the revelation of God's greatness in grace. The end in view is that God may have good pleasure in men.

name means "The favour of God". No doubt Zacharias had prayed that he might have a son who would be the expression of the favour of God to the sons of Israel, and his subsequent unbelief did not invalidate the genuineness of his exercises before God, nor prevent God from answering those exercises by bringing in His own favour. There never had been such an expression of divine favour in this world before, because John was not to be like an Old Testament prophet who could speak of divine intervention as a more or less distant prospect. John was to be the immediate forerunner of Jesus; that is why he was great before Jehovah as expressing divine favour to men as no prophet had ever expressed it. Gabriel announced the birth of John as glad tidings from heaven; he would be joy and rejoicing to Zacharias, and many should rejoice at his birth, for he would be great before Jehovah. He would not be marked by natural energy or excitement — wine or strong drink — but by being filled sovereignly with the Holy Spirit. He would be the expression of the sovereign favour of God in regard of Israel's departure from Him. He would be a vessel of divine power and grace to turn many of the sons of Israel to their

God. It was when the sons of Israel had departed from God, that divine favour came in to turn them to Jehovah their God. It was all to make ready for the Lord a prepared people. There must be a people prepared to appreciate the grace that was coming out of heaven — the divine favour to men that was about to be expressed in Jesus. We all have to be prepared to appreciate it as much as the sons of Israel had to be prepared.

In Mary we see divine favour magnified more than in any other instance. No human being was ever the subject of such favour as Mary; Gabriel's salutation to her was, "Hail, favoured one!" His coming to her is not presented as being in answer to her exercises, but as the unsought and blessed outflow of the favour of heaven. That is the character of Luke's gospel — heaven breaking forth into this world so as to bring divine joy to the children of men. It is not divine favour known providentially or in changed circumstances for men, but God Himself coming in in a grace that surpasses everything, in grace that was as high above the thoughts of men as heaven is above the earth. Mary is in one way a contrast to Zacharias; in Zacharias there was self-consideration which led to unbelief, but in Mary there was complete absence of self-consideration. She yielded herself to God to be the vessel for the working out of His supreme thoughts of grace. She said, "Behold the bondmaid of the Lord; be it to me according to thy word". There was no self-consideration. Elizabeth might well say, "Blessed is she that has believed". Mary is an outstanding example in Scripture of a believer. Heaven was about to break forth in the way of boundless favour to men, and there was one heart at least divinely prepared to appreciate it. The thought of it raises exercise as to whether we are prepared to appreciate through divine grace the great things of God which are unfolded in this gospel. Mary only asked how. It was a question of faith, not unbelief. She was not dumb; how beautifully she spoke! It is to be noticed that she did not speak as being full of the Holy Spirit like Elizabeth or Zacharias. She spoke out of her own faith and her own simple joy in grace. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour". It is the precious and holy activity of Mary's own spirit that is brought before us; she could say these things as being equal to them in her own spirit. To speak out of one's own spirit and one's own understanding, is in one sense a greater thing than to speak in the power of the Holy Spirit, because in the former case we have a person formed intelligently in the things of which he speaks. The Spirit might take up a vessel like Balaam and make him say wonderful things that he knew nothing about himself, but it is a greater thing to say things about divine favour as knowing the blessedness of them oneself. Mary was a suitable vessel to be taken up in divine favour, and what she was

came out in what she said. She was imbued with the spirit of her sister Hannah in the Old Testament.

I think we should be justified in regarding Mary as the representative of that humanity with which the Lord was about to identify Himself. Mary was saluted from heaven as a favoured one — “Hail, favoured one”, and “Thou hast found favour with God”. It was not a question of meeting need but of divine favour being expressed from the height of heaven. The birth of the Holy Child Jesus as conceived and born of a woman was the supreme expression of that favour. There could be no closer identification with humanity than to be born of a woman. “Come of woman”, Paul says. How favourable God is to men! He would send forth His Son, come of a woman, as a Child born. The prophetic word had said, “Unto us a child is born”. Mary was actually His mother, but He was born unto us who are of the race of men; He came forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse. May the greatness of it arrest, and hold our hearts! The Scripture we have read is covered by the two statements — “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given”. The Child born secures everything in divine favour for men, the Son given secures supreme delight for God in Man. In the apprehension of this, God would enable us to give Him a Name, He would enable us to call Him Jesus. God would have all that is covered or expressed in that Name — the infinitude of divine favour manward — to be intelligently recognised by us — “Thou shalt call his name Jesus”. There can be no greater thought of divine favour than is expressed in that Name. It means “Help of Jehovah” or “. Salvation of Jehovah”. We get God’s help or salvation for men spoken of typically or prophetically in the Old Testament, but now it is in One who comes in in a divine way as born to us. All the grace of heaven is in that Name of Jesus, brought into humanity so as to be recognised and known by men. Have we learned to name Him as the expression of infinite divine favour?

The angel said to the shepherds, “Fear not, for behold, I announce to you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people: for today a Saviour has been born to you in David’s city, who is Christ the Lord”. The coming in of this Child has a bearing in divine favour towards all men. In the gospel of Luke it is not only that man needs God, but that God needs man in order that He may express in man and towards man the favour of His own heart. Jesus coming in manhood is all for men. It is sovereign in the sense that God took His own way unsolicited; He moved according to His own pleasure in causing the Dayspring from on high to visit us — the shining forth from heaven of what was in His own heart.

I do not wonder that Satan makes every effort by his servants to cast doubt on the virgin birth of Jesus. If he can succeed in that he has gained his, whole

object; he has robbed us of all that the birth of Jesus means: he has robbed us of the favour of God, and of God's salvation. If Nazareth and Bethlehem go, Calvary goes also, and there is no Jesus of Nazareth glorified at the right hand of God. The whole fabric of Christianity is gone.

In order to understand the expression, "He shall be great and shall be called Son of the Highest" we must go to chapter 6: 34, 35. "If ye lend to those from whom ye hope to receive, what thank is it to you? For even sinners lend to sinners that they may receive the like. But love your enemies and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return, and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be sons of the Highest". The Highest as referred to in Luke seems to refer to the way in which God is above all the evil of men. He is so great and so high that the evil of men does not hinder Him; He moves on in the height of His own blessed way of grace and goodness because of what He is. The greatness of Jesus as Son of the Highest is the greatness of superiority over evil, He was unhindered by it. God goes on with His elevated thoughts, He is not diverted from them by the evil in man. God's intent is to bring men into correspondence with Himself.

If God is superior to all the evil in men and is favourable to them in spite of the evil in them, He takes account of the fact that there are powers adverse to men, and that is why the throne comes in. "The Lord God shall give him the throne of David his father" — David's throne was a victorious throne. What marked his reign was the subjugation of all that was adverse to Israel. God takes account of man as having fallen under the power of things that are adverse to him, but God is favourable to man and He has set up a throne in Jesus, a throne of unchallenged supremacy over every power that is adverse to man. It had pleased God to put men in positions of rule, but they had all failed; but now He speaks of One who would meet victoriously all the powers that are adverse to man — Satan, principalities, authorities, and all the influences emanating from them, and even death itself. The throne has proved itself supreme, and will do so publicly ere long.

His reigning over the house of Jacob brings out the calling and election of God, in sovereignty. But for that there would be no subjects for the reign of Jesus. Jacob needed lifelong discipline; he had to be corrected and adjusted, but God had taken him up in grace and faithfulness, and He did not finish with him until He had brought about what He intended. He said to him, "I will not leave thee until I have done what I have spoken to thee of". Jesus reigns over the house of Jacob; all the subjects of divine calling and election come under the sway of Jesus. God's object in His calling and election is to secure a people who shall come effectively under the sway of Jesus — under the influence of

divine grace set forth in Him — and as we do so we shall reach eternal life; that is suggested in the words, “of his kingdom there shall not be an end”. Nothing more is needed to bring us into eternal life than to be under the sway of Jesus. Supreme grace in Jesus brings in eternal life, for it brings in conditions that displace lawlessness and idolatry, and the power of death.

“Mary said to the angel, How shall this be?” When there is any difficulty as to divine things and we ask for explanation, we always get an enlargement of what has been spoken of. When the Lord explained His parables He always added their import. When Mary asked Gabriel how this was to be, she got great enlargements. It is noticeable that in the first statement Mary is prominent as the subject of divine favour, but in answer to her question the angel turns to speak of things on the divine side, so what is prominent is the Holy Spirit, the power of the Highest, and the Holy Thing that shall be called Son of God. It is now what is for God. There was to be One found in manhood for the complete satisfaction and delight of the heart of God; He was to be called the Son of God; it is what He is in relation to God. The things we have been looking at show what He would be on God’s part in relation to men, but now we set what He would be in relation to God — the Son of God. That suggests the other side of the glad tidings; God’s thought is to have sons for Himself. Eternal life is for men, but sonship is for God, for His own delight. There was about to be One in this world in manhood who could be called Son of God; the full delight of God was secured in Him in view of men being brought into sonship for God’s delight. The complete thought of God is set forth in the two things — eternal life and sonship — and all was to be secured by the coming in of the Child and the Son given.

“When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, come of woman, come under law, that he might redeem those under law, that we might receive sonship”. We are living in this extraordinary time in the ways of God, a time marked by fulness; there is supreme favour for men and supreme delight for God. It is the time of the fulness of the thoughts of the heart of God in blessing manward and for the delight of His own heart. People talk of being poor, miserable things, but God would say to them, ‘Do you understand the character of the moment? Do you understand that there has been a Child born and a Son given? Will you not take account of all that has resulted from that for you and for Me?’ We have the shining of God in the revelation of Himself in grace, and it becomes great to us. We begin to contemplate with adoring and satisfied hearts the fulness of what has come in through the Child born and the Son given. All is secured there for men and for God. Luke’s gospel shows how God needs man in order to express His own unbounded favour. The question is often asked, Why did God permit sin to come in? He

allowed it to come in because in relation to a sinful creature He could give expression to the boundless grace of His own heart in a way that He could not express to an unfallen being. It has given God occasion to make Himself known in the supremacy of His grace, that in result He might have men as objects of delight for His heart. It shows the extra-ordinary place man has in the thought of God. The divine Person who came of a woman was before God in purpose as the expression of the thought He had in His mind in relation to men. God's thought for man for His pleasure was that he should be in sonship.

One feels the necessity for being somewhat in Mary's spirit, "Behold the bondmaid of the Lord, be it to me according to thy word". She submitted herself to be the vessel of these wondrous thoughts of favour. God is looking that we should submit ourselves to His thoughts of favour in regard to us, and His thoughts for His own delight. We came to them in a spirit of subjection as subdued by the grace and love which has made them known.

There could hardly be anything more beautiful than the conditions that are set before us in these holy woman. "The hill country" is an appropriate setting for such incidents; there is a moral elevation about these favoured persons and their utterances which is far above the level of the world and the thoughts of men. Both Elizabeth and Mary were extraordinary subjects of divine favour, Mary particularly so. They are representatives of humanity as the subject of supreme divine favour. They both spoke of what God had done to them, of how He had acted with reference to them. We do not see a trace either in Mary or Elizabeth of the degradation of the fallen creature. What shines out in each of them is the exaltation which grace confers on the creature: "He has exalted the lowly". In the persons of these holy women we see humanity most blessedly exalted as the subject of divine favour. There is a moral suggestion in the "hill country"; it is an elevated region; and it is important for us to take account of it with reference to the incoming of Jesus. We see in Mary and Elizabeth a lowliness and an exaltation, neither of which belong naturally to the fallen creature. We see subjection to God and an appreciation of divine favour; we see elevation and dignity through the knowledge of God; and a laying hold of what was in God for the creature; all that is exaltation, not degradation. We have to take account of the degradation of man as a fallen creature, but as we read the gospel of Luke we are brought to take account of the elevation which divine favour confers upon that fallen creature, so that no trace of the degradation is left. What could be more exalted than the utterances of Elizabeth and Mary!

It is of the utmost importance that we should see two histories in Scripture. From the beginning of Scripture to the end we find in a great variety of ways

the portrayal of the degradation of the fallen creature. But alongside of that history we find another; from the first chapter of Scripture to the last we find the history of the moral elevation to which the favour of God can exalt men. Those two histories cover the whole of Scripture. I dwell on this because it is of vital importance in regard to the coming in of the Son of God into this world. The Lord came in to identify Himself with man as the subject of divine favour. The Lord never identified Himself with the degradation of the fallen creature until He took it up sacrificially upon the cross. It was there and then, and there and then only, that the Lord came into personal contact with sin. He "did no sin", He "knew not sin" and "in him sin is not"; He was "the holy thing", but on the cross He touched sin vicariously and sacrificially; He was made sin; He bore the judgment that attached to the degradation of the fallen creature. But in life He never identified Himself with the degradation of the fallen creature; He identified Himself with all that was of God.

Mary and Elizabeth stand as representatives of that history of man which is connected with man as a subject of divine favour. All through the Scriptures we see that there is something else beside the degradation of the fallen creature; there is the work of divine grace in man. Right through the ages from Abel down we find men marked by the fear of God and faith in God, and by the appreciation and joy of knowing what was in God for them and what He could be to them. Nothing that is on that line belongs to the degradation of the fallen creature. It marks the moral exaltation of a creature who has learned to fear God, and to hope in His mercy, and to be lowly as knowing what attaches to himself by nature — knowing well that by nature he is a child of wrath even as others. How much there is in Scripture of the history of faith, of man as morally elevated by divine favour! It is of the utmost importance to see that the Lord Jesus in coming into humanity did not partake in any way in the degradation of the fallen creature, nor did He personally identify Himself with it until He was made sin upon the cross, but He did identify Himself with those who were morally elevated by divine mercy and favour. I believe that is vital to the truth of Christianity, and I do not think the truth\ of the Lord's Person or of divine grace will be rightly apprehended apart from the recognition of it.

The titles and designations which the Lord assumed all indicate His identification with men, or with women, viewed as the subjects of divine mercy and grace. He is spoken of as the seed of the woman, and the seed of Abraham, and the seed of David. All these designations suggest the operations of divine mercy and grace. Abraham is the great father of the faith family, the root of the olive tree of promise; he is a singular example of man as the subject of divine favour. David was the depositary or vessel of the promises

relating to the kingdom, just as Abraham was the vessel of the promises of world-wide blessing to the families of the earth. That Christ should be the woman's seed indicates this line of mercy and divine favour in a most extraordinary way. When Jehovah Elohim spoke to the serpent of the woman's seed, and said, "He shall crush thy head", what favour He was putting on the woman! It was as much as to say, 'You have corrupted and degraded her, but I will put honour upon her; I will give her a Seed who shall be capable of destroying your power altogether'. It conferred a distinction upon the woman that was purely of divine mercy and grace. The seed of the woman in principle covers, not only Christ, but all the saints. God said, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman" — I think that indicates that the woman represented humanity as the subject of divine mercy — "and between thy seed and her seed". Abel was the first on the line of the woman's seed, and Cain the first of the serpent's seed; there was enmity between them, and there has been enmity between the two seeds ever since. The serpent's seed are men viewed in the degradation of the fallen creature, but the woman's seed are men who become the subjects of divine favour and are thereafter morally exalted. The Lord identified Himself with humanity in the latter aspect. It is said of Him in Hebrews 2, "For he does not indeed take hold of angels by the hand, but he takes hold of the seed of Abraham". He takes hold of humanity viewed as linked up with the promises of God, the faith family. He identifies Himself with that family: "Behold I and the children which God has given me. Since therefore the children partake of blood and flesh, he also in like manner took part in the same". Mary and Elizabeth were two of "the seed of Abraham", not merely by nature but morally as having faith. They represent the kind of humanity that the Lord Jesus, the holy Son of God, could identify Himself with. It would be blasphemous to say that He identified Himself with fallen humanity, save, of course, in atonement.

The Lord spoke of Himself often as the Son of man, but that title does not suggest the thought of man as a fallen being, but of what Christ is as the Heir of all that attaches to man in the mind of God. If we read Psalm 8 we shall see that it is man supremely exalted. Two words are used for man in Psalm 8 "What is man that thou art mindful of him?" — the word there means mortal or fallen man — "Or the son of man that thou visitest him". Christ is the Son of man. God is mindful of the fallen man, He regards him in mercy and grace, but the Son of man is the heir to all the thoughts of greatness, exaltation and supremacy that God has in mind for man. The title Son of man is really Son of Adam; Adam was the name God gave to man as unfallen, the heir to great dignity and exaltation, indeed to universal supremacy according to Psalm 8.

It has often been said that the Lord's genealogy in Luke is traced up to Adam, but if we read it we shall see that it is traced to God, and that makes a great and vital difference. It is traced step by step right back to God, and I believe that every person in that chain was the subject of the sovereign mercy and favour of God, and was found in the line of His grace and favour. The Lord came in to take His place in that generation; He was of that stock; not the stock of the fallen man marked as the subject of divine mercy and grace; He was a shoot out of the stock of Jesse. Vagueness as to this is at the bottom of many erroneous ideas as to the Person of the Lord, and if we are not clear as to the Person of the Lord we shall not be clear as to anything.

The Lord's identification in baptism with those who were being baptised by John is confirmatory of what we are saying. When He saw the repentant remnant submitting to the baptism of John, He went also to be baptised of him in Jordan. He identified Himself publicly in baptism with them, because they were moving Godward in repentance. He did not identify Himself with them as lawless sinners, but as repentant. It is true that He received sinners and ate with them, for He was here to express the infinitude of divine grace to men, but we may be sure that none came to Him in this way but repentant ones; only those who feared God really came to Him. Mary spoke of God's mercy being to generations and generations right through to the end. The Lord said, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Of course He will, because God will maintain it in His grace.

I do not doubt that Adam had faith, for he "called his wife's name Eve, because she is the mother of all living". It was, I believe, the evidence of his faith. Everything began with God; then we have this long line, a chain of many links, beginning with God and ending with Jesus. It was the line of man viewed as the subject of divine mercy and grace. On that line man is greatly exalted in the knowledge of God. That is the line that the Lord could be identified with; He was never identified with fallen man except upon the cross sacrificially and substitutionally. He said prophetically in Psalm 16, "To the saints that are on the earth, and to the excellent, In them is all my delight". That was His generation, and we see a sample of it in Mary and Elizabeth; the Lord came into a generation which was morally suitable for Him.

Seth was a vessel of God's praise, for he was appointed by God instead of Abel — appointed to take the place of one who had the thought of what was excellent before God, "the firstlings of his flock, and of their fat". It was not the efficacy of Abel's sacrifice which commended it, but its excellence. By faith he had an apprehension of Christ in the excellence that would be brought to light through death, so that his sacrifice is not called a burnt-offering, or a sin-

offering, but an oblation, referring to the pleasure of God in His gifts. Then Enos was a vessel of God's praise in the acknowledgment of what man is as having come under sin and death — his name means *weak* or *mortal* — and it was in the sense of this that "people began to call on the name of Jehovah", Genesis 4: 26. We have only to mention Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Boaz, David (as a few well-known names selected from the genealogy) to see that it represents a line marked by divine mercy and grace. Indeed it would be true to say that they all derived from Christ. He was David's Root as well as his Offspring; in a spiritual sense David derived everything from his greater Son. Abraham derived all from the One who could say, "Before Abraham was, I am". It was the Spirit of Christ in Old Testament saints that gave them character and faith. Whatever was, brought into humanity that was of God was by His sovereign favour, and Jesus came in as connected by birth of Mary with the unbroken continuity of the line of divine favour to men. He came in as identified with "Mercy (as he spoke to our fathers) to Abraham and to his seed for ever". His genealogy was morally suitable to Him, as having features which were of God right through.

In Elizabeth we see a woman filled with the Holy Spirit, and her child filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb; there could not be a greater expression of the sovereign favour of God than that. John had not yet come into responsibility, but he had come into sovereignty, and in sovereign favour he was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, recognises the unborn child as "My Lord". As to Mary hers was the blessedness of a believer; the things spoken to her would be fulfilled; all that was conferred upon her was purely in divine favour. In a spiritual sense she derived all from God and from her blessed and holy Son. How lovely are her words! "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour". The question of what was coming in was before her; her whole inward being was absorbed with the blessedness of divine favour, and it is God's thought for every one of us that we should be absorbed with it. Mary was truly a lowly one exalted; she was naturally a child of wrath, even as the rest, but as a subject of divine favour she does not make the slightest reference to her state as fallen. She speaks indeed of her low estate, but her low estate not as a lawless sinner, but as a bondmaid of God. She was wholly committed to His service and surrendered to His pleasure. Hers was a low estate, but what exaltation was conferred upon her! Henceforth all generations were to call her blessed, but her exaltation was altogether of divine favour, no part of it could be attributed to her. "For the Mighty One has done to me great things, and holy is his name". She speaks of His mercy, and of how He has helped Israel. All is on the line of what man is as the subject of divine favour,

and it produces in Mary a spirit of adoration. She herself was conscious of divine favour, and she thought of generations who should fear the Mighty One, and appreciate the favour manifested in Jesus.

In reading this gospel I believe God would have His grace to liberate us completely from every consideration connected with our natural state as sinful so that we might be fully and adoringly occupied with the supreme blessedness of His favour that has come to us in Jesus. God scatters haughty ones and puts down rulers; He sends away the rich empty, but He exalts the lowly and fills the hungry with good things.

We have been speaking of Elizabeth and Mary as representatives of humanity as the subjects of divine favour. The key-note of the portion that is before us now would seem to be the word "mercy". Mary said, "His mercy is to generations and generations of them that fear him"; she looked forward to many generations as being subjects of mercy: it would be those generations who would call her blessed. And again she says, "He has helped Israel his servant, in order to remember mercy (as he spoke to our fathers), to Abraham and to his seed for ever". The question was asked J.N.D. in the closing days of his life: What is the difference between mercy and grace? His answer was, Mercy is great in the greatness of the need, grace in the thought of the one who exercises it. That sentence is well worth weighing. Take an illustration. The king might be pleased to bestow upon me some mark of his favour; that would be purely a question of what was in his own heart. Grace is great in the thought of the one who exercises it. But suppose I were a convicted criminal in Exeter jail, mercy would be requisite, and the king could only show me his favour in the way of mercy; so mercy is great in the greatness of the need.

We have been speaking very much of grace — of divine favour — which is purely a question of what is in the heart of God. But then we have also to take account of the sinful condition of men, and that makes mercy requisite. Israel's fathers were poor idolaters, so that when God called Abraham out it was indeed mercy. When God made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He had the history of the people before Him; He knew all that they would be, right down to the crucifixion of Christ. Israel was His servant as a matter of pure mercy, and all that He spoke to the fathers was mercy. Mercy supposes conditions that are contrary to God, but in presence of them He shows mercy. When Israel worshipped the golden calf God said, "I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy". Nothing can invalidate the mercy of God with us; He reviewed all our history before He began with us; He knew all we should be as sinners, and as failing believers; He began with us in mercy, and it will be mercy from first to last.

Mercy is spoken of here in connection with the coming in of Jesus; God remembered mercy. At the end of Exodus 2 we are told that God remembered His covenant. The people were poor slaves and idolaters; Ezekiel tells us that they worshipped idols when God took them up in Egypt, but He remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and He acknowledged them as subjects of mercy. That is how God has acknowledged us. The state of Israel in Luke I was a very sad one, but Mary took account of them as subjects of mercy. John came in altogether on the line of mercy; Jehovah "magnified his mercy" with Elizabeth, and when her neighbours and kinsfolk heard it they appreciated it and rejoiced with her. The subject of conversation in all the hill country was the acting of God in mercy. Thank God there are still people living in "the hill country" who are not engrossed with business, or pleasure, or politics, or religion, but who converse together on the ways of God in mercy! God made His covenant in mercy, and He remembers it, and nothing can invalidate it. He brought in Jesus purely on the line of mercy. God is said to be rich in mercy; He has such an abundance of it that He has a large quantity to dispense.

We see here that there were persons who appreciated mercy, but they had to learn to discard natural thoughts. It was very natural to call the child after his father, but John had been named from heaven. He was the expression of the favour of heaven, and Zacharias and Elizabeth were in the confidence of heaven. They were free from natural thoughts, and they both appreciated that his name was John. The Lord Jesus Christ is the great expression of God's mercy, and Elizabeth was occupied with Mary's Child rather than her own, and Zacharias was full of thoughts of Christ rather than of John. He spoke of God fulfilling "mercy with our fathers" and remembering "his holy covenant". He speaks of "the bowels of mercy of our God". That is the source from which all blessing comes; Jesus comes to be the full expression of it.

Zacharias dwells entirely on what God has done. There are no "ifs" of any kind in what he says; he does not even bring in the thought of faith on the part of the people of God. Everything is seen in its absoluteness as wrought by God in mercy; he was full of what was coming in Jesus. He does not speak, like Simeon, of the Child being set for the fall of many in Israel and a sign spoken against. He speaks of what was coming in on God's part in all its greatness as mercy to His people. He had visited and wrought redemption for His people and raised up a horn of deliverance. "Bowels of mercy" show the tender yearnings of God over man, over Israel. What God is in His nature is the source and spring both of mercy and grace. Scripture does not say that God is grace or that God is mercy, but that God is love; that is what He is in His nature, and mercy and grace both flow from that. God has visited His people

in the way of redemption, and raised up a mighty horn of deliverance that His people may be liberated from everything adverse to them, so that they may serve Him in piety and righteousness before Him all the days of their life. God has made full provision for it.

This utterance of Zacharias shows that God is moving in the presence of conditions of need that call for mercy. The thought of influences adverse to God and adverse to His people is clearly referred to, for He speaks of "deliverance from our enemies and out of the hand of all who hate us". There are hostile conditions in view but the Horn of deliverance is equal to them all. It is a happy thought that if we are hindered by any hostile power there is not the slightest reason for it on God's part, for He has raised up a Horn of deliverance that is equal to anything. We all have enemies. A great deal rises up in ourselves and many influences act upon us through others, but God's Horn of deliverance is more than equal to liberate us from all. There is no need now for us to be hindered by any influence adverse to God. Peter speaks about fleshly lusts that war against the soul; if I have a fleshly lust it is an opportunity for me to prove the power of God's Horn of deliverance. Then there are reasonings. Did you never have a battle with your own reasonings? God's Horn of deliverance would set us free from all "reasonings and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God".

How is it that people do not get deliverance? I believe we do not get deliverance because we have not definitely committed ourselves to the service of God. Every person who definitely commits himself to the service of God will find there is deliverance in that mighty Horn that God has raised up. We have to come to it that it is the happiest possible thing to serve God. If I want happiness I can only find it on the line of serving God. To serve myself or my lusts and pleasures is bondage; we have all proved it to be so. If I am just going on with a comfortable life in the world, my soul is robbed of all I might be enjoying in the service of God. Liberty is found in serving God; it is the happiest thing possible to connect all you do with what pleases God. No one can get deliverance until he can say of God, like Paul, "whose I am and whom I serve". It is when we take that ground that we prove the power of God's Horn of deliverance. God does not grant deliverance as a *thing*; what He has provided is deliverance in a *Person*; He has raised up a Horn of deliverance — Jesus. There is a power of deliverance in Jesus to set us free from everything that is adverse to God and to us. The deliverance of the people from Egypt was a picture of it. God came in in mercy to deliver Israel from the bondage of Egypt so that they might serve Him. "Let my son go, that he may serve me"; that is what He wanted. It was seen in picture in Israel, but now we have come to the substance of it in Jesus. There is wonderful power in Jesus. I

suppose none of us really apprehends the immense divine power that is available for us in Him. Satan always works to get us to serve some other than God; he is always saying, Serve yourselves, or Serve the world, or, Serve your circumstances. But happiness lies in serving God, and the great evidence of mercy is that God has brought in a power adequate to set us perfectly free so that we may not ever do anything from morning to night every day of our lives but serve God, and find our happiness in doing so. Whether we are in the daily occupations of life, in the household, or business, or in the assembly, we have nothing to do in any sphere but to serve God. That is supreme happiness, and deliverance is needed for it, and the power of it lies in Jesus.

What is requisite on our side is self-judgment, and that is why John goes before the face of the Lord as the prophet of the Highest; the effect of John's ministry is to bring about self-judgment and repentance. If I am a self-judged person there is nothing to obstruct the movements of the Highest in supreme grace; He can take His own way with me. If I am self-sufficient or haughty I cannot expect anything from God in the way of blessing, but if I am self-judged there is nothing to hinder God from moving in His way of grace. John was to be called the prophet of the Highest to go before the face of Jehovah to make ready His ways. What ways they were! As we move through the gospel let us never forget that we are observing the ways of the Highest. Every self-judged soul gets the benefit of them. He comes to remit sins, and to give knowledge of deliverance by doing so.

The light of heaven — the dayspring from on high — breaks forth in this wonderful way. The light of heaven has broken in to give remission of sins on account of the bowels of mercy of our God. There is such an intensity of mercy in our God — such yearnings on His part to be known by His sinful creatures — that He comes out to remit our sins. If God will remit sins He will do anything that we need. If God remits His people's sins, will He leave them helpless in the hands of the enemy? Never. The fact that He has remitted our sins is the pledge that He will deliver us from every influence and power that is hostile, so that we may be set at liberty to serve Him continually. There may be painful experiences externally, but they are not superior to the joy that is within. Two dear brethren had painful experiences at Philippi, but they were able to sing through them. They were in the joy of deliverance inside before they had outward deliverance. They were praying and singing praises to God; they were as completely free inside as any lark that ever soared into azure with its breast full of song.

LUKE 2

Luke 2

There could be no greater evidence of the low estate of God's people than what we see here. The heir to David's throne was a carpenter in an obscure city of Galilee, and he, along with all Israel, was under the orders of the Roman emperor. But everything, from the emperor down to the carpenter, had to move in such a way as to carry out the will and purpose of God, and His prophetic word. The whole habitable world was set in motion to bring Mary to Bethlehem that her Son might be born there. God was in supreme control; He controlled the emperor; He used him to control the movements of Joseph and Mary, and He brought about just what He intended, and it is ever thus. He "moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform", and He makes everything contribute to the furtherance of His designs of grace. He makes everything subordinate itself to His will; it is good to see the greatness of God. Caesar Augustus had to take his place in the carrying out of what was in the will of God. Probably the census did not actually take place at this time, but some years later under Cyrenius' government, which shows that God used the decree to take Joseph and Mary to the royal city. It was not the census that was important, but the birth of Jesus.

"She brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him up in swaddling clothes and laid him in the manger, because there was no room for them at the inn". Those were not merely casual circumstances, because they were announced from heaven as being "the sign". The angel said, "And this is the sign to you: ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger". It is the sign. We should notice the contrast between Matthew and Luke. In Isaiah 7 the sign given by God is, "Behold the virgin shall conceive and shall bring forth a son, and call his name Immanuel". That scripture is quoted in Matthew I. That is the sign of God coming into be with His people as Emmanuel, "God with us". There are no swaddling clothes mentioned in Matthew; all is great there; He is born King; His star sheds its ray afar over the Gentile world; the magi come to do homage and open their treasures to offer Him gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh. He is seen in divine and regal glory. But in Luke the sign is connected with the lowliness of His nativity; no star, no homage, no offerings, but "a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger". It was the expression of weakness and complete dependence. He came in at the lowest point, personally and circumstantially.

A babe is humanity in the form of great weakness and dependence; no one is more absolutely dependent than a new-born babe; everything has to be done

for it. Jesus came in as a dependent Infant, receiving all from God through the loving care of His mother. It is perfection in an infant to be the subject of maternal love and care, and in that place His trust was in God; Psalm 22: 9, 10. The shepherds saw One in the place of manifest dependence, and that was to be characteristic of Him all through. It might be said that every infant is dependent on a mother's care. But what gives infinite meaning and value to the scene before us is that a Saviour, Christ the Lord, the Son of the Highest, the Son of God, was found in a condition where His mother had to wrap Him in swaddling clothes and lay Him in a manger. That *He* should be there exalts the circumstances to the highest point of moral glory. The swaddling clothes spoke volumes to heaven; they spoke of the place of complete dependence in which the Son of God was found as having come into humanity. God's salvation has come to us in One who came into humanity to be there as the entirely dependent One. He was cast upon God, He trusted in God even from the womb, as the Psalm tells us.

The wonder and the glory of it is that such a Person should be found in such a place, coming in at the lowest point of human weakness to be the dependent One from the moment of His birth. God found in Him One who could wholly trust Him, even as a Babe. Psalm 22 puts it clearly, "I was cast upon thee from the womb", and again, "Thou didst make me trust upon my mother's breasts". He received all as One dependent upon God, however God's care might be expressed, through His mother or through others; however it might come, it was to Him the care of His God. From the first moment of His entrance into this world He was the perfectly dependent One, who was cared for by God, and God's salvation has come to us in Him.

It was said to the shepherds, "Ye shall find a babe...".. Heaven could speak of it with delight. There was nothing for this world in a Babe who required to have everything done for Him; but there was everything for heaven. The shepherds were deeply interested; they said, "Let us see this thing that is come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us". A babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger: that was *the sign*. God has wrapped up in that sign what is essential to the whole truth of His grace. The shepherds came and saw, and they spoke of it far and wide. People that heard it wondered, and those who entered into it glorified and praised God.

But there is no room in man's world for One who is wholly cast upon God. It is not dependent ones who get the best room in the inn; it is independent people, men with material resources who get the best rooms. An inn is a place where men are measured; the best rooms are given to the rich, the common rooms to the poor, but for Jesus there was no room in the inn. There is no

room in man's world for perfect dependence upon God. Men say, 'We have our societies, our unions, our clubs. Come and join us and we will protect you and make things comfortable for you. You will have a nice time in the inn'. But if a man says quietly, 'I raise no question as to what you are doing, but for my part I prefer to depend on God', many a confessor of Christ in Christian England has found that it meant the loss of his daily bread. There is no room for dependence on God in man's world; every form of independence is there. God provided the manger for Jesus; it speaks of a provision that lies outside man's arrangements for himself or his fellows. The manger is outside what man provides for man, but God always provides for those who are content to accept whatever provision He may be pleased to make. God always has had, and always will have, a provision for those who trust in Him, and those who are in dependence on Him will prove it. It may not be luxurious, but it will always suffice for faith. Truly dependent ones accept what is provided, and find the care of God very sweet even in outward reproach.

The manger implied an outside place — a place of reproach; but it was God's provision for that holy Child, not a dignified place in this world, but honoured as being God's own provision for One who wholly trusted in Him. There will always be that which answers to the manger; it is for us to see that we are content with it; it is a sign of wondrous portent. People say, 'Why do you not build a fine chapel, and have it on the main street, and put yourselves into prominence?' We must remember the sign of the manger which speaks of divine provision in the place of reproach. Think what it was for Joseph and Mary to come to David's city and to find no room in the inn! The rightful heir to David's throne comes to David's city and there is no room in the inn! If things had been right in Bethlehem the best rooms in the inn would have been vacated for them. Yet they accepted the manger, and it became the sign of where God's salvation would be found. You will not find God's salvation in the best rooms of the inn, but in the manger. The grace that was coming in was not to be great and honoured in the world; it was to have the lowest place in the estimation of men. But what we want is the mind of heaven. Joseph and Mary were in the secret. They knew the greatness and the glory of the Child who was just about to be born when they went into that city, but they accepted the manger as God's provision.

All the interest of heaven centred in that manger and in the Child lying in it wrapped in swaddling clothes; outwardly there was the expression of greatest weakness and dependence, but everything that was great and glorious was there. How favoured were the shepherds to get communications from heaven! They learned where all true glory was found; they learned divine favour in that which to men was of no account. The inn represented man's provision for

himself and his fellows, and there was no room in it for Jesus, but there were shepherds abiding without who were sympathetic with heaven.

The wise men in Matthew recognised under the instruction of heaven that He was the King. They said, "Where is the King of the Jews, that has been born? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to do him homage". They saw the royal glory that attached to the Child, and they did Him homage; they gave Him choice and costly gifts. But in Luke it is the grace of God coming near to men, and what is brought out is the place of dependence into which He came, the place of having no resource save what God provided. Jesus came to be in the place of dependence and to be of no account in the estimation of the world — to lie in a manger. The shepherds were sympathetic with the thoughts of heaven, and all those thoughts centred in that Babe in the manger. In Matthew His official glory is prominent, but in Luke it is His moral glory. In Luke's gospel we see the Lord many times in prayer. It is the setting forth of One who was in absolute dependence, and the swaddling clothes were the sign of it. He received all as the expression of the care of His God. The shepherds were greatly affected by what they heard and saw; they returned glorifying and praising God. Shepherds represent those who care for what has value before God at some personal cost to themselves. God took up shepherds like Moses and David because in caring for their flocks they were in keeping with His own thoughts. If there was no room for the Lord in the inn, there was room for Him in the hearts of the shepherds; heaven took them into confidence. As having been taken into the confidence of heaven we see the most wonderful glory in that which in the eyes of man was of no account whatever. The shepherds said, "Let us see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us", and they came and saw, and became witnesses of it to others, and returned glorifying and praising God. All who heard it wondered, but Mary did more than wonder; she "kept all these things in her mind, pondering them in her heart".

There is also another remarkable feature in this scene which must not be overlooked. There was not only an angel of the Lord by the shepherds, but "the glory of the Lord shone around them"; Jehovah, God Himself, was there as well as the angel. He had come down in the glory of grace near to the shepherds. It was not merely that He sent a message from heaven, to announce what had come in in the Babe that was born, but God in His glory was there; the glory of Jehovah shone round about them. It was the Shekinah glory, but seen in a new character; God coming out of the clouds and thick darkness to shine in the effulgence of His own glory in perfect grace to men. Instead of fear being called for, the hearts of men were to be illuminated and filled with "great joy". The angel brought a wonderful message from heaven;

the joy of heaven was overflowing and pouring itself out into the hearts of men on the earth; and Jehovah Himself was there, the immediate presence of the glory of God. The glory of grace stamps its character on the whole of this gospel, the glory of God revealed in grace to men. God Himself is near to men in the effulgence of His glory, and yet not in a way to strike fear, but to fill the hearts of men with supreme joy. It is true that the shepherds "feared with great fear", but this was because they did not understand the nature of the glory. The angel told them not to fear, because the glory was shining in perfect grace; it was shining to fill men's hearts with great joy. It is a beautiful scene; one prays for ability to take it in. Everything was secured in that Babe. Though not yet manifested, it was well known to God and heaven, and God would have it well known to men, "glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people". If we think of the condition in which "all the people" were, it enhances the glory of grace; most of them were still in captivity in or beyond Babylon: probably by this time most of them had dropped down to the level of their surroundings, and yet "all the people" were to be the recipients of the glad tidings of great joy. It is more limited here than what comes out in the utterance of Simeon; it is limited to "all the people" — that is, to Israel.

It has been said that grace is commensurate with glory; that gives grace a wonderful character. If we think of all the glory that belongs to God, grace is commensurate with it; it can only be measured by the glory of God. The glory of Jehovah had been known in a certain way in the Old Testament, but now it has come out in the fulness of grace. John says, "we have contemplated his glory", but the character of that glory was that he was "full of grace and truth". The glory was a consuming fire in the Old Testament, but now it is the glory of grace and truth — a transforming power; those who look at it become like it. Great joy has been brought in from God and from heaven; the glory of God as known in grace becomes a spring of great joy. If any one is not perfectly happy now, it is because of unbelief; there is no excuse for unhappiness, for God has announced "glad tidings of great joy".

The angels' message was in keeping with what Mary and Zacharias said. "He has helped Israel his servant, in order to remember mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed for ever", chapter 1: 54. "To fulfil mercy with our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to Abraham our father", chapter 1: 72. These statements are limited to Israel. That gives a peculiar touch of mercy, because the most wicked people on the face of the earth was Israel. Think of their history! Unbelief, disobedience, departure, idolatry, refusal of the prophetic word! No Gentile nation lay under such terrible guilt as Israel; no Gentile nation had the opportunity of being so bad as Israel. For Israel had been the subject of extraordinary favour on the

part of God; they had His holy oracles, the law, the promises, the covenants, the sanctuary and its services; they had every privilege that God could give to men. Yet with all this light, which the Gentiles never had, they behaved so badly that God's name was blasphemed amongst the nations on account of them. No people were in such a state of moral departure from God, considering the light they had, as Israel. But the covenant was in mercy, and God remembered it.

At the end of the gospel we read that repentance and remission of sins were to be preached "to all the nations beginning at Jerusalem". They were to begin with the very people who had betrayed and murdered Christ; the worst people on the face of the earth. Israel will be in a certain sense an even more remarkable monument of mercy than the Gentiles. No other nation actually and literally rejected Christ; the Gentiles never had Him presented to them. No other people had the opportunity to betray and murder the just One. We are no better than they, but in the actual history of things features of wickedness came out in the Jews that never had an opportunity to come out in other people, so there is a peculiar quality of mercy in God's dealings with them. God came out to make the glory of His grace shine for such people as that, and not a word is said here about repentance. I do not plead for the omission of repentance, far from it, but what I see magnified here is the measureless favour of the blessed God, "glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people", not even if they repent, but unconditional favour. If we could get a sense of how favourable God is to His poor creature into a man's heart, it would break him to pieces. The goodness of God would lead him to repent. It was not the people's sins that were in view in Luke 2, but their Saviour. If there was a Saviour it implied a lost condition, forfeited blessing in the enemy's power. But a Saviour born to such a people carried with it all that they needed. Everything was met in a divine way.

God has brought in the true David, a man after His own heart, to fulfil all His will, born in David's city. It was a little city of Judah; all here is on the line of what is little in the eyes of men. The prophet had said of Bethlehem that it was "little among the thousands of Judah". Christ came in as David did; He was of no account. When Jesse called his sons together that Samuel might look at them, he did not even include David; he was too insignificant to be taken any notice of at all, and the true David came in on that line. But He was God's anointed One, invested with divine authority as the Lord, but exercising His authority in grace as a Saviour for all the people.

We can understand a multitude of the heavenly host being found there in praise Godward. They did not speak of man's side of what was coming in; it

was God's side. "Glory to God in the highest" is God's side; "and on earth peace", is not what people think — peace amongst men — though that may result from it, but that not a contrary element is left under the eye of God. And then God's "good pleasure in men". The angel tells what men get: "unto you is born a Saviour who is Christ the Lord"; He was a true evangelist. But the multitude of the heavenly host were occupied with what would be secured for God, and they were praising God on this account. It is blessed to think of the heavenly host as understanding the character of the glory of God. The angels are spoken of in Luke 15 as the friends and neighbours of divine Persons. God has taken the angels into confidence, and let them understand what His thoughts are in relation to men, and what His glory is in relation to men. They are just as happy as if all was for them.

"Glory to God in the highest" declares that God would be seen in the full height of His heavenly grace. His glory was to have this amazing character — a glory of supreme grace to men. We read later of the glory of His grace (Ephesians 1) and of the glad tidings of the glory of the blessed God (1 Timothy 1). He will display the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus, in the coming ages; His glory will shine out in that way in the very highest degree. We need to consider the glory of God in grace; the gospel of Luke is the development of it. If we want to see it in its climax, we see a man who an hour ago was a condemned and dying criminal in paradise with Jesus. That is the glory of God. He could take such a man and put him in the highest and brightest spot in paradise with Jesus — it is the glory of God to do that. The glory of God is now the glory of grace. It is not a question of the creature's need, but that God wills to be known in the highest glory of His grace, and He has brought it out through Jesus in a way of marvellous wisdom "On earth peace". When Jesus was here there was a spot on this earth in such harmony with God that there was nothing to disturb the repose of God. There were no contrary elements there, nothing of a character that conflicted with the mind of God — never a movement of will to bring in a jarring note. The contrast between this and chapter 19: 35 has often been pointed out: Jerusalem had not known the things that were for her peace, and henceforth peace was to be "in heaven", not "on earth". The Lord was about to be rejected; there was no longer to be peace on earth, but peace in heaven because Jesus is there.

"Good pleasure in men". God's delight in men was to be fully secured. I have no doubt this is a reference to Proverbs 8. The effect of the coming of Jesus would be that the devil's works would be undone and God's good pleasure in men eternally secured. This shows men to be the peculiar objects of God's favour. Men that have been sinful creatures, that have had every feature that

was contrary to divine pleasure, are to be for God's delight eternally. When we think of that we begin to look at men in a new light. What a privilege to know some of those "men" in whom God has such pleasure! What a privilege to be numbered with them, in such infinite favour, as appreciating Christ! In Psalm 16 Christ said prophetically of the saints, "In them is all my delight". His presence here on earth, even as a Babe in a manger, is the security that the divine good pleasure in men would be brought to pass.

The Spirit of God would delight to show us that all that God had in view in various institutions of the Old Testament was secured fully in Jesus. We have particularly before us at this time circumcision and the presentation of the first-born. These are two prominent and blessed thoughts in the Old Testament. What joy it must have been to God to bring out in types all that which would be fully secured for His pleasure in Jesus and through Jesus in others! There was a reserved portion for God in those types even at a time when no one else entered into their meaning.

Circumcision was "a sign of the covenant" (Genesis 17), and the presentation of the hallowed firstborn intimated God's purpose to have sons for the pleasure of His love. God known as in covenant relations with men — and men on their part answering to those relations — covers a great part of what is brought before us in the Old Testament. Then there is the additional thought of men being in the place of sonship. In the circumcision of Jesus, and His presentation as firstborn to Jehovah, these two precious thoughts of divine love are viewed as brought to fruition. They were both to be realised in full measure in Him, and by the grace of God to be realised in many others through Him.

"And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee... . And as for thee, thou shalt keep my covenant, thou and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee — that every male among you be circumcised... . And at eight days old shall every male in your generations be circumcised among you", Genesis 17: 7 - 14. God looked to have a people to whom He would be God, and who would wholly trust in Him, so as to prove what He would delight to be to men upon this earth.

Circumcision was a sign, as the New Testament tells us, of "the putting off of the body of the flesh" (Colossians 2: 11); it spoke of the bringing to an end of all confidence in the flesh, and a trust in God alone. God committed Himself to Abraham by covenant, and told him he should be a father of a multitude of nations, and that He would give him the land of Canaan for an everlasting

possession, but on the side of Abraham and his seed circumcision had to have its place. On their side there was to be renunciation of all confidence in flesh, and a trusting wholly in God.

True circumcision is not outward in the flesh, but is an inward and secret thing. Paul says it is "of the heart, in spirit"; it is really known only to God; "whose praise is not of men but of God", Romans 2: 29. God takes account of those whose resource is in Himself, those to whom He is really God; it gives Him great pleasure to be God to us.

There was no sinful flesh in Jesus, but all that was in view in circumcision as the sign of the covenant was realised and patterned in Him. In human condition, from infancy to manhood and all through His course, He knew what it was to have God as His God — to have no other confidence. He would only receive from God; He would only trust in God; He was wholly apart from fleshly or creature confidence. He was in the true and full consciousness of God being committed to Him to bring to pass what was in His own heart. In being circumcised He was recognised as in the place of covenant relationship with God, to know and enjoy all that God was in thoughts of blessing manward, and to respond to it as delighting in it, and having no other confidence. Humanity was found in Jesus wholly apart from self-sufficiency and self-confidence, finding all its strength and resource in God. God was with Man, and Man with God, in the blessedness of covenant relations fully secured for the first time. Such relations had been secured in measure in saints favoured of God, but now there was One with whom they were secured in absolute perfection.

Such relations can only be brought about for us through His death, and by our "circumcision not done by hand". No doubt His circumcision was a figure of His death, in which the body of the flesh is put off so that in result the self-confidence that naturally marks man is set aside and His saints are brought to trust wholly in God. There was nothing to set aside in Him, but He had come in the likeness of sinful flesh, and that flesh was going to be cut off in His death, which Paul refers to as "the circumcision of the Christ". No doubt His circumcision at eight days old was a foreshadowing of what would be accomplished in His death. His Name being called Jesus in connection with circumcision would show that His saving character depends on what was accomplished in His death.

The result of God being really God to man is that man is wholly for God. The eighth day is connected in Scripture with what is for God. As to the firstborn of beasts it is said, "On the eighth day thou shalt give it me", Exodus 22: 30. On the eighth day the male child was to be circumcised. The eighth day is thus

God's day when He gets His portion. It will have its full issue in what Peter calls "the day of God", the "day of eternity". In Jesus everything was secured for God in Man; a perfection was there which could go through death into resurrection, and be for God's pleasure eternally. All that is for God's pleasure, whether in time conditions or in eternal conditions, has been patterned in Jesus. He went into death to set aside the man after the flesh who could never be for God's pleasure, but in Him all that was suited to God in Man was fully set forth. If we accept circumcision — the cutting off of the flesh in the death of Christ — and by the Spirit of God bring that death as a sharp knife upon the flesh in ourselves, we shall prove what God delights to be for men, and in the strength of it we shall be for Him. All was patterned in Jesus. God gave His covenant to Abraham and circumcision as the sign of it, and when He took Israel out of Egypt He introduced another and an even more precious thought, to have the firstborn son for Himself. These are two of the greatest thoughts in Scripture. He said, "Israel is my son, my firstborn", and He claimed every firstborn for Himself. In Luke 2 we see the true Firstborn presented as "holy to Jehovah"; there had never been a truly holy firstborn Son before. "That holy thing that shall be born shall be, called Son of God". What had been typified in the firstborn was realised now in Jesus.

We see in Scripture generally that nature's firstborn has to be superseded. Nature's firstborn is typified by the firstborn of Egypt, and judgment has to come on that. But then, God has His own thought of firstborn, and He realised it in Jesus. God has the assembly of firstborn ones now all having firstborn character. Such a thing could not be known in a natural family. In God's family all are firstborn ones, because all partake of the dignity and excellence of Christ.

When they came to present Him to Jehovah, there was need on their part for purifying; not for the Child, but for the parents. "And when the days were fulfilled for their purifying according to the law of Moses, they brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord", verse 22. In Leviticus 12, which gives us this ordinance, there is no thought suggested of the child requiring to be purified. The burnt-offering and sin-offering were for the mother, not for the child. The priest "shall make atonement for her", that is, the mother. The Spirit of God had the holy Child in view; when God laid down the ordinance as to the firstborn and as to purification, He was thinking of Jesus. The burnt-offering and sin-offering intimate what was coming in for the purification of men, that is, the purification of Israel represented in Mary.

I have thought sometimes that no offerings in the Old Testament ever could have had quite the place in God's estimation that these two turtle doves and

two young pigeons had. Solomon and Hezekiah and Josiah offered thousands of bullocks and sheep, but who can tell what those two little birds spoke to God! It pleased God that in connection with Jesus there should be the humblest and smallest possible type — two little birds — outwardly insignificant, but what volumes did they speak to God! They brought before God what He would secure through the coming in of that Babe — an entirely new ground of acceptance for man and the complete removal of the pollution of sin! The turtle doves or young pigeons seem to suggest the peculiar way in which the grace of God was coming in. Many thousands of bullocks were sacrificed at the dedication of the temple; it was an immense thing publicly. But when God brought in His saving grace, He brought it in in a form that was insignificant in the eyes of men; nothing could be a greater proof of, this than a Babe lying in a manger. It brings out the character of the dispensation. God is not bringing out what is publicly great, He is bringing His salvation near to men in a shape which outwardly appears to be small and feeble. Two turtle doves or pigeons were the provision for extreme poverty. Things were in such disorder in Israel that the heir to David's throne was unable to bring more than two little birds; it was under such circumstances that God brought His supreme grace into the world. God's greatest things have come in a way that is outwardly weak and small; there is nothing to impress the natural man at all. There is everything for faith, and for God, but nothing to minister to the mind of the natural man.

We find here a man whose name, Simeon, means "one who hears"; his ears were opened to what the Spirit of God had to say. There were many clever men in Jerusalem at that time, doctors of the law and so forth, but Simeon's ear was open to what the Spirit of God was saying. Have we ever heard what the Spirit is saying? The Spirit told Simeon about Jesus. He was awaiting the consolation of Israel. What faith he had! Israel was in a deplorable condition, most of them still in captivity, but here was a man looking at Israel in the light of the covenant and promises, and cherishing in his heart their coming consolation. The Spirit took him into confidence, and told him things that were not known publicly at all.

It is remarkable how much is said of him in relation to the Spirit. "And the *Holy Spirit* was upon him. And it was divinely communicated to him by the *Holy Spirit*, that he should not see death before he should see the Lord's Christ. And he came in the *Spirit* into the temple", verses 25 - 27. He was in the confidence of the Spirit, and the Spirit told him things that were not known publicly. Peter said, "knowing that the putting off of my tabernacle is speedily to take place". He knew he would have to put off his tabernacle; and Paul knew that the time of his departure was at hand; they both knew that the

Lord was not going to come in their lifetime. As a young believer I ventured to say to J. B. Stoney, 'Do you believe that the Lord will come in your life-time?' He looked very grave and said, 'I think not, I think He would have told me'. He was near the Lord, and he felt assured that the Lord would have told him. Simeon was told, the Spirit communicated to him, that he should not see death before he should see the Lord's Christ. I believe that, before the rapture, there will be some in this world — perhaps not many — who will be so in communion with the Holy Spirit that they will have the consciousness that they are not going to die. "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death". He had the faith of translation before he was translated; that is very striking.

The Spirit was on confidential terms with Simeon; it is possible and within reach of any of us if we have affection and spiritual ability for it. It is of great importance, not only to read the Scriptures which bring out the truth of the Lord's coming, but to be in such close communion with the Holy Spirit that we know exactly how things are moving. People get occupied with events, but they will never learn anything that way. The first move will take place at the right hand of God so far as the church is concerned. Who can tell us about that? No one but the Spirit; the Spirit came from there and He is in the secret of what is known there. The Spirit delights to have some down here whom He can take into confidence, and tell what is going on at the right hand of God. That is something to be greatly desired.

Simeon was just where he ought to be; he was doing the right thing at the right time. Whatever is done in the Spirit will always be done in a way that is suitable to the moment. We could not think of a man controlled by the Spirit doing what was not appropriate. So Simeon came into the temple just at the right moment and Anna likewise. The Spirit brought them to the spot just at the right time; He is never before or behind His time; every movement of the Spirit is timed with beautiful accuracy.

Simeon is a remarkable figure or pattern of what is possible for saints in view of the Lord's coming again. He was a prepared servant, prepared to receive Him, and to take Him up in his arms. Jesus did not at that time have the throne of His father David, but He had the affectionate embrace of one who knew how to appreciate Him as the salvation of God. Think of the intimacy and affection of it! Simeon took Him in his arms, knowing well who He was, His greatness, His majesty, for He was God's salvation.

This is a sanctuary scene; therefore there is great expansion. Simeon had a much wider outlook than anybody seen before in this gospel. He had a wider outlook than Zacharias, or Elizabeth, or Mary, or even than the angel. His

utterances go far beyond Israel. The angel said, "I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people"; that does not go beyond Israel. "The people" in Scripture is always Israel. But Simeon says, "for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all *peoples*"; he had the world in view. So he continues: "a light for revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel". We see in this the universality of grace. God would have all peoples to be spectators of what He has brought in; it was not to be hidden from any.

The Gentiles being mentioned first is a touch of grace which is in accord with Luke's gospel. The light shone to reveal the Gentiles as subjects of divine favour; that was something new in the ways of God. Prophetic light had shone chiefly to show that Israel was the subject of divine favour, but the coming in of Jesus was "a light for revelation of the Gentiles"; it had in view that the nations should be in divine favour. Simeon had probably in mind such a scripture as Isaiah 49: 6, where God said prophetically of Christ, "I have even given thee for a light of the nations, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth". God would not ignore the nations; Israel was not enough for Him, though there was the glory of His people Israel. He would not diminish what belonged to Israel, for whatever glory Israel had as the subject of promises and prophecy was all to be secured in that holy Child. God's salvation, His light and His glory, were there in such a form that they could be affectionately and tenderly embraced. The Spirit of God would lead us to embrace all this great and precious grace as found in Jesus.

There is something here sweeter, and more intimate and blessed, than what we have in Matthew. There, when the magi saw Him, they fell down and did Him homage; it was very suitable that they should, because in Matthew He is seen in His official and regal glory. We see in Simeon a sweeter and more intimate character of apprehension; he received Him into his arms. The Spirit would enable us to embrace Him. Simeon was not led by a star; that was a beautiful thing, but external and distant; rather a long way off. We read of people who saw the promises from afar off and embraced them, a long reach to embrace promises which were afar off! But God's salvation is near in Luke 2, and it is in such a form that it can be affectionately embraced. All was there in Him, and there is no light, glory, or salvation anywhere else. Faith might give a man great expectations and desires, but think of the marvellous depth and fulness of the expectations and desires that the Holy Spirit could give to a man! What we see in Simeon is that the Holy Spirit was upon him; he was controlled as to his thoughts and aspirations and expectations by the Spirit. But the moment came when every expectation and desire that the Spirit of God had given him was realised; it was the happiest day of his life. There was

nothing to be added; everything was there in that Babe of six weeks old; God's salvation and the glory of Israel were there to be affectionately embraced. For a man who embraced Him, there was nothing else he could want; he says, I am prepared to go now.

Simeon had also before him what we may call the dark side of things. He not only saw the brightest light that ever shone in human eyes, but he saw the conditions in which that light was going to shine; he saw that the reception and result of it was going to be mixed. "For this child is set for the fall and rising up of many in Israel, and for a sign spoken against". He was going to be a stone of stumbling and rock of offence according to Isaiah 8; many were going to fall; that was very solemn. God's light and salvation and Israel's glory were there, but they were going to be met by the enmity of the human heart. What a terrible thing for human beings to stumble over Jesus into everlasting perdition!

"And even a sword shall go through thine own soul". Mary represented the favoured remnant of Israel to whom the Child was born and the Son given, and that favoured remnant had to go through the deep sorrow of seeing the nation reject Him. He was God's salvation, God's light, and Israel's glory, and yet Israel, whose consolation He was, would reject Him. It was real anguish, a sword piercing the soul.

Simeon spoke of the thoughts being revealed from many hearts. I have no doubt that the thoughts of all hearts will be brought to light, but God delights in bringing to light the thoughts of His saints about Jesus. It is over 1900 years since He died, and, ever since, the Spirit of God has been filling the hearts of His saints with thoughts of Jesus. How many books it would take to record them all! Look at the woman in Luke 7. She was at His feet, washing them with tears and anointing them with myrrh; it was an affectionate handling of Him, revealing the thoughts of her heart. Many of us have truths and doctrines pretty clearly; if anybody says what is wrong we can spot it in a minute. But heaven is interested in our embracing Jesus in our affections, so that we have precious thoughts of Jesus that can be revealed. If our hearts could be turned inside out, what would be revealed? For nineteen centuries the saints have been speaking of Jesus, and preaching about Him, and praising Him; they have been writing hymns, and singing hymns; they have been conversing about Him; to say nothing about all the unspoken and unwritten thoughts! When those thoughts are all revealed, there will be a wonderful library for heaven to read.

Anna brings before us another side of things. The Spirit of God dwells on the length and varied character of her experience; that is the marked feature.

What Anna had reached, she had reached through a long history of experience with God. It was not simply that the Spirit had said things to her as He did to Simeon, but she was a woman who had been working out things in her own exercises for many long years. That is what marks a prophetess — a prophetess must have soul-history, and what she acquired through long experience with God became the word of God in testimony. Simeon represents those for whom the Spirit does things, but Anna represents what is worked out through soul-history and experience; the two have to be put together.

We are told that Anna had lived with her husband seven years from her virginity. Living with her husband is put in contrast, it seems to me, with abiding in the temple. She had to face the experience of death coming in on the natural. However happy she was with her husband, its effect practically was to detain her from absolute devotion to the service of God. God brought death in, and her whole heart turned to God. She had deep sorrow, but it liberated her. From that moment she dedicated herself entirely to God; she lived in the temple and served; her whole course changed from that point — it was a solemn experience. The Spirit of God does not tell us these things for nothing. Anna learnt that what was legitimate in nature might detain one from being dedicated to the service of God. So her whole course afterwards was marked by fastings, by the refusal of that which was legitimate on the natural side. She had learned her lesson. She did not fast merely sometimes, but went on “serving night and day with fastings and prayers”. She continued in the refusal of what might have been legitimate on the natural line but which she had learned might interfere with absolute devotion to the service of God. From the death of her husband, she had dedicated herself entirely to the service of God up to 84 years. And she prayed; prayer brings in what is of God. She acquired, by the course of exercise she went through, the knowledge of the mind of God for testimony; thus she became a prophetess. We can understand that Anna spoke of Jesus. She praised God and spoke of Him; she had the word of God in testimony, but it was the result of her long soul-history with God.

Anna was of the tribe of Asher, meaning *happy, blessed*. The blessing of Asher is very beautiful: “Asher, his bread shall be fat, and he will give royal dainties”, Genesis 49: 20. And again, “Asher shall be blessed with sons: let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil. Iron and brass shall be thy bolts; and thy rest as thy days”, Deuteronomy 33: 24, 25. As dwelling in the temple and continuing in fastings and prayers she had the fatness and wealth of what God could be to her, and she had the word of God in testimony. What force there would be in her giving praise to God! All that she had learned to value and look for through her long years of exercise was there

in the holy Child, and God gave her access to many to whom she was acceptable; she knew "all those who waited for redemption in Jerusalem". We learn thus that there were many people in Jerusalem looking for redemption, and they had "royal dainties" given to them when Anna spoke to them of Jesus.

A touch of grace comes out in the fact that Anna was of Israel, not of Judah; as being of the tribe of Asher, she represents the ten tribes rather than the two. It shows that God had reserved something for Himself even in the ten tribes. Anna would justify Paul in saying, "Our whole twelve tribes serving incessantly day and night". No doubt Anna's movements were by the Spirit, but what is called attention to in her case is the long experience that she had had with God in varied conditions. Power for testimony came in as a result of that. Simeon was marked by embracing Jesus, and speaking of Him, as we might say, in private. But in Anna we see the word of God in testimony; she is a prophetess, and speaks to all in Jerusalem who waited for redemption. There were those in Jerusalem who were sympathetic with heaven, and to such persons God had much to say concerning Jesus. It is interesting to see that the spirit of prophecy had not died out; it was found, perhaps in a feeble form, in an aged widow. The prophetic word had not been withdrawn; the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus; so Anna spoke of Him. Those who waited for redemption were the product of the spirit of prophecy; it had brought forth fruit in them. God had preserved that which would produce a generation deeply interested in Jesus, so that Anna had a responsive audience; she had something to say that profoundly interested those who were waiting for redemption. No doubt this was a compensation to her for those long years during which she had the experience of death on her choicest natural affections.

Those waiting for redemption get the good of any prophetic ministry that the Lord is giving, and the prophetic spirit will never be withdrawn. The spirit that can give us the mind of God for the moment is going to remain here until the kingdom is established. It will be here as long as the church is here; and after the church is gone the prophetic spirit will be here, and it will always be the testimony of Jesus. All that God can delight in is in Jesus, and God will judge all that He will judge because it does not correspond with Jesus. This makes the prophetic word interesting. God is going to judge Babylon, Tyre, Sidon, Egypt and Assyria, because they do not correspond with Jesus; everything that does not correspond with Jesus must go out. All the blessedness of that Person is for us at this moment; when we come together it is to open our hearts to impressions of Jesus.

Jesus came into conditions like our own; He came into conditions in which He had to grow up, and He had an appropriate place in which to grow up; no doubt that is as true of every one of us as it was of Jesus. "They returned to Galilee to their own city Nazareth, and the child grew and waxed strong". All that was typified in the firstborn was there in Jesus; perfection was found in conditions where its development and growth might be wholly according to God in its own appropriate place. We read in Zechariah 6: 12, "Thus speaketh Jehovah of hosts, saying, Behold a man whose name is the Branch; and he shall grow up from his own place, and he shall build the temple of Jehovah; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne". To build the temple, and bear the glory, and sit and rule upon His throne were preceded by growing up from His own place.

There was reproach connected with Galilee and Nazareth, but the small place, and the obscure place, and the place of reproach are favourable to divine growth. The small circumstances and common-place things of every-day life test us, but they are the appropriate place for spiritual growth. Nazareth is more favourable really than David's city. The Lord reminded Saul of Tarsus from the very height of glory that He was Jesus the Nazaraean — He will for ever be Jesus the Nazaraean. He grew up from His own place; it was not a place that was outwardly or circumstantially favourable. We have no record that there was ever a conversion in Nazareth during the Lord's life and ministry on earth. It was the place where the Lord stood up to read and told them that the Scripture was fulfilled in their ears. There had never been such a wonderful preaching, but it was to an audience entirely unsympathetic; that shows the real power of the anointing. Any of us could preach to a sympathetic audience; but to set the grace of God before a people who are at the bottom entirely unsympathetic requires divine power.

We read here that as a little Child in Nazareth He was filled with wisdom, and God's grace was upon Him. Could anything be more wonderful than to see this little Child growing up from earliest infancy with never at any moment a foolish thought in His mind or heart? To be "filled with wisdom" means that not a foolish thought was there. Then the grace of God was upon Him; there was nothing to be seen in that Child but what was the expression of the grace of God. The words used would suggest that He was clothed with it. It is said of the disciples in Acts 4 that "great grace was upon them all". They were acting in grace, selling their possessions and goods and giving to every one who had need, so that it could be said that the grace of God was upon them. It is wonderful to think of that little Child in whom was nothing to be seen but the grace of God, and that more and more manifest every day as He grew up to boyhood. At the end of the chapter we read that Jesus advanced in wisdom;

He was always filled with wisdom, everything was suitable, and there was always perfection, but it developed as He grew in stature. There was never anything that He had to grow out of; He never had to unlearn anything. What was there was always perfection in its place, but there was enlargement in it: He "advanced in wisdom and stature". All was suitable; there was nothing unnatural in the Lord.

Saying that He "waxed strong" is looking at Him as developing from the weakness of infancy. A new-born babe who was powerful would be unnatural. A new-born babe is as weak as anything to be found in the world, and the Son of the Highest came into that condition of weakness, and from it He grew and waxed strong. He grew up from the weakness of an infant to the strength of a child and then to a boy, and finally to manhood. He went through every stage of human life, which Adam never did. Adam could not have been sympathetic with the feelings of a child; he could never have understood them. But Jesus has been a little Child, so that He can be sympathetic with all the exercises of a little child. I do not suppose any of us knows how early spiritual exercises may begin in the heart of a child, but Jesus can be sympathetic with them. Samuel is an instance of one who heard the Lord's voice very early in life, and there are many such, thank God! Jesus has gone through every experience that could be the part of humanity in the path of faith from childhood up to manhood. There is not a stage of human life in which God has not been perfectly glorified. He is qualified to build the temple, and to reign, and to exercise priesthood; He is qualified for all that by growing up from His own place.

Jesus had been in the form of God, but He made Himself of no reputation. He came into the place of absolute subjection and obedience; it was a new estate for Him to take up. What would be apostasy in the creature was perfection in Christ. Human perfection has been seen in Jesus. He never was anything less than "God over all, blessed for ever", but He came down from Godhead's fullest glory into the place of obedience; we come up from all the degradation of our ruined state to be exalted by obedience. What humiliation for Christ! What exaltation for us! He accepted the place that God appointed for Him. We are restless and often anxious to get out of the place which God puts us in; but, if we could get out of it, we should only deprive ourselves of divinely appointed conditions for growth. We may be sure that God puts us in the right place to grow. His appointments are never a mistake. We see in Jesus the beautiful development of perfection, and it all opened out in Nazareth.

Then we have a wonderful incident which has been selected by the Spirit of God because God would not leave us without some impression of those hidden

thirty years. The Spirit of God has selected the incident that was best suited to show it to us. We see in it for the first time the interests and promptings of His own heart. The development we have spoken of went on to the age of thirty; then it was complete. The Lord Himself spoke of growth as being "first the blade, then an ear, then full corn in the ear". We might say that He was "the blade" as the little Child; then at twelve years of age we see what would answer to "an ear"; and at thirty there was the "full corn in the ear". As fully developed He was anointed for service. The perfection we see in Him at twelve years of age is not perfection connected with service or ministry, but perfection in the interests of His heart.

Joseph and Mary were excellent persons; what we know of them would give us a great impression of their piety, but they were not absorbed with the things of God as He was, and there is in this incident in the end of the chapter a certain suggestion of failure on their part. They had not realised the value of the precious treasure that had been entrusted to their care; they went a whole day without Him. "His parents went yearly to Jerusalem to the feast of the passover"; it was an assembly matter. When he was twelve years old they went up to the place where Jehovah set His Name; all Israel had to come there. Others might come and do what was necessary and return to their homes, but Jesus was held by the blessedness of the place where Jehovah had set His Name. It is one thing to fall in with assembly customs, but another to have the heart commanded by the blessedness of God's things. His was the latter part; His remaining behind was the fruit of spiritual intuition. It is striking that the first recorded action of the Lord should be of that character, an intuition rather than obedience to a command. Joseph and Mary do not shine in this incident; they ought never to have gone without Him for a whole day. Then in seeking Him among their relations and acquaintances they were altogether off the line on which He moved. They ought to have known that He did not live in the sphere of what is natural. When they returned to Jerusalem they spent three days seeking Him, and came to the temple as the last place to be searched. Jesus says to them, "Why is it that ye have sought me? did ye not know that I ought to be occupied in my Father's business?" Joseph and Mary represent those who have true affection for the Lord but who are not spiritual enough to know whether He is with them or not. He is often supposed to be in the company when He is not. Many people tell us they are gathered to His Name and have His presence, when perhaps He is not there at all. Joseph and Mary found that Jesus was not with them, not in their company, and for three or four days they were without Him. What an experience! Mary might well say, "We have sought thee distressed", It would be a good thing if some of us were distressed when we have been a day or

two without the Lord. We ought to know when He is not with us, and we ought not to go on supposing He is with us when He is not.

Mary and Joseph ought to have known where to find the Lord. This was not public service, but the condition of His heart in relation to the things of God. I believe this incident was selected by the Spirit of God to show us what governed Him in His affections and interests all through those hidden thirty years. We have but this one precious utterance from His life for thirty years. "Occupied in my Father's business" covers the thirty years, not in public ministry, but His inward occupation of heart. His mother had said to Him, "Thy father and I have sought thee distressed". He puts all that aside; His Father's business governed Him; Jerusalem, the temple, the teachers, were all to Him that Scripture showed them to be. As the Lord grew up He was absorbed with what was spiritual, and with God's interests. That is why He listened to the teachers and asked them questions. How this holy Child must have pondered the Scriptures! With what intense interest did He listen to those who were teaching the law and the Scriptures! What questions He had to ask as He heard them! All who heard Him wondered at His understanding and answers. All the Lord's understanding and thoughts were formed by the Scriptures, His whole interest was in them, so that those who taught the Scriptures were more interesting to Him than anything else in Jerusalem. It was His Father's business, and He was occupied in it. We can all be occupied in it, too.

The time had not yet come for the Lord to take up the public work which His Father had given Him to do; He did not do that until after He was anointed, but His whole heart and soul were engrossed in His Father's business. It is open to us to be concerned and occupied with it; it is an inward state of heart. I have often thought of the Levite coming to the place where Jehovah sets His name "according to all the desire of his soul", Deuteronomy 18: 6. This incident was recorded to show us what governed the Lord at the age of twelve, where His interests were, even as a Boy. But the veil so lifted was quickly dropped. He was still a Boy, and His place was that of subjection. He accepted the ordering of God for Him at the time, and that ordering was for Him to be in subjection to those who were in the place of parents to Him. He went down to Nazareth with them and was in subjection to them. How perfect He was in all things! And there He "advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man". Everything was so morally beautiful that men were constrained to accord Him their favour. The time had not yet come for His testimony to touch their consciences, and bring out the enmity of their hearts,

LUKE 3

Luke 3

The public position is taken account of in the opening verses of this chapter; everything that publicly attached to Israel had broken down. The times of the Gentiles were running their course; the Roman power ruled. That in itself was the evidence that the kingdom had passed away from Israel. Descendants of Esau were subordinate rulers in that which had been David's kingdom. As to the priesthood we are told that it was the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas,

and Luke states elsewhere that they were of the sect of the Sadducees. I understand that Annas had been deposed, but he continued to exercise the authority of high priest along with his son-in-law Caiaphas. The point here is to bring out how the kingdom and priesthood had lost their divine character. The men who were exercising the priesthood were Sadducees; they denied that there was any spirit or resurrection; they answered to the infidels of today. But if the kingdom and priesthood had both broken down, there was another element, thank God, that did not break down. The kingdom and priesthood had failed, but the prophetic word came to John in the wilderness. God always reserves to Himself the right to speak, whatever failure there may be on the part of men. That is an important principle. Publicly the administration entrusted to the church has broken down, but God still reserves to Himself the right to speak. He has spoken in the last dark day of the church's departure and His word is a pure word, it does not break down. Annas and Caiaphas were the chief promoters of the crucifixion of the Lord. That was the character of the priesthood; they were thorough unbelievers. It is a great comfort to see that, however things which God committed to man have broken down, the prophetic word has always been available and always will be.

The word of God came upon John. God spoke then in view of the coming of Christ, and He is speaking now in the last days of the church in view of Christ's coming again. The state of things in the church is every bit as bad as, or worse than, the state of things in Israel, but God is speaking in a distinct and marked way. God has been bringing in light ever since the Reformation; every century He has brought in more light; the word of God has been given and it is that which emancipates the people of God. They have been able to escape from what is really the word of man by receiving the word of God; the word brings forth a generation that is according to God. It is incorruptible seed and it brings forth a generation like itself. What marks Philadelphia is, "thou hast

kept my word"; such persons receive and value the word of God. God is speaking in grace, and that will always be the character of divine speaking while the assembly is here. The word of God is the word of grace; Paul says, "I commend you to God and the word of his grace".

The word of God to John concerned the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; it was a word of Pure grace and it became fruitful; the grace of God opened up new ground for people to take. The great lesson of John's ministry is that man is shut up to God. God was going to take a wondrous way, but that way had to be prepared, and God Himself had to prepare it. Repentance is a fruitful principle in the soul, for it involves, through grace, moral adjustment by the salvation of God. Those who were baptised by John acknowledged that they had nothing to look forward to but coming wrath. But by the favour of God they were permitted to take entirely new ground as judging themselves, and looking to God for remission of sins and for His salvation. Repentance results from a moral work of God in men, in which it is recognised that, if there is to be any blessing, it must be wholly of God. There is no natural ground on which we can have it.

If God moves in grace, it is to remove every obstacle or difficulty that stands in His way; that comes out in this quotation from Isaiah: "every gorge shall be filled up". The gorges represent what does not come up to the proper level; there is deficiency, the valleys have to be filled up. This is illustrated in the crowds, who were lacking in gracious consideration for others and who said, "What should we do?" John says, "He that has two body coats, let him give to him that has none, and he that has food, let him do likewise". If God comes in to operate in grace and salvation, He will fill up every deficiency. But on the other hand there are mountains and hills which have to be brought low; they represent such as the Pharisees boasting that they had Abraham for their father; all that sort of thing has to come down; if God moves in grace He will bring it down. Then the "crooked places" have their counterpart in such as the tax-gatherers who made people pay too much; the soldiers, oppressing and falsely accusing, would answer to the "rough places". If God operates in grace He adjusts everything so that all flesh shall see His salvation; in result all can see how God can adjust man morally at every point. He deals with every condition, and He adjusts everything that is wrong, whether it is deficient, or high and haughty, or crooked, or rough — God takes His own way to bring about moral conditions that are suitable to Himself.

There are many crooked and rough places today; we have to take it home. Has everything been brought into adjustment with God in our souls so that not a single thing is left to interfere with God's way in grace? The grace of God

operates to effect perfect moral adjustment, and all is brought to pass through man's realising what there is for him in God through grace. He has to give up all hopes of remedying his own condition; baptism means that all thought of that is given up; man must go under the water out of sight. Through the favour of God it is possible to take new ground, to repent and look to God for remission of sins and salvation. Salvation would involve complete moral adjustment.

John teaches the necessity for new birth in a very striking way, though he does not exactly put it in those words. He says to them, "God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham". I have no doubt that is an allusion to the necessity for the new birth. If God makes a stone into a child it is a very sovereign movement, and that God should so act is the only hope for man. As far as man is concerned there is not a bit of anything in him for God, but if God makes a stone into a child it is a miracle of mercy. Man after the flesh is morally the offspring of Satan, the "offspring of vipers", and therefore that man never has brought forth good fruit, and never can. John says that the time has come to deal with the tree right down to the root. It is not a question merely of the fruit but of the tree; he says, "Every tree therefore not producing good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire"; the axe is applied to the root of the trees. The root is what man is according to the flesh. Man according to the flesh never did bring forth good fruit, and the time had come for all expectations from man after the flesh to cease, not only for the tree to be cut down, but to be cast into the fire. It is quite certain that if you cut a tree down you do not expect fruit from it afterwards, and still less would you expect any fruit if it had been cast into the fire: that is the complete and final rejection of it so that henceforth nothing is to be expected from it; you cannot revive it. Such a statement as this looks on to the cross, where there was the cutting down and casting into the fire of all that man is according to the flesh, in order that the ground might be cleared for a new generation raised up by God Himself out of what was lifeless — "these stones".

"All flesh shall see the salvation of God". What God was going to do in grace would be the testimony to His salvation; it will be so when God saves Israel. When all Israel shall be saved, all flesh shall see the salvation of God in Israel. God's intention now is that all flesh should see His salvation in His people. If the church had continued in unity, what a testimony there would have been in this world to the salvation of God, people walking in holiness and righteousness and serving God all the days of their lives! What a testimony to God's saving power! If a man who has been a notorious drunkard, an evil living man, or a violent-tempered man, by the grace of God escapes from that and becomes characterised by just the opposite features and without

boastfulness or pretension walks humbly with his God — what a testimony it is!

Everyone can see the salvation of God. There is a power about it. People take a great deal of notice of Christians; they watch us all the time, but do they see the salvation of God in us? The jailor at Philippi saw the salvation of God in Paul and Silas, and he said, I would like to be saved too. The great point is that men should be turned to God. It was said of John, "Many of the sons of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God". If man turns to God, God in grace will adjust him and save him and give him repentance and remission of sins and everything he needs. The whole question is, Do we turn to God? Naturally we have all sorts of expedients of our own, but the secret of blessing is to turn to God. God says in substance in the glad tidings, 'I will do everything for you if you will only turn to Me'; that is the God we have to do with. In the end He will have His garner full of precious wheat.

The evidence of man's sinful state is that all his thoughts centre in himself and his own advantage. Men in the world are marked by self, but, when God's grace comes to a man, instead of living for himself he begins to think of the good of others (verse 11). The question is not raised here of men leaving military service, but of behaving rightly in it. I believe, in the wonderful grace of God, it has pleased Him to have some testimony in almost every condition of life. Every saint should be exercised to be in keeping with his Christian profession; there is no Scripture to say that a man who is a soldier must give it up; God has left it to personal exercise. It is part of the liberty of Christianity that there are a number of things concerning which there is no legislation; they are left to individual exercise, and in such cases it becomes a question of how much I know God. I am told to abide in the calling wherein I am called "*with God*". If I increase my knowledge of God I shall be exercised about things I was not exercised about when I did not know Him so well. The Christian does not judge of things in a legal way, but according to the spiritual intuitions of one who knows God, of course in the light of all that is enjoined, or found in principle in Scripture. God likes to see His people moving in their own exercises and spiritual intuitions. A man baptised by the Holy Spirit will have exercises according to God. In every case contemplated here things are adjusted: valleys filled, mountains and hills brought down, crooked places made straight, and rough places made smooth — all is adjusted. And then John says, 'There is One greater than I coming after me; He is so great that I am not worthy to unloose His sandals': "he shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire". What a thought it must have conveyed to his congregation of the greatness of the coming One! John was full of the Holy Spirit from his

mother's womb; he was an extraordinary man, but the Lord was infinitely greater.

I think there is at the present day special need to be more exercised about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. All round about us people are talking a great deal about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and connecting it with all kinds of things that more or less attract attention, professed healing and speaking with tongues and so on. In a day when the religious world is full of all sorts of notions about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we ought to be exercised to be in the spiritual genuineness of it. There is, I am afraid, a lack with us of that purifying of which the fire speaks. It indicates purification of the dross. Water baptism has an aspect of external purification, as purifying from evil associations, but fire penetrates to the very inwardness; the refiner's purifying fire searches out the inwardness of man, it is an intense purification, and would be connected with what the Lord said in Malachi 3: 3, "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he will purify the children of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver". Fire penetrates to the most inward feelings and motives of one's heart and does not leave unjudged any dross. If I could speak with a tongue I should be a rather great person, much more important than one who could not; and if I could heal people or work miracles I should be a wonderful man. But to be inwardly in accord with God is much greater morally than to do such things. The Spirit and fire would exercise a purifying influence to the very centre of a man's moral being so that there should not be anything in his secret thoughts, feelings, or desires that is contrary to God. Are we prepared to go in for that? There is fear lest young people may be drawn away from a divine path under the influence of high sounding talk about the baptism of the Holy Spirit and its results in outward signs. It ought to be an exercise with us to know the One who baptises with the Holy Spirit. John says, "*He shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit*".

The great mark of having been baptised with the Holy Spirit would be that we should work together harmoniously as members of that body into which He has baptised us. The baptism of the Spirit is not exactly an individual matter; it puts all the saints vitally together in a living organism, and the great evidence of the power of the Spirit is that we function properly as members of the body. To function properly as a member of the body of Christ is morally greater than to work a miracle or speak with tongues.

John speaks of Jesus in two characters — as baptising with the Holy Spirit and fire, and as purging His threshing-floor. That covers the service of Jesus as John has it in view. He secures the wheat by baptising with the Holy Spirit, and that necessitates the winnowing away of all that is of the flesh. I have no

doubt that the result of John's ministry needed to be winnowed. There was wheat there, but chaff also. The Lord's ministry had a winnowing effect; it got rid of what was of no value, even though clearly associated with what was of God. I suppose John recognised that there was much in the threshing-floor as the result of his ministry that would not go into the garner, and his words contained a solemn warning that the chaff would be burned with fire unquenchable. But I think we may regard the winnowing as also setting forth a service by which the Lord displaces worthless flesh even in true saints.

The threshing-floor is the place where wheat is found on its way to the garner. It answers to the present place of the saints; we are in His threshing-floor now, not yet in His garner. The saints are viewed as wheat, that is, as having divine value as being morally of Christ's kind. Fire is the most penetrating form of purification that there is, and that goes along with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. All that is of the flesh will be burnt up, however pretentious it is,

Baptising with the Holy Spirit brings in what has positive value before God, and it suggests that there will be no positive value for God in man apart from the Spirit. All that is of the flesh is worthless; it is a pity to cling to it, for it will all be burnt up. The baptism of the Spirit necessitates the refusal of the flesh in a way that was not possible before the Spirit was given. In the Old Testament there are certain allowances made for the flesh, but no allowances are made now. We can speak of infinite grace, but there is no grace for the flesh. To be baptised with the Spirit would indicate that men were to be characterised by the Holy Spirit, and nothing outside that would yield any pleasure to God.

The axe being laid to the root of the tree shows that the time had come for God to deal with the root of things; He was going to the very root of what man is as in the flesh, and dealing with it so that there might be a clear course for His grace in Christ. If the man characterised by sin and death is cut down, the way is cleared for the second Man out of heaven to bring in all the pleasure of God. The question is, Are we prepared to let Him have His way with us? It is well to note that all this was John's "glad tidings to the people".

The result — man characterised by the Holy Spirit — has been perfectly patterned in Jesus, so that we see the true nature of the wheat by looking at Him. Wheat has precious value before God as being characterised by the Holy Spirit. Winnowing is not a violent or destructive process like burning up; it is displacing in a gentle way. The winnowing fan creates a movement of air which blows the chaff away; it is a gentle movement, effectual, but not of a violent character; such is the Lord's present service. One great object which the Lord has in view in all ministry is to practically displace the flesh; He

displaces it by that which is of the Spirit, and which has been perfectly patterned in Himself. There is discipline and ministry. Tribulation is a word which I believe is connected with threshing, but winnowing comes after the threshing. Threshing I should understand to have more of a disciplinary character. The discipline of God is always of a delivering nature; it always cuts where the flesh tends to be most active. Winnowing gets rid of the chaff, so that it does not remain in evidence; nothing remains to be seen but the wheat, what is like Christ as Man in the Holy Spirit. The temptation in chapter 4 was necessary in order that it might be manifested what Man is as characterised by the Holy Spirit.

The winnowing process would go on much faster if we submitted ourselves more to the Lord. There is a great lack of subjection with us, like Peter who said, "Thou shalt never wash my feet". The question is, What are we set to promote? We are either sowing to the flesh or to the Spirit. Are we laying ourselves out to give place and importance to Christ and the Spirit? Nothing will go into the garner but what is for the pleasure of Christ, because it is His garner.

John had before him the whole result of the Lord's coming in. The Lord did not actually baptise with the Holy Spirit until He went to the right hand of God, but John was looking at the whole result of His coming in; he had it all before him by the Spirit.

Let us cherish the thought of what has divine value; it is all to be seen and learned in Jesus, and until we learn it there I doubt if it becomes power in our souls. Therefore if one goes on habitually with what is of the flesh it indicates that there is great distance from Jesus; we have not come under His personal influence. It would raise the question whether we are like the baptised persons with whom Jesus identified Himself. The persons who were baptised by John and with whom Jesus was baptised were persons He could identify Himself with; they were renouncing all confidence in the flesh, renouncing all claim on the blessing of God by reason of goodness in themselves; Jesus would identify Himself with that. He would take that ground publicly; there is nothing more wonderful than that the Lord should take the place publicly which is set forth in the prophetic language of Psalm 16: "My goodness extendeth not to thee". The known favour of God was what He lived in; blessed and sinless as He was, He delighted to be on the ground of what God was for man. He, the sinless One, would take the ground that goodness extended not from man to God but from God to man. And sinful ones could take that ground too. Wondrous to say, it was common ground for the sinless One and for repentant ones. If man is shut up to God — which he is by his

sinfulness — he becomes a vessel to receive all that God has for man in grace. That is how man gets blessing; he owns he is sinful, has no claim, and he is shut up to God, and he becomes a vessel to receive all that God has in favour for man. Man reaches that point through being convicted in divine goodness of his sinful necessities; Jesus took that ground in pure and perfect grace. Man comes up to it from his degradation; Jesus came down to it, to a place where He could say, "My goodness extendeth not to thee". In Psalm 16 He is in the place of receiving as the One who trusted in God all that the pure and boundless favour of God would delight to give. Sinful men through repentance can receive all in boundless favour too. So Jesus would be with such; He was baptised and He prayed. All that was suitable to man was patterned in Him. The Lord's words to the young man, "Why callest thou me good?" are in keeping with what we have been saying.

The Lord is seen here as in the place of entire dependence on God; there was a blessed Man here upon whom heaven could be opened; there was no longer any restraint on heaven, nothing to check its outflow; heaven was opened because a Man was found in this world who was a suitable resting-place for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit as a dove speaks of the Holy Spirit as seeking a resting place. Noah's dove sought a resting place, and the psalmist says, "Oh that I had wings as a dove; then would I fly away and be at rest". The dove seeks rest, and the Spirit of God was seeking rest in man, and He found it at last in Jesus, the perfect Man — the One who would fully take the place of dependence on God.

Here we see the second Man out of heaven taking the place before God of identification with those who renounced all claim and cast themselves wholly upon what God was in favour to men. If there was nothing in man for God there was everything in God for man, and it is in the apprehension of that that men become objects of good pleasure to God. Jesus was publicly acknowledged here as the beloved Son in whom God had found His delight. As Man He derived everything from God, His whole being was derived from God, and morally He had ever lived by what God was to Him; He was the beloved Son, and God's delight was in Him. Man in the Person of Jesus is seen in the place of sonship, seen as the resting-place of the Spirit, every desire of God's heart supremely gratified in One who looked up to Him to receive all that divine favour was pleased to bestow on man.

Our coming into the wealth and blessedness of this favour is dependent on redemption being accomplished, Jesus being glorified, and the Spirit given; but it is all patterned in Jesus. He received all from God: "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, yea, I have a goodly heritage. Jehovah is the

portion of my inheritance and of my lot". As the dependent Man He received all that God was pleased to give as the full expression of His favour to man. Sonship for God's delight was there; Man in supreme favour and blessedness with God in the Person of His beloved Son is seen here as identified with repentant ones, who would through infinite grace become His joint heirs. All through the thirty years He had been God's delight; He had ever been in complete dependence on God, and the intelligent and affectionate answer of the beloved Son to God had always been there. But the heavenly host had said, "Good pleasure in men". All that was patterned in Jesus will be brought to pass for the delight of God in "many sons". The delight of God found in Jesus He will find in every grain of wheat that goes into the garner. It is reached on very simple lines; if we take the place of having no claim, the only question is, What is the favour of God to man? If we take the place of having any claim we cannot receive as of pure divine favour alone. God has no favour for man on that line. His favour for man is on the line of pure grace and depends on what He is. The supreme thought of divine favour for man is sonship. God has secured it in one Man; what He had cherished in the purpose of His love from eternity, He has secured in one Man. Now He can secure it through redemption in myriads. In Mark and Luke it is "Thou art my beloved Son", but in Matthew, "This is my beloved Son". The anointing in Matthew is more official — God calling attention to Him, "*This* is my beloved Son". But when He says, "*Thou* art my beloved Son", He is expressing His own delight in Him; that involves the sealing.

"The Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form as a dove upon him". This seems to convey the striking thought that the Spirit of God as characterising man was going to come into tangible expression in Jesus. If we want to understand what man is as characterised by the Spirit we must look at Jesus; it was expressed there in a bodily form.

The genealogy here is, I believe, the genealogy of Mary; that in Matthew is the legal genealogy of the King traced from Joseph; but here, as we have before noticed, the genealogy is traced up to God. I have the impression that every one of these persons named had some features derived from God; it is not a genealogy derived from the fallen man, but derived from God. The Lord came in as the fulness of everything that had been produced in man by the grace of God for 4000 years. He came in as the culminating point, and all the fulness of it was there in Him. The Lord did not identify Himself with the fallen race but with man viewed as the subject of divine grace.

LUKE 4

Luke 4

We all know a good deal about man in the flesh, not only from Scripture, but from personal experience and by observation of others, but God would have us to apprehend and appreciate the moral beauty that has been disclosed in His beloved Son, who was here in manhood wholly for His delight. He came to that place in view of God's thought to have many sons before Him for the pleasure of His love. God would have it to be evidenced that a dependent Man full of the Holy Spirit can withstand "every temptation".

Luke is the only evangelist who speaks of the Lord as being full of the Holy Spirit; Luke presents Him as a vessel in manhood for the Holy Spirit. With one exception Luke is the only New Testament writer who speaks of men being full of the Holy Spirit. The one exception is in Ephesians 5, where Paul says, "be filled with the Spirit". But Luke speaks repeatedly in the Acts of disciples and servants as full of the Holy Spirit. That kind of man is seen patterned in Jesus.

There was no unsuitability in that holy Person; He did not need to have suitability conferred on Him. If we are to be filled with the Spirit it is obvious that suitability must be conferred on us; it is not personal to us as it was to Him. Our suitability to receive the Spirit is the result of our being in the value of redemption, and it is by the working of God that brings us through many exercises into suitability. But Christ was personally suitable as a vessel to be full of the Holy Spirit. It is touching to observe that He was sealed with the Spirit at the moment when He was identifying Himself with the repentant company; it shows the kind of spirit that is delightful to God. He is seen as personally delightful to God in chapter 3, and this involved His sealing, a personal matter, but He is the anointed Servant in chapter 4. What He is personally precedes, and is morally greater than, what He is officially. As regards ourselves it is good to be exercised as to what we are personally and spiritually rather than as to what we might be officially: one might have capacity to serve the Lord in some way, but to be in conscious sonship for the delight of God is greater.

Spiritual suitability in full maturity is seen here in the Lord Jesus. Luke presents a wondrous development in Him; He introduces the Lord as a Babe, and he calls our attention in a marked way to His growth, His increase to full maturity. I have likened it to the Lord's word, "First the blade, then an ear, then full corn in the ear", Mark 4: 28. In the little Child who had the grace of God upon Him (Luke 2: 40) we see the "blade": at twelve years of age we see the "ear" — things taking definite and intelligent form for God; then at thirty

years of age we see the “full corn in the ear” — everything had come to maturity. There was no single element wanting that could be for the pleasure of God in Man. He thus comes into view as the incomparable Vessel, full of the Holy Spirit. An entirely new character of things came in with the Lord. If we want to know the character of man as dependent and as full of the Holy Spirit we must contemplate Jesus.

In regard to the temptation it is to be noted that He was led by the Spirit in the wilderness to be tempted: the Spirit was the first mover, not the devil. It was necessary that what man was as dependent and as full of the Holy Spirit should be manifested in the presence of all the power and subtlety of the devil. It was not a test of man as independent of God; that testing had been going on for four thousand years, and at every moment the independent man had proved a failure, but God would have it manifested that the dependent Man full of the Spirit was able to withstand the whole power of evil. That is an immense thing for us to understand: God is well pleased that we should contemplate the perfection of Jesus, and look on Him as the pattern of what man really is as dependent and full of the Holy Spirit.

The features that come out here are of the utmost importance. We may be sure that the devil would not raise minor points, but would attempt to strike at that which was most precious to God, and most essential to the life of man in relation to God. Then, on the other hand, these features were precisely those which the Spirit of God intended should be brought to light. God would engage our hearts with the positive features in Christ which were disclosed in Him as tempted; they are features which are proper to man as in relation to God. We see one here as Man in the place of man’s responsibility, filling that place with absolute perfection. In Him we see Man in responsibility without any failure, without any imperfection, marked by dependence and the presence of the Spirit. God’s thought is to have man in responsibility after the pattern of Jesus; it is the proper character of the sons of God. As a Christian I learn what I am privileged to be as in responsibility, not from man after the flesh, but from Christ. He came into the place of man’s responsibility, and has filled it with absolute perfection; not as having strength or resource in Himself at all — that is the wonder of it — but as having confidence in God. He filled that place as the dependent Man drawing every bit of strength and support from the God whom He trusted. He has fulfilled responsibility in exactly the same way as we are privileged to fulfil it. If I were always dependent and full of the Holy Spirit I should always fulfil my responsibility for the pleasure of God. There has been One here upon earth as Man who lived by every word of God, and was dependent upon God at every moment and in every step, and everything in Him was for God’s delight. I need not say that there was much more than

fulfilled responsibility in Christ, for there was in Him the perfect setting forth of the favour and love of God to men, but we are speaking for the moment of what was tested and brought out by the temptations of the devil. What came out as the result of his temptations was that there was a Man upon this earth in whom man's relations with God were seen in perfect adjustment, and so secured that not all the power of the devil could disturb the adjustment.

No doubt the devil was aware that He had been saluted from heaven as the beloved Son of God, but it was morally impossible for the devil to know the Person that he was tempting. How could an evil being understand a Person who was absolutely true and holy and good? If the devil had known Him morally he would never have tempted Him; he would have known that it was utterly useless to present such things to Him. But God permitted the temptation, and it was by the leading of the Holy Spirit that Jesus went into it, in order that the true character of Man in dependence and full of the Holy Spirit might be manifested, and that it should be seen that such a Man could maintain all His relations with God inviolate. God has introduced into this world, in the Person of His beloved Son, something which is invulnerable in presence Of all the power of evil. Perfection was there which the devil could not touch so as to mar it in any way.

It was important in the first place that it should be demonstrated how man *lives* in relation to God. The first temptation brought that out; man lives "by every word of God". He *lives* by what God is pleased to communicate to him. It was this great lesson which God was seeking to make Israel know in the wilderness. "He suffered thee to hunger and fed thee with manna ... that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread alone, but by everything that goeth out of the mouth of Jehovah doth man live". It is by receiving communications from God that man lives; there is no other life for man as to his spirit, which is indeed the true man; he cannot live by any outward resources. We all naturally turn to something else, but it fails. We think it will be some satisfaction to do this or that, something that we mark out for ourselves, but humbling and hunger come in on that line. The cravings of the spirit of man are not met by such things, as we see in the book of Ecclesiastes. We scheme and plan and work out our designs to completion if God allows it, but we find there is no life on that line at all; we cannot get bread from stones, but communications from God enable a man to live. All the exercises of the wilderness were designed to teach the children of Israel that lesson, and we have to learn it too. Material things, and what we can get in a natural way, do not bring in life for our spirits in relation to God. Some of the Psalms are very precious as showing the value attached by men to communications from God. Men who had the Spirit of Christ attached the

greatest value to communications from God. Psalm 19 and Psalm 119 are fine instruction as to the preciousness of "every word of God".

For about thirty years Jesus Himself had been living by the words of God, taking up each word as it came to Him, in its application to the conditions in which He was found, as light and sustainment. "Every word of God" had been appropriated by Him; the communications of God, not only as a whole, but in detail; "morning by morning" His ear had been awakened to hear as the instructed; Isaiah 50: 4.

He gave every word of God its place, and He lived by the blessedness of what was communicated to Him by God. He would not make stones into bread at the tempter's instigation, for He lived in the strength of another kind of food. I suppose we have all known how a word coming to us, perhaps in pressure or circumstances of trial, has altered everything. Not that anything external was changed; the circumstances were all the same, but a word from God had come into our souls so that we lived in the blessedness of it. That is more precious than to have all the resources of the world at our disposal. The lack of resources may test us at times, and cast us upon God, but it is an even greater test to be in affluence, to have the ability to supply every desire of one's heart, and to be able in such surroundings to live by every word of God. That is the true blessedness of a saint. I have known persons with great resources as regards this world, who as to the life of their spirits did not live in these resources, but on communications coming to them from God. "Every word of God" would cover all His communications. We get the knowledge of God by listening to communications from Him. The first breath of life in a man's soul is when he receives a communication from God. It gives him what natural resources never could give him. He finds out the precious thoughts of God in regard to him, and he lives by them. Here, of course, it is not the impartation of life, but the sustainment of it. Our souls need to be set in life; Psalm 66: 9. The practice of having a few verses of Scripture early in the morning is a fine support for the day, and it is wonderful how often in one's regular reading one gets just what is needed for the day. We become conscious that it is the word of God to us for the time. If we do not get it, it is very likely that before the day is over we shall be trying to make some stone into bread..

The second temptation brings out the great and blessed subject of God's service and worship, and this can only be taken up by those who know what it is to live by communications from God. God is ready to speak to us every day; He taught us that by the manna. He showed that He cared for His people every day; He did not give a week's supply but a daily supply. The Lord

Himself as Man here knew what it was to live by every word of God, and we have it on record that He received communications every morning. Jehovah opened His ear to hear as the instructed One, (Isaiah 50); it is really the word *disciple*: He was the true Disciple. His spirit was not sustained by outward circumstances or encouragement, but by every word of God. If He could speak of having His ear wakened, we may gather from it that we are dependent on God to waken our ears, and to speak to us every morning. He is exceedingly ready to do so. He never failed to give the manna. He never once threatened to stop the manna, although they were disobedient, rebellious, idolatrous, and turned back in their hearts to Egypt. The manna was a particular evidence of the faithfulness of God; it was never suspended however badly they behaved. We need to be much exercised as to being sustained in life, because God is a living God and He wants a living people — people living by fresh communications each day. The Lord Jesus had fresh communications every morning; therefore He was qualified to serve; He could speak a word in season to him that was weary. He said to the disciples, "All things which I have heard of my Father I have made known to you". He received communications and passed them on. If I receive from God I have something to pass on, and others will get the benefit of it.

The full scope of man's ambition as fallen away from God is found in the power and glory of the world-kingdom, and this is also the limit of what the devil can give. He can give nothing beyond death, nothing for eternity, but power and glory in the present habitable world can be bestowed by him. He proposed to confer it on Jesus if He would but do homage before him. This brings out the terrible price at which present world glory can be purchased. To covet it is really to bow down to a power which is hostile to God. But the Son of God, the blessed dependent Man, full of the Holy Spirit, was absorbed with God, and with what is due to God. One who does homage to God will not be attracted by a power and glory which the devil can give. He has another kind of power and glory before him. "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee. My soul thirsteth for thee ... to see thy power and thy glory, as I have beheld thee in the sanctuary", Psalm 63: 1, 2. It is striking that the worship and service of God should stand in contrast with wanting the power and glory of the world, If we live by what God speaks to us it is in view of our worshipping and serving in a priestly way. God's sons are also priests for holy service Godward in His house. As in the shining of God's love and delight the outgoings of the heart are in a worshipping spirit. God has now a spiritual house, a holy priesthood. It is said of Zacharias in this gospel that he "fulfilled his priestly service before God", Those who do so find no attraction in a power and glory which the devil can confer. The house of God is a glorious place;

there is a power and glory there which throws into the shade everything that is in the world.

The temptations stand in a setting which corresponds with the book of Deuteronomy, for each quotation of Scripture by the Lord is from that book, and in Deuteronomy great place is given to the place where Jehovah would cause His name to dwell, and where He would be served and worshipped. Our attention is thereby called to the magnificence of what God would set up here in contrast to everything that has power and glory in the estimation of the fallen man. Solomon's temple was, I have no doubt, the most magnificent building that ever stood on the earth; it was "great and wonderful"; but it was only a typical shadow, and we have to do with the substance. The house of God as it is on the earth at this moment is far more magnificent spiritually than Solomon's temple, and we have not to go to Jerusalem to find it.

The devil does not speak to the Lord of what men would call the evil things in the world, but of the world-kingsdoms with their power and glory; he claims them as given up to him and the Lord does not dispute his claim. In that world which the devil can claim as his own there may be power and glory, and everything to satisfy ambition and the vanity and pride of man, but what is due to God cannot be found there. But in the house of God there is everything that ministers to His pleasure; it is a spiritual house, and the sacrifices offered in it are spiritual sacrifices, and they are acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

There are two great systems; the world system where man is clothed with power and glory without God, and another system where all power and glory is seen to belong to God, and where He is served and worshipped. Which system are we living in? The house of God is the assembly of the living God, and it is built up of living stones, and God is served and worshipped there. When the house was built the glory came down and filled it. I believe that is always morally true; the glory of God fills His house. To see God's power and glory as it is known in the sanctuary delivers us from the world system. The thought at the end of Ephesians 2 is very beautiful: "all the building fitted together increases to a holy temple in the Lord". Finality is not yet reached, but the holy temple character is increasing all the time. It is not when we reach heaven, because it is "in the Lord", and that is while we are here in responsibility. There should be something more of holy temple character about the saints now than there was five years ago. We do not get free from the world merely by renouncing certain things, but by realising the moral grandeur of a sphere where everything is spiritual, where all the light of God is, and where He is served and worshipped. The great business of Israel was to go up to the place where Jehovah set His Name; they had to have that in mind all

the time; and our chief business is to be engaged in the service and worship of God in His house, which is a good place for men, but which is prominently brought before us in Scripture as a place for God where there is something agreeable to Himself — “spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ”.

The devil proposed to give the power and glory of the world-kingdom to the Son of God if He would do him homage; to have that kind of power and glory involves some measure of homage to the devil. It is a very serious thing to think of. The devil said, “it is given up to me”; that would be true, not as a matter of any right to it, but as a fact through the lusts of men. The lusts of men have given the devil power, because he can minister to such lusts. The power and glory of the world have become the great prize of man’s unholy ambitions, answering to every corrupt desire in the heart of a man who does not know God. How blessed to recognise another system where everything is of God, a system filled with all the perfection and blessedness of Christ, and the fruit of His work, and everything sustained by the presence of the Spirit! There is a system where God and Christ and the Spirit are the source of everything, and in that system God is served and worshipped; He is not served and worshipped in this world.

Luke puts the temptations in moral order; Matthew gives the historical order. What Luke gives as the second temptation was the last in historical order according to Matthew; when the Lord said, “Get thee away, Satan”, that was the end; the devil said no more after that. But Luke puts the temptations in moral order, he writes with method, and he puts the temptations in an ascending scale. First the temptation to make stones into bread, then the devil’s offer of the power and glory of the kingdoms of the world, and then finally he brings forward what may be called a spiritual temptation. The devil is the slanderer; he slanders God to men, and he slanders the saints to God. Satan is his name as the adversary, the one who is in positive opposition to God at every point.

I do not think any other family will have the same privilege to serve and worship as we have. Praise and worship is rendered now by persons who have been in the holiest: that will not be true in the millennium. It gives the Lord joy for us to praise in concert with Him; the great delight of His heart is that we should know His God and His Father so as to worship and serve Him, and when He has brought us to that point it is His supreme satisfaction. If the Lord delighted to identify Himself with a few poor sinners who were repentant if they were to Him the excellent of the earth, of whom He could say that in them was all His delight — how does He delight in those who have received from Himself the knowledge of His God and Father, and who live in the

enjoyment of the grace and blessedness that He has brought to them! What immeasurable delight He has in such a company! He speaks of them as being not of the world; they are of a spiritual system which is outside the world altogether.

The third temptation was more subtle than the first two, because it was based upon a divine promise; it was a suggestion that the Lord should avail Himself of a promise which would show publicly that He was the subject of divine care. The devil would suggest a putting of God to the test as to whether He would be true to His word. To do so would be a proof of want of confidence in God; it would be to tempt God, as the people did when they said, "Is Jehovah among us or not?" The Lord answered this by the scripture which forbade doing so. We learn here that Satan is conversant with Scripture; he knew that Jesus was the Son of God and the Messiah, and he knew the scriptures referring to the Messiah, and quoted one of them. I suppose the devil knows the Bible better than any one of us and he often quotes it for his own ends. But he was careful to quote just as much as would answer his purpose; there was another verse immediately following: "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under foot". He did not quote that. The question is raised now whether one dependent and full of the Spirit requires any outward and circumstantial proof that God cares for Him. The Lord Jesus had a home; according to the very Psalm quoted, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty". One who is dwelling in the secret place — one might say, in the very bosom of God — does not need any circumstance, sign, or miracle to make him sure of God's love and care. Verse 4 of this Psalm says, "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou find refuge". Nothing could be more touching than that the blessed God should compare Himself to a bird cherishing her young; He speaks of the Messiah as being covered with His feathers. Nothing could be nearer or more intimate. He was under the warmth and cherishing of the love and care of God, and He did not need any outward sign of it. Verse 9 of the Psalm shows the conditions in which He lived: "Because thou hast made Jehovah, my refuge, the most High, thy dwelling place". That is the privilege of the saint. The dependent Man, full of the Holy Spirit, was in the most intimate enjoyment of the love of God; He lived there. It has been said that we cannot live in the world and we do not yet live in heaven; the only place where we can live is in the love of God. If you live continuously in the known love of a person, you do not think of putting that love to any test; to do so would be a proof of distrust. It is just the same with God; if we have to put Him to the test as to whether He loves and cares for us or not, it is a proof of unbelief and distrust. The apostle says,

"We boast in tribulations ... because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us". That is the secret. I do not know the love of God by outward circumstances; He might allow me to suffer very severely. Many of our brethren suffer very severely; their outward circumstances do not seem to evidence that God loves them, but we know the love of God by the fact that Christ has died for us, and the Spirit of God pours that love into our hearts. We have a secret; this Psalm speaks about "the secret place of the Most High". The love of God is a blessed secret only known to those who come into the light of the death of Christ. As Christians we cherish this wonderful secret, We know the love of God in two ways; by the expression of it in the death of His Son, and by the Spirit shedding it abroad in our hearts.

It is really "the secret place", and if we live there we do not need a sign.

It is very sweet to think that God has a secret place in the heart of one where His love has become known, and we have a secret place in the heart of God. "Because he hath set his love upon me". There was a blessed Man in this world who set His love upon God, and that is our privilege too. Then there will be no thought of requiring some outward evidence of His love; we have it in the secret of our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Even Job could say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him". He had the root of the matter in him. God is pleased sometimes to leave His children in very trying circumstances and great suffering; He does not appear to intervene. I have known many saints who have not even wanted Him to intervene. They have been so happy in His known love that they have not wanted Him to change their circumstances; they have not wanted any outward sign. That is very glorifying to God. It is a great triumph on God's part to make one in such circumstances conscious of His love. I remember an old sister who had never been outside the four walls of her little room for thirty-five years, and, when my mother went to see her and said something to her about the love of God, she said, 'O, the love of God, it swallows me up'. She was in the secret place. We need to cherish that. We sing sometimes,

"Our hearts resort to where
Thou liv'st In heav'n's unclouded rays".

That is a secret place. Then you do not need to put the love of God to the test. The Scripture said, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God"; that referred to the children of Israel in the wilderness when things all went wrong and they had no water to drink. Things were looking very black; to be in a wilderness without water to drink is a dire case. But they said, "Is Jehovah

among us or not?" and God never forgot it; He reminded them of it several times in their history. Think of what He had done for them: the passover lamb, the passage of the Red Sea, the pillar of fire by night, and the pillar of cloud by day, the manna every day, and yet they said, "Is Jehovah among us or not?" And for us, we have the death of His Son: "Christ has died for us". Nothing in the history of the world can be compared to that.

The Lord has overruled the devil's quoting of Psalm 91 because it attracts the attention of saints constantly to that Psalm, which so beautifully brings out the personal relations of the Lord Jesus as Man to the blessed God, so that it is a Psalm which deserves most careful consideration. It is a conversation; there are different speakers in it, but it brings out the relations of Christ as Man to God.

It is of the greatest importance that we should cultivate the secret life of our spirits with God, so that we taste the known love of God all along, and do not wait until we get into a tight place and then look to God for deliverance, and take it as a proof of His care and love; but we live in the sweetness and blessedness of the known love of God all the time. Romans 8 tell us that nothing can separate us from the love of God or the love of Christ; these are things from the preciousness of which nothing can separate us. Then why should we want any circumstances changed to make us more sure that God or Christ loves us? Nothing is more humbling than to think what a little thing can upset us; it shows how little we are really living in the love of God. We spend time in praying that God would change our circumstances, whereas we should use our time better by asking that we might be changed.

Jesus returned in the Rower of the Spirit to Galilee; He had passed through the testing with undiminished power. Full of the Holy Spirit to begin with, He was not one whit less full when He came back to take up publicly His precious service of grace as God's Anointed.

All the grace of heaven was waiting to break forth upon men, but it needed a suitable vessel in which to disclose itself. The full and perfect answer is found in Jesus. There is a Person in whom there is not the slightest disparity with heaven. Heaven found a perfect answer here on earth in a Man, so that in the presence of God He was the beloved Son — the object of God's delight — and in the presence of the devil He was untouchable. That is the One in whom the grace of heaven has come to man — to us. It pleased God that the great light should shine, not in Judea, but in Galilee, for the value of a great light is best known in darkness. The prophetic word was that to a people who were in darkness and in the shadow of death the light should shine, and that light is

shining still for us. It is a Person having such a character and such qualifications who is able to bring all the grace of heaven to man.

Now we see Him full of the Holy Spirit and speaking with divine authority. He is speaking in absolute grace to a people who are poor, captive, and blind. He brought tidings of immeasurable grace to those who deserved nothing. Everything that we learn in the Lord in His pathway here lives in Him in heaven, so it raises our hearts to heaven above. Every person in the world who knows the grace of God learned it from Jesus. He is still the anointed Preacher; human vessels are only mouthpieces, but Jesus is still the anointed Preacher; and Ephesians tells us that He is come to the Gentiles to preach peace to them that were afar off. He is saying the same things from heaven as He said on earth. What we have to do is to allow the Spirit of God to fill our hearts with a sense of who Jesus is and what He has brought.

The very fact that the Lord preached such wonderful divine favour to people who had not the slightest appreciation of it shows how entirely it is from God's side, because it would appear that the Lord never had one convert in Nazareth. We see this grace in all its supremacy and majesty and glory, and it shines all the more brightly because it shines in darkness. Nothing influenced the shining and the preaching — the indifference has not influenced the preaching one iota. He came to a place where He knew He would not be appreciated: "Verily, verily, I say unto you that no prophet is accepted in his own country".

Isaiah 61 had been read on numerous occasions before, but it had never been read as it was that day, because there was something more than Scripture read — it was Scripture fulfilled. The Lord then closed the book; He did not read a long piece — only two verses — but what volumes were in those two verses! Then He added something which no one could have added before: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your ears". There was no haphazard reading; He found the scripture for that day; He did not read further.

Jesus represents the grace of heaven, and if we really are prepared to appreciate Him, He will become the supreme Object for each one of us. He said, "The Spirit of Jehovah is upon me, because he hath appointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord", But are we poor and captive and blind so as to appreciate Him, or are we full of self-righteous pride? That is the test, and when it comes home to us that we are blind and that we *do* need glad tidings and deliverance from heaven, it no longer becomes just a picture to admire; it is a personal Deliverer who

captivates and charms the heart, so that we are made willing to follow Him at all cost to ourselves. If the Lord is anointed to preach glad tidings just to people who are broken-hearted, Sidonian widows or Syrian lepers are just as much entitled to it as anyone else. Both in the widow of Sarepta and in Naaman, there was that which had to be taken to pieces, so that each of them might understand the wealth of grace and mercy that had come to them, undeserving as they were.

When the Lord brought home to His congregation the real state of their hearts, it turned out that on their side they were not poor, blind, crushed, and captives; they were not at all in that spirit, for they took Him to the brow of the hill to cast Him down. We do not learn grace very readily; it is wonderful how little one's heart is prepared to take in pure grace.

Conviction of sin is of divine sovereignty; it is a divine operation which we cannot explain and no human power can bring about.

In verses 33 - 41 we see grace in its application. The condition of man is such that he is quite incapable for service either Godward or manward. But the gracious power of Jehovah's Horn of deliverance came out in dispossessing the unclean demon that was in the synagogue, so that the man might be found in conditions suitable to the holiness of God and the service of God. Then Simon's mother-in-law was incapable of service manward by reason of fever; and the application of grace to her set her in perfect liberty for service manward; she stood up and served them. The two incidents largely characterise the gospel of Luke. God has introduced a Person who in the application of His grace is capable of delivering men from everything that incapacitated them for service Godward and manward. A great many people want deliverance; the secret of it is a Person, and that Person is fully available for us. All that is in Him as power is as much available for us in our moral weaknesses and necessities as it was physically for the people that came in contact with Him in the days of His flesh. We have to go to the gospels to learn the character of the Person of whom the epistles speak. The doctrine is unfolded in the epistles, but for the substance we must go to the gospels. The substance and power of deliverance are in the Person of Christ.

LUKE 5

Luke 5

Chapter 4 ends with a reference to “the glad tidings of the kingdom of God”. The kingdom of God is something quite new; we cannot read anything about it in the Old Testament save prophetically; the thing itself was not there. The New Testament opens with the statement that it was at hand, drawing near. There never was such a joyful kingdom as the kingdom of God; its character is set forth in “new wine” — wine richer and more precious than any wine known on earth; it is indeed “good wine”. It was said of the men at Pentecost, in derision, that they were “full of new wine”, but it was true spiritually; many a true word is spoken in derision. The Lord wants every one of us to be full of new wine. He came into this world to secure it, and Luke 5 shows how He secures vessels to contain and preserve the precious grace which He has brought here from heaven.

The coming of the Lord in this gospel is to secure three things; glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good pleasure in men. That is what God desires and He started out to secure it by bringing in one Man in whom He has completely found good pleasure. God is working to bind us up in our affections completely and effectually with that one Man so that we may become objects of pleasure to His heart — that He may have pleasure in us as He has in Christ. In chapter 4 we have one beautiful Vessel capable of bringing down to men in this world all the grace of heaven — all the grace of the heart of God. In chapter 5 we have presented a number of vessels all made suitable to hold the new wine — all filled out of the one beautiful Vessel. That gives a wonderful idea of the kingdom of God.

At the beginning of this chapter they press on Him to hear the word of God. But we find that preaching and hearing are not sufficient; there must be a work of God in the souls of men to bring about the formation of new vessels. That is what we see illustrated here. The Lord preached and people heard, but, in addition to that, a work of God was accomplished in the soul of Simon Peter — a sovereign movement which was, no doubt, figured in the number of fish brought into Simon’s net. A movement under the surface brought all these fish into Simon’s net. It was a sovereign movement of God, for there were no fish there before; they had tried all night and caught nothing. The thought is suggested that God was going to work in the souls of men so that there should be something taken out of the mass of mankind for His pleasure.

The first element in the formation of a new vessel is conviction of sin. It was a new kind of conviction of sin which no sinner who ever lived in this world had

had before. No man had ever before been convicted of sin *in the presence of Jesus*, and that made all the difference. He fell at Jesus' knees, because along with conviction of sin there was a mighty power of attraction. Now it is attraction that holds people; conviction of sin is the net in which God catches people, but, it says, "their net broke". It could not hold what was caught. Their "net" represented what they were conversant with; that is, the ministry of the law and the prophets. That might convict people but it would not hold them for God; there was no power of attraction in the law and prophets — no inherent power to hold men for God — but there is a power of attraction about Jesus which will hold men for God. That is the kind of conviction of sin that belongs to Christianity; men are convicted deeply of sin, but the consciousness is brought into their souls of the marvellous power of attraction that there is in Jesus; that holds them for God. The old divines used to talk about the difference between legal repentance and gospel repentance, and there was a good deal in it. Suppose a man stood under mount Sinai with its thunder and lightnings, and heard the terrible words, "die without mercy" — that man might be convicted of sin in terror, but that is not the kind of conviction of sin that God gives to men today. A man might realise that he was, as it were, standing over the pit of hell and ready to drop in in a minute, but that is not the kind of conviction that God gives people today. There is a new kind of conviction of sin which belongs to the kingdom of God, the new system of divine grace. In chapter 4 Jesus is the Preacher and the Deliverer, but in chapter 5 He is the Bridegroom. In the end of chapter 5, when the Pharisees asked Him why His disciples ate and drank while the disciples of John fasted, He answered, The bridegroom is here, everything is new now. Even conviction of sin has a new character, different from what any one had before. Simon Peter fell down, but it was at Jesus' knees. He was as near to Him as he could get; the power of attraction was great in His heart. That is the kind of conviction of sin that God gives people now; they feel their utter unfitness for Jesus and for God, but at the same time they are filled with the sense of how exceedingly suitable Jesus is for them.

The gospel of Luke is the divine disclosure of the personal charm of Jesus, the heavenly Bridegroom. "The charm of a man is his kindness", Proverbs 19: 22. There is no more beautiful word in Scripture, and we might say that it describes Luke's gospel. Here is a man so convicted that as to his own consciousness there is not a spot of anything in him but sin; he is a sinful man; and yet he is attracted by the divine charm of kindness in Jesus, so as to be drawn to His very knees. That is the first element in the formation of new bottles. There is the deepest conviction of our own unfitness and sin but there is no discouragement or remorse in it because we learn it in the presence of

the personal charm of Jesus — the attractiveness of the Bridegroom. Repentance and remission of sins are to be preached in His Name — that is the end of Luke — we are to set forth repentance and remission of sins in all the personal charm of the Name of Jesus. It makes us love God when we know that is the way He has taken, to know that He has brought in such a wonderful Person. I do not wonder that these people were astonished; there was only astonishment left in their hearts. Think of the charm about One who was personally delightful to God as His beloved Son; we see His charm in that character in chapter 3. Then we see in chapter 4 the charm of One who was untouchable by the devil, and the charm of the anointed Preacher who could fully set forth the grace of God to men, and then the charm of the Deliverer who can relieve us of every power of evil and every infirmity. Now in chapter 5 we see the charm of His kindness to a man convicted of sin. Then the Lord says to him, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" — He takes Simon into partnership. One like that is qualified to catch men, because he can present something very attractive; he can speak of the charm of Jesus. If we knew that charm better we should use it more on others.

This chapter puts together for us carefully and methodically the different elements that go to make up new bottles. The first new element is conviction of sin in the presence of Jesus. But this does not do all that is needed; it awakens the necessity in the soul for a divine cleansing, not merely what will satisfy our consciences, but what will make us suitable to God. We have now a new kind of cleansing. There had never been a man before to whom a leper could come and say, "Thou canst make me clean", but this leper comes and says to Jesus, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean". What an apprehension he had of a new order of things — a Man on earth able to cleanse lepers so that they should be fit to approach God!

This leper says, "Lord, if thou wilt". What a beautiful spirit that is! He had learnt what the men in the synagogue of Nazareth refused; they refused divine sovereignty, but this man had learnt to submit to it as the way of blessing. If we submit to divine sovereignty we find it ten thousand times more favourable to us than we ever thought. It is God's sovereign pleasure to bring about a cleansing that is perfectly suitable to Himself. That is what God proposes; not simply to cleanse us so that we can get into heaven without a charge and have some lone seat within the door, but to make us as fit to be presented before Him as ever any holy angel was, and even more than that, for it is a cleansing that could only be brought about by the death of Jesus. Could there ever be anything more wonderful than that? Jesus effects cleansing for us through His own death. It was in the death of Jesus that He really and sacrificially touched the leper. It was the pleasure of God to cleanse

us so effectively that not the keenest priestly vision — not even His own holy eye — could detect a single trace of leprosy; all pollution is completely gone. The Lord went to the cross to do that. The charm of His kindness alone would not meet the case, He has identified Himself with our sinful state; He has touched us; He has been made sin for us. Such is the value of the death of Christ that for us who believe on Him there is not a trace of defilement left under the eye of God. "I will: be thou clean" is the word of the cross. That word rings down through the ages from Calvary. "I will: be thou clean" is a new kind of cleansing altogether; it is not merely ceremonial cleansing such as an Israelite might have by observing the rites and ordinances of the law. It is a new kind of cleansing which makes us spotless in the presence of the holiness of God, all secured by the death of Jesus.

Then the Lord said to him, "Go, show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing as Moses ordained". Think of this man taking his two birds, cedar wood, scarlet and hyssop, and his lambs and fine flour and oil as presented in Leviticus 14, and going to the priest! Everything that he offered speaks to us of the Person who cleansed him. What instruction there is in the things which he offered! The two birds, one killed and the other dipped in the blood of the dead bird and let loose in the open field, speak of Christ going into death and coming out in resurrection. Then the cedar wood, scarlet and hyssop declare the greatness and glory of Christ as Man. The cedar wood speaks of His excellent bearing, the scarlet of the glory of man as seen in Christ, and the hyssop suggests the lowliness of the One who came down to the lowest point to meet sinful men. The leper had in type all that before him; it should fill our souls with adoring thoughts of Christ. We can look at it and say, All that is for me; it is in the value of that holy Person going into death that I am cleansed; my soul is in adoring liberty in presence of the perfection of Christ, who went into death to secure my cleansing according to divine holiness and to set me up in the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit. It is not a question of what I need to relieve my conscience, but of the marvellous character of the cleansing that has come in by God's Son having become a Man, presenting in Himself every feature of human excellence and perfection, and giving it all in death, so that in the excellence and virtue of that I am cleansed. It is not only a negative removal, but the bringing in of the blessed perfection of Christ so that we are set free to offer Christ before God.

The cleansed leper went away with the blood on his ear, thumb and great toe. Think of his walking out into the world with the sense that he was to hear everything, do everything, and make every movement in the sense of the marvellous character of his cleansing! He was cleansed by a Person who came out of heaven, having every perfection that was suitable to God in a Man, but

who went into death as a sacrifice for sin to secure a cleansing for sinful men that would leave them as spotless as He is in the presence of God. The cleansed leper had the blood on his ear, his thumb, and his toe, and he had the oil on the blood, and then he had all the rest of the oil poured on his head. The cleansed leper had a dignity in Israel that attached to no other person save God's anointed priest and king. He went out as an anointed man.

This new kind of cleansing altogether surpasses any cleansing that men might have had in the Old Testament; it is a cleansing which can only be measured by the Person who effects it. Such is the value of the death of Christ that, if the full blaze of the light of God were to shine on the believer, not a single spot of sin would be discovered; he is cleansed.

There is a significant break in the chapter at verse 16: "And he withdrew himself and was about in the desert places praying". It seems to intimate the completion of what He had to do in connection with the exposure of sin and its cleansing. The exposure of man's state of sin and divine cleansing were not all that divine grace had in view, and the Lord withdrew Himself, I would suggest, to pray in regard of the further thoughts of God for men. It is deeply interesting to think of the blessed Son of God as entering into all the thoughts of grace, and praying that these thoughts might be fully secured in men. If there are to be new bottles for the new wine, there must not only be a new kind of conviction of sin and a new cleansing, but there must be a new power. Men are marked by weakness, but one of the great thoughts of God for men is that they should be characterised by power instead of total incapacity for good, so that men should be able to walk here to the glory of God.

We see in this section a paralysed man. It is not only true that we are sinful and need cleansing, but we are utterly incapacitated and without strength. This is another opportunity for divine grace to disclose itself. I do not think it is too much to say that the power which was present to heal, and in which the paralysed man stood up and walked, was the answer to the prayer of the Lord Jesus. There is not one of us here who has not felt the need of power, but suppose we start at the divine side. Long before I felt the need of power, Jesus felt it for me, and long before I prayed for power, He prayed for power for me. *His* praying brought the power of God into that house, and into that paralysed man. Power is always in answer to prayer, but let us not forget the prevailing efficacy of the prayers of Jesus. Whatever need I may become conscious of, I may be assured that there is not one of those needs that the Lord Jesus has not felt and taken up in intercession for me. How it draws one's heart to Him!

We come, in figure, here to the gift of the Spirit; power lies in the gift of the Spirit. It is the thought of divine grace to set us up capacitated for good. Naturally we are marked by utter weakness for what is good, but the thought of divine grace is to set us up in power by the gift of the Spirit. Now the gift of the Spirit comes in answer to prayer: "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much rather shall the Father who is of heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" And the Lord said to the woman of Samaria, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that says to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him and he would have given thee living water". But, while taking account of that, let us not forget that the Spirit is given in answer to the prayer of the Lord Jesus, the blessed Son of God. He said, "I will beg the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, who shall be with you for ever". The gift of the Spirit is the answer to the prayer of Jesus, just as the power that came to this paralysed man was in answer to the prayer of Jesus. That is the Person we know through the infinite grace of God — a living Person now in heaven who has prayed that we might have the Holy Spirit as power.

Power in the creature must be dependent power; God would never give power to the creature to make that creature independent of Himself. The Spirit as power is dependent power, and even the gift of the Spirit is seen to be in answer to prayer, which is the expression of dependence. The paralytic man was entirely dependent, because he came as brought by others; he was brought by men who had the faith of what was available. The whole case as taken up by Jesus and the men was marked by dependence. There was the prayer of Jesus and the faith of the men, and the result was that the man became energised and characterised by a power that was of God.

There is not a thought of God in grace in regard to me that the Lord Jesus has not taken up in an intercessory way with God, and it is on that ground that we get every blessing. That brings in a very attractive element; it makes the Lord Jesus attractive; we begin to see something of His character as Bridegroom. This chapter is leading us on by stages to the knowledge of Christ as Bridegroom, One who holds everything for God in the power of affection, and in a personal charm that becomes attractive to everyone who comes to know Him. He is the great attractive centre of God's universe, and all this leads up to a company being secured who are "the sons of the bridechamber"; they find charm and satisfaction in the Bridegroom.

They were not conventional in the way they went about what they had in hand, but they got the man to Jesus, and that settled the whole thing. That is what we want; many of us may read our Bibles and pray, but do we get to

Jesus? These men got the man to Jesus, though I dare say they shocked the doctors and Pharisees by the way they did it. There is always a way to Jesus round by the top. The Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by would represent the unprofitableness of the old legal system. They could only *sit* by as the priest and levite in chapter 10 *passed* by. Power comes in by Jesus and on the principle of faith and dependence.

The power of the Spirit is given so that the walk of the saints may be a living testimony to the disposition of God's heart towards men. It is not merely that we may have power to get through, but that there may be a testimony in this world to the forgiveness that is in the heart of God for men. The need has been fully felt by Jesus; none of us have sufficiently felt the need, but He has. The One who is our Lord, our Head, the Bridegroom, has felt the need, so He says, "Thy sins are forgiven thee". It is as much as to say, That is the great point in the testimony of God at the present moment. "Thy sins are forgiven" is God coming out in forgiveness. The rising up and walking of this man were to be a testimony to the fact that there was a Man on this earth making known the disposition of the heart of God in all its blessedness. God's heart was being uncovered to man, the guilty sinner. What was God doing? He was in Christ reconciling the world. There is forgiveness in the heart of God; in spite of all I have done His heart refuses to hold anything against me. The Lord seems to say, This question comes first; you must know the disposition of God's heart towards you. It is a wonderful moment when we learn the disposition of God's heart towards us. If we get a sense of it we shall understand that He will not leave us without power to walk for His glory. If He regards us so tenderly, if that has been His attitude and disposition, He will not leave us without power, but then He says, The power I give you is to be a witness to the disposition of My heart. We do not think enough of the forgiveness of sins. People think of it as elementary, though we do not find it in Romans save in one quotation from the Psalms. But in Colossians and Ephesians we find it. That God is righteous in justifying is prominent in Romans, but forgiveness is the tender disposition of the heart of God. We do not find in Romans such a verse as "Be to one another kind, compassionate, forgiving one another, so as God also in Christ has forgiven you", Ephesians 4: 32. I find forgiveness in the very heart of the blessed God. Forgiveness is the disposition of the heart of the person offended; it is how he feels. God glories in forgiveness; it was in His heart before it took form in Christ. The point here is not so much the meeting of man's need, but that the great heart of God must have an outlet. Our sins, our weakness, everything there is with us, are from the standpoint of Luke, opportunities valued by God and precious to Him because they give Him an opportunity of making Himself known to us in the

marvellous fulness of His grace. It is not merely that I, the sinful creature, need God, but God needs me; He needs me in my sinfulness, my weakness, all my moral disorder as a fallen creature, in order to express in me the unsearchable riches of His own blessed grace. That is the presentation in this wonderful gospel.

God has introduced the charm of Jesus into this world — a Person attractive with all the grace of heaven. He is the Bridegroom, the joy-giver; He fills with ineffable satisfaction and delight every heart that knows what it is to be drawn into companionship with Him. Now we see the same power of attraction exercised in the case of Levi the publican to give him an entirely new interest. Self-interest is the very centre of a man naturally, but a power of divine grace in Jesus came in to deliver Levi from self-interest and to give him a new interest centred in Jesus. So along with a new kind of conviction of sin, a new kind of cleansing, and a new power, we find a new interest brought in to govern us in every way.

The word to Levi was "Follow me". Jesus was, as the following verses show, the Bridegroom, the centre of interest and happiness. It is grace coming in to set men free from all self-interest, so that they may be attached in affection to a new centre and object. Many people are not marked by gross evil, but by the fact that their whole lives are governed by self-interest. That will not do for the kingdom of God; it will not do as a feature of the new bottles. We find a new interest connected with Jesus as the Bridegroom. The Lord says, "Follow me".

Levi became a true Levite as having been drawn into the communion of grace; that is what characterises "sons of the bridechamber". It suggests a new interest which has superseded and displaced the self-interest that was there before. This new interest centres in Jesus as the Bridegroom. His interests and His joys become the interests of the sons of the bridechamber. Each of them has left his own interests to become identified with the interests of Another. This is as far as the figure takes us. We do not find the bride in the gospels. We have the friend of the Bridegroom, and virgins going forth to meet the Bridegroom, and the sons of the bride-chamber, but we do not see the bride. There cannot be a bridegroom without a bride, but the bride is hidden in the gospels; we do not see her.

The work of God as illustrated in this chapter culminates in men having a new interest connected with Jesus in the character of the Bridegroom. The title of Bridegroom sets Him forth as the Person who is the centre of interest and happiness. Whatever other interests the disciples may have had, they were all set aside by a new and commanding interest which centred in Jesus as the

Bridegroom. Everything was there that was of grace and of God, and it had come in to be the source of unalloyed happiness. The Lord moved through a certain orbit when He was here, and all the grace of heaven shone out in Him. The sun is compared to a bridegroom in Psalm 19, and is no doubt a figure of Christ in that character. He is spoken of as rejoicing, and His joy was to bring in and express all the grace of heaven. We do not think enough of the profound joy that God has in His grace, but it has been fully known and expressed in a Man, in Jesus, and He calls us to Him that we may participate in it. The joy of God in forgiveness is far greater than our joy in being forgiven. It is a far greater joy to God to cleanse us in all the efficacy of the death of Jesus than it is for us to be cleansed. It is a greater joy to God to set us up in the power of the Spirit than it is for us to have the power. The joy of God in grace is set forth in the Bridegroom, and He would have us as His companions in the joy of grace. This is the new interest that belongs to the kingdom of God.

Levi answered to the call of Jesus, and he made an entertainment for Jesus — not for the tax-gatherers and sinners. He ministered to the joy of grace in the heart of Jesus; that became his new interest. He knew the kind of company that would give joy to the One who was setting forth God as supreme grace. That the tax-gatherers and sinners who came in enjoyed the feast is certain; but Levi made the great entertainment for Jesus; he knew that He would like it. He was a true son of the bridechamber. He had great appreciation of the divine joy which was set forth in Jesus, and it had become his new interest. Do we really know the charm of Jesus in this way? He has called us by His own attractiveness away from self-interest to be dominated and characterised by an entirely new interest. Is it true that Jesus has become the Centre of interest to us? He has brought all the grace of heaven for men. Have we apprehended and understood it, and do we participate in the joy which He has in doing so? Then we can in the communion of grace think of the need around us, but in doing so we think of Him, of His joy in grace, and of how we can minister to it.

Paul speaks of himself as “carrying on as a sacrificial service the message of glad tidings of God, in order that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit”. He says, as it were, I am going to bring them all in for the pleasure of God. That is what gives an entirely new interest that belongs to the kingdom of God. Everything takes a new character, so that what Levi had providentially become an opportunity for him to give expression to the grace of heaven. The chief use of money is that — though in itself the mammon of unrighteousness — it may be used in such a way as to give expression to the grace of heaven. It is the privilege of the saint to let his

new interest be manifest first in his own house. The paralysed man was sent to his house that his new power might be first in evidence there, and Levi made a great entertainment for Jesus "in his house"; the new interest came out there in a very practical way.

We see here in this fourth incident a man in communion with the grace of heaven, fully furnished to meet need because in the sense of full supply as having understood the grace that was there in the Person of Jesus. He regarded everything from that standpoint, and brought his guests together to minister to the joy of the Bridegroom, not merely that they might be blessed. It is more to the Lord that we should be near to Him and in communion with Him in that way than any service we could render. He has many angels He could send to do great things, but no angel knows the Communion of grace as those know it who have been sinful creatures; angels can look on and wonder at it, and learn their God in it, but they cannot be in the communion of grace as the sons of the bridechamber are. Levi saw a blessedness in Him that overpowered every bit of self-interest in his soul. His heart unfolded to the Bridegroom "as the rose to the golden sun". That is what I would like Jesus to be to me, an overpowering influence to displace every bit of self-interest. It is on that line that God is working.

The more we know the festivity of grace which has come in by Jesus as the Bridegroom, the more deeply we shall feel the state of a world which has rejected Him. Fasting comes in here, verse 35. It is not that the grace has diminished, but it has been rejected. The Bridegroom is taken away, so that feasting now is connected with heaven where He is accepted, and fasting with earth where He is still rejected.

Verses 35 - 39 contain what is probably the first of the Lord's parables. It impresses on us the entirely new character of what has come about by the presence of Jesus in this world. It suggests the divine pleasure to invest man with a garment which is altogether new and complete in itself, and which is of a different kind from anything that men ever wore before. The old garment represented all that was provided for men in Judaism under the old covenant. Men had been wearing that garment for fifteen hundred years, but God had said by the prophet Jeremiah that days would come when He would "consummate a new covenant as regards the house of Israel, and as regards the house of Judah", Hebrews 8: 8. The comment of the Spirit of God upon this is, "In that he says, New, he has made the first old; but that which grows old and aged is near disappearing", Hebrews 8: 13. The old garment did not meet man's case, for it did not bring in righteousness or salvation; we are told it made nothing perfect, and it did not disclose the mind and heart of God.

God found fault with that old garment. The system of things with which God had been pleased to invest Israel — the law and the sacrifices, and the order of service that belonged to the tabernacle and temple — while it contained a shadow of good things to come,

did not bring the substance of anything. The new garment implies that God would set up man in an entirely new way before Him, and it is a complete unit to be taken in its entirety; we must not tear a piece out of it to add to the old. There is a new garment which is never going to be old; and which provides a complete and satisfactory covering for men, and satisfaction for God in the men who wear it. Something has been brought in of a different kind from anything proposed in the law. The coming of Jesus into manhood, His going into death, His going on high and giving the Spirit, result in an entirely new garment being provided, no part of which can be added on to the old one. To tear a piece out of the new garment is to spoil it, and it does not suit with the old. Present Christianity as we see it around us is very, largely Judaism with Christian terms imported into it; they have torn a piece out of the new garment, and tacked it on to the old, but it does not fit. No part of a system of things which does not recognise man in the flesh at all can be added to a system of things that was suited to man in the flesh.

There are two things in this parable — the system as set forth in the new garment, and men of a new kind figured by new bottles. Neither the old covenant nor men in the flesh who were under it were satisfactory to God, so He has brought in an entirely new system of blessing, and secured man after a new kind to suit the system which He has brought in. Both the new garment and the new bottles give pleasure to God. It pleased God to invest Israel with everything connected with the old covenant so that things might be tested and that it might be brought to light whether such a system and such men as there under it could abide for the pleasure of God. It was demonstrated that they could not so abide, and the system had to be set aside for the weakness and unprofitableness of it. The epistle to the Hebrews tells us it was weak and unprofitable, and that it did not make the comers thereto perfect. It did not bring in perfection for men or pleasure for God. So God had to speak of something new, and that implied the discarding of the old. Now there is a new garment. God has brought in what is connected with the revelation of Himself in grace in His beloved Son, and the perfect work of the cross, and the gift of the Holy Spirit to men, and He would invest men with the knowledge of this.

The scribes and Pharisees were wearing the old garment,

and though they were able in measure to understand the fasting of the disciples of John, they did not at all appreciate that by the coming in of Jesus

there was a new garment and new wine; they were not able to understand the unmixed joy which characterised the disciples of Jesus as sons of the bride-chamber. The Bridegroom being here, everything was new and of a changed character. There was a new garment, new wine, and new bottles. The Lord says, as it were, You are going on with what is old, with a system of things which for God is past, but I and My disciples are in the joy of what is new and for the pleasure of God. The new wine is the joy of God in His grace communicated by the Spirit to the heart of the believer.

The great truth of the gospel is that God needs man. There is no gospel in saying that man needs God, but to know and be able to say that God needs man is glad tidings. God must have men to display upon them the exceeding riches of His grace in his kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. Man's state is God's opportunity to come out in the wealth of the grace of His heart, and pour Himself out in immeasurable blessing. He finds joy in doing it. The knowledge of that in the heart of the believer by the Holy Spirit is the new wine. We are told in Acts 13 that the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. Paul says, "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" — that is new wine. Luke brings out in a very blessed and attractive way that God has lost what is of great value to Him and He must have it back. God would make Himself known in His thoughts, His heart, and His disposition of grace. It was a necessity to God to make Himself known in grace, and man, a sinful creature, was needed in order that He might do so. People often ask, Why did God allow sin to come into the world? He did so because only in relation to a sinful creature could He disclose the marvellous depth, riches and fulness of His great grace and the love of His heart.

It needed the Son of God to come from heaven to tell us that God needs man. In Luke 15 we have the shepherd, the woman and the father — it is God seeking man. Think of the light and blessedness of all this being available to every one of us! It is noticeable that this gospel is addressed to one man, It is as much as to say that God is prepared to confer all that is disclosed in this gospel on one individual; it is open to every one of us to take this gospel of Luke in all its fulness as personally addressed to us by the blessed God, that we may know Him in grace. He makes no demand; He bestows everything; He confers on men everything that they need, and everything that will disclose what He is in grace. As to the pollution that belongs to man as sinful, God has met it through the efficacy of one sacrifice for sin that has completely and for ever removed it from before Him. Sin in the flesh has been condemned in the death of God's Son; purgation and cleansing have been effected in all the value and power of the death of Christ. Believers are now in the light of that;

it is what God Himself has brought in; we are perfected for ever in the value of the work of Christ. That is the character of the system we belong to: there is perfect revelation of God in grace, perfect cleansing from sin, and also power conferred by the Spirit. God's ways are characterised now by the ministry of righteousness and the Spirit. The old system served out death and condemnation, but the new system serves out righteousness and life. It is impossible to mix the two; one is a system of demand and the other a system of supply.

The last clause of the chapter is a solemn reminder of how easy it is to lose the taste for what is new. If I drink old wine, I shall lose my appreciation for what is new. If I read an interesting book of the world and get absorbed in it, because it appeals to my natural likes and tendencies, I find it diminishes my power to appreciate what is new. I desire to maintain in my soul appreciation of the new, and I believe that is more to God than any service I can render. Old wine belongs to the old system. How soon the Galatians were turned aside from the new wine to the old! They had been connected with the new system of heavenly grace and had known the new wine, at any rate in some measure, for Paul referred to their "blessedness". But they had become occupied with circumcision and law-keeping and observance of days and all those things that were really connected with man in the flesh. They drank old wine and liked it and for the time lost their taste for the new. Satan works that way, not exactly to bring in what is sinful or that might give us a bad conscience, but to turn us back to what is really "old". The whole system of current Christianity is marked by what is old and, if people go in for it, they cannot enjoy what is new. Music at religious services is brought in, not because it pleases God but because it appeals to and pleases men; it has the character of old wine; it belongs to a system that God has discarded. Many things in the Old Testament were introduced because God was putting to the test whether things adapted to man in the flesh could bring about what pleased Him, but they entirely failed to do so. If people go in for those things, one cannot expect them to have much taste for new wine. At the present time the religious world is largely laying itself out to provide something that will attract and be agreeable to man as after the flesh — things often borrowed from the Old Testament without any idea of their spiritual import. We must cultivate acquaintance with what is new — the whole system of heavenly grace which centres in Christ as the heavenly and glorified Man, and which subsists in the value of His death, and is known in the heart of the believer by the gift of the Spirit.

The new wine requires new bottles, which do not represent the system but the persons who stand connected with it. There must be a new kind of person to appreciate divine grace and to be a vessel to hold the joy of that grace. Luke 5

shows the features which characterise new bottles; they are marked by four features — a new kind of conviction of sin, a new kind of cleansing, a new power, and a new interest. These things put together give us the moral features of a new kind of man, and in result there are suitable vessels to contain and preserve the new wine. If we are not supremely happy there is a reason for it. Old wine gratifies the flesh, but self-gratification and happiness are two quite different things. Old wine represents legal principles, but what is proposed in Luke's gospel is that God's joy in grace should be a spring of joy in our heart perpetually by the Spirit; then there will be new wine in new bottles.

LUKE 6

Luke 6

There is profound blessing in seeking to enter into the thoughts of the Lord as He went through the cornfields. Every ear of corn in those fields had sprung up out of death to be God's bountiful provision for men, and the particular sabbath mentioned in the first verse of our chapter had a significance peculiar to itself. It is called here the "second-first" sabbath.

The first sabbath was the sabbath of the Passover, the second-first was the one immediately following the waving of the sheaf of firstfruits (Leviticus 23); it was the first of the seven sabbaths which were to be counted until the feast of weeks. What it must have brought before the Lord's heart! He knew perfectly all that was set forth in the type of the first-fruits; it spoke to Him of God's great provision in grace which would be set free as the result of His own resurrection. Every thought of grace in the heart of God is now set free on that ground. He had, too, a very different thought of the sabbath from that which the Pharisees had. They had made the sabbath a day of bondage and restriction; the thought of rest and refreshment and liberty, a day hallowed for God as the One who had secured rest for Himself and who delighted to have men to share His rest, was far from *their* minds. But we have seen what the Lord connected with the sabbath in chapter 4 when He stood up to read and to preach in the synagogue at Nazareth. "The Son of man is Lord of the sabbath also"; this gives it its true character according to the mind and heart of God.

The disciples, following upon what was true of them as sons of the bridechamber, and as new bottles filled with new wine, are seen here in the liberty of grace. "His disciples were plucking the ears and eating them, rubbing them in their hands". They were freely appropriating the goodness of God which was available, just as He would have us to do, but this displeased the Pharisees. It raised the whole question of the sabbath, and whether it was designed to give men a legal righteousness by keeping it, or whether it spoke of God's delight in giving rest and blessing. Was the sabbath to be merely an ordinance for man in the flesh, and thus part of the old garment, or was it to be understood in the light of God revealed in grace? There will be no true sabbath until men rest in the known grace of God. The Son of man is Lord of the sabbath; He exercises the rights of God in grace, and brings in a true sabbath of rest for men.

The religious man can never understand the liberty of grace, so some of the Pharisees challenged the disciples as to why they did what was not lawful to

do on the sabbath. But the Lord answered for His disciples by reminding the objectors that there was at least one instance in which a hungry man had done what was not lawful under the legal system without incurring blame for it. David was, in a remarkable way, in the secret of divine grace. The loaves of shewbread represented all Israel as in favour before God; it was His thought that they should all be before Him as identified with Christ, and indeed as having Christ as their life. If this was so it was a matter of pure grace, and this justified David in saying, "The bread is in a manner common", 1 Samuel 21: 5. Though it was "holy bread", it was "common" in the sense that it was available for men that were needy, and whose vessels were holy. The bread of God's house is always available for faith, and wherever there is faith there will always be, in some measure, suitable moral conditions. There will be true repentance, and an appreciation of grace on God's part, and these are holy conditions. The provisions of His grace may always be freely appropriated by those whose vessels are holy as being marked by these conditions.

What a cluster of divine teaching is here — the cornfields, the sabbath, the shewbread! All belong in their true significance to the new system. Each had to be seen as having Christ in view, and not man in the flesh. God's thought has ever been that man should be blessed through Christ and in Christ, and even the power to appropriate this is of God, as we see in the next incident.

On another sabbath the Lord entered into the synagogue and taught, and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. Such a one had no power to appropriate; he could not pluck the ears of corn or rub them. The scribes and Pharisees would have kept him in that state; they were jealous for the sabbath, but they hated the grace of which the sabbath was the covenant-token. How manifest it was that the old bottles could not hold the new wine! But Jesus knew their thoughts, and He was minded to convict them publicly; He called the man into the midst that He might demonstrate before all the rights of God in mercy. But there was no room for God in their system; if He came in in mercy it broke up the whole system as it was in their minds. If Judaism was to be preserved God must be shut out; what a terrible thing to contemplate! It shows how old and unrepairable the old garment was. It had become a system that looked with suspicion and hatred on the actings of God in mercy.

The test for this poor man was, would he be governed by the word of Christ? Had he been subdued to Him as Lord, to the One who had come from God with divine authority?

When Jesus said, "Stretch out thy hand", would he obey? There will be no power with any of us to appropriate what is of God save as there is a spirit of

subjection. When souls do not get the good of what God has provided in His grace it is because they are not really subject. This is the secret of most of our difficulties and weaknesses. But the work of God in this man showed itself by immediate obedience, and his hand was restored as the other. Where there is inability to lay hold of God's precious things, it will generally be found that the Lord has spoken, but His word has not been obeyed.

The scribes and Pharisees were unsubdued; they were filled with madness. The things of the kingdom of God are new things, dependent on God being known in grace, and those who would in self-righteous pride maintain the old things become definitely hostile to the new. The breach between the old and the new was complete.

It was "in those days that he went out into the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God", verse 12. It was, as we should say, a crisis. What was the mind of God at such a moment? What form would He have things to take in presence of manifested enmity to grace? It was clear that the system that then was could not hold the new wine that was coming in. There must be a new administration set up in the world, something quite different from the law and the prophets. This great matter became the matter of prolonged prayer. We might truly say that the whole dispensation of grace, and the form which it would take, were the subject of that night of prayer. The order of the dispensation, with all its gracious power, is the answer to the prayer of Jesus. It is one great characterising feature of Christianity as set up in the world that the Lord's authority in grace has been connected with the apostles whom He chose after this wondrous night of prayer. His choice of them was a matter of His own sovereignty, but it was a sovereignty exercised in complete dependence upon God. The Lord has set up a system in which His apostles have a very distinctive place. They are, as Jude says, "the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ", and Peter calls them "your apostles", 2 Peter 3: 2. They are not named apostles in Luke 6 in relation to their place in the assembly, but in relation to the kingdom of God as the sphere of divine authority in grace. These men were qualified to speak with authority as sent apostles of the Lord. Their names are in the twelve foundations of the holy city Jerusalem; they were chosen for suffering as the apostles *of the Lamb*.

"Judas Iscariote, who was also his betrayer" being numbered amongst them would indicate that the kingdom was intended to be a place of testing, and that it would not be enough to have an outward place in it, even that of an apostle. It suggests, too, that there would be the possibility of failure being manifested in the public administration of the grace of God; even for apostles, security would lie in prayer. We may be sure that the Lord spending the night

in prayer would never be forgotten by those who loved Him; it was a model which they would know well must be imitated if they were to be sustained in the wondrous position and office to which He had appointed them. On the other hand we may be certain that Judas was not a man of prayer; I doubt if he ever prayed at all.

The Lord descended with the apostles and stood on a level place, verse 17. He had prayed on the mountain and chosen the twelve, and then He and they came down to bring the power of divine healing to men below. They came down from His own elevation with God, yet, withal, an elevation marked by perfect dependence; and on the level place they find "a great multitude of the people from all Judaea and Jerusalem, and the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases", and we are told that "power went out from him and healed all". We can hardly fail to see in this multitude, including some from even Gentile cities, a figure of that vast throng to whom spiritual healing would be brought through the great administration of grace for which He had chosen His apostles. There was, indeed, power in Him for the healing of all, and it seems to me that the Lord brings out the character of those who are spiritually healed in what He says to His disciples as recorded in the verses that follow, for the moral features set forth in Luke 6: 20 - 49 could only be the result of divine healing. Men of this type can only be seen on earth as the result of the healing virtue of the kingdom of God brought to them in Jesus. There is a moral connection between that spoken of here and the appropriation of divine grace in liberty as seen in figure in the cornfields at the beginning of the chapter. All that the Lord says here supposes that grace is revealed and known and has become the formative principle of a new kind of man who is patterned after God as known in grace.

"And he, lifting up his eyes upon his disciples, said, Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God", verse 20. The Lord addresses His disciples here as having the character spoken of; it is not an abstract statement that the poor are blessed, but "blessed are ye poor". He could lift up His eyes upon them with complacency as finding delight in them; they were those of whom He had said prophetically, "In them is all my delight", Psalm 16: 3. Do we long to be such as He can admire? Then we must be content to be poor in all that the world esteems valuable. The "rich" have received their consolation (verse 24) in a perishing system of things, but it is infinitely better to be "poor" as to these things but to have the kingdom of God. How can any lover of God find consolation in things in which God has no place? The disciples as seen here were new bottles filled with new wine, and they could afford to be poor in relation to the scene where the grace of God was unknown. In the very nature

of things we cannot have the two kinds of wealth. Those who do not know God have their resources and gratifications and joys in this world, and they think it strange that there should be any who prefer to be destitute of the things which they count to be happiness. Indeed, to stand apart from all that is thought well of in the world "for the Son of man's sake" is quite sufficient to provoke contempt and hatred. But the Lord accounts "blessed" those who are poor in the sense that they stand apart from what the world counts advantageous, and who are content rather to be deprived and to sorrow in a world where the Son of man is rejected and put to shame. Those are truly "blessed" in whom the Son of man can see some of His own features appearing, to be despised and rejected even as they were when seen in Himself.

Then from verse 27 there is another part of the Lord's discourse addressed to "to you that hear". This section contemplates a further development of the work of grace in the disciples, resulting in their becoming manifest as "sons of the Highest". The Highest is a title of God more often used by Luke than by any other New Testament writer, and as used by him it has a particular connection with what God is as made known in grace. He is so high that He is far above the unthankfulness and wickedness of men; He is good to them in spite of what they are. Now the Lord has in mind that His disciples shall be "sons of the Highest"; they are to be like God in His blessed superiority to what is evil in men. One can understand that this is not presented by the Lord as something fully realised in them. His words in this connection are addressed "to you that hear"; they are intended for persons whose hearts are spiritually attentive. There can be no greater or more wondrous proposal than that we should come out as giving expression to God's character in presence of the evil that is here. God will bring out His sons in glory very soon, and they will be all like Him then (Romans 8: 19), but He would have them to be manifested morally as acting like Him even now when things are so contrary.

It is well to bear in mind that we have proved in our own experience that this is God's character, for it is how He has acted towards us. He has loved us when we hated Him; He has continually done us good even at a time when we were unthankful and wicked; He has been merciful and has remitted our sins; He has been ready to give when we asked Him. It is only a matter of righteousness that we should act towards others in the grace which has been shown to ourselves. God will have His sons like Himself, and He will see that they are fully recompensed for any cost that is involved on their part. May we be amongst those who hear these words of grace! We do not really appreciate grace beyond the measure in which we express it, so that this chapter pulls us up with a challenge as to how far our souls have been penetrated and

permeated by the power of grace. In hearing what the Lord says we acquire an ever deepening sense of what grace really is. Most of us are small in grace; we need to grow in it as Peter exhorts us to do. It is something very strange to our hearts naturally, but as disciples of Christ, hearing His words, we are learning it with a view to its coming out in us.

The last section of the Lord's discourse begins with the parable of verse 39, "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Shall not both fall into the ditch?" It raises the question with every professed disciple of Jesus whether he can see where he is going. It is to be feared that many are content to be led without any exercise or discrimination of their own. They take for granted that what their parents did is right for them to do; or that religious institutions which have been set up for hundreds of years must be a safe guide; or that what so many learned men think right must be right. But this is really spiritual blindness, and unless I can see myself I have no means of knowing whether the one who is leading me is blind or not. The only way to be safe is to have spiritual vision oneself; blind people will be sure to get into the ditch.

There is no blind leading or following in the new order of things instituted by the Lord, but the principle of teaching and discipleship has a permanent place in it. "The disciple is not above his teacher, but every one that is perfected shall be as his teacher", verse 40. Intelligence comes on the line of discipleship, and this is not a blind leading but divine instruction coming to us from One who is at the full elevation of God's thoughts, and under whose teaching it is possible for us to be "perfected". Under the teaching of Christ there is no uncertainty; no one who comes into subjection to His teaching ever has a doubt whether it is of God or not. And it is the teaching of One who was the exemplification of all that He taught, so that to be perfected under His teaching is to become like Him. There is no blind leading blind in this, but One who knows perfectly the mind of God imparting it to others who can see clearly as taught by Him.

Not that all are "perfected", for many lessons come on the way to this, and we have to find that there are "motes" and "beams" which dim our vision, and which have to be cast out even after we have sight. And the Lord points out that we are apt to lose time by seeing a "mote" in the eye of our brother when we cannot perceive a "beam" in our own. It suggests plainly that every one who is concerned about his brother not seeing well had better give attention to something much nearer home. There is more hypocrisy than we think in our quickness to discern the spiritual defects in others; the Lord would warn us off from that most unprofitable occupation.

"For there is no good tree which produces corrupt fruit, nor a corrupt tree which produces good fruit; for every tree is known by its own fruit, for figs are not gathered from thorns, nor grapes vintaged from a bramble", verses 43, 44. The Lord does not contemplate a mixed product; each one is either a "good man" or a "wicked man", verse 45. Scripture does not acknowledge any third class who are neither good nor wicked. Those who have turned to God in repentance, confiding in Him as the alone Source of good, are good, and they bring forth good fruit. The knowledge of God in the heart of man is never fruitless; it invariably produces fruit of its own kind. "The good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, brings forth good". His heart is stored with the good that he has found in God, and he brings forth good out of what his heart treasures. The heart of the natural man is full of vain things in which God has no place; all such things are "wicked", however amiable they may appear to be, for nothing could be more wicked than for an intelligent creature to have a heart in which there is no place for God. All that such a heart can yield is corrupted by the terrible fact that the only One who is really good has no place in it; it is far alienated from the true and only Good. But the "good man" has learned his own sinfulness, and has turned to God and found that God is good enough to pardon and cleanse him, and to purify his heart through faith, and to set him up in freedom from sin's dominion, so that he now makes his boast in God, and knows no good save what has its source in God.

When the good that is in God becomes the treasure of a man's heart it is bound to produce good in what the man says and in what he does. It really makes him a "good man", for the element of corruption has been counteracted, in a practical sense, by the good that he has found in God. He is recovered to good by being recovered to God, and the works of the devil are undone in him. It is immensely important to open our hearts to the knowledge of God that comes to us in the Lord Jesus; it is enriching, gladdening, purifying; as our hearts are filled with it we become "good". Paul could say to the Roman believers, "But I am persuaded, my brethren, I myself also, concerning you, that yourselves also are full of goodness", Romans 15: 14. What a contrast is this from what he had said in chapter 3 of the same epistle. "There is not one that practises goodness, there is not so much as one"! The latter Scripture shows what we were when grace found us, but the former shows what grace makes us.

Finally the Lord says, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?" A mere lip acknowledgement is nothing to the Lord, nor is it of any value to the one who makes it. It is in doing what the Lord says that we secure a good foundation for our building, for it is evidence that we really believe on Him. If His words have no authority Over us In a practical way we

only deceive ourselves by calling Him Lord. The real test which marks us off as true disciples is that through much exercise we do what the Lord says. It is in this way that we commit ourselves to Him definitely; it involves a break with the whole manner of life which characterised us previously, and which characterises most of those who are around us. We ally ourselves with the most unpopular cause that ever was in this world, but which is the only security against impending ruin. The man who builds a house upon the ground without foundation undoubtedly takes the easiest course, but he is very imprudent. It is easier to be a nominal Christian, with just enough profession to give one respectability, than it is to steadily set oneself to do what the Lord says. The latter requires deep digging, and getting down to the rock. Nothing will stand the impact of the coming storm but what is built on the principle of obedience to Christ. We do not truly believe on Him if we do not do what He says. It is certain that this will involve an immense amount of exercise, continuous exercise, but this is precisely what is meant by digging and going deep. One little thing done in obedience to Christ, which we never should have done according to the flesh, and which cost us something to do, will give us more stability than listening to sermons all our life without our practice being affected. But the life of discipleship does not mean *one* thing done on that principle, but the whole life built up on it because the One whose words we do has acquired supremacy in our hearts. Nothing less than this is true Christianity.

LUKE 7

Luke 7

Simeon had said with the holy Child in his arms that he would be "a light for revelation of the Gentiles", chapter 2: 32, and we see this fulfilled in the centurion. A Gentile was brought to light by the presence of Jesus in Capernaum as distinguished by a greater faith than He had found in Israel. One can understand the peculiar delight that Luke would have in writing this incident, as being himself a Gentile and writing to a Gentile. The centurion was one of the firstfruits of a great Gentile harvest for God, and the presence of Jesus in the city brought him to light. It is well to mark his character, as showing the kind of material which God would secure for Himself from the Gentile world. He had no selfish object in view, for it was an affectionate interest in his bondman that moved him to send to Jesus. Though consciously unworthy he felt assured that he could count upon the kindly interest as well as the divine power of the wondrous Person of whom he had heard. It is remarkable how he measures the Lord Jesus, if we may so say, by what was true of himself. He assumed that Jesus, though so great, would have as much interest in his poor bondman as he had himself. And he most strikingly compared the Lord's authority with his own in verses 7 and 8. All this was not presumption, for he was manifestly unworthy in his own sight to have any direct dealings with Jesus. It was such a blessed reasoning of faith that it called forth wonder on the part of Jesus.

We see a Gentile here in whom the knowledge of God was an active principle, for the elders of the Jews could say, "He loves our nation and himself has built the synagogue for us". So that he evidently loved the Jews because of their relation to God; he would favour that relation as much as he could, It is fine evidence that faith is operating in the soul when there is love to the people of God, and desire that they may prosper spiritually. But the centurion would not allow that he had any worthiness either to come to Jesus or to receive Him under his roof. The only ground of his confidence or his expectation was what Jesus was in Himself, and his apprehension of this was truly wonderful. He says, "But say by a word and my servant shall be healed. For *I* also am a man placed under authority, having under myself soldiers, and I say to this one, Go, and he goes; and to another, Come, and he comes; and to my bondman, Do this, and he does it". It was not only that he recognised that Jesus was able to heal his servant, but that he was acting *under authority* in what He did. He was acting in pure and perfect grace as under the authority of God. The centurion did not think, as many do, that Jesus was kind, but that God was not so favourable. He traced all that he had heard of in Jesus to the fact

that He was acting under the authority of God, and therefore it was as easy for Jesus to give a word of command as it was for him. He knew that all the power of Caesar was behind every command that he gave, and all the power and authority of God was behind every word of Jesus. He had not the slightest hesitation or uncertainty about it. Now that is faith. "And Jesus hearing this wondered at him, and turning to the crowd following him said, I say to you, Not even in Israel have I found so great faith". The centurion was a "good man" because his heart was stored with the goodness which he had apprehended in the blessed God, which was coming into expression in a Man who was acting here under God's authority.

In the next incident we see Jesus as the glory of His people Israel, for the widow of Nain represents the nation as bereaved of all hope, but finding in her desolation that there was One who could bring back her son from the gates of death. In this incident we see the compassion of God expressed in Jesus in circumstances where all was utterly hopeless on the human side. A widow bereft of her only son! What could be more pathetic? Such an occasion would move human sympathy almost everywhere, so we find here that "a very considerable crowd of the city was with her". But how helpless they all were! He was dead, and they could only carry him out. Every citizen of Nain up to that time had had to succumb to the power of death. But One greater than death drew near that day to the city gate, and met the burial procession. No one called upon Him to intervene; He had not as yet, so far as we know, exercised His power in the domain of death. It might well have been that no one in the crowds had the slightest hope that He could do anything when death had actually taken place. It was a case in which the initiative could only be with Himself. But He was here as God's representative, and, as Peter told a Gentile congregation later, "God was with him". How would God act in the presence of a heart desolated by the ravages of death? "And the Lord, seeing her, was moved with compassion for her, and said to her, Weep not; and coming up he touched the bier, and the bearers stopped. And he said, Youth, I say to thee, Wake up. And the dead sat up and began to speak; and he gave him to his mother", Sin has let loose a flood of sorrow upon human hearts, and this is no small part of what is under the eye of God in the world. Indeed, I have no doubt that the sorrows which sin has entailed upon mankind are much greater in volume than "all the pleasures of sin". We are apt to think that the ambitions of men, and their lust for gain and self-gratification, and their pride and vanity, are more prominent than their sorrows. They are, perhaps, in a public way, but, if the true secret history of every human heart were written, I believe it would be found that disappointment and sorrow are in greater bulk, and have been more really felt than anything else. And the

greatest sorrow of all is the sorrow of death, for it desolates everything. I am not, for the moment, speaking of death as being on ourselves, but as breaking in on our happiness by its power over others. The dearest natural tie must be broken; the most valued friend is snatched away; the one on whom our fondest hopes have been built lies in the silent grave. Now is it not an immense thing to know that God feels and cares for the sorrows of His creatures? He has compassion, notwithstanding that sin and rebellion are the cause of it all. He would love to make Himself known to every sorrowing heart as He made Himself known to the bereaved widow of Nain, that is, as entering compassionately into the sorrow, and as having power to relieve the heart that is oppressed by it. I venture to say that the knowledge of God in this way, as we may learn Him in the incident before us, brings a greater relief to a sorrowing heart than would be brought about by any outward deliverance. We have learned something of the heart of God, and that is greater than having our dead back again, for it is an indestructible and eternal possession. The effect of seeing the widow's son brought back to life was that "fear seized on all, and they glorified God, saying, A great prophet has been raised up amongst us; and God has visited his people". They did not all have their dead sons raised up, but in seeing how He compassionated one bereaved widow they learned God as they had never known Him before. The incident remains here on the page of Scripture that we may learn God in the same way, and have infinite comfort in thus knowing Him.

But there was more than divine compassion in Jesus; there was power that could deal effectively with the might of death. Indeed, we know of no instance in which death was in His presence without being despoiled of its prey. God has thus shown that He can deal with death, and set aside its power, and free His creature from that which the creature dreads. If He can do it for one the thing is established; it is only a question of His wisdom as to when and how His power will effect it. He has met the power of death in a more wonderful way even than was seen at the gate of the city of Nain. I do not doubt that when Jesus "touched the bier" it was an intimation that He would come into personal contact with the power of death. He did this, as we know, at the cross; the full power of death came upon Him, not because He was personally liable to death, but because He tasted it by the grace of God for all that had come under it as a result of sin. But death was not able to hold Him. He saw no corruption, and on the third day He rose triumphant. God has triumphed over death through Jesus; His victory has been gloriously seen in one Man, but it is seen there to be available for all who are in bondage through fear of death. Death is annulled in a risen Christ for all who believe on Him.

All these things are reported to John by his disciples, and John could not understand why he was left in prison if such wonderful things were being done. He felt it was time to remind the Lord that he was there, so he sent a message to Him: "Art *thou* he that is coming, or are we to wait for another?" John had to learn, like many another, to accept his own ministry. He had said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3: 30), but this became more testing than he had expected, and he had to learn to justify wisdom as one of her children. But the Lord took a beautifully gracious way to teach His servant, as He always does. "In that hour he healed many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and to many blind he granted sight". He gave the fullest evidence of the divine power that was operating, and sent John's messengers back to tell him of it, and to add, "Blessed is whosoever shall not be offended in me". John had his own place, "more excellent than a prophet", for he was the Lord's immediate forerunner, but it was not given to him to have a place in the new system of things introduced by the ministry of the Lord Himself. He had to accept his own place according to the counsel of God, and it was a wonderful place, but it was preparatory. He had not his place in the new order, though his ministry was essential to its introduction. So the Lord could say, "Among them that are born of women a greater prophet is no one than John the baptist; but he who is a little one in the kingdom of God is greater than he". How this would direct our thoughts to the surpassing excellence of what we are called to have a part in! The prophets of old, and John himself, were men sent from God to speak in the power of His Spirit; they were wonderful servants, divinely chosen and honoured vessels, but they were not in the kingdom of God. Does not the thought of this stimulate great desire in our hearts to know what it is to be in that kingdom? If the little one in it is greater than those great servants of God,

what a marvellous thing it is to be in it! A new order of things has been introduced by the presence here of the Son of man; the music of divine grace has sounded forth in this world of sin and death, and tax-gatherers and sinners have a Friend who can bring them righteously into the kingdom of God, and give them a greatness in the knowledge of God which the greatest of His servants in Old Testament times never had. Are we prepared as repentant sinners to justify God (verse 29), or are we, like the Pharisees and lawyers, rendering null as to ourselves the counsel of God?

The Lord says, "Wisdom has been justified of all her children" (verse 35); it is not that she will be justified, but she has been; the Lord saw around Him those who were the children of wisdom, and they had all justified God by condemning themselves and gladly appreciating the grace in which He had become known to them in Jesus. A child of wisdom — representative of them

all — is brought before us in the next incident. And I believe we see in the “woman in the city, who was a sinner” one who was truly “a little one in the kingdom of God”, and therefore greater than John the baptist. I believe she had acquired through Jesus a knowledge of God as revealed in grace which gave her wonderful greatness. How slow we are to understand what true greatness is! We are only great in proportion as we know God in grace, and are in heart under His sway. We can then minister to His pleasure in a way that no saint of old ever could. This woman’s tears and kisses and anointing of His feet, her much love, showed how great she was. She was great in the appreciation of Him. The Spirit of God brings her activities before us; Jesus is sitting and He remains sitting — it is the woman who is active.

It is a choice moment when the Lord has no longer to be active, but can be the Object of activities which divine grace has set in motion in the heart of a sinner. No doubt there had been previous movements of grace which had affected her heart. She had heard the music to which He referred in verse 32 which brought the sweet sound of One who was “a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners”, and she was responsive to it. The Spirit of God has not been pleased to give us her previous history under grace, but He shows us the precious fruit which had resulted from it.

The evangelical part of Christendom is largely occupied with the thought of working for Jesus, but it is a much greater thing to minister to Him in love. Simon failed to do so, and I think we may say that Jesus is in Simon’s house now as being where He is outwardly honoured, but where few hearts really minister to Him in love. The woman was deeply affected by the forgiving grace that was there in Jesus. Simon was blind to it; all he could see was One who did not repel a sinner, and that convinced him that Jesus was no prophet. He had no thought that the Creditor was there, but there as a Friend who was present in the grace of forgiveness for all His debtors. Jesus being there brought to light that there was a very great difference between Simon and the woman. She knew that she was a sinner, and that her sins were many, but the thought of this gave her an intense appreciation of the grace she had perceived in Jesus, and filled her soul with deep gratitude and love which could not be held back from expressing itself even in the chilling atmosphere of a Pharisee’s house. The myrrh with which she anointed His feet no doubt set forth some intuition on her part that grace could only be shown to such as she at the cost of suffering. It was at cost to Himself that the Creditor could forgive. Her soul was moved to its depths at the thought of it. Simon knew no such emotions; he had never felt the burden of his sins, though no doubt he would have admitted in an orthodox way that he was a sinner. He could coldly

criticise the One in whom heaven was expressing the grace of forgiveness. The Lord answered his unspoken thoughts.

"And Jesus answering said to him, Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee. And he says, Teacher, say it. There were two debtors of a certain creditor: one owned five hundred denarii and the other fifty; but as they had nothing to pay, he forgave both of them their debt: say, which of them therefore will love him most? And Simon answering said, I suppose he to whom he forgave most. And he said to him, Thou hast rightly judged", verses 40 - 43. That is the position. The Creditor has a righteous claim upon all His debtors, but none of them can meet it, so that happy relations can only be brought about by a grace that is prepared to forgive them all. God's present attitude is one of forgiveness; it was set forth in Jesus when He was here and it has not changed now that He is glorified. The heart of one who is conscious of being a great debtor is deeply moved with gratitude and love when he learns the grace of the Creditor. He would do anything to show his love. But the one who in his own mind is a small debtor does not appreciate the grace of forgiveness, and, as the Lord says, he loves little. How this searches us out! I may even be a professed believer in Jesus, and yet love Him little because I have a small sense of how much He has forgiven. What Jesus gets from me and what God gets from me in the ministry of love depends on the sense I have in my heart of how much He has forgiven me. This is how God is winning the heart of His poor fallen creature, for the real truth of the gospel is not so much that man needs God but that God needs man to display His kindness and grace upon him, and to secure his love. It is wonderful that God should want my love, sinner as I am. He wanted the woman's love and He wanted Simon's love; He got the first, but He did not get the second, and He felt it.

"And turning to the woman he said to Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thy house; thou gavest me not water on my feet, but she has washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with her hair. Thou gavest me not a kiss, but she from the time I came in has not ceased kissing my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint, but she has anointed my feet with myrrh", verses 44 - 46. There is a proverb which says, "He that covereth transgression seeketh love" (Proverbs 17: 9); that was what was in His heart, and in the woman He found what He sought. She had broken through all the conventionalities in the strength of her much love. It is *our* privilege now, in the face of a cold and heartless profession, to show that we love Him much, not merely by working for Him, but by lavishing upon Him personally that which love only can give. None of us would dare to say that we had been forgiven little, but many of us might well pray that we might have a deeper sense of how much we have been forgiven, so that we might love much.

"For which cause I say to thee, Her many sins are forgiven; for she loved much". To Simon, who had despised her as a sinner, He would say plainly with divine authority that her sins were forgiven and He would claim that it was fitting that she should be righteously absolved, for she loved much. She was now in right relations with God as knowing His grace, and in consequence loving Him. Not even a Pharisee could dispute that one who loved God much had established a tide to forgiveness. Not that she received forgiveness on that ground; she received it purely on the ground of the grace of the Creditor, and Simon might have had it on that ground also. But to Simon He would speak of her love as justifying her forgiveness. There is in forgiven sinners that to which the blessed God could call attention as evidence that there is a moral suitability in such persons being forgiven. But this is for the Pharisee who did not understand grace at all, and not for the woman who did. "And he said to her, Thy sins are forgiven". The Lord would not leave any forgiven sinner without a personal assurance of this kind, but it is the result of being near to Him in an affectionate way as appreciating the grace that has expressed itself in Him. That grace shines upon all in a general way, but when it is appreciated, and He is loved for it, there is a positive and personal knowledge of forgiveness which comes from nearness to Him so that there is a sense of having it directly from Himself. It is not His thought that any of us should be without this.

LUKE 8

Luke 8

The Lord going through the country city by city, and village by village, is an intimation that He would have the power of the kingdom of God to be known in a large number of different localities. The reign of grace was to come into expression in many places, a foreshadowing of what would come about by the setting up of local assemblies in connection with Paul's ministry. Not only did the Lord preach and announce the glad tidings of the kingdom of God, but the power of the kingdom was seen in the persons who accompanied Him. "The twelve" represented His authority in administration, but the women who had been healed of wicked spirits and infirmities, and who now ministered to Him of their substance, were a personal evidence of the power of the kingdom. The Lord would have that kind of administration, and that kind of personal testimony, in every city and village that He visits throughout the world. The authority of those whom He has chosen to be apostles must be everywhere owned, for they are the representatives of His authority, but there must also be the subjective state set forth in the women, who were healed persons, set free from the power of evil, and now ministering to Him in love. The woman seen at the end of the previous chapter is a selected pattern of the kind of persons who can be with the Lord and can minister to Him in every City and village. The true character of the kingdom of God is that the authority of Jesus is owned, but it is owned by those whose sins have been forgiven, and who have been healed of wicked spirits and infirmities, and who now love Him much and minister to Him as the woman did in Simon's house. What a testimony to be set in every city and village!

The testimony of God in this world largely hangs on the appreciation of Jesus as the Friend of sinners. Where Jesus is loved and ministered to, and where His heart is gratified by what He receives from those who love Him, there is the kingdom of God in power. Perhaps many of us would be more vitally in the kingdom of God if we were more in the ardent affection of those to whom much has been forgiven. Perhaps some of us still need healing of infirmities which hinder us from expressing what God is in grace. Mark tells us that the Lord cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene, but here in Luke we read that they had "gone out". It suggests that they could not remain where Jesus was loved. But if the demons go out it is that the Lord's appointments may be recognised as set forth in "the twelve". For us this would mean that the Lord's commandments through His apostles have their full place in directing us as to how we walk together (see 1 Corinthians 14: 37). One important way in which

love to the Lord Jesus comes into expression is by regard for that assembly order which He has instituted.

The first three verses of chapter 8 really connect with the end of chapter 7; verse 4 begins a new subject. There is now "a great crowd coming together", and this brings before the Lord's mind that the kingdom of God was going to take a certain form in which it would be necessary to discriminate between different classes of persons who would come into relation to it. The word of God would be widely sown, and many would hear it, but it would only be fruitful in "good ground", where there would be, as presented in Luke, a full result — a hundredfold. What we see here is the normal yield from seed so valuable and fertile as "the word of God". The word of divine grace falling into good ground produces a full result for God. The Lord gives His disciples a clear understanding why the word in many cases does not result in a normal yield. These are "mysteries" known only to those initiated into them. Many at the present time hear the word of God, but they are not so affected as to become fruitful. In the woman at the end of the previous chapter we see one in whom the word had become very fruitful, and those mentioned in verses 2 and 3 of this chapter had brought forth fruit with patience. But this proves that the seed had fallen into good ground. "An honest and good heart" in man can only be the result of a work of God.

In this parable as Matthew gives it there is a diminishing result — "one hundred, one sixty, and one thirty" — because things are viewed there as committed to the responsibility of men. In Mark there is an increasing result — "one thirty, and one sixty, and one a hundred" — because a service patterned after that of the Son of God is in view. But in Luke the word of God is regarded as producing its own normal fruit because it is the word of God, not as Moses spoke it or as the prophets spoke it, but the word of God in grace as the Son of God spoke it, and that word falling into an honest and good heart — that is, a heart exercised in self-judgment, for every man is dishonest until he repents and acknowledges that he is a sinner. Then a good heart appreciates goodness as seen in the Friend of sinners. The woman in chapter 7 had an honest heart; she knew that her sins were many; but she had a heart that deeply appreciated the goodness and grace that she found in Jesus. She delighted to lavish her all upon Him, the best and choicest that she possessed. She was one in whom the word of God would bring forth a hundredfold.

The seed sown by the wayside, or on the rock, or in the midst of thorns, bears no fruit. This explains why the word of God does not become fruitful in all who hear it. By the wayside the devil comes and takes away the word from their

heart that they may not believe and be saved. How solemn to know that there is a positive action of the devil when careless people hear the word! Then those on the rock are superficial; they readily profess to believe, but they have no root; there has been no breaking up of the fallow ground with them, and in time of trial they fall away. Then that among thorns gets choked under cares and riches and pleasures of life. The Lord would give us spiritual understanding as to these things.

Keeping the word of God (verse 15) would be treasuring it in the heart; then there is the bringing forth fruit with patience. The word multiplies itself as it produces in believers what corresponds with it. And the grace of God cherished in the heart is capable of producing a full result; we ought not to contemplate anything less than a hundredfold.

Then the Lord has the thought, not only of fruit for Himself and for God, but that there shall be a testimony shining forth for men to see. No one who lights a lamp covers it with a vessel or puts it under a couch, but sets it on a lamp-stand. The knowledge of God in grace in the heart of man is, at first, hidden and secret, but He intends it to become manifest and known. It is to shine, and therefore we are to take heed how we hear, so that it may really shine forth as light from us; as it does we shall get more, but if we are not possessed of it so that it shines the Lord says that we shall lose what we seem to have — a very solemn consideration.

A very precious result of hearing the word of God and doing comes out in verse 21. There is a generation produced that is morally kindred with Christ. The word "it" in that verse is not in the original; it reads literally, "those who hear the word of God and do". That is, the word puts them in motion, as it did the woman in chapter 7, and the women in chapter 8: 3. To "do" something in relation to Christ is the thought, to minister to Him. The world can understand good works, but to do something purely to minister to Him is another matter. For instance, He said, "Do this in remembrance of me". That act of love means very little to the world, but it means much to Him.

"And it came to pass on one of the days, that he entered into a ship, himself and his disciples; and he said to them, Let us pass over to the other side of the lake; and they set off from shore", verse 22. I think "the other side of the lake", as presented here, has the Gentile world in view. The Lord was educating His disciples in preparation for the extension of the testimony of grace to those who, up to that time, had been beyond the range of any direct testimony from God. They were now coming into the divine view for blessing, but this would entail special difficulties and opposition from Satan. This would be of such a character that it could only be overcome by the power resident in

the Son of God. The water of the lake speaks of the unstable conditions which existed in the world, and upon which Satan could act. In carrying the testimony to "the other side" there would be peculiar difficulties to meet which the Lord perfectly understood. He was with His disciples, but not apparently active on their behalf; "he fell asleep". It was going to be a testing time for them, but He knew all about it, and He indicated to them by falling asleep the restful confidence which was suited to such conditions. They would apparently be without any outward security, and exposed to danger through adverse power. The conditions of the world to come were not yet present, but the Person was there who could bring them all in. Did they know Him well enough to be restful in a sudden squall of wind? Do we know Him well enough to be restful when the enemy's power shows itself? His sleeping was a voice to them; it was as much as to say, It is a time to be restful. We have noticed, and we shall notice, how things are patterned in Jesus in this gospel. We may be quite sure that His conduct in any circumstance was the right conduct for that circumstance. His servant Peter had learned the lesson when he slept in prison (see Acts 12). A great storm was then breaking on the little ship, for James had been killed with the sword and Peter was put in prison with every probability, humanly speaking, of being put to death. But such was his confidence in the Lord that he slept, though there was no sign as yet of any divine intervention on his behalf. Quietness and confidence are one great proof that the Lord is with His people, even though conditions may be very unsettled, and we may be very conscious of weakness in ourselves. The Lord would not have us to doubt that He is with us. It is said of Israel that they tempted Jehovah by saying, "Is Jehovah among us or not?" If we say that, we tempt Him; we have called His love in question. Some of the last words of the Lord to His own were, "These things have I spoken to you that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye have tribulation; but be of good courage; I have overcome the world".

When the Lord "entered into a ship, himself and his disciples", He knew what He was doing. He knew all about the storm that was coming and He intentionally put Himself in that position, but He was with them in it. Note that word, "*Himself* and his disciples". It is necessary that we should know the Person who is with us. The previous chapters had been enough to show who He was, and yet they thought they could perish with Him in the ship. A dreadful storm burst upon Stephen, but he had no thought of perishing; his last hour was one of calm and holy triumph, though there was no intervention outwardly on his behalf. Such is the Lord's tender compassion that He often quiets a storm, as He did in the scripture before us. He will assuredly not fail in consideration for our weakness, but He would like our hearts to be filled

with the consciousness of what we have in *Himself*. He does not always change circumstances, but He over-rules them for the good of His saints, and in view of His testimony.

"The country of the Gadarenes" (verse 26) would probably be inhabited by Gentiles, and the man who had demons may set forth the condition of things as seen in the Gentile world. The full strength of the power of evil was manifested there in a terrible way. We have only to read Romans I to see what man was as in the Gentile world: idolatry, licentiousness, violence and corruption in their full strength were seen as holding possession of man. There was not even the outward propriety which, to some extent, marked the Jew. Philosophers and moralists had tried to curb the most glaring evils, but without success. But it was in the mind of God that His grace, revealed through Jesus, should go out to the Gentile world in delivering power. God needed the Gentile to bring out the fulness of His grace; God's house could not be filled by Jews alone, so the bondman was sent out into the ways and fences — that is, into the Gentile world — to compel men to come in to the great supper of grace.

This incident intimates how the Lord would effect full deliverance for men outside privileged Israel. What a marvellous sight it was for heaven to look down and see Corinthians, Cretans, Thessalonians and Romans clothed in garments of righteousness and holiness and sitting at the feet of Jesus! The Lord has secured a testimony to Himself in the Gentile world in those once dominated by the power of evil, but now delivered and restful, and left here to be a witness of what Jesus has done for them. Every believer delivered from the power of sin is part of that witness.

But Gadara was as little prepared for the powers of the world to come as Judaea. They asked Him to depart from them. It was soon manifested in the Gentile world that Jesus was not wanted by the mass of people, but He secured a witness for Himself, and there has been a witness to Him in the Gentile world ever since, though the mass of people do not want Him. I have no doubt, the time is coming when Jesus will be as definitely refused in Christendom as He was in Gadara.

Complete apostasy has not yet come, but it is drawing near.

The sovereign power of the Lord in delivering from the active energy of evil is set forth in the man who had demons. There is no evidence of any godly exercise in the man, or of any desire on his part to be set free, though he did fall down before Jesus. Our attention is called in his case to the interest the Lord had in him, and what the Lord did for him, rather than to any exercises he had. The gospel going out to the Gentile world was a matter of pure sovereignty; it was God visiting the nations to take out of them a people for

His Name. And so it is still in many cases. Sometimes the most violent and outrageous sinners are met by divine power acting in grace, and they are subdued and delivered without having previously any desire for Jesus.

But in the case of the woman with a flux of blood we see a history of exercise such as would be found with those who have had some knowledge of God but are conscious of needs that no human power or skill can meet. There had been long experience of weakness, and of effort and desire to be healed; her state was obviously a very defective one, and she had twelve years experience of it, but in the end she got the virtue that was in Another. Her condition rendered her unclean (see Leviticus 15).

If she had eaten a peace offering, she would have been cut off from the people of God altogether. Her condition rendered her unclean, but she felt it, and was very anxious to be relieved of it. The fact that she had spent all her living on physicians was a commendation for her; it proved that she was in dead earnest and that there was an intensity of desire that was prepared to sacrifice all her living in this world that she might get back to the enjoyment of spiritual privileges. Her condition incapacitated her for spiritual privilege; she could have no communion with the altar of God. She wanted to be relieved of this disability, and she went industriously to work. For twelve years she did everything that suggested itself to her mind to get relief, so that she might return to the enjoyment of communion with the altar, and be able to eat the peace offering which speaks of communion; all who partook of it were brought into communion with the altar.

There is something very beautiful in the intense earnestness with which this woman had sought to have her disability removed, and the confidence she was brought to after long experience of the fruitlessness of everything else; she was brought to be perfectly assured that if she could but touch His clothing she would be healed. What faith in His Person! We have been considering in this chapter that all turns on having the faith of His Person; if the disciples in the boat had had the faith of His Person they would not have waked Him from sleep. This woman came to the faith of His Person. However long she might have been in that state, and however hopeless was every other resource, she had perfect confidence that if she could but touch His clothing she would be healed. She was brought to the faith of what was in Christ for her, and we all have to come to it.

The presence of Jesus calls faith into activity. If we get an apprehension of Him it brings faith into activity, and we begin to realise that no case is hopeless. The man possessed with demons was brought to the feet of Jesus in the sovereignty of divine power. But now this inward exercise has to be met.

The woman apprehended what was there in His Person, and touched the hem of His garment; she touched the ribbon of blue. Full of the sense of her own weakness and failure, and full of the experience which twelve years had given her of spending all her living without getting better, she sees now in Another the heavenly perfection of everything which she had experienced was lacking in herself, and she put herself in contact with Him. She had been struggling for twelve years with what was in herself, but now she put herself into contact with what was in Him — that is the whole secret. Have we been in dead earnest about it? I knew a very pious lad in Yorkshire who was greatly concerned about what he found in himself, his own weakness and failure. He came to me one day and said, 'I have saved up a little money and have £150 in the bank — do you think it would help me if I gave it to the Lord's work? I am willing to give it now if it would help me'. He was ready to spend all his living, and sacrifice all that he had belonging to life in this world to get spiritual healing. What we see here is a soul going through a prolonged exercise because of a condition in itself which deprives it of the joy of communion. I suppose every one of us knows something of what it is to be in a state where we could not say that anything particularly wrong in a word or deed was on our conscience, but we found ourselves deprived of the joy of spiritual communion. That was the case with this woman — what could put it right? The remedy was to get linked up in her faith and affection with another Person in whom there was perfection after a heavenly order. There is perfection in Christ of everything we crave for, and we may pass over from the consciousness of what we are, and the failure of our efforts, to the consciousness of what is in Him. Then we can go to the altar of God with exceeding joy and eat the peace offering; we can enjoy fellowship with God and with His people.

Earnest people try many physicians — the law, resolutions to be different, or prayer — prayer is a very common resort of earnest souls, but it is possible to pray and yet not touch Jesus. Some of us have known what it was to have natural propensities which, when active, operate to hinder communion. I have known what it is to pray earnestly to God to give me grace to overcome them, and then get up from my knees and find the same things working still. It is a Person we want. This woman got power and virtue out of the Lord. The Lord did for her what she could not do for herself, and what no physician of any kind could do for her.

There is much that we have to arrive at for ourselves. The gospel presents the full measure of divine grace to us objectively; the Lord's servants preach it and will keep on preaching it until the Lord comes; but then all that is presented objectively in the glad tidings has to be reached from our side. We have to put

the link on. This woman put the link on from her side; it was a personal transaction, a personal touch. We see the divine deliverance in its completeness from God's side in the man possessed with demons; the sovereignty of divine power acting in grace did everything for him. From one point of view we may say the gospel does everything for us; it comes to the poor sinner and tells him of One who can truly deliver him "from sin, the world and Satan", One who will delight to blot out his sins and give him the Spirit. Through Christ and in the value of redemption he can be washed, sanctified, and finally glorified, having a body like Jesus. That is one side, but we have also to take up things from the side of our exercises, and learn through them the reality of what there is in Jesus for us. This woman learnt what was in Him at the end of twelve years of exercises.

I think the demoniac might be said to answer to Romans 6, the woman to Romans 7, and the little maid to Romans 8, where the Spirit is life. In the demoniac there was a past history of the power of the devil, and in the woman a past history of the incapacity of the flesh, disqualifying her for communion. In the case of the damsel it is rather the drooping and withering of everything that seemed attractive and beautiful. Just at the time when the father would be looking for his daughter to answer to him in intelligent affection more fully than ever before, she droops and dies. How often there is with us a lack of living affections! It has often been my deep exercise that I have a sense of the lack in my heart of living affections that would be suitable for right relations with God. I suppose many of us know what it means. What is the good of Christian privileges if we are not there in living affections? We need affections moving in the energy of, life, and for this there must be the quickening word and touch of Jesus. One thinks tenderly of children brought up, as we might say, in the synagogue; this girl was brought up in relation to the synagogue. We do find children who are attractive, their ways are comely, they are obedient to their parents, no vice is manifest in them, but have they a life that death cannot touch? There may be everything beautiful outwardly like the young man whom the Lord loved when He saw him; but he had not eternal life; he had not a life that death could not touch, and he knew it. I think we have to pass through an exercise which teaches us the necessity for divine quickening in our affections.

In saying that she was not dead the Lord was looking at her from His own point of view; the case was not hopeless in His eyes. Psalm 119 is very helpful in relation to this question. We find there great delight in the law of God, in His commandments, His word, and His statutes, but ever and anon through that Psalm there is a prayer for quickening. If the heart is to answer affectionately to God there must be a quickening of the affections. It is not

enough to be outwardly correct; we need divine quickening in our affections so that we truly answer to the place and relationships in which divine grace has set us. When Israel is quickened they will answer to God; they will love God with all their heart, and their neighbour as themselves. We sing sometimes, "We've heard Thy quickening voice". The word 'quicken' in Hebrews refers both to making alive and keeping alive. We need not only a first quickening, but we need quickening in the sense of keeping alive. We are to live in our affections in a new and divine way. This chapter looks on to conditions which will be public in the world to come. If a person is to live in the world to come he must have eternal life, that is, life that death cannot touch.

This maid was the subject of her father's devoted affection; she was his only daughter, the darling of his heart, and he was suddenly smitten with the terrible fear that he was going to lose all response from her. That led to his bringing the Lord in, and in bringing the Lord in, he brought the power of life in. The Lord can quicken us and keep us alive, so that when we come together to remember Him it is not done in a formal way merely because it is the right thing to do, but it is done with a living spring of affection towards Himself; there is life there. Then "he commanded something to eat to be given her". I think we miss something if we do not look at the Lord's supper as food; it is not only a remembrance of Him, but it is food for our affections. If we have eaten the Lord's supper a great many times there should surely be vigour in our affections, vigour that would delight to minister to the Lord in the energy of life. It is not the divine thought that we should eat the Lord's supper and go away without increase of strength in our spiritual affections. If this girl had not lived she could not have eaten; we must live to eat, and then we eat to live. It is the Lord's intent that our affections should be enlarged and invigorated every time we eat the Supper. Without living affections it would be merely a religious form; but then on the other hand we eat to live. We eat that we may be nourished, enlarged, and strengthened in our spiritual affections. I have known what it is to be concerned and worried about something, and to come to the Lord's supper and get such a sense of His love that I felt what had troubled me did not matter a straw.

LUKE 9

Luke 9

This chapter opens with the mission of the twelve. The Lord had chosen them in chapter 6, and what follows in that chapter seems to emphasise the need that they should be like Jesus. That is, the Lord speaks of loving their enemies, doing good, and being sons of the Highest. They are to be like Him, as He says, "Every one that is perfected shall be as his teacher". It suggests the necessity of being like Him before any could be sent forth to represent Him. That is the idea of discipleship, not simply that we learn things, but we become as the teacher. The primary thought of God in creating man was that man might be in His image and after His likeness. Now if I understand this chapter aright, it is man in the image of God; that is, God is rightly represented in man. In order for that there must be likeness; the disciples were to be like Him, to be as the Teacher. When that is secured we have persons who can be the image of God; they can publicly express God in the scene where He is unknown. In sending out twelve I believe that the Lord had in mind that there would be a great extension of the representation of God in this world. The Lord was not going to limit the representation of God to His own Person, but He would give an extension so that, not only could He cast out demons and heal the sick, but He would give men the power to do what He had done. The representation of God in the power of grace was to be extended. Of course the Lord in securing the twelve had the heavenly city in view; He was thinking about the foundations of the city. When the heavenly city comes down with the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb on the foundations of its walls, there will be a glorious public representation of God in His creation, because the city has the glory of God.

We must not lose sight of the distinctive place of the twelve, but at the same time, in principle, every soul converted has in view the extension of the representation of God in this world. There is a further extension later on, in the mission of the seventy. We see the representation of God in one Man, then in twelve, and then in seventy; the thing is extended, and in a certain sense has been extending ever since. We should cherish the thought of representation; it has come very much before me of late. The twelve represented the Lord wherever they went; they did what He did and they said what He said. They preached the kingdom of God. It was the distinctive position of the twelve, but it is the position morally of all saints.

The Lord brought the disciples up to the full measure of His thoughts, and we all have to be brought up to it. The Lord did not cease to act by them until He

had brought them into correspondence with His own thoughts, so that they fully represented Him to the five thousand. What a blessed representation of Him there was when they took the loaves out of His hand! They had to bring their own limited apprehension to Himself; but then, when He connected that with the grace of heaven and with His own blessedness, the disciples could dispense perfectly according to the fulness of the Lord's own thoughts so that every one in the crowd was filled and satisfied. There was a perfect representation of the gracious power in Himself through the disciples. They had to learn, as we have to learn, that they were hopelessly inadequate for everything, but when things were livingly connected with His Person there was no inadequacy, and there was enough to fill every one of the five thousand men, representing, I suppose, the whole number right through the present dispensation that would be fed under His blessed Hand, and then there was enough left over for Israel.

This thought of representation is a very important thing in the mind of God. I believe it is the great primary thought of God, and it puts great dignity on the twelve, and on all who are represented in the twelve. For this representation nothing is requisite outside likeness to Jesus and what is in Him; no accessories are needed; no staff, no scrip, no bread, no money, and not two coats. The Lord could invest the disciples with ability to do as He did Himself, and to say the same things that He would say Himself; and to do things without any extraneous addition of any kind, no matter how necessary it might appear to be from a human point of view — they were adequately furnished without any addition. It is not only that things are done correctly, but that they are done in such a way and by such persons that there is a representation of Christ and of the blessed God in the way they are done. We want to see what the divine mind is, and to see that there is that in Christ that can make it good according to our measure in every one of us.

It seems to me that the verses we read cover a great scope of things; the delivering, healing, and proclaiming of the kingdom of God would cover the representative side in connection with what is evangelical. The feeding of the crowd would cover what we might speak of as church service. The delivering and healing would be the gospel side, but then when we have people delivered and healed they want feeding. It was in the Lord's mind to feed them; He would have every one of them well fed. This crowd represents the result of the Lord's delivering and healing. The Lord had great regard for the crowd, and not one of those five thousand escaped His notice.

The idea of a crowd is an unordered mass of persons; and the Lord would act to set the crowd in order so that they might be fed. In a desert place, such as

this was, a vast company of persons were found who were divinely satisfied and nourished by that which is completely outside the ken of man. That was the divine thought, and the disciples, who were representative of Him in delivering and healing power, had to learn to become representative of Him in feeding.

The Lord says, "Give ye them to eat". In this gospel He is not presented as doing it Himself, as in John's gospel. Here He makes the disciples representative of Him. The saints have food to administer. In this chapter they had five loaves and two fishes, representing what has been acquired of Christ through spiritual exercise and spiritual diligence. A loaf is the result of various processes: there has been sowing, reaping, threshing, grinding, and baking, involving much diligence. A fish is not quite like that; it is not the product of man's labour; it is brought into the net by the sovereign action of God. The loaf would represent what we learn of Christ through exercise and consideration, but the fish would represent what is given by God sovereignly. I believe that if we furnished the five loaves God would give us the two fishes. Five speaks of human weakness, but with two fishes we have seven, suggesting spiritual completeness, and it became adequate to feed the five thousand. No one can represent Christ in ministry apart from much exercise. There has to be much spiritual labour, seeking the mind of God, and prayer; but then also there is beyond that what God sovereignly gives out of His hidden resources, so that those who minister get thoughts and apprehensions of Christ that they did not labour for; they come sovereignly into their nets. That is how the food supply is made available.

Both the loaves and fishes represent what is of Christ, but as apprehended by His saints. The disciples could say, It is very little, but we have it. In a certain sense it does not matter how small it is, because if it is of Christ it can be multiplied immeasurably. The question is, Have we something that the Lord can multiply when He touches it? Philadelphia had something that the Lord could multiply; He could say, You have kept My word and not denied My name; you have kept the word of My patience. They had cherished Christ; there was something there that the Lord could multiply, and make it food for every saint on earth. The Laodiceans said they had a great deal — "We are rich and have grown rich, and have need of nothing" — but when the Lord touches it, it withers and crumbles into nothing — "thou art poor and blind and naked". If we have an impression of Christ, however small, He can multiply it and make it food for the whole church of God on earth; there is no limit to what He can do with it. I look round on Christendom and see people everywhere going on with things that, if the Lord touched them, would burst like a bubble. What a mercy to be where there is the ministry of Christ, and

where the Spirit gives precious thoughts of Christ! If we have only a little and it gets into the hand of Christ, there is something there that He can cover with all the grace and power of heaven. He looked up to heaven, blessed it, and gave it into the hands of the disciples, and there is enough for the whole five thousand. This is a remarkable picture of what the Lord is doing at the present time. There is an appalling lack of food among the people of God today. It is a desert place to many. The crowd is an unordered company, but the Lord would have things in order, and He makes them to sit down by companies of fifty, which is a suggestion that companies of such a number facilitate the administration of the food supply. It is important that what the Lord is giving universally should be made available in our localities. These "companies of fifty" provide suitable conditions for personal interest and pastoral care and for the effective representation of Christ in His service of nourishing and cherishing the assembly.

The disciples, in dispensing the food, were to be representative of Christ. It is a sobering thought that in all service among the saints I am to be personally representative of Christ. What a character it would give to the service! I am not to serve because I know a thing or two, but as personally representative of Christ in His feeding activities towards His saints. Our service would be more effective if we were more like Him — no other service is worth anything.

Luke's account of the transfiguration (verses 28 - 36) is in keeping with the general outlook of his gospel; he speaks to us of the present aspect of the kingdom of God. Matthew presents the future glory of the kingdom, so that what is future may be present power in our souls: "the Son of man coming in his kingdom", Matthew 16: 28. But here they were to see "the kingdom of God". Matthew presents the majesty of the King; it is the divine side. Luke, on the other hand, presents our side as seen patterned in Jesus; He is the pattern for all who are true subjects of the kingdom. So here the Lord Jesus was transfigured *as He prayed*; it is a dependent Man seen in conditions of glory.

It is not without meaning that Luke describes the transfiguration as "about eight days after" the Lord's words, whereas Matthew and Mark speak of six days. "Six days" suggests the period of man's day after which God will bring in His seventh day in perfect contrast to all that has gone before, but the eighth day suggests an entirely new beginning. The number of the beast (see Revelation 13: 18) is 666, and this is short of perfection, but the number 8 speaks of the pleasure of God in Jesus. (It is remarkable that the numerical value of the Greek letters composing the name Jesus is 888.) We have seen that in this gospel He is constantly presented as praying. Subjection and dependence are primary elements in the kingdom of God, involving the

surrender of our own wills and the recognition that the will of God must prevail. The first sign of a man being elevated is that he prays, as we see with Saul of Tarsus — “behold he prays”, Acts 9: 11. He was truly a subdued man, and this would be the result of Matthew’s presentation of the Lord in His majesty. Saul of Tarsus was brought down by “a light out of heaven” (Acts 9: 3), and the sense of it grew with him: in chapter 22 it was “a *great* light”, and in chapter 26 “a light *above the brightness of the sun*”. Then, having been subdued, he was marked by dependence, for he prayed. Man is never so elevated as when speaking to God. If I could always have an audience with the Queen, I should be regarded as having great dignity; to have access to God is the greatest possible dignity.

As Jesus prayed on the mountain, “the fashion of his countenance became different”. A man’s spirit expresses itself in his countenance. There was no need for any *moral* change in the Lord Jesus, but the proper effect of prayer is patterned for us in Him. As we pray we are filled with the sense of what God is, His feelings, compassions and thoughts, and this affects our very countenances. We are *transformed* (the same word as *transfigured*) as we behold the glory of the Lord (see 2 Corinthians 3). The actual transforming object is the glory, but it works through prayer. As we see the blessed shining of God in Jesus, we pray about it and we are changed.

Then His raiment became white and effulgent. It is a fore-shadowing of His glory. As applied to us it would suggest that everything about us is to be in keeping with the presence of God — our habits, associations, households, business, and relations with our brethren. The apostle exhorted even young converts that they should “walk worthy of God, who has called you to his kingdom and glory”, 1 Thessalonians 2: 11, 12. Are we all exercised to be in correspondence with the light that has shone upon us?

Then Moses and Elias are seen, two men talking with Jesus. They represent persons who have spiritual intelligence. It was not to be found then upon earth, so these two men are brought forward. They spoke of His departure, or exodus; He was going out of everything here. Moses and Elias knew well in spiritual, heavenly communion with Him that the kingdom of God as patterned in Jesus could not possibly have a place in this world. The kingdom of God necessitates that we too must have our exodus, because it is patterned in Jesus.

The children of Israel had to leave Egypt because there was nothing there suitable for them as the people of God, and we shall leave this world system even in its most religious character, for it was from Jerusalem that He went out. It is not here the aspect of atonement for sin, but that in His death Jesus

has left the whole scene of the enemy's power. In its application to us it would correspond with Romans 6: "he has died unto sin once for all". He has left the whole sin-system behind Him for ever. So we are to "reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God in Christ Jesus". We are to make our exodus publicly "with a high hand", as the Israelites left Egypt, not as convicted felons. It involves the teaching of baptism; they were all baptised in the cloud and in the sea. "Baptised in the cloud" answers to Romans 5; "baptised in the sea" to Romans 6. The cloud is the Shekinah glory cloud, all that God is in grace shining out through Jesus. If we knew what it was to be immersed in that — justification, peace with God, access, the love of God, reconciliation and eternal life — we should have a great desire to be baptised in the sea, to accept death to the system controlled by Satan in order to be here for God. The children of Israel went out triumphantly in military order, and they sang their song of victory on the wilderness side of the Red Sea; there is no such song in Egypt.

As these things have place with us we shall learn the blessedness of sonship. The reason why we do not know more of our place as sons with the Father is because we have not worked out the exercises which belong to the kingdom; there must be a moral foundation laid in the soul. "There came a voice out of the cloud", and the scene around fades. Nothing can surpass in excellence the place the Son had with the Father, but kingdom conditions are necessary for its display. The Father calls attention to His beloved Son and says, "Hear him", as if to say, I want you to know *Me* and He knows *Me*. Our place in sonship with the Father is patterned in Jesus, the beloved Son. We can only learn it in Him and from Him; we cannot learn it from books. He says, "And the glory which thou hast given me I have given them", John 17: 22. It is an exodus from a world of darkness to the light of all that the Father has established in the Son — it is worthy of God.

LUKE 10

Luke 10

WE have noticed that the Lord sent out those who should be His personal representatives. He extended the testimony of grace by adding to the vessels in whom it should be carried — first the twelve, and then the seventy. In principle every soul brought to know the Lord is an extension of the testimony of grace and of the personal representation of Christ in this world. The Lord says in verse 16, "He that hears you hears me; and he that rejects you rejects me, and he that rejects me rejects him that sent me". The Lord was the personal representative of God, and those whom He sends are His personal representatives.

A divine principle is involved in their being sent in twos. One is not adequate as a witness: "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established". Peter stood up with the eleven; he did not stand up alone. If we are called to be personal representatives of Jesus, it is important that we should be up to our mission. The seventy were, like ourselves, not up to the height of their mission. They had been wonderfully used, but they had been sent forth to prepare the way of the Lord; He sent them "into every city and place where he himself was about to come". They were sent to prepare His way and as workmen into His harvest. As having His Spirit they were sent forth as lambs in the midst of wolves, they were sent as peace-bringers, and they were to be content with such circumstances as they found themselves in. All this was their mission, but they came back rejoicing in the fact that the demons were subject to them through His name. It was below the level of their mission; it was something that signalled them. There was the divine power, but evidently they thought of it as giving them some peculiar distinction — "the demons are subject to us" — they rejoiced in that. The contrast is marked in this section; these verses are the crown and climax of the gospel. The joy of the seventy was quite different from the Lord's. He had His joy, but their joy was based on something quite different from what His was based on; and the Lord is not content that we should have a joy of a different character and on a different basis from His own joy. That is why this is the top note of the gospel, because in these verses we are brought into the region of the Lord's own personal joy, and of the pleasure of the Father and the Son. There is no possibility of any movement of evil there, no demons to be subjugated there.

Luke greatly supports Paul by making the heavenly supreme in our thoughts. The great point is, not that we are going to heaven by and by — all Christians

look for that — but that we are citizens of heaven now at this present moment; our names are written there, we are on the roll of the citizens of heaven at this minute. If you could look at it you would find your name, and the names of all who love the Lord Jesus Christ, inscribed there as present citizens of heaven. The teaching of the heavenly in Luke is in keeping with Paul's teaching; we have to do with a heavenly One and we are heavenly ones.

Chapter 9 brings us to heaven. "It came to pass when the days of his receiving up were fulfilled" — that is the great turning point of the gospel; what follows is more or less connected with the Lord as in the heavenly position, as received up. Luke presents things morally, and this is the point where the Spirit of God through Luke contemplates the Lord as about to be received up; He is going to heaven. Now all the teaching of this gospel turns on that, and we have to be impressed with the importance of the heavenly. People say,

Why have you not more converts? We need to understand the relative value of things. I see people doing great works, and able to speak of conversions, but how does it stand in relation to the heavenly? That is the great question. You may have great activity of divine power and little appreciation of the heavenly, like the seventy, but that was not the special pleasure of the Lord. His thoughts are set on what is heavenly. If the Lord is presented to us as "received up", what is heavenly must be of supreme importance. I see people more interested in having power on earth than in being citizens of heaven: they talk of speaking with tongues, of healing the sick, of miracles, and make all that very important, but that is not heaven or the heavenly.

Paul was used to the end of his career in preaching the gospel, but there was always a heavenly ring about it; his gospel was always clothed in blue. He never tired of telling people that he was converted by a light out of heaven; he had a heavenly commission and there was something peculiarly heavenly in the way he preached the gospel.

The Lord had sent forth the seventy in the light and power of what was heavenly. Here we find them rejoicing in the power they had over what was evil, and it was true enough. But what was in the view of the Lord was Satan's fall from heaven: "I beheld Satan as lightning falling out of heaven". The Lord was thinking of heaven, and they were thinking of their wonderful power over evil here. The Lord was going to heaven; the fact of His being received up involved the fall of Satan. The very fact of Jesus going up as Man to heaven made it absolutely necessary that Satan should fall out of heaven. We are sent forth to represent the Lord, but we have to feel that we have given a defective

representation; we cannot deny it. This dispensation has heaven in view, so the full height of everything on the divine side is brought in in love. It is what prophets have desired to see and have not seen. What satisfies divine love must be a scene where no evil is present. The setting of this is beautiful — Christ is received up into heaven, the saints are registered there, and Satan falls from heaven. Now, the Lord says, I want your joy to be there. The Lord gives the power to put all evil under the feet of the saints; even Satan himself is to be bruised under their feet; but that is not our joy, nor what made the Lord praise. Satan's fall is not actual yet, but it was in the view of the Lord. Satan is not actually cast out according to Revelation 12, but in the view of the Lord Satan is seen as fallen from heaven and man is seen as exalted to heaven, and the saints are registered in heaven.

We ought to think much of heaven as our present place, not only that we are going there. The more we accept that we are at the present moment citizens of heaven, the more we shall be characterised by what is heavenly. Publicly the Lord is rejected. What marks this section of the gospel is privacy: "having turned to the disciples privately", verse 23. The Lord said these things privately. What we get here we cannot get by the preaching or by the ministry of the word; it is a matter of what is personal and private. The Lord withdrew their hearts into the region of His own joy. There was a region of unalloyed joy to the Lord, and it formed His praises. On this occasion we are permitted to hear the Son speaking to the Father — what an immense interest to us! There is a holy character and sweetness about it that does not attach to anything else. There is a private scene too in John 17: the Lord is with His loved ones, and He opens His heart freely, and in their presence speaks to His Father. The trouble is that so many of us live on what is public or on what we hear ministered in the gospel or in teaching, but we do not get revelation that way. Here we have the region where the Father is acting; we have the activities of the Father and the Son. There is no other movement of any kind; we are outside the region of evil altogether. The Father is praised because He has hid these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes, so one would be sorry to be wise and prudent. There is the direct action of the Father and the Son in personal revelation. This is a blessed retreat. Even if we could do works of power there is something far better, the favour of having a personal revelation.

This is an action of the Father revealing these precious heavenly things to babes, persons of no account in this world but only subjects of affection. If we are prepared to be that, there is no limit to what we may get through divine favour. The new man is marked by an absence of self-importance and self-sufficiency. To be a babe indicates that we are subjects of divine work, so the

self-importance of which we are all full naturally has come down, and a different kind of spirit has come up, and then the Father can reveal heavenly things.

Someone once asked J.N.D. to give him some hints as to the best way to study the Scriptures. He replied, I find that when I come to the word in the spirit of a new-born babe I get something.

In verse 22 the Lord says, "No one knows who the Son is but the Father, and who the Father is but the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son is pleased to reveal him". That is personal. One cannot conceive of anything greater or higher than this, because it is the good pleasure of the Father and the Son. The Father is seen in supreme authority as the Lord of heaven and earth, and it has pleased Him to reveal the whole blessedness of heavenly things to babes. All things, in heaven and on earth, are seen as delivered to the Son. We are outside the sphere of evil; there is no possibility of failure in the system of things delivered by the Father to the Son. It changes the character of persons who get this supreme favour; it is open to all who have the babe character. These things are beyond all thought — what creature could take in the thought of all things delivered by the Father to the Son? It is infinite. The Son is so great that no one can know Him but the Father. What a comfort that is! If One in the form of God comes into manhood, there must be that about Him which is inscrutable. It is our great theme of praise that no one knows the Son but the Father; we should not like to think that we could compass the Son. Then, no one knows the Father but the Son, "and he to whomsoever the Son is pleased to reveal him". It is a matter of the Son's personal favour and pleasure to reveal the Father. The Lord delights to put in the hearts of His saints the knowledge of the Father as He knows Him. If we know the Father at all we know Him as the Son knows Him; there is no other way to know Him now in this heavenly system. He is revealed sovereignly by the Son.

Matthew 11 presents the side of the Lord's rejection. Here He praises in view of the completeness of the fall of all evil, and consequently the establishment of the divine pleasure; and this is what prophets and kings desired to see. It was not only that things were hidden from the wise and prudent, but they were not seen by men who were in the place of the greatest favour with God. It is extraordinary to think that we are more favoured of God than Daniel, David, Solomon or Isaiah, or any of the great prophets and kings: they did not see what we see. They only got an inkling of the heavenly system. What desires must have sprung up in David's heart when he wrote Psalm 110: "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" — how he must have desired to understand that! Scripture says that they enquired and

searched diligently, but there were hints in the Old Testament of the heavenly, and the spiritual desires of the prophets and kings were so strongly awakened that God comforted them by telling them that these things were not for them but for others who were coming after. They will have their part in the heavenly undoubtedly, but they did not have it then; they did not see these things. We ought to cultivate the thought of the excess of divine favour. How many of us here have the deep sense in our souls that we are much more favoured of God than Abraham? The consciousness of this would keep us from the world. If we want to deliver saints from the world and from earthly-mindedness we must get their minds full of Christ and what is in heaven. These prophets and kings put us to shame, for they did not see what we see. We may apply the principle in another way. How many great and honoured servants of God in the church have not seen what we see! The Spirit of God could not fail to give heavenly desires. All our brethren who are in any way walking in the Spirit must have heavenly desires, but a great many are in such environment that they cannot see heavenly things. What a favour it is to be so endowed and so privileged as to be able to see heavenly things! We are called to a heavenly position, joy and relationship, everything that is for the pleasure of the Father and the Son — there is nothing higher than that. These verses bring us to the climax of things as Luke presents them, and from this standpoint we approach the latter part of the chapter.

The man among thieves was a helpless victim. This is not the sphere of divine purpose; in this section we come to a scene of need. If we have been in that heavenly elevation where all is light and blessedness, and have learnt the supplies that are there, we can come down into this scene of ruin and need to act as real neighbours, as those who are able to supply all that is requisite for ruin and poverty. The actual condition here is one of deep and dire need, and that is the condition still, even amongst the people of God, for the man who fell among thieves was no doubt one of them. The Lord could bring heaven's resources down, and the Lord is saying to us now, This is what I want you to be — a neighbour. We are tested, not by what is in heaven but by what is in a scene of need. The test is, Have we been in heaven spiritually, and have we the supplies of heaven? The Lord could bring down supplies from heaven to meet the direst need. The Lord wanted, in the power and blessedness of the resources of heaven, to convert this man from a lawyer into a neighbour. It is patterned in the Lord, but it is not to remain there. In the power and blessedness of what is learnt in private we can come out as neighbours in a scene of need. Heaven's resources are boundless, and the Lord would take us into that region to furnish us. How much need there is amongst the brethren! What spirit does it bring out? That of the lawyer saying, This ought not to be

and that ought not to be, or the spirit of the One who can bring a supply of everything that is requisite? The priest and the Levite may have been very good men, but they had no resources. But the neighbour had full resources. If we are heavenly, we shall have resources when we come into contact with need. Naturally we are all lawyers. A lawyer will use any light even as to God's mind, and apply it in a legal way, to set himself up, and to expose weakness and failure in others; but he has no resources. This applies to us all in regard to conditions which are not what they ought to be.

The man who fell among thieves had left the place of favour which God had given, and he had got into a state which God never meant him to be in. Can you act as Christ did? Now what can you do for him? This man was cured, carried and cared for; he is the subject of service and care until the Lord comes back. We are to look at the saints as objects of care if we are true neighbours.

The legal man can tell you what is wrong and how it grieves him, but he can bring no remedy. The lawyer came professing to be interested in eternal life, but when he came into the presence of the Lord a very serious question was raised as to his own state as having no resources. Eternal life is connected with the world to come; then divine resources will be made available so that the whole condition of distress and weakness will be met, but have we the supplies by which to meet it now? It needs the grace of heaven. The neighbour came making no demands, but furnishing all that was requisite. We should be ready to act as neighbours to the very end in pure grace. If we have found, like the man who fell among thieves, that we are destitute and that Christ has supplied every need, that will affect our hearts and we shall be able to act in that spirit towards all. The assembly is the place where people are cared for; it is like the inn, a place where the service of Christ is carried on unweariedly until He comes. The Lord's death is involved in His coming into the place where the man was.

It is remarkable that it is the question of the neighbour that is raised in this man's conscience, not of love to God. His summing up of the law in verse 27 referred to both. The Lord had shown how the first part, love to God, is secured in chapter 7. God is securing the love of His poor debtors; the great Creditor comes out in the grace of forgiveness, and secures the love of the worst debtor by forgiving all. But there is the question of the neighbour too. It is beautiful to think that the Lord can use any wounds that I have sustained as the result of my own departure to make me learn the touch of His hands in a way that I should never have known without those wounds, and to make me conscious of the tenderness of His hands in binding them up. It is in the grace

that I learn in Him that I can serve others: if I am to render any service effectively I must know what it is to be served. This man was at Jericho; there are few saints who have not known what it was to be carried away. He lost his possessions, he lost his raiment, he lost all except his life; he illustrates one who has got away from the Lord. Many have lost what God has granted to them in favour. The Lord is challenging the lawyer as to what he can do for this man; He is raising that question in plain words. He says, as it were, It is no use opening out all your rich stores of learning and law; if you cannot do anything for this man you will have to give place to Me.

The oil, the wine, and the beast all suggest the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is viewed first in a restorative way. The Lord came bringing divine resources and they all lie in the Spirit. The vigour of life is restored to the man and then he has a beast to carry him. He had no ability to walk himself, but he is set up in the power of another. J.B.S. used to tell us that he was cured, carried and cared for. Restoratives and power for walk lie in the Spirit.

The host represents the feature of responsibility and care in the house of God; he acts under the instruction of the neighbour. This service has now passed into the hands of the saints for the benefit of those who have lost what they ought to have retained. The Holy Spirit acts through the saints. An inn is a temporary provision, a place for passing strangers. In that provisional setting there is a carrying on of neighbourly care, and an expenditure of resources for those who have none. The possibility of spending more suggests that there is full scope for any amount of care. The Lord is very concerned that this spirit should prevail amongst His people. If we are to be here to dispense the grace of heaven, who is going to say we have not enough to go on with? I have had to learn what a Neighbour He is to me. Think of the many forms of need we find ourselves in, and there have been resources to meet every one of them; that is the spirit in which we are to go on together.

In I Corinthians the apostle is showing them how they are to keep the inn; chapter 13 is the spirit in which it is done. In 2 Corinthians the apostle says, "I shall most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your souls, if even in abundantly loving you I should be less loved", chapter 12: 15. That is the real spirit of the neighbour, and the inn-keeper must be imbued with that spirit. The neighbour takes all charges; he is not restricted, he spends as much as he likes in care. We have to look at saints as in the region of need; they are to be cared for. What sort of people do we expect to find in the assembly viewed as the inn? "Admonish the disorderly, comfort the faint-hearted, sustain the weak, be patient towards all" (1 Thessalonians 5: 14) — these are the people we may find in the assembly.

The Lord would lead us to another region in His Supper. His intention in giving it to us is that by means of the Supper we might pass over from the region where there is need to the region of divine pleasure and appreciate it as Mary did. "Jesus loved Martha", but she allowed service to hinder her from giving Jesus the pleasure that Mary gave Him. Are we going to let service hinder us? Martha was hindered by what was extremely good. She had received the Lord into her house in order to serve Him; nothing could be more commendable, but it became a distraction. The point here is to mark the contrast between one who was interested in what lay very near the heart of the Lord and one who was hindered even by service. The Lord wants to convert us from Marthas into Marys, just as He wants to convert us from lawyers into neighbours.

In John 12 we see Martha serving without any distraction. She was divinely adjusted so that she could take her place in that circle of affection and represent the true place of service. If you get occupied with service you will find such a multiplicity of things needing attention that it becomes a distraction to rob you of the good part. There is an extreme reluctance with us all to pass over into the region of the pleasure of God. We need the service of Christ; Mary was the product of the Lord's own service.

This is the climax of the gospel: all that goes before leads us up to what is heavenly. The Lord would lead us into the apprehension that heaven is our place, not in the future merely, but *now*. All believers acknowledge that heaven is their place in the future, but few have apprehended that that is their place now, that the world is no more their place now than it is Christ's place. Mary gave herself over to His thoughts and to His word. Martha was serving Him, actively and indeed devotedly, but she did not touch the region of that good part. There is no true service without having sat at the feet of Jesus. The fact of being distracted about service proves that it is of a Martha character. One of the world's poets has said, "All great service springs from the centre of a quiet heart". It is a bad sign if we begin to complain of the brethren. Martha made complaints. When we get on to the line of serving only, we always think that other people should be doing just what we are doing. The question is, Are we supremely interested in what is for the divine pleasure? Mary's blessing lay in her deep interest in the supreme joy of the Father and the Son; she gave supreme pleasure to the heart of Jesus in listening to His word. We all know what it is perhaps to do a great deal for a person, and for that person to receive it with gratitude and affection; and our hearts might be full of something we want to speak of, but we find they are not interested; we know the bitter sense of lack that it gives. That is so with us often and the Lord's heart is grieved. We are more interested in what meets our need than in what is for His pleasure. I noticed this when I first began to preach: if I spoke of

what was for man's benefit and gain, there was interest shown; but when I turned to speak of what was for the heart of God the interest flagged.

Mary realised the true character and blessedness of the moment. The Son was here on earth revealing the Father; His word was the revelation of God as the Father, and she felt that was infinitely greater than all matters connected with service here; she yielded herself up to it. The good part is the knowledge of God revealed as Father. The full truth as to God is out; we have not to wait for some further light as to God. It was said many years ago, Who can speak after the Son? When the Son speaks it is the final word, and He speaks to make God known as Father. The degree in which we have received the revelation is measured by the degree of our confidence in God. The Son has been pleased to reveal the Father, and the first product of the revelation would be perfect confidence, and that is most essential to our happiness. Dependence without confidence is misery, but dependence based on confidence is supreme happiness.

LUKE 11

Luke 11

We have seen the Lord in the previous chapter as the Revealer; that would clearly be on the divine side, but we see Him here as the Teacher, and that would have reference to our side. Prayer would represent spiritual exercises on our side that are brought into activity as the product of the revelation: that would be the true character of prayer. No one has ever before spoken to the Father in such a way as the Son spoke to Him. I suppose the disciples must have felt the wonderful character of His speaking to the Father, and they were so moved by it that there was a desire with them to be taught to pray. I think we have all to feel that we need to be taught to pray; that is, prayer in a spiritual sense is not merely the expression of need, but the expression of exercises brought into being in the light of the revelation of God.

It was said of Saul of Tarsus, "Behold he prayeth". His prayers were set in movement by the light above the brightness of the sun. His prayers got their impulse from heaven, and we can understand that a new set of desires began to work in his heart, brought about by the heavenly light that had reached him. All his prayers would have been coloured by that heavenly light. I believe that prayer in the Christian sense is the result of coming under the influence of Jesus as the Revealer on the divine side, and as the Man of prayer on the dependent side. The most holy parts of Scripture are those parts that record the utterance of the Son to the Father in prayer. It is the pure, salted, holy incense — most holy — nothing is more affecting than to hear the Lord speaking to His Father. I suppose we all feel instinctively that in John 17 we reach a spot compared with which there is nothing else in Scripture, it is the inmost shrine. One divine Person in manhood speaking to another, the Father — it is the very inner shrine. Now the full truth is out and the Father's Name is manifested; now all suitable and spiritual prayer must be in the light of that.

The Father has been revealed and the disciples are looked at as being in the light of that, as those to whom the Lord has manifested the Father's Name, so they can say "Father", can speak to God in the light of revelation. We get into the habit of saying "Father" without thinking of the greatness of it; we forget that men like Abraham, David and Daniel could never say "Father". I am using language that not one of the blessed men in the Old Testament could use. The name of Father could not be used in addressing the blessed God until the Son was here in manhood and manifested the Father's Name, and so put it in the hearts of His disciples that under His blessed teaching they could say "Father". Only the Lord could teach that: we are as dependent on the Lord now as the

disciples were for ability to say "Father". He has manifested the Name of God as He knows Him; He was Father to Him, and what He was to Him He has been pleased to reveal to others, and through His teaching He gives ability to take up a position with God which corresponds to His own. We want to start our exercises as to prayer in the light of revelation. The full truth is out; God is known in all the fulness of grace that belongs to the Father. It is not relationship here but revelation; that is, the blessed God is known as the Father, it is the Name of supreme grace — "Hallowed be thy name" — that holy Name which we can only utter in company with Jesus, the beloved Son, as taught by Him. Our first desire as taught by Him is that that Name should be hallowed. It would seem to be the contrast to what is said in Romans 2 of the Jews, that God's Name was blasphemed among the nations on their account. The hallowing of the Father's Name brings in the highest possible standard of sanctification for the saint; that is the character of my sanctification as taught by Jesus. I must not suffer anything less than the sanctity of that Name, or than what is in accord with that grace. If I speak unkindly of a brother, that is not hallowing the Father's Name.

This prayer covers what is essential to the testimony. It does not cover the petition for the Spirit; that is added lower down. It covers the revelation of God as Father, which the disciples had before they received the Spirit. In John 17 we get into deeper waters; there we find a new relationship set up in which the saints are set and are loved with the same love as the Son; but this prayer has to do with the light of revelation before relationship is realised.

Relationship is dependent on the Spirit in our hearts crying "Abba, Father"; it is those who have the Spirit who can be consciously in relationship. Here it is revelation, what God is in grace shining on the soul and profoundly affecting it, giving it a new character and changing all its desires. I take it that the words "Thy name be hallowed" are not merely a pious sentiment, but that the saints are set that the Father's Name should be hallowed in them; it is in the saints. It is not hallowed anywhere else, it is blasphemed by the world; but, if Jesus has become to me the Revealer and Teacher, the Father's Name will be hallowed in me, in my words and in my ways. I feel how little one knows the power of it, but it is the truth.

Then the thought of the Father's kingdom is beautiful. It is not the kingdom of the Son, but the Father's kingdom. I suppose the saints are viewed as having known and tasted what the Father's kingdom is, so they desire it to come and radiate its light and blessedness. They can ask for it to come because it is in them. The Father's kingdom is known in the hearts of the saints and therefore they can greatly desire that it should be known universally. I should suppose the Father's kingdom will come when all that the Father has wrought in grace

in His saints is made influential universally. It is wonderful that the Father is working in grace. The Father is always viewed in Scripture as the Originator of the work of grace; He has been working for two thousand years through innumerable exercises in His saints, and by their learning the blessedness of His kingdom in His beloved Son, and He is going to bring all that out, the fruit of His working, in such a way that it will gladden the universe — “then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”. So things will not only be morally suitable to God but there is the influence of grace.

In the kingdom of God everything is suitable to God — righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost — all is morally suitable to God. But in the kingdom of the Father we get the influence of all that is blessed in the divine nature. It is a beautiful thought which shows that the kingdom will be permeated by the sweet influence of grace. It is where the fruit of the Father’s work is displayed; it will all be displayed when what the Father is doing is complete. Think of all the grace of the Father — He is good to the unthankful and evil — that is something additional to what is morally right. There is a motive working in the Father’s heart making Him good to the unthankful. Lower down we are told He is compassionate, there are tender feelings in His heart, and all that will give character to His kingdom. So it is not enough to think of the coming kingdom merely as a reign of righteousness; the thing is taking shape now, and whatever I do under the influence of the Father’s grace is essential to His kingdom. Suppose some one insults me and I do not resent it, but pray for the one who spitefully uses me and persecutes me. That is an expression of the Father’s kingdom. His kingdom refers to the sphere of His influence. There is a certain sphere of the Father’s influence and that at present is confined to His saints; they so know the sweetness of it that they pray for it. If we think of how the Lord manifested the Father’s Name, how in this gospel He moved about, what touches of grace, what consideration, what tenderness and patience — it was bringing out the Father’s Name and all that constitutes the Father’s kingdom. It is in the light of that that I should look at the needed bread for each day; one can understand the necessity on these lines for the needed bread each day. How are we to be supported on such spiritual lines? It is only by needed bread for each day. Our individual path is divided into days. It has often been said that church exercises are weekly, but our individual exercises are daily, and each day we must have needed bread; if we do not get it we shall break down in the testimony of the hallowed Name of Father.

The manna emphasises the need for fresh supplies every day. Supposing I knew at the beginning of the day every circumstance that would try my spirit or that I would come up against, I could brace myself up for the occasion and I could consider what I could do, but I do not know who will irritate me or

what little opportunities I may have of upholding the testimony to the Father's name which I may miss by my carelessness. But the Father knows each circumstance which will come into my life every day, and He can give me the needed supply so that I shall not break down in testimony. The Lord had His instructions every morning, "He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed" — He was taught how to speak a word in season. Think of the hallowed communications that the Lord had with the Father on the morning of John 4, and the Father putting in His heart and lips the very word He should speak to the woman at the well! He got the word that morning. There is a full supply of needed bread for each day if we would only prove it. Not one of us will ever have a day like this one, and we shall never see this day again; so it is important that we should rise to the elevation and not break down in testimony. If we took up this line we should be sustained in the testimony to the Father's Name, and His Name would be hallowed. It would be a miracle, and yet distinctly within the bounds of possibility. Christians have often told me of severe testing coming upon them unexpectedly, and that if they had not received the little word they had in the morning from the Lord they could never have gone through it. A brother once said to me, I knew an unusual demand would come upon me because of the support I got from the Lord in reading this morning. In that way when a test comes we are able to exhibit something of the Father's Name instead of exhibiting flesh and nature. None of us could do it except by getting the needed bread for each day.

Then the Father's Name comes out in the spirit of remission. Suppose a brother offends you, how will you meet that? We all offend each other some time. Do I want an apology? Can it be met by the spirit of requisition, or by the spirit of remission? The saint who can take up this prayer has met all in the spirit of remission, so he can count on the Father to remit his sins. He has tasted the luxury of making a release. The year of release is not only for the benefit of the debtors but for the privilege of the creditor. Suppose a brother or a sister is not just what I expect them to be, suppose they hurt or even injure you! You may have a hard feeling, rankling and souring you and making you unhappy. What a privilege to make a release! The creditor gets something off his mind that has been rankling. You may say that he or she did very wrong. Well, is there any sin so great that it cannot be met by the grace of remission? God has shown us there is not. But we want some food to enable us to do this, so the divine nature must be built up and nourished, for naturally we should like to exact every penny of the debt. After all, the Lord supposes that we all have many sins that have to be remitted, and James says, "In many things we all offend". It is no use to say we are not sinners. If

we were honest with ourselves we should have to admit a great many sins, so how can we go on happily without the sense of the Father's remission? Many Christians have unhappy lives because they have not a sense of how readily the Father remits. The reason is that they have not tasted the luxury of remitting — it may be little things, little offences, little hurts that have touched our pride and vanity.

Then we are to say, "Lead us not into temptation". That shows the saint knows himself, he is not under any delusion as to temptation. In the mercy of God things that appeal to me may never have come in my reach. I believe with every one of us there is something that would be too much for us if we were tempted, so we say, "Lead us not into temptation". I want to be kept by the Father's grace from these particular things that would be too great for me to withstand, and from circumstances that would be too great a test for me. So this prayer finishes in profound humility, a true spirit of self-distrust, true self-knowledge. There is no self-confidence; we are cast on the Father that if He left us in temptation we should be sure to fall, and so in true self-judgment and humility we pray to be kept.

I think this prayer shows how saints are preserved in the divine testimony. It will be fatal if we disregard it. We do not want it as a form, but we want the Lord to teach us to pray this prayer.

The revelation has the effect of producing confidence, so there is no sense of difficulty in getting things from the Father. The Lord uses figures to illustrate His meaning, but we find that the figures are taken up in some sense by way of contrast, not only of comparison. For instance, a man has a friend, but if he goes at an unusual hour like midnight to prefer his request, he may find the friend unwilling, though he may by importunity overcome his unwillingness. Now the Lord indicates that you will never have to do like that with the Father, though we are to ask, seek and knock. Again, the Lord speaks about a man who is a father, if his son asks him for bread, will he give him a stone; or a fish, will he give him a scorpion? No, He says, You would not do that yourselves, evil as you are, "How much rather shall the Father who is of heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him". He contrasts the blessedness of the Father with the disposition of an earthly parent to do the best for his son. The disposition of the Father is placed on a higher plane altogether — "How much rather", the Lord says. So again in chapter 18 where the Lord speaks of prayer in connection with the unjust judge and the widow. The judge does not respond to her request; his heart does not move him in the least degree towards her, but he is harassed by her continual coming, so

she gets what she wants. It is very different from the way God treats those who come to Him, though we are to persevere in our prayers.

I think our want of confidence arises from our feeble apprehension of the revelation of God as Father. Dependence in a true sense is based on confidence, and therefore it is happy. We all know what it is to be dependent for certain things on people in whom we have no confidence, and it is misery. In a sense all men are dependent on God, and often it is without any confidence in Him, so they are not happy. The believer in the light of the declaration has confidence, therefore his dependence is of a confiding nature, and he knows it is not difficult to get things from the Father. The Father is moved in the most active grace in response to every true desire that comes to Him in answer to the declaration that He has made.

It is noticeable that the Lord has much before Him the question of food supply. There is a spiritual suggestion in it which seems to show the paramount importance of the food supply. I take it that, having received the declaration that has been brought to us by the Son, we require to be nourished in it by food; the confidence of our hearts has to be preserved in strength by spiritual food; that is, food which continually nourishes us and strengthens us in the knowledge of God. I think that is the primary necessity of happy Christian life. The ministry of Christ in the power of the Spirit nourishes the knowledge of God in our souls, so that, instead of confidence waning as time goes on, we are getting more and more confidence in God. The knowledge of God is the one thing needful. Paul said to the Corinthians, "Some have not the knowledge of God"; he was writing to believers and they had not the knowledge of God. Speaking generally, the food would illustrate the ministry that is found in the assembly, and that there should be a full supply of it is a matter of exercise and confidence in God. In Colossians Paul speaks of "growing by the true knowledge of God" — food in a spiritual sense is what nourishes us in the knowledge of God.

All this is of the greatest importance in view of the Spirit coming in. This chapter brings us to the gift of the Spirit. This attitude of confidence is the preparation of soul for the reception of the Spirit. It is wonderful to so know the Father under the teaching of the Son that we are perfectly assured that He would give us the Holy Spirit, so that we may have resources and revenue equal to our citizenship which has been made known to us in the previous chapter.

Luke seems to give us the moral conditions which prepare the soul for the Spirit, and I do not think we get the gain of the Spirit until those conditions are present. I do not say that persons have not the Spirit before these

conditions are reached, but they have not the gain of the Spirit. Many people have the Spirit who have not the gain of the Spirit. The Galatians had the Spirit, and yet had gone far from the light of revelation. The Corinthians had the Spirit, but the revelation was obscured by their carnality, so Paul had to say, "some have not the knowledge of God; I speak as a matter of shame". Here we see the moral conditions which are preparatory to the reception of the Spirit according to Luke's presentation.

It is a great thing to be assured of the Father's willingness to give us a priceless gift. The object of the Spirit's being given is that saints may occupy effectually and intelligently the place in testimony which Jesus held so perfectly when here. So completely would that be brought about that the Lord could say in chapter 12 that the disciples would not need to think what they should say — "the Holy Spirit shall give it to you in that hour" — a wonderful qualification for testimony. We come into the power of it along these moral lines.

There is a moral order in these things as Luke relates them. First the Lord tells His disciples to rejoice that their names are written in heaven, which is a greater thing than to have power to cast out demons. If that is so, should we not like to be in possession of something positive and heavenly now? The Lord is leading up to this, so that we should have confidence in the Father to give the Holy Spirit so that we might live here on the wealth of the heavenly revenue. We have not only the citizenship — that is wonderful — but we have the resources and revenue, all the wealth of the Spirit as given by the Father. The Lord would encourage us to exercise liberty and confidence; He would dismiss from our thoughts any question or uncertainty in praying in the light of the revelation. A person in the light of the revelation would never want anything inconsistent with it.

The reception of the Spirit is presented in a great variety of ways in Scripture in order to preserve us from taking it up in a formal way. There are hardly two scriptures about the reception of the Spirit which speak of His coming in the same conditions. There is variety and diversity to keep us out of all ruts, to make us exercised as to the living reality. This is Luke's presentation, so that as having confidence in the Father we ask for the Holy Spirit. We are so assured of the grace that is bound up in the Name of the Father that we count on Him with confidence to give even such a stupendous gift as the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Spirit is for ourselves, but it is in view of the wonderful place we are set in by the revelation of the Father as left here to be in the testimony of the Father. The Lord said, "I have given them thy word" — that is the Father's word in testimony.

If we do not move on these lines we shall be in danger of what follows, and that is very solemn. The revelation is rejected and Satan gets possession. The house is swept and garnished; things are outwardly respectable, and yet wicked spirits come and dwell there, and the last condition is worse than the first. That is the state of Israel, but it is also exactly the state of christendom. We are either moving on the line which results in the reception of the Spirit and all the wealth connected with that, or else we are on the other line where plenty of sweeping and garnishing are going on — all is outwardly right, but there is no place for God or Christ, and wicked spirits have come in to dwell. That is what Christendom is drifting into. But we want to be giving place to the Holy Spirit and the Father's Name. There can be no neutrality. It is Christ or Satan; there is no middle path. "He that is not with me is against me". It is the path giving place to the Spirit out of heaven, or the path resulting from wicked spirits coming in and getting possession. That is the solemn aspect of things presented here.

I think the Lord presents these things to confirm us and to encourage us in confidence in the Father. I feel that if I knew God better I should never have a misgiving about anything; I should be able to count upon Him about everything. What a wonderful thing it is that there is a Person out of heaven now dwelling in the saints! Not only are we heavenly by calling, but there is part of the very essence of heaven in us by the Spirit now. If this is so, do we not want to give more expansion to it now, more room for the expression of it?

We have been speaking of the Lord as the Teacher, teaching us to pray, in the light of the revelation which He has brought to us of the Father, so that prayer becomes the expression of confidence. That being the case, one can see how the power of evil manifests itself in dumbness. For a man to be dumb indicates that he is not able to speak to God; he is not in the light of the revelation, and there is therefore no confidence to speak at all. The power of the kingdom is necessary in such a case. If that power did not act sovereignly, nothing would be wrought. The Lord acted sovereignly. He cast out the demon; it was His own activity in the power of the finger of God. It is a great object with God to give evidence in this world that His power is greater than all the power of evil, so the character of two kingdoms comes to light: the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God. Therefore it is no longer possible to be neutral; that is why the Lord said, "He that is not with me is against me". Neutrality is impossible when the character of the two kingdoms is manifest. If there was not a single soul in Teignmouth able to speak to God in the confidence of grace, there would be no evidence in the town of the kingdom of God. The Lord is encouraging confidence, encouraging us to speak to God

in the light of the revelation that has come to us, to speak in confident assurance. It needs the finger of God to bring that about. There is a demon holding the ground and he needs to be dispossessed. The Lord here is dispossessing the demon and showing that the kingdom of God is stronger than all the power of evil. The question is, Are we going to identify ourselves with Him? Neutrality is impossible.

The finger of God accomplishes what is altogether beyond the power of the creature. When the dust was turned into lice in Egypt, that was beyond the magicians to imitate, and they said, This is the finger of God. Certain things were in their power to do, but it was not in the power of the creature to turn death into life. If one soul is in the light of the revelation of the Father so as to be able to speak to Him confidently, that is the finger of God. It is the mighty power of God exercised by the Spirit. Every believer who can speak confidently to God is the evidence of it, of divine power greater than evil.

There is not only deliverance, but the heart is occupied. What comes out in the Lord's words that follow is that there is a man from whom an evil spirit has gone out, but his heart is not occupied. Now you want something to occupy your heart that is security against evil; you want God brought in as known in His beloved Son so that the heart is occupied. It is not only deliverance effected but the heart occupied and preserved against any return of the power that has been dispossessed. We want to be so secured that the power may never return, not merely to be delivered from it; otherwise the last state will be worse than the first. It was so with Israel and it will be so with Christendom. We want Christ to have such a place with us that the house is not simply swept and garnished but occupied. In Matthew we have the word 'unoccupied' as to the house. It is not enough to have an outward deliverance — that may be providential. Israel was in the position of a man from whom the evil spirit had gone out; the evil spirit of idolatry went out, but it was not cast out by the finger of God. It went out, I might say, providentially; God so ordered it. But when the Lord was presented to them, when God came near in the Person of Jesus, they would not receive Him, so the house was unoccupied; it was empty though swept and garnished. That is like Christendom today. Providentially Christendom has been freed from the gross evil of the heathen world, but there is no security in that. Security lies in giving the Lord Jesus a place in our hearts, so that we are not unoccupied. He is not only the Owner but the Occupier; if He is this there is security against evil.

People are deceived by the house being swept and garnished. Things are made respectable, but there is no occupier, and it is going to issue in apostasy. The last state will be worse than the first. Our only security is in being

inhabited. The Spirit brings Christ in. If we have the Holy Spirit out of heaven, we have a divine Person from the place where Christ is. He comes to be the witness of the glory of Christ in our hearts, so that the house is occupied, and the evil spirits cannot come back. If the evil spirits have been cast out they will never come back, but if they only go out they may come back. There is that difference between what God does providentially and what He does in power. If the spirits are cast out by the finger of God they will never come back. If the Person who brought the deliverance occupies the house there is perfect security. The top note of Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3: 16 is, "that the Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith". It is Christ in the affections that gives permanent security,

The Lord felt it when they wanted a sign (verse 29); it was the evidence that they were a wicked generation. In presence of all that there was in Him, to want a sign proved man wicked, and He says that no sign should be given them but the sign of Jonas the prophet. Jonas brought to the Ninevites the testimony of their real state under the eye of God. God said, "Go to Nineveh and cry against it", and Jonah's preaching was, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown". The Lord is virtually saying to them, You can only get blessing on the common ground of the heathen world. He is putting this generation on a level with the Ninevites.

The wonderful thing is that their state is demonstrated in the Son of man. The state of Israel and of the Gentile world is not demonstrated by judgment falling on them, but by judgment coming on the Son of man; so their state is demonstrated in the way of supreme grace. John the baptist shows the state of man to be corrupt and that the tree must be cut down, but the Son of man shows how the tree has been cut down in holy judgment, but in the way of grace to men. Therefore the Son of man is *the sign*. The Jews might have thought of Him as the Son of God, or have gloried in Him as the Son of David, but God says, No, you must be widened out and get blessing on the same ground as the Ninevites. As Son of man He was the great expression of the universality of God's grace. The only thing that saved Nineveh was God's pity, with which Jonah was not in fellowship. God said to him, You have had pity on the gourd, and you do not want Me to have pity on Nineveh, "where there are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle". It is the pity of God on His creature that the Son of man takes up in grace. The Lord is telling the Jews that they must come down to that platform, the Son of man taking up in grace all the judgment of God on man's sinful condition, so the Son of man is the great sign of man's condition and the blessed evidence of God's grace to His creature. The Lord's widest glory is His glory as Son of man;

it was as Son of man that He came to seek and save the lost. There are no distinctions there, for Jew and Gentile are lost; there is only one common ground on which the Son of man can touch men, and that is the ground of His death. Jonas is the great sign that everything offensive to God is removed from the eye of God, and Solomon is the great sign that everything delightful to God has come in.

In Matthew 12 the Lord speaks of Jonas being three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, and says, "thus shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights". He showed that the Son of man was going down to the very bottom; He not only died but was buried. The whole extent of the removal of man was effected by Christ; it was not only death but burial — going into the heart of the earth. Burial is complete removal; death is not. If a man dies, he is in evidence there as a dead man; but when he is buried he is no longer in evidence, he is gone. That is the importance of the burial of Christ. It means the absolute removal of man from the eye of God; he is out of sight.

We cannot preach a full gospel without speaking of the burial of Christ. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 what the glad tidings which he announced were: "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and he was buried". It is part of the gospel. We must have the penalty dealt with to the full extent. To die is part of the penalty, but not the whole of it, for God had said to Adam, "dust thou art and to dust shalt thou return" — that involves burial; Adam was to disappear from the eye of God. So in the death and burial of Christ man disappears from the eye of God. We are to be consistent with His death and with His burial too. We are to realise it every day as we walk about this earth; we are to be consistent with the burial of Christ in the place where He was buried; there is no Christianity without that. In Jonas we see the complete removal of the man who was under the judgment of God, and that is what the Son of man has done; He is the sign of it. The Son of man has gone into death and burial to remove the man of offence. It is not the pulling of the old man to pieces but seeing the blessedness of the Son of man having removed him. If the Son of man has removed him, it is unrighteous to bring him back.

In Solomon we have all the wisdom of God; all the profound thoughts of divine wisdom in regard to man were spoken by Solomon. The Lord intimates in connection with Solomon that people afar off would come. The queen of Sheba sets forth the Gentile company who would appreciate Christ — the wisdom of God — when Israel had disregarded it.

Solomon was the centre of a system where everything spoke of the fame of Jehovah's Name: the house he had built, the sitting of his servants, the ascent

by which he went up to the house of Jehovah. All was secured in suitability to the Name of Jehovah, and that was what the queen of Sheba heard about. Movement is required to reach Solomon. These are the two sides of the truth: Jonah represents grace and compassion going out to men in their need and opening a door for repentance to them. God's *pity* is the word used in Jonah, and even the cattle are spoken of, showing that God was thinking of His own creation. The end of Mark speaks of the gospel being preached to all creation, showing God's interest in all creation and His regard to the state into which it has come. That side of the truth is brought *to* us, but to reach Solomon a journey has to be undertaken, and it will only be by lovers of God. Solomon has to be found where he is; he is found in his own circle where everything is delightful to the heart of God.

These are the two sides of the work of God. I do not think we shall understand the calling of God unless we see these two sides. When the calling of God is presented to us in an elementary way in I Corinthians, Christ is spoken of as God's wisdom, and He is made the wisdom of God to us. The apostle has in view for the saints a whole system of things, predetermined "before the ages for our glory". It is a positive construction of what is delightful to God in the power of the Spirit, a system marked by glory — "Solomon in all his glory". The queen of Sheba heard of his fame in connection with the Name of Jehovah. If we think of man as sinful, God must come to him; if the sign is to reach him it must go to him where he is. Jonah is the sign of grace which will bring man to repentance so that he is free from all his old associations; but God has something more in mind than that, something for lovers of God. It seems to me that the queen of Sheba came as moved by her affections; she had problems to be solved and she was prepared to appreciate the wonderful character of divine wisdom seen in Solomon's surroundings. It is a great thing when we begin to be interested in divine wisdom, to study the way wisdom is spoken of in the epistles. The system into which we are brought is an evidence of the wisdom of God, so that in result the principalities and powers in the heavenlies will learn in the church the "all-various wisdom of God". All is for God's delight, and it is all connected with Christ, because He is the wisdom of God.

Unless we leave the world we shall not intelligently form part of the vessel of divine light which is here for the pleasure of God. There is the shining forth there of all that is of God and suitable to God; it is substantiated in Christ and in the power of the Spirit, and even the bodies of the saints are to be irradiated with the glory of it. God moves to us in grace that we may move to Him in love, and in result the light that is going to fill the city will be found morally in the saints now.

"The light of the body is the eye". Our appreciation of light depends on our capacity of vision; so the Lord turns from the thought of light in its source to speak of the condition capable of seeing it. That is where exercise comes in. The most blessed light is shining; there has never been greater shining of spiritual light than now, but the organ of perception is of the greatest importance.

The light has "shone in our hearts" (see 2 Corinthians 4). God shone in the heart of Paul for the shining forth; and in a sense nothing can add to the brilliancy of the shining forth. But if light is to characterise the vessel, if it is to be put on a candlestick for public witness, certain conditions are requisite; we need a simple eye — a vision unobscured by any selfish motives, by any form of idolatry. It is contrasted with the wicked eye; the eye is either simple or wicked. Paul prays for the "spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him" — that would give a simple eye. It is the divine intent that the spirit of wisdom and revelation should be given to the saints, so that there is no foreign element to obscure the vision. It is not complicated by a variety of motives, not by any element of self-pleasing, self-seeking, or self-exaltation. All that is idolatrous and wicked in character is out of harmony with the blessed revelation, and with the confidence which revelation produces; it is out of harmony with the Spirit and leads to an evil eye. A simple eye is just the opposite.

It is interesting to see the general thought of light in verse 33: "No one having lit a lamp sets it in secret, nor under a corn measure, but on a lampstand, that they who enter in may see the light". That is the general idea of light, and then we have the way it is taken up by saints, so that what shone so perfectly in the Son of man might shine in them, and their very bodies are to be luminous. That is a thing no Pharisee can imitate. He could put on a clean garment, but it could never be a shining one. The two men in the end of this gospel were in shining garments, so the character of God's shining in Christ should mark the saints. The light was obscured at Corinth; the candlestick was there with all its vessels, but the light was obscured; the lamps needed priestly attention. But the light was radiant in Paul, and it was intended to be radiant in the saints so that the light might be as the candlestick; that is, be definitely set up in a defined position. It is not exactly the light of the world, but it is a question of those entering in — "that those who enter in may see the light". There is a sphere secured among the saints where there is divine shining. I have said to people who complain of poor meetings, You were never in a meeting so poor that nothing was said in praise of God and His beloved Son. People come in to see the shining; you go out with the gospel.

The divine intent in bringing in a light is that it should be public, not secret. There is a certain sphere where it is found and it fills that sphere with its radiance. That shining is not only when we are together, though it is seen particularly when saints are convened; we are saved then from distracting influences. The delivering power of the kingdom is known when we come together; we come into a sphere where there is a different element. There is the shining there and no place for darkness, whether we come together for the breaking of bread, or for prayer, or for reading. It is the place for the light.

In contrast with this we see (verse 37) that there is a system that professes to entertain the Lord — the Pharisee invited Him to dine. Ostensibly he was honouring the Lord, but it was only to exalt himself, and his surroundings were only darkness. There is a system of darkness obtaining after the full light has come in; and the end of that system will be so opposed to God that the blood of all His faithful witnesses will come upon it, as we read in Revelation 18. The great thing for us is to cherish the light, to be intelligently occupied with the light, and in that way we shall be preserved from the darkness.

God works from within. In the system of darkness all outside is respectable, but the inside remains selfish and wicked. God works from within that there might be hearts capable of entertaining Christ. What the Pharisee did outwardly we are to be prepared to do inwardly. It is good to understand that God is dealing with the inward parts; the external system will not do. "Thou desirest truth in the inward parts; in the hidden parts thou wilt make me to know wisdom", Psalm 51: 6. God begins there; He does much in secret with souls before any of it comes to the top. The enemy would like to hide what is there of God, but God means it to shine. God is working to bring people to have no confidence in the flesh; His complaint about the Pharisees was that they were particular about little things, but left aside judgment and the love of God. What is God's estimate? What does He think? That is the thing to be concerned about. For instance, I see the judgment of God in this: "In thee have I found my delight". That is His judgment, that is the estimate He has formed of His beloved Son, and we want to have His judgment about things. Everything is judged in the light of God's judgment in regard to Christ. He has a judgment of what is delightful to Himself, and all His work in our souls is to prepare us to have His judgment, His delight, so that instead of selfishness and wickedness there is Christ and He becomes the hidden Man of the heart.

This chapter is important as giving us the character of the system that professes to entertain Christ but is really a system of darkness and only uses Christ to exalt self. The judgment of God is not considered and the love of God not known. It is very important to have the judgment of God first, then we

reach definite conclusions. Everything in Christianity is marked by finality; the judgment of God has been pronounced, and the wisdom of man is to regard it. If I regard God's judgment as to Christ I shall be committed to regard His judgment of man after the flesh. To maintain the judgment of God and the love of God there is a vessel of light, and it is in contrast with the religious system that professes to honour Christ. The things the Lord speaks of in this chapter are the positive things — the judgment of God, the love of God, wisdom, the key of knowledge, the Holy Spirit — what an amount of precious substance shining in contrast to the system of darkness!

God is working on the line of secret things; He is working for heart purification; He is moving to secure an inward result first. He is working to set up a vessel of light, and to secure it He must work inwardly. Paul speaks of our hearts being purified by faith — if God comes in sin goes out. Faith rings in God and Christ, and if so we get rid of selfishness and wickedness. The Pharisee did not bring Christ in morally or spiritually; he represents that system of things that nominally acknowledges Christ and treats Him with respect, but had nothing inward. God only gives His Spirit to purified hearts; the gift of the Spirit is a witness that hearts are purified.

Paul speaks to the Colossians about the glad tidings growing and bearing fruit. It is not only individually, but in the way the saints are set together and move together so that people come in and see the light. It is found in the Christian company. The mutual relations of the saints are formed in the light of revelation, and in confidence in God, and in the presence of the Spirit, so that there is a whole system of spiritual things that is light in contrast to darkness.

The giving of alms (verse 41) involves the activity of grace. If we are moving in the activities of grace we shall not contract defilement; there is a protective armour round the soul. It is very often our slackness in the activities of grace that opens the door for what is unclean. If in the activity of grace we are seeking the good of others we are outside the range of what is unclean; selfishness, wickedness and uncleanness are shut out. In Leviticus 11 we are told that a quantity of water is not defiled even if an unclean animal or insect falls into it. Where there are such activities of the Spirit as are found when the saints come together, what is defiling is excluded. It is engagement with positive good that excludes evil. Deliverance in a practical sense is found in moving on with activities which are pleasing to God. It is worthy of God to work on that line. If a saint is down, how will you help him? Not by telling him he is down, but by bringing in something positive. God always presents something positive to us. J.N.D. said, "The way of peace within and power without is to be always and only occupied with good". *That* is the simple eye.

Paul spoke to the Philippians about beautiful things, and says, "think on these things".

Paying attention to the outside while the inside is unclean, paying great attention to trifles — all this is an element of darkness. I have observed that when people are very punctilious about trifles they generally fail grievously in big things. We can clothe ourselves with credit by being particular about something that does not cost us much. To tithe little herbs is no cost, but the Pharisee can take credit by it. It is right to attend to little things, for the Lord says, "these ye ought to have done, and not have left those aside". Do not neglect little things, but do not attach undue importance to them. To present things in a burdensome way belongs to the system of darkness. Paul never put burdens on the saints, but he showed how ready he was to carry all the things that came on him. You cannot read his ministry in the epistles without feeling that there is a man there ready to help you to carry your burdens, whether it is soul exercise, personal difficulty, or church sorrow; he will not come in with demand but with a helping hand. We are not to come in with the spirit of exaction — that belongs to the system of darkness. Paul took up the whole burden of the trouble in Galatia; he took it up on his spirit, and brought in an extraordinary ministration of divine wealth. That was how he corrected; he gave alms practically. Burden-bearing belongs to the vessel of light, and we want to get more and more into the shining so that we might get clear of all the elements of darkness, though they commend themselves to us naturally.

LUKE 12

Luke 12

WE have been occupied with the divine intent that there should be a lamp lighted here and set upon a lampstand to shine for God, and thus to anticipate morally and spiritually the shining of the holy city; and we have noticed how the Lord draws attention to that which would darken the shining. I suppose nothing could be more darkening than hypocrisy; therefore it was the first thing that was on His heart to say to His disciples. If every form of hypocrisy was got rid of, we should be like the city. We read in Revelation 21: "Her shining was like a most precious stone, as a crystal-like jasper stone" (verse 11); "and the city, pure gold, like pure glass" (verse 18); "the street of the city pure gold, as transparent glass", verse 21. It suggests a medium that in no way obscures the light; and that is the Lord's thought for us spiritually now.

Hypocrisy is passing off as having a character which is not that is the leaven of the Pharisees. Hypocrisy is a principle to which we naturally gravitate, so that we need to take heed to the wholesome words of the Lord. The character of Christianity is indicated in the river of the water of life: "He showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, going out of the throne of God and of the Lamb", Revelation 22: 1. Every darkening influence will be gone when the city is displayed, but then it will be gone, as I understand it, not only by a mighty act of divine power, but through a process of spiritual exercise which brings about this crystal-like clearness so that there is no need to pretend to be what we are not. As Christians, we are not under the slightest necessity to pretend to be what we are not. The gospel in its own native power would make us all crystal-like so that there is no darkening element. It is the character and nature of God that we begin with. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all", and the gospel which has come to us has that character. It comes in such grace that it dispels all the spirit of hypocrisy. I do not think any man can be saved as a hypocrite.

In the verses we see two dangers. The leaven of the Pharisees is to pass off as being better than one is; on the other hand, one may not shine in the light that is in one's heart; one may hide it through the fear of man. There are the two dangers. The first is illustrated in the action of Ananias and Sapphira, and the second in the dissimulation of Peter recorded in Galatians 2. In Acts 6 there were those who wanted credit amongst the brethren for devotedness which was not in their hearts. It was a very solemn thing, and was visited by instant judgment. Then on the other hand Peter changed his course, "fearing them of the circumcision". He had the light of the gospel in his heart, but he

allowed it to be obscured by the fear of the circumcision, and I suppose at the bottom of it was a desire to keep up his own reputation as a good Jew. Paul speaks of it as dissimulation — a very strong word, certainly of an apostle. Peter at that moment was not free of the system that darkened the light.

The revelation of God in Christ received in its proper character would take away all desire to appear different from what we are. Everything has come out into the light; there was a whole history of covered and secret things with every one of us, but the gospel has shown us how God has dealt with all those things; He has brought them out into the full light in the judgment-bearing of Christ, and dealt with them so effectually that there is not a single jot or tittle of that kind of thing remaining to obscure the light in which He shines. We should not be ashamed to have everything told out in the most public way possible. Things covered are going to be revealed, and secret things, whispered in the ear, are going to be known publicly. We move in the light of that.

Ezekiel (chapter 1: 22) speaks of the crystal, but he says, “the *terrible* crystal”; it is the idea of being shone through by divine light. Who would like to be made of crystal so that the most hidden thoughts and secret motives could be seen by everybody? No natural man would like it. But then Ezekiel shows that there is something for God in the terrible crystal, something on a higher plane. He sees a throne and the appearance of a man upon it, and the throne surrounded by a rainbow. God is able to act in the faithfulness of His own covenant towards sinful men, because the very Man who sits upon the throne has died on the cross for them, and everything the light has exposed love has removed, so there is no need for covering anything up; it is all out. That is where the gospel puts us. So now the covered up and secret things with Christians are such as we should be very happy to think of being brought out in the most public way possible. It will come out, What were you doing in secret? The Christian was on his knees in the secret of his chamber seeking a better knowledge of God and of Christ and praying for his brethren. Those are the new kind of secrets going to be manifested in a coming day; there is a new kind of secret history now.

If we are going on with things that we should not like the brethren to know, these are certainly things which we ought not to go on with, and it will all come out. It is a very bad business for any of us to allow the leaven of the Pharisees, and it will have a very short history; it is all going to come out publicly. If a saint is pursuing an evil course it would very likely come out now. If a man had never been converted it might be left in the dark. If we are content to be just what the grace of God would make us, it would simplify

everything. Paul could say, "By the grace of God I am what I am". That is what he was and he did not want to be anything else. He could also say: "We are made manifest before God, and I trust to your consciences".

The judgment of God is the way God regards things. When He said, "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I have found my delight", that is the judgment of God. It is the appreciation of Christ; He has formed a judgment and expressed it, and our wisdom is to pay attention to the judgment of God; then we come into the apprehension of the love of God, and then go on to the wisdom of God.

The light is the revelation of God. We see that in the previous chapter; the revelation is there, and in the light of the revelation of God a man prays. True prayer would eliminate the darkness. If one prays, the darkness goes, because prayer means that you get near to God, and near to God there is no darkness. John Bunyan said that either prayer makes a man cease from sin, or sin makes a man cease from prayer.

Now in verse 4 the Lord says, "I say to you *my friends*". It is beautiful that the Lord can address us in that character. In their heart of hearts they are His friends. Now the danger is that they might allow their friendship to be hidden through the fear of man. We do not want our friendship to Jesus to be obscured through the fear of man; that is a very darkening influence. The most they can do is to kill us. I have often been hindered from coming out as a friend of Jesus by a very little thing, just the thought that one would make a fool of oneself, or be laughed at. But what a privilege it is to come out as a friend of Jesus, and to fear only the One that can cast into hell! The fear of God would preserve us from vain-glory. It is wholesome to remember the character of God as the One to be feared. He has authority to cast into hell. That would set aside all self-importance and bragging. We are walking in the fear of God as One who has authority to cast into hell. The Lord would have that present with us; like Peter when he says, "If ye invoke as Father him who without regard of persons judges according to the work of each, pass the time of your sojourn in fear", 1 Peter 1: 17. We have to do with God as the Judge of all; He is scrutinising our motives all the time, and there is no toleration of evil with the God we know.

Then on the other hand the friends of Jesus are much better than many sparrows. The friends and confessors of Jesus are not forgotten; the hairs of their head are numbered. The Lord is instructing us in the minuteness of the care and protection of God, so that while there is profound reverence in the sense of His authority, there is profound confidence in the sense of His care; the friends and confessors of Jesus are the objects of the greatest care and

interest of God. Suppose one is in the presence of worldly people, and in the sense of great weakness one is just trying to stammer out the Name of Jesus, God thinks so much of it that He counts every hair of the head of such a person. He would not let the enemy pull out one of the hairs of his head unless it was going to further the testimony. If there is one hair less He knows it, and it is a question here of confessing. The extraordinary importance of confessing the Son of man is brought out here. One might be in a shop, or an office, or a school, and the temptation is not to confess the Son of man — not to confess Jesus. But then think of all that hangs upon it: there is a day coming when the Son of man is going to tell the heavenly hosts how you behaved. There is a young Christian, perhaps in an office or school, and the Son of man is going to tell all the heavenly hosts about your just confessing His Name.

All this gives us such a sense of the minuteness of God's care. We do not think much of a sparrow, but the Lord tells us that not one is forgotten before God. He does not forget a sparrow, not for a moment! It is wonderful. So nothing in our lives is small. There is nothing small about the confessor of Jesus. Every time you mention His Name with reverence in the face of the world it is going to be told to the thousands and ten thousands. It is worth doing. I would say to young Christians, Mention His Name; it does not matter how you say it. Do not say, 'I am not interested', when asked to read a novel, or to go to the pictures; do not get out of it by a backdoor way; it is missing a privilege. Mention His Name and never mind how stumblingly and weakly you do it; you may shake like an aspen leaf but get His Name out. Say why you do not go to the pictures. Mention His Name; you hoist the flag of the kingdom then, and all the power of the kingdom will support you.

"He that shall have denied me before men shall be denied before the angels of God". It supposes that in the end that is the character of such a person; but a rather different form of words is used in this connection. Such a man's character is summed up as a denier of the Lord Jesus. Peter denied the Lord, but that was not Peter's character; he did not deny Him on the day of Pentecost.

The friends and confessors of Christ are viewed here as identified with the testimony of the Holy Spirit. I think what the Lord said here of the Holy Spirit is to encourage His friends and confessors that they might be emboldened to share with the Spirit the witness to Himself, and that they might have a sense of the exceeding gravity of the Spirit's testimony being disregarded or insulted. Being the time of the greatest grace on God's part, it is also the time of the greatest guilt on man's part. The testimony of the Son was not final; there still

remained in reserve the testimony of the Spirit; but there is nothing for those who reject contemptuously the testimony of the Holy Spirit. There is no remedy if the testimony of the Spirit is refused and rejected in a violent way — the Spirit insulted.

It might be illustrated in Acts 13, where the testimony of remission of sins was announced, and those who heard it spoke injuriously; then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold and said distinctly: "It was necessary that the word of God should be first spoken to you; but, since ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the nations". In the principle of it this applies to the Spirit as having His place of witness in the saints. It is not exactly, as in other Scriptures, the Spirit as the power by which the Lord did His mighty works, but it views the testimony as passed into the hands of the saints, though really the testimony of the Holy Spirit. It is most serious to think of the testimony in its true character as being the witness of the Holy Spirit. Mr. Stoney used to tell us that we were either in the dock with the world or in the witness box with the Holy Spirit (see John 16).

Those who speak against the Son of man are forgiven, but to speak injuriously against the Spirit is not forgiven. It shows the extraordinary importance and seriousness of the presence of the Spirit in witness. Where the apostles' testimony was deliberately rejected and spoken injuriously against, there was no forgiveness. That would not apply to any particular preaching now; the apostles preached the gospel with the Spirit sent from heaven, but we would not take the place of doing that like the apostles. The Lord said this as encouragement so that there might be no shrinking back from being identified with the Spirit's witness; even if brought before magistrates and rulers the Spirit would teach them what to say. I might preach as well as I can according to my measure of knowledge, but it might not be the direct witness of the Holy Spirit. The idea here is that there is deliberate wicked hatred of the Spirit as rendering testimony to Christ; and there is no forgiveness for that.

Stephen, in Acts 7, reviewed the whole history of the past and concentrated divine light on the present position; there was not a word he said that was not the result of the teaching of the Holy Spirit, so it was an exceedingly solemn thing to reject it. If a man preached absolutely in the power of the Spirit it would be very solemn to speak against it. The Spirit's witness is not to be trifled with, and if it brings out nothing but deliberate enmity it is very solemn. Then it would give encouragement to the friends and confessors by giving them a sense of being identified with the most wonderful, and at the same time most responsible, testimony — that is, it brings the greatest responsibility on those who reject it violently and contemptuously.

There is a crowd who are not confessors, or those who speak injuriously; they occupy a neutral position. That is where most are today in Christendom. Rejecting the testimony would not go so far as speaking injuriously; I think the latter is the expression of wicked hostility which would not be found in every person. In the Pharisees it was wicked hostility to the Spirit as manifested in the Lord Himself; but I think the principle of it is passed on to confessors to encourage witnesses that they are identified with the Spirit's witness. The Lord says in John 15, "The Spirit ... who goes forth from with the Father, he shall bear witness concerning me, and ye too shall bear witness" — that is, He identifies the witness of the disciples with the witness of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's testimony was purely of God; there was nothing of man about it, and it brought out a diabolical character of opposition.

Paul speaks of himself as a blasphemer, a persecutor and an insolent, overbearing man, but he adds a saving clause: "I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief". What is done ignorantly is a different thing; it would come in as a sin of ignorance; but this enmity and wickedness is deliberate, with eyes open.

Then the Lord turns to another darkening influence, the desire to get possessions here. The Lord would call attention to a life of a different character from anything that consisted in possessions here; that does not constitute life, but to be rich towards God, that is life. To be rich towards God is surely an object of desire for all of us. The Lord disclaims the position of a judge or divider, but I think He brought home to the person who spoke to Him that he as well as his brother was moved by covetousness. Covetousness often presents itself as prudence; the great corrective would be to seek to be rich towards God. If a thing is not adding to my wealth towards God, it is not contributing to my life at all. It is very important that we should not handle business in a covetous spirit as wanting to increase possessions here. We want the things that will increase life Godward, so that: there may be more joy, and more praise, and more consciousness of divine wealth — that is the great object of desire for us. If we are on the line of covetousness, of pulling down barns and building greater, we do not want the Father's care; it means we are able to care for ourselves. To be rich towards God is to be in the appreciation of mercy; a person who appreciates mercy is rich towards God; he appreciates that in which God's riches consist. There are outgoings towards God, his wealth is for the pleasure of God, there is the sense of divine favour in Christ, and the acquisition of what lies in the Spirit, getting possession of an inheritance that no selfish brother can deprive him of. All these things make us wealthy towards God. What is the gain of ministry if it does not increase our wealth God-ward? One might be making self a centre even in regard of

spiritual things; but anything that ministers to life makes us rich Godward, and we are more furnished to contribute to the pleasure of God. That is the object of ministry. One who is exercised to be rich towards God becomes a special subject of the care of God, because anxiety about circumstances here might be a very darkening influence, It would be sad if we found we had been working hard for ourselves, taking up the responsibility of caring for ourselves and missing the blessed privilege of being cared for by God. A friend and confessor of Christ, and one rich towards God, becomes of the greatest interest to God; there is life there and a body there that are of deep concern to the blessed God. If He cares so much for a flower or a bird, what will He do for a friend or confessor of Christ, or one rich towards God?

There is a difference in this chapter between what we have need of and what the Father gives us. The things He gives us are far superior to the things we have need of; but as long as we are here we have need of food and clothing, and the Father knows that. It is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom, and that is far greater than feeding and clothing us. If He will give you the kingdom, a whole realm of blessed things perfectly in accord with His own mind, He will assuredly give you bread to eat, and clothes to wear, so that you may be perfectly free for that kingdom. On the Father's side it is His good pleasure to give us the kingdom; and on our side it should be our pleasure to seek it, and to be relieved in the sense of divine care so that the provision for temporal need is not the ruling principle of life. The principle of covetousness does not rule, but we are perfectly free in the sense of the Father's care to seek the kingdom. The Father's kingdom is a wonderful thing; that is what is to be sought, and we can all seek it. There is nothing that has any kind of prior claim. People say that they have not time for spiritual things, but there is nothing that has a prior claim to the Father's kingdom. The little flock are a select company, suited to receive such a gift as the kingdom; they are apart from hypocrisy and covetousness, and free from all fear; they are friends of Christ, identified with the testimony.

The Father's kingdom is a realm ordered according to the Father. It is the place where God is known in supreme grace as Father; and the saints are in the place of dependence, praying in the light of that revelation, and having the gift of the Spirit out of heaven. These things constitute the principal features of the Father's kingdom. The Father's kingdom is an order of things morally according to His mind. God is known there in the relationship of Father: "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" and "Your Father knows you have need of these things". All is now being worked out in conditions of outward smallness — in a "little flock".

On the Father's side it is His good pleasure to give us this wonderful realm of spiritual good; all the good in the heart of the blessed God is brought out to overcome every influence of evil here. On our side there is to be seeking in contrast to care and covetousness. "Sell what ye have and give alms" — the testimony of God comes out in giving; we are here to give away spiritual riches, gospel wealth, but we are also to give alms. It is obvious from Scripture that alms-giving is very acceptable to God, because it is the expression of His own character of goodness and bounty.

Let us get our souls steeped in the grace of the Lord's words and think of what is positive, so that, if there were not one consistent Christian on the face of the earth, the privilege is open to each to be the first. The Lord does not come down from the elevation of divine thoughts to suit us; He would elevate us to them; we must begin on that side. If there is a lack in the spirit of giving, it arises from the poverty of the saints, and we must get the saints enriched. Are we all conscious of being rich towards God, and of having received the illimitable wealth of the realm He has given us, a realm where everything is marked by beauty and suitability to God? If that is in our souls we shall look at possessions here in the light of their relation to heaven, and we shall go definitely into business, so to speak, in view of heaven — selling and making purses which do not grow old. Our concern is not to be in the spirit of a covetous man who wants all he can get, or of the man oppressed with care, afraid of not having enough and of what he may lose. We are to take up business in the light of heaven. Our heavenly-mindedness depends, I am convinced, on what comes from practical every-day life. The moment we get to business, as we have been speaking of it, we become heavenly-minded and have Jesus as our "own" Lord (verse 36). That means that if He is not Lord to any one else on earth, He is to me. It is open to us all to be on this line, and if others do not take it up it is still open to me.

I think that giving alms is far too casual a matter with us. The giving of alms and prayer are linked together, showing how important it is that giving should be done in active dependence on God, and not on the line of human kindness and benevolence. It is easy to give money or goods away, but nothing demands more grace than to give so that there is a real shining of the character of God. If we are distributing gospel wealth we have to pray for open doors and access to souls; we are concerned to have someone to receive. Now in giving alms we are just as dependent on God as in giving gospel wealth; we should pray for opportunities to give in such a way as would glorify God. We are not to be marked by covetousness or care, but to hold all things in relation to God. As a man begins to have treasure in heaven he becomes heavenly-hearted. What we are possessed of here is an opportunity

to give. Treasure in heaven is very safe, and it is also the way we become heavenly-hearted. We need this in order to be qualified to be His bondmen in charge of His establishment while He is away; it is preparatory to our being able to take charge. He has an establishment, and He leaves it in charge of those to whom He has become their own Lord. Mary said, "They have taken away my Lord", and Paul said, "Christ Jesus *my* Lord". It is good to individualise ourselves sometimes.

The Lord has a household, an establishment, and He has left His bondmen in charge of it. He may come at any time, so everything is to be ready to receive Him. The wedding is merely a general figure; the point is that on any such occasion every servant is to be on the alert. We are to be on the alert, so that when the Lord comes we open to Him immediately; He has not to wait a moment. The bondmen are in charge; it is part of the condition contemplated. The knock shows that the Lord will intimate His desire to come in. We must disabuse our minds of any thought of the rapture in this scripture; it is not the Lord's coming to take His saints away. It is the Lord's establishment here; He is absent and may come at any time or repeatedly. The parable suggests His coming more than once: "if he come in the second watch *and* come in the third watch", verse 38. Visitations are in view here. It is solemn that Laodicea kept Him outside.

A house is contemplated in verse 39 where the Lord is not expected. In regard of that establishment the Lord is unwelcome; it is like what He said to Sardis, "I will come upon thee as a thief". This is in contrast with the house where there is no authority but the Lord's, where every bondman is girded and illuminated, and ready at any moment to let Him in. For those who are in the house with another authority set up like Jezebel, the Lord has to say as He did to Sardis, "I will come upon you as a thief". If we are not looking for Him He has to take the thief character.

Diotrephes had taken the Lord's place (see 3 John) and was casting out of the assembly people who were the friends of Christ, to whom He was "their own Lord"; there was no room in his mind for such persons, for he was master of the house. Diotrephes would not have welcomed a visit from John, much less a visit from John's Master. John represented the true Master of the house, and when he came in with authority it would soon be settled as to Diotrephes. This verse gives a clue to the whole position: these two houses still stand; the Lord's establishment entrusted to faithful and prudent bondmen who cherish Him as their own Lord, with loins girded and lamps burning, ready for instant service at any moment of the night — for it is a night scene, we do not need lamps in the day time — and then there is the other house which has a

master. When we come together we should recognise that we are the Lord's household and that at any time He may visit His household. We see what He says, "If he come in the second watch, *and* come in the third watch" — that suggests repeated visitations, and however often He came they were to be ready.

These faithful bondmen are made to sit down at table and their own Lord comes and serves them. I do not think that is in heaven, for He says, "coming up he will serve them". It is the idea of coming up to serve; it is intended to show us the extraordinary blessedness that awaits those who are maintaining conditions during the Lord's absence. If He comes in He comes to serve, and if we are in the spirit of these bondmen we shall hear His knock, and when we open He will come in and serve us. We want to get a sense in our hearts that we are holding a place for the Lord in the world that has rejected Him; it is a place He loves to visit, and when He comes He knocks, and when we open we get the most wonderful privilege. Our service is to hold a place collectively for Him, to stand with loins girded and lights burning ready for instant service. We have not to get ourselves into trim when a knock or call comes. We so often stand ungirded; we let our thoughts and affections go ungirded here and there after other things. One has so often felt one had a splendid opportunity for service and one has let it go. The thought is that we stand ready for instant service; our lamp is to be burning so that we are not in the dark. No one in the Lord's service is groping in the dark.

The reference to the Son of man coming brings in His universal rights. The household is a little narrower thought than what is universal. He leaves His own household and His bondmen to hold it for Him: there is a sphere which is held for His pleasure during His absence, and He is entitled to come there, and to be received whenever He comes. It is not exactly an administration entrusted, but more the personal relation of heart to Himself; they are waiting their own Lord and cherishing the thought that He may come at any hour, or repeatedly; and whenever He comes they are to open immediately. The reward is not a place of administration, but His personal act of love towards them; the reward corresponds with the place of trust. Nothing could be more precious than that the Lord should serve us, giving us a sense of the love that delights to serve. He comes in and the result is the servants are made to sit down and He comes up and serves them.

If the Lord serves it is without measure because He would feed us with all He enjoys Himself. It is a great thing to look for it and not to put it off to some future day, to look for it *now*. Then as being served by the Lord we know how to serve the household. He is the first One to serve the household, and it

seems to me He sets the pattern for all the service in the household, so that anyone who had been served by Him would know the manner and style suitable to the household — there would be a grace about the service that would bring the Lord into evidence. I think it would give character to all the service in the house. "I am among you as one that serves". That was His attitude and character all the time He was serving.

The fact that the Lord speaks of coming twice shows that the experience might be repeated. The setting of the picture seems to be simple; the Lord has a place here which is held for Him by His affectionate and faithful bondmen; the place is to be so held for Him that at any moment of the night He can come and be welcomed, and He tells us the result that when the door is opened He comes forth and makes them sit down and serves them. The Lord in John 14 says, "I am coming to you", as if to say it would be characteristic of the time when He would be gone to the Father; He would be coming to His own and they would look out for Him and be ready for Him, and welcome any visit from Him. It suggests visitations.

The second and third watch intimate the progress of the night; the night is going on and He may come repeatedly as it goes on: If He comes once they are not to sleep for He may come again. Every visitation of the Lord should quicken the desire for more, so that if we have one visitation we want another.

Peter raises the question as to whom this instruction is for, and the Lord says, It is for those to whom responsibility has been committed. "Who then is the faithful and prudent steward?" — it applies to those who have been entrusted with the ministry of food to the household. Personal responsibility is emphasised. The apostles in the first place were faithful and prudent stewards, and they fed the household in full measure and in a seasonable way. Both measure and seasonableness are important. Paul, speaking of coming to Rome, says, "I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of Christ" — the measure would be full. Epaphras wanted a full measure for his beloved Colossians; he prays that they "may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God". Then the teaching is seasonable; we cannot transpose epistles. We could not send the epistle to the Corinthians to the Philippians, or the epistle to the Philippians to the Colossians. If we want to understand the seasonableness of the corn measure we should do well to study the epistles and see how the faithful and prudent stewards fed the household; we have actual examples of faithful and prudent servants who did it.

The steward introduces the thought of administration. There is nothing administrative in the first thought of waiting and watching for the Lord; it is His own place before the hearts of His servants. But here (Verses 42 - 44) it is

an administration entrusted, servants set over the household to minister food, and the reward is in keeping with the service: "Blessed is that bondman whom his Lord on coming shall find doing thus ... he will set him over all he has". The Lord gives him a great place of administration. It suggests the thought of prudence and fidelity; the Lord may give great enlargement, so that if a servant begins with a small sphere of service the Lord may give a larger sphere. I think there is the principle of a widely extended sphere of service, though actually when the Lord takes up the inheritance His faithful servants will have a great place in it,

Now is not the time for exercising rule; our capacity for rule depends on our ability to feed. The wicked bondman takes up the place of rule, and feeding stops and beating begins, We see in the epistles to the Corinthians Paul's beautiful spirit;

he would not take the place of having dominion over them but as being helper of their joy; 2 Corinthians 1: 24.

The corn would suggest what is made good in Christ as risen and even glorified. Peter had a feeding commission for the lambs and for the sheep; and the elders at Ephesus had been made overseers by the Holy Spirit to shepherd the assembly of God. There are those who have responsibility in that way, and there are different measures of responsibility according to what is given to us; we are not told to make bricks without straw, or to go to warfare at our own charges. It is a question of handling what has been given to us. It was said to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord". The thing has been received; we have not to work up something out of our own resources. The corn is given, the stock is there; it has only to be served out with fidelity and prudence. Peter says in his first epistle (chapter 4: 10), "each according as he has received a gift, ministering it to one another, as good stewards of the various grace of God. If any one minister — as of strength which God supplies; that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the might for the ages of ages". This brings out how everything is supplied. The servants have not to find the food for the household; it is put in their hands, and the ability to serve is God-given, so it is for each one of us seriously to face the question as to what we have. My measure is the measure of faith and grace which God has dealt to me. I have not responsibility for the measure you have, but I have as to my own, and the Lord would raise the question with us what measure of grace has been allotted to each brother or sister, for whether large or small that is what we have to use for the good of the household. If we want to know how the lambs and sheep are to be fed and shepherded, we cannot do better than

study Peter's epistles; we shall see there the kind of food that a man served out who had a special commission and the ability to exercise it.

The hindrance with us often is that we do not really take stock of what has been entrusted to us. The grace of God is "all various" or "many-coloured", 1 Peter 4: 10. In Romans 12 we are exhorted to think soberly according to the measure of faith which God has dealt to each of us. Now what measure of faith has He dealt to me? It is no use to say He has not dealt a measure of faith to me, because He says He has; and so it is well to take stock and find out the measure. Peter says it is grace given us. When we have taken stock we must realise that what we have is for the benefit of the household; it is not given for private consumption. The spiritual stock that we have lies in the knowledge of God which has come to us through Jesus Christ. If we have not any stock we had better look into the matter and find out why it is. There is a great deal of stock that is being, as it were, shut up in a store-room instead of being served out. My impression is that there is an immense amount of latent gift, a great deal of divinely given ability not exercised through different reasons. It is for every one of us to take that to heart and see to it that if there is ability it is exercised, and that we are good stewards of the manifold grace of God. The increase of the knowledge of God goes on; the result of the brethren coming in contact with one another is a constant increase in the knowledge of God, and a greater and fuller volume of praise when we come together in assembly. The measure of that is the measure in which we are fed. Peter is much on the line of addition and increase and growth. We want to give an impression to the brethren of great stores as we come into contact with them — not that it is a lean time, but a very fat time. The true character of the house is that there is a full measure of corn seasonably served out. We cannot admit for a moment that anything else will do for the Lord's household; His household is so beautifully ordered that nothing less than full measure and perfect seasonableness will do. Am I doing my bit in this wonderful establishment? If I am a scullery maid I cannot do the work of the head cook or the chief butler, but every servant has his bit, and it is not reproach to me if I cannot do what you do. Nothing gives one greater joy than to see a brother or sister doing something which one cannot do oneself. It gives one profound joy and one thanks the Lord for it, for we all feel how restricted we are; we can only do our little bit, and the household needs the accumulated service of all. We do not want to be beating our fellow-bondmen, finding fault with them; we are thankful to see them doing their bit. There is a ministry in the Lord as was said to Archippus; and the more we pray the more our service will be purified. For instance a brother might be able to speak very well and might get a place by his speaking, but that might be natural ability. The ability to

charm people by the way you put things out might be merely a human quality; but as a man prays he would seek more and more that his ministry might not be a human impression; he would not like to impress people by human personality, but he would long that his ministry might be in the Lord. He would not want his ministry to command admiration and applause, but that it should do the work of God — that is what is wanted.

The Lord in His administration had accorded a certain place of service to Archippus, and he was not disposed to fill it up. Most of us are guilty of that. I believe for every one who goes beyond his measure there are nine who do not come up to it; and the reason that one goes beyond is that the other nine are not coming up to it and so leaving room for the one.

Then there is the bondman who says, "My lord delays his coming" and the sense of responsibility is relaxed; it leads to fault-finding, beating other servants and taking the place of authority. He is marked by self-indulgence, eating and drinking and being drunken — he is the wicked bondman, and his end is to be cut in two. It is a great contrast to verses 44 and 45. The principle of responsibility is very important; we are apt not to think enough of it. The Lord's support depends on our definitely taking up responsibility.

There is such a thing as knowing the Lord's will and not doing it. We see the principle of government here; the Lord exercises it even now. It is a very serious thing to be well acquainted with the Lord's mind. To receive light means responsibility and more "stripes" if we do not prepare ourselves to do the Lord's will. I think the Lord in His government deals out stripes where they are due. His government goes on; and I believe the Lord will not suffer in us what He suffers in some of our brethren who have less light. Some of our brethren do things with a good conscience and the Lord suffers it, but if we do them we come under His discipline. His government goes on and we are all under it, and it is a mercy that we are.

The grace in which the Lord came is greatly magnified in this gospel, but it is not less true that He came to cast a fire upon the earth. It necessarily follows that if God brings in what is of Himself it judges everything not of Himself. It must be so. It is a very serious consideration that, the whole light of what God is in grace having been brought in, it now becomes the judgment of everything contrary to it. Paul speaks of the law not having its application to a righteous person, "but to the lawless and insubordinate, to the impious and sinful, to the unholy and profane ... and if any other thing is opposed to sound teaching, according to the glad tidings of the glory of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted", I Timothy I: 9. That is, everything contrary to the glad tidings is brought under judgment by the glad tidings coming in.

Grace reigns in the soul of the believer to bring about self-judgment; that is the normal effect of the light of God. In that way the fire comes into the soul of the repentant sinner; the fire burns in the way of self-judgment, but if the fire does not cause self-judgment it makes manifest the necessity for judgment. The fire is cast on the earth; the Lord says, "what will I if it be already kindled?" He, as it were, shrinks from the thought; it excites feelings of distress and almost horror in His mind, but it was so.

Nothing manifests the lawless state of men like this gospel. The law does not do it; the law says, Do this and do that, and you must not do this and that. But in the gospel God comes out and says, See what provision I have made for you, see what I have done for you; and man's answer is, I do not want you and I do not care to be reconciled to you. That is how the gospel manifests the state of man, but it produces self-judgment where it is received; it brings about repentance, but it throws a solemn light on those who do not receive it; the fire is cast on the earth. God coming near to man is casting fire on the earth; it has brought such light that it casts the fire of judgment on those who do not repent; they can escape by repentance. The whole system of darkness is judged, and the only way men can escape from it is by repentance. The scribes, the Pharisees and the lawyers were judged; the whole system was judged by God being there in grace, and those who repented turned away from it all; they turned to God in grace and repented of everything in the system of darkness. And it must be so today. I do not see how there could be repentance without everyone being salted with fire. Isaiah said, "Woe is me, for I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips". He felt he must get away from self and from his associations; they were all as bad as he was, they were all unclean — that was the effect of the fire coming in. If the light comes in with one person it exposes others. If any one of us begins to fear God and walk in His ways, it condemns those who do not fear God. One praying man in a town condemns all the town because they do not pray. If a few saints seek to walk in the truth they condemn all those who belong to the traditional religion of Christendom; a few walking in truth bring judgment on all contrary to it.

The blind man of John 9 condemned the synagogue. There was the work of God in him and the Pharisees were against it and so were condemned by it. The proper effect of any testimony for God individually or collectively is that it judges everything contrary to it; so it brings not peace but division. The Lord says, Do you think I am come to bring peace on earth? "Nay, I say unto you, but rather division". His coming would divide families. If a household is not subjugated to Christ there will be division. The time has not come yet for universal peace, but the bringing in of what is of God will bring division. In

Genesis we read that God divided the light from the darkness. It is God's principle; if He brings in light it must make division.

In verse 59 the Lord calls attention to going along with an adverse party before the magistrate; when the case comes before the magistrate it will have to be dealt with, and a righteous judgment given, but on the way there is opportunity for reconciliation. God is saying now, If I am in the position of the adverse party there is opportunity to be reconciled. The Lord is saying this to Christendom now. The time has not yet come for judgment and final condemnation. It is in keeping with what He says to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3; He tells them to repent. He is the adverse party; He says, "I have against you". If there is anything about any of us that is not in accord with Christ, He says, Repent of that, have done with it, get it judged, be reconciled. It is very searching. The whole principle is that man is offered opportunity to repent; every individual has opportunity to repent, and the church has opportunity to repent.

"This time" (verse 56) is the character of the dispensation. They could look round and say, It is a fine day; they could understand natural things, but the great spiritual character of the moment they did not see. Jehovah was there in the Person of Jesus and they could be reconciled to Him on the simple principle of repentance. Now this is a universal principle: it is a time when everyone can be reconciled on the footing of repentance. God says, I am compelled to be adverse because your ways are not Mine, but you have only to repent and I am ready to be reconciled. The Lord has a controversy with the assembly as He had with Israel, and there is opportunity now to be reconciled, but it is always on the basis of repentance.

LUKE 13

Luke 13

The opening verses of this chapter show that all blessing must be on the basis of repentance. So when they spoke to Him of the Galileans slain by Pilate, the Lord said, "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish". It is the only ground on which we can come into accord with Christ; it is the ground of self-judgment. It is the only fruit God is looking for when failure has come in. He is not looking for good in men, but He is looking for the recognition of their badness; He says, If you will only recognise you are bad, I can do something with you. The thought in the minds of the Jews was that those who were killed were very bad men, but the Lord says, No, it is a warning to you; you will all perish like that if you do not repent. I have no doubt it had special application to the nation. They did not repent, and in the overthrow of Jerusalem over a million Jews perished; the streets were rivers of blood.

The fig tree (verses 6 - 9) represents Israel, who were given another opportunity of repentance. Israel were cursed because they did not yield any fruit of repentance. God would have blessed them to the full but repentance was not there. The natural man never judges himself and God has ceased to expect that he will, so He says, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforth for ever". Nathaniel had judged himself; he had had everything out and the Lord had heard all he said under the fig-tree, and He could say, There is a man without any guile, who has made a clean breast of it all, and I know all about it. Jeremiah 24 speaks of good and bad figs: the good figs were the people who submitted to go into captivity because they deserved it; they judged themselves and accepted what they deserved. The bad figs were those who remained in Jerusalem and held on to their religious pretensions; so God cursed them. There is the principle again of self-judgment: God blessed those that judged themselves and cursed those who refused. Hezekiah had a boil that nearly caused his death, but a plaster of figs was put on and that recovered him. A boil represents a violent outbreak of the flesh, but under the blessed healing power of self-judgment there is recovery. This principle of repentance is of the utmost importance for all of us. If anything is wrong between two brothers or sisters it can only be healed on the principle of self-judgment. The question is, What have I done wrong? I have nothing to do with what the other has done. In every case of difference between brethren there is generally some wrong on both sides: there has seldom been a case where all is black on one side and all white on the other. If I begin to judge the little bit wrong on my side, it is much easier for the other party to judge himself.

Nineteen centuries have passed since the death of Jesus; it is the longest period there has been, and it is just about to close. It is pure mercy that we have not been taken away. The Lord has perhaps left us here because there may be something in our ways or spirits to which He is an adverse party, and He wants to give us opportunity to repent. He is saying to us, I want you to be in perfect harmony and agreement with Me.

The woman we read of in verses 10 - 14 would represent those in whom there was the fruit of repentance but who were not yet in the good of the intervention of God in Christ, and therefore in bondage to Satan. It is important to recognise the two classes: the unrepentant nation not availing themselves of the opportunity for repentance, not seeking to be reconciled to the adverse party; and the remnant who were bound down in the sense of their sinful condition. It is in principle like Romans 7. We see the use Satan would make of godly exercises. Satan had bound this woman, who was a believer, for she was a daughter of Abraham, one of the family of faith whom the Lord had come to lay hands on, but she was not in liberty. She did not know the great deliverance in Christ that God had brought in. Under the legal system even "the children" were subject to bondage. The children are recognised as a distinct class in Hebrews 2; the Lord did not take hold of angels but of the seed of Abraham. "Since therefore the children partake of blood and flesh, he also in like manner took part of the same, that through death he might annul him who has the might of death, that is the devil; and might set free all those who through fear of death through the whole of their life were subject to bondage". That supposes persons marked by piety and the fear of God.

The thought of God is that His people should not be bowed down, but here is a daughter of Abraham so bowed down that she could see nothing but herself; she could not lift up her face to see the Lord. Souls in this condition always come under the Lord's notice. He was anointed to preach to those bound; this woman had been bound for eighteen years, and God had noticed that here was one of the children who the whole of their life were subject to bondage. This woman was in bondage; it was not activity of sin. It is like Romans 7; there is delight in the law of God but no power. Then the Lord comes in as the anointed Deliverer; He puts His hands on her and looses her. That is His pleasure; the pleasure of Jehovah prospers in His hand. The Lord is well pleased to set souls free; if people go on in bondage for eighteen years they do not know the pleasure of God. God did not have these records penned by His servants as history; they are pictures of what the Lord lives to do now. If there is any element of bondage in my soul now, He is as near to me as He

was to the woman, and He carries out the pleasure of God. It was not the pleasure of God that she should be bound.

The moral condition of the nation was set forth in the fig tree that bore no fruit, but this woman represents the remnant, the subject of divine working, the daughter of Abraham, part of the family of faith. Thousands now belong to the family of faith; there has been repentance and God has found a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, but Satan would like to keep them bound, occupied with themselves and not able to look up, like the one in Romans 7. As soon as we see the liberty in Another we can look up and say, "I thank God". Two good chapters to read together are Romans 7 and Isaiah 53. Everyone who has read Isaiah 53 has noticed that all through it is *He* and *His*; it is just the contrast to the *I* and *me* of Romans 7. Another Person has come in and gone through death in order that He may take up the pleasure of God and give effect to it. Now the deliverance from bondage lies in getting away from *I* to *Him*

This woman had to wait for the Lord to come out as the anointed Deliverer; it would seem her bondage commenced when He was twelve years old. The Lord waited eighteen years from the moment when He expressed His intelligent relations with God, which He did when He stayed in Jerusalem and was with the doctors in the temple; but He waited for the anointing. It is wonderful to think of grace waiting for its opportunity, and weakness waiting for its deliverance, for eighteen years. The moment came when the Lord was anointed, set free for His work, and this was the time for the woman's deliverance. According to the pleasure of God there is no waiting now. Perhaps many truly repentant souls never get life and liberty until their death-beds, but that is Satan's work, not God's. One might say this woman was made straight in Another. He laid His hands on her; He came into identification with her; it was this that liberated her. In figure we are all in the anointed Deliverer; deliverance is brought in and applied by the touch of His hands.

There was the speaking of Jesus as well as the touch. The speaking is like liberating ministry, but the touch is like the Spirit given. There is liberating ministry, the ministry of Christ as the anointed Preacher. Every one who fears God would listen to Christ and the setting faith of all that came in as the result of His sin-bearing. He knows all in the mind of God, and He went through all the suffering to make it good to us. Then the touch indicates the work of the Spirit; Christ touches souls now by the Spirit. Souls may listen to a most delivering ministry, but they do not get deliverance until they are prepared for it; no doubt this woman's eighteen years were a process in which she was learning a good deal. She was one of "the children" and one of those who

repented. There is necessity for repentance, whether we regard ourselves as sinners or as part of a ruined profession; but here we see the positive side, the making straight. Here we see Satan holding in bondage one who really had faith, yet was bowed together, not able to look up. The law made nothing perfect; it manifested imperfection, but the Lord came to replace it by perfection; He made her straight, so that she might glorify God. We see in Jesus God making Himself known in His thoughts of grace: He not only makes them known but gives effect to them. If God comes in for His people in all their sinfulness and weakness they have a new kind of power to lift up their hearts in joy and righteousness before His face. The Lord would bring out here the interest of God in His creature. Even man would take an interest in his ox or his ass and would care for it; if man is so interested in his creature surely God is entitled to be interested in His people, especially in those of the faith family. This brings out the gracious thoughts of God. The Lord was here to express them; He seems to say, Will you not let Me be as good as you are? He puts it that way, but it is terrible that He says "Hypocrites". The religious man will not allow God to be as kind as he is himself. It is astonishing but true.

The sabbath was a blessed expression of the goodness of God, a day of rest and refreshment. It was made for man; we might have expected the Lord to say it was made for God. Religious man turned it into bondage, but the Lord gave it its true character by setting a daughter of Abraham in full liberty on the sabbath — she had never had a real sabbath before. "All who were opposed to him were ashamed; and all the crowd rejoiced at all the glorious things which were being done by him". We are in a time of glorious things; we should not entertain any thought of anything else. The system we belong to subsists in glory; it is not only glory at the finish. Everyone thinks of glory at the end, but our system begins in glory, and there are glorious things all the time.

The real character of the kingdom of God is a system of glorious things; and that makes it so sad that it has become a great tree and a leavened mass (verse 21). The thought of this seemed to come into the Lord's mind as a contrast. He was bringing in a glorious system, but He knew what it was going to work out to in His absence — a great tree and a leavened mass. So that in that connection it becomes us to strive earnestly to enter in — there is a narrow door and nothing goes through that door but Christ. It is just so far as we have acquired character from the system of glory that we can go through the narrow door; nothing else will go through. The Lord was looking at the public form which things would take; He would introduce the kingdom of God, but He would leave it to work out in man's responsibility, and it would become something great which He never intended. There is a narrow door which will not admit anything of man after the flesh; nothing of the flesh can go through

that door. It is a matter of earnest striving to go through, a serious business for us. The Lord is pointing out the seriousness and difficulty of the present situation. I knew a place where a preacher came for a long time, and after him another came and said, He has told you how easy it is to be saved, and now I have come to tell you how difficult it is to be saved. Both are true. If Christ is to be everything for us as righteousness before God, He must be everything down here. That necessitates a narrow door so that nothing of the flesh can get through. It is easy to be influenced by the great tree and the leavened mass. The tree is big because there is so much of man in the flesh there; and the mass is inflated because there is so much of the wickedness of man there. Do we understand that not a bit of that will do for God? If we want to be in the kingdom we must go through the narrow door. If Christ is all for righteousness He must be all for practical Christian life. That is the narrow door; nothing goes through but what pleases God. Then there will be no fear of finding a shut door.

The Lord spoke solemnly to people near Him, eating in His presence. They had not sought to get in at the narrow door; no one will ever seek to get in at the narrow door and not get in. But the door will be shut — people will want to get in to the public blessings of the kingdom, but they have neglected the narrow door. They would like to get in without ever facing the reproach of the kingdom. There is nothing about them that the Lord can recognise: they had been religious and in His company, near to Him, but He calls them workers of iniquity. They were going in for what was of the flesh in a religious way, and that is just what Christendom is doing now. Everything not Christ is iniquity, so the Lord says, I do not know you. There was nothing that the Lord could recognise as kindred with Himself. The Lord knows every repentant soul. He could not say to a repentant soul, I do not know you. The repentant sinner gives joy to heaven. It is the most elementary feature of the work of God; every repentant sinner is well known to heaven and to the Lord. And every bit of appreciation of Christ makes one to be well known to Him; He takes note of it.

The Lord called attention to the extended character of the kingdom of God: it was not at all to be a limited range of things, for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be there, and people from east and west and from north and south, and would lie down at table in the kingdom of God. The thoughts of God are not narrow; but the word comes in a searching way, "Behold, there are last who shall be first, and there are first who shall be last".

When the kingdom of God will be in display, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob will be seen in it, and a vast company from all quarters will be brought into the

communion of grace. The kingdom of God is looked at as a place of repose and satisfaction, where people "lie down" — it would seem to be the communion of divine grace. The door is narrow for present entrance, but what is entered into is very extensive. The Lord had pointed the contrast between this and the public side, the mustard tree and the leavened meal of verse 21. Publicly the kingdom would be great and corrupted, so that now it necessitates that there should be a striving to enter the narrow door so as to come into the kingdom vitally. All the elements that make the mustard tree and the leavened mass have no place in the kingdom vitally though they get a place publicly. If we wish to be in the kingdom vitally we must be free from the elements that have made the tree great, and have leavened the meal. The Lord's word? "the last shall be first", may be that those last in the profession of Christianity are first in that which is vital. That is the great exercise of the present time; we should want to be last in what is great and corrupted by an evil influence. Those who are last in that will be first in the kingdom of God vitally.

It is easy to become self-centred and to lose sight of divine grace. The thought of God's election is always introduced as an enlarging thought; in God's election He secures many. What the company in verse 29 enjoy is common to all; they all lie down at table, and the one who enjoys most of the grace is first in the kingdom. It is not ability but enjoyment of grace that makes anyone first in the kingdom. None of us would come in but for election; God's election secures a great company. It is always put that way in Scripture. God is pleased to secure a great company in His kingdom — Abraham, and in him all nations are blessed.

All this is very searching and exercising. No doubt the Pharisees felt the exercising character of it, and they tried to intimidate the Lord by telling Him Herod would kill Him, but their trying to frighten Him only brought out the steadfastness and undeviating character of His course. He would not be deflected from His course by Herod or anyone else. We see imperfections in the history of His servants but none in the Master Himself. He says, "Behold I cast out demons and accomplish cures today and tomorrow" — nothing would interfere with what He was doing — then the third day is resurrection. The Lord was moving on to the stability of resurrection, and then He would be perfected. He is perfected by going through death into resurrection; the faithful mercies of David are secured in a risen One. The third day is a hint of resurrection and that involves death, and so the Lord was perfected as the Vessel of grace; He would not have been perfected if He had not gone through death. All the grace expressed in the Lord as Man on earth came through

death into resurrection. The whole system of divine grace is perfected in Him, so that there is no flaw in it. We belong to a system of perfection.

Verse 33 is a little different: "I must needs walk today and tomorrow and the day following". There is nothing about the third day, it refers to the Lord's walk here which went right on to death; He pursued His course to the very end, undeviated, undeflected. His face was set stedfastly to go up to Jerusalem; He must go there to complete His course and to suffer in Jerusalem just as all the prophets had suffered. His "path uncheered by earthly smiles led only to the cross". He was to be rejected in the most highly favoured city on earth, and because it was the most highly favoured it was the most guilty. The Lord distinctly takes the place of Jehovah in this wonderful appeal: "How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen her brood under her wings, and ye would not". It was Jehovah in the yearnings of His love over the city He had chosen; He had often been prepared to take them under the warmth and cherishing of His protecting love, but they would not. There is an exceeding dignity about this as He moves on. There is the thought of deliberation — "I must needs walk today and tomorrow and the day following". He had a definite course and nothing would move Him. It behoved Him to suffer; He moves on in the greatest deliberation and purpose. It is good to have the eye fixed on Him.

Christendom is in much the same position now as Jerusalem was then; it was *the* city on earth where God's favour had been known. One feels the solemnity of the Lord's speaking thus for the last time to the city that would not have Him: "ye would not". It is very much like the attitude He takes up in regard to Laodicea: He is standing at the door and is ready to come in in the yearnings of His faithful love, but He is outside. Jehovah had been sending His servants and prophets to Jerusalem, and last of all He came Himself in the Person of Jesus and showed His willingness to cherish them. His attitude was boundless grace spite of all they were, but now He says, "Your house is left unto you", Him again until they said, They would not see "Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord". Their house was left to them; the Lord was, as it were, saying to them, If you will not have Me I must leave you to find how empty everything is without Me. How empty everything is without Christ! If Jehovah is rejected, what value is there in His house? It is left to them; the Lord speaks of it as "your house". The correspondence between the time when the Lord was on earth and today is remarkable; the Lord could address Christendom in the same way as He speaks here, at the end of a dispensation. We, too, are at the end of a period in which God is professedly honoured and the Lord is rejected. The Lord could say to us, Your house is left to you. What is Christianity without Christ?

In Laodicea Christ definitely refers to those who pride themselves on being Christians. We should be in the spirit of divine yearning over them; the Lord's attitude to the seven assemblies is the model for ours. If He stands at the door and knocks it is our privilege to knock too, to do all we can, to be ready to call the attention of everyone to Christ. The prophetic voice of Christ is there even if men do not listen; the Lord has not ceased to speak in prophetic warning and in love. There is no more touching appeal in Scripture than this, the yearnings of the heart of the rejected Christ. Jerusalem having been the favoured place was the most guilty now; Jerusalem is the greatest expression of grace because the gospel started there. One would like to feel about everything as the Lord does, to be in the spirit of yearning over others.

LUKE 14

Luke 14

In this chapter the Lord is not only regarding things with compassion, but He comes in with healing. The Pharisees and the doctors of the law were themselves set forth in the dropsical man; he was a sample of the company. They were watching to condemn the One in their midst who was Jehovah, but He saw the inflated condition of the dropsical man as evidence of their state, and He was there to reduce man to his right dimensions. To receive divine grace a man has to be healed of his dropsy; nothing will take away man's self-importance but the action of the Lord Himself. If a man is going about to establish his own righteousness he is dropsical; he is not prepared to take the lowest place. There is no other way of promotion but to take the lowest place, and no one but the Lord Jesus could heal my self-importance and make me willing to take that place. He alone can reduce man to his proper dimensions, and when he is reduced the Lord can exalt him. It is a matter of sovereignty, because the man did not ask to be healed, and the company were averse to it; the Lord took him and sovereignly healed him. Man made the Sabbath minister to his self-importance, and people sought out the first seats — that is self-importance. Every one of us has had that disease and no one but the Lord can heal it.

In Philippians 2 we read that the Lord made Himself of no reputation; the One in the form of God who could claim equality with God made Himself of no reputation. He came down to go to the cross for us; but we have to come down from a diseased condition to be prepared to take the place of the last, to give up all our self-importance. It is the last who are going to be first. That very self-importance makes me an object of interest to God; if I realise that, it makes me ready to be reduced. All the things that mark our moral degradation awaken interest in the heart of God. When we begin to see we are self-important under the Lord's teaching, we loathe ourselves, and think God must loathe us too; but He loves us and says, I will heal you so that you may be small enough to come into My family for time and eternity. It is the action of His grace. If I take the lowest place, He says, "Go up higher". God will allow all kinds of things to operate to reduce our self-importance. No saint will go into the presence of the Lord with self-importance.

We may profess to think nothing of self; we are often ready to say self-depreciating things; but God is working to make it true, and it is in presence of His love that we learn to take the lowest place. The ministry God sends is the ministry of Christ, and if that gets its place in our hearts what is of flesh must

go out. If Christ comes in, self-importance must go out. But with most of us it is only a little; it is like a dissolving view. Self-importance begins to go and Christ begins to be seen. God is working on these lines with us, so we should leave it to the Lord to promote us. Let the Lord say, "Go up higher". Mary said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it to me according to thy word". She was ready to go up to the highest favour ever shown to one of the human family; but it was the Lord who exalted her. It was because she was so without self-importance that she could go up to the highest place. One would desire to be in the spirit of this, content to be last so that one might have a greater appreciation than anyone else of the favour of God to a poor sinner.

One who puts himself down in the last place commends himself to the favourable notice of the Lord, and to the favourable notice of the brethren too. If we see anyone wanting a prominent place, wanting to be noticed, and to be something, it degrades him, and our estimate of him is lowered. But if we see a spirit of readiness to put himself down in the last place, there is something commendable about it. No one can find fault with me for wanting to be last. Paul speaks of himself as "less than the least of all saints". I have often said, If Paul was less than the least, what size are you? It is a beautiful spirit in the kingdom, and a spirit that prepares us for the greatest enjoyment, because enjoyment comes through the appreciation of grace. The lower down I am, the more I am prepared for the exaltation of grace, like the man who was last and the host says, "Go up higher". It is never the Lord's mind to abase us; His thought is to exalt us, not to abase us; He would like us to do that, and then He can exalt us. If people walk in pride He knows how to abase them, but we do not want that. It pays to take the low place, it is to our advantage. If we want the best place it is to our disadvantage, for perhaps the Lord will give it to another and we shall feel ashamed; we "begin with shame to take the last place". The Lord would like us to be in a state where He can exalt us. We should each be esteeming others better than ourselves; we can do that if we are not taken up with our own quality but with the qualities of others, and admiring them, and looking upon them as better than our own. We may pretend to like the low place when we do not, but the Lord can take all the drops out of us.

In the next section of the chapter we come to the service of grace; we are not thinking of having a good time with people who can be as good to us as we to them, but we are thinking of the service of grace. Mutuality is not grace; grace is always one-sided. Mutuality is found in the family circle; love is in the family circle, but grace is always one-sided, it is all on God's side and flows down from God to unworthy men. We must have grace first, then love. In the family circle you have love and mutuality, but this is the kingdom, not the family, and

in the kingdom we are to be prepared for the service of grace. The one who has is prepared to put what he has at the disposal of the one who has not. Nothing else is righteous. If I am not prepared to put what I have at the service of the brethren without looking for any recompense, I am not on the line of the kingdom. So do not ask those who are as good as you are and can ask you back again, but ask the poor, and the blind, and the crippled. We have to act on God's principle — how does God act? He has everything for the poor sinner who has nothing, and we are never to get away from this service of grace. It is in the lowest place we become qualified to serve, because it is there we learn grace; and having learnt it we can express it to others without recompense. We do not want recompense at the present time, but only in resurrection. Paul did not want recompense; he said, "the more abundantly I love the less I am loved". The Lord would discourage us from providing for people who can give back as good as we give them, but He tells us to manifest grace to those who cannot give to us, and then we shall have something in resurrection. It is worth while to have recompense then. You may have great recompense for a time in this world, but you find that people who think well of you one moment will think badly of you the next.

Blessedness consists in acting like God: "It is more blessed to give than to receive". If I act like God nothing is more blessed; whatever we have in the economy of grace is to be at the service of those who cannot make any recompense. Many labour, and if they are not appreciated they feel unhappy as if deprived of their due; but we are to look on to resurrection. One would like what one does to be appreciated in resurrection. We need to live more under the eye of God for His pleasure, not to be approved of the brethren or anyone else: that is not the motive, though no doubt the brethren will approve.

The poor, crippled, lame and blind are people who cannot make recompense; not bad people, but people poorer than yourself. Amongst the people of God are found those that are defective, who might answer to cripples, blind and lame; but they are to be served in grace. The point is that God is going to have His recompense in resurrection when the saints are raised in spiritual conditions and there is not a trace of weakness or infirmity. There is nothing more one-sided than resurrection: there is a man dead in the grave, and the sovereign power of God acting in love comes in and raises him, and God has His recompense. When God looks down on the whole risen company, all like Christ, He will have His recompense. He will look down and see all the risen saints for one moment on earth. It is good to think of God having His recompense in resurrection, We have to admit we have not recompensed Him much in the present condition. God's people have been to Him, as Israel was,

a source of anxiety and grief. God has been seeing His poor people worldly and carnal, but He will have them all in spiritual conditions in resurrection eternally. What a recompense that will be! If I am working towards you in view of resurrection I shall be on spiritual lines; we should all work on spiritual lines in view of the resurrection. Those who act on these principles are righteous; they act like God, and will be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. God would have us to have regard to the recompense. It pleased Him for Moses to have respect to the recompense. Paul looked for a crown; speaking generally he saw all seeking their own things, but Paul will get his recompense when he sees the saints in resurrection, He says to the Thessalonians, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not ye also before our Lord Jesus at his coming?" That is the time when Paul will be recompensed. We shall be recompensed then even if we have to suffer now.

In the family there is mutuality which works both ways, but grace is one-sided. This gives the secret of the great supper; it is for the joy of God. The great supper was not to meet need, unless for the need of God to have His house filled. The great supper is to give expression to what is in the heart and mind of God. He makes ready according to the greatness of His own mind, and says, Come: it is all one-sided, None of them could contribute; all the people who had resources missed it, and those who had nothing were glad to come in.

It is God providing for His own satisfaction; there is not a word said about repentance or forgiveness. There is a greater setting forth of grace in this parable than in anything we have had in this gospel. It has been called the celebration of righteousness, and I think that is very beautiful. Those invited made excuses because they were not interested in the pleasure of God; they had another set of interests. The great point is now that God is saying: I have provided everything for the supreme satisfaction of My heart; I have secured My pleasure to the full — are you interested to come in and see what I enjoy? That is the gospel. The place where Jesus is glorified is the scene of God's delight; righteousness is accomplished, and God is saying to man, I want you to come in. God makes everything ready. The need that exists is on God's side; He makes the supper and He needs guests to come in and enjoy it. There is no thought of the antecedents of persons; it has nothing to do with their previous history. What God has prepared is for His own satisfaction; there is no reference here to man's state. It is God providing according to His own pleasure, and now He says "Come".

The invited guests were Israel, "whose are the promises". A certain people had the promises, and God had been intimating what He would do for His

pleasure, but Israel was not interested in God's pleasure any more than people are today. If we go out into the streets and speak of God's pleasure, people are not interested; they have their business, their families and other things to interest them.

The feast in Matthew 22 is what God has prepared for the honour of His Son, but in Luke 14 it is for the gratification of His own heart. He makes everything ready on the ground of the death of Christ. A Man has entered into the presence of God for His satisfaction, and the Holy Spirit has come down to report it so that there may be the enjoyment down here of what God has secured for His pleasure. Before it is in display in the world to come there is to be the enjoyment of it down here.

Not a single invited guest ever came in or ever will: all who come in are commanded or compelled. No one will come into the celebration of grace unless compelled. There is no room for man's free-will. God has provided for His own ineffable delight; it is not man in innocence or fallen, but Man in righteousness in heaven, a glorious Man in righteousness. God has secured His supreme delight in Christ and He is saying, Come in and enjoy it with Me. There are first the invited guests, then the blind and halt and crippled in the city, and then those in the "highways and fences", the open country, which would bring the Gentile in.

The bondman represents the Holy Spirit, who has come down to say, "All things are ready". God has secured everything for His own delight in a risen and glorified Man, and no questions are asked about the guests; everything is secured. The invited guests will not come, and it raises anger in the one who prepared the supper. There is no anger so terrible as the anger of grace. Not a single thing can be added to make the pleasure of God greater than it is, and it is all outside of us, whether innocent or fallen; it is all in the sovereignty of God. What will be displayed in the kingdom of God in the future is now to be enjoyed in the house of God.

The compelling work is attributed to the bondman. In the epistle to the Romans Paul makes a good deal of the commandment of the eternal God; the gospel in Romans is not on the line of invitation but of commandment, a positive divine commandment: "It is done as thou hast commanded". Then the compelling is connected with the call of God. Romans brings in the divine calling: certain persons are called in the compulsion of divine grace. God calls in an irresistible way. The calling is developed in Romans as the means of blessing — "whom he called them he has also justified", and Paul said to the Corinthians, "Ye see your calling" — that is, Look round and see what kind of persons God has called. There is no resisting the calling; it is a matter of

sweet compulsion. It was an action of grace to send out the invitations, but on the line of invitation no one ever did come; there must be a divine compelling power to operate so that the house is filled. The gospel does not take effect in any but the called ones, however powerful the appeal. The gospel preached is God beseeching; God will justify Himself before all men, and no creature of God can ever say, You did not give me a chance.

This wonderful development of grace goes beyond chapters 7 and 10; it is a new system brought in, not to meet man's need, but to satisfy the heart of God. It is a wonderful picture; none could have drawn it but the Son of God. In His going as Man into the presence of God the summit of divine pleasure is reached; God has Man in righteousness before Him. Now, He says, Come in and enjoy it, and see that My thought is to have you like Jesus for My pleasure. The question of suitability is not brought in here. In the next chapter there are the best robe and the ring and the shoes, but in this chapter the thought is purposely left out so that we might see the altogether one-sidedness of grace.

Now we have to see that we do not take up grace in a superficial way. "Great crowds followed him"; it seemed to be an easy path to follow One who spoke so blessedly of divine grace. It is wholesome to keep the two sides before us; there is such a tendency with us to take up the thought of grace lightly, and not to understand what is involved in it. Both in regard of chapters 14 and 15 the Lord gives us the practical effect of receiving grace; the practical effect is the test of whether we have come in to the great supper. If we have, we shall be prepared for discipleship; that is the test of whether I have really come in to the supper.

This system of grace, the celebration of righteousness, is something altogether outside the region of the natural. The tendency of everything in the natural is to oppose it, just as the oxen, the piece of land, and the wife tend to make one uninterested in the pleasure of God. The tendency of the best things in nature is to divert one from the blessedness of this new system of heavenly grace, so that discipleship is needed to maintain in our souls the joy of the new system into which we have been compelled to come. We cannot be in the great supper without being committed to the path of discipleship. You cannot say, I will have Jesus, and all His love and grace to men, and I will not have anything else; if you have Him in His love and grace to men you must have Him in His faithfulness to God — that is the faithfulness of discipleship. The Lord Himself was *the* Disciple. In Isaiah 50 He says that He has been given "the tongue of the *instructed*"; that is the same word as *disciple*. The Lord never allowed Himself to be diverted by the natural: He had a mother and He

loved His mother, He had the most tender care for her in committing her to John even in the hour of the cross, yet He never allowed her to bring any influence to bear on Him. He said, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" when at one time she made a suggestion to Him. He was uninfluenced by the natural and ever governed by faithfulness to God. We have to recognise the tendency of the natural, however attractive, to divert us from the grace into which we have been brought; therefore we must learn to hate it from that point of view. All our natural relationships have to be watched in view of the tendency that is in them to divert us from the knowledge of God in grace.

Nothing is more testing than grace; it is much more testing than law. "His own life also" (verse 26) comes very close home. It involves a moral separation from all that would be naturally one's own life, which is not the system of grace that we have been compelled to come into. The Lord would teach us to draw a sharp line of distinction between heavenly grace, God's satisfaction in Christ which I enjoy by the Spirit, and the best thing in nature and one's own life viewed apart from that system of grace. I have to have everything in myself that is apart from that system of grace. What is of the natural has a tendency to divert us and we have to watch it. That is just a simple fact, and most of us are old enough in the school of God to have learnt it.

God would impress on us the entirely new character of what He has brought us into by compelling us to come in; it is something as entirely apart from natural relationships as from sin. Many think of Christianity as liberating us from sin, but it has come in to liberate us from the best things in nature. A brother may be surrounded by every domestic joy and comfort, but in touching the things of God there is something much more precious to the heart, a deeper joy to be tasted, and if we are rightly exercised we must be careful lest even domestic happiness should divert us from the blessedness into which we have come. The Lord put it as a test, as much as to say, You have been pleased to hear what I have been saying, and you are crowding after Me, but do you understand that it means an entirely new life, not only apart from sin but apart from the natural life? There is always a tendency for the natural to hinder it, and therefore the natural has to be regarded with jealousy.

Here it is a question of the salt of the covenant. The covenant is pure grace, but you cannot have the covenant without the salt, which is the principle of faithfulness to God. It is faithfulness to God in regard to that system of grace which He has set up, faithfulness to the true character of grace. The Lord lived in the full blessedness of the favour of God to man, but He never allowed anything for a moment to hinder His faithfulness to God. We cannot come into

the Supper and partake of its festivities without taking up the path of discipleship. To divorce the two things would be to spoil the grace of God; nothing is to be allowed to take one out of the enjoyment of this wonderful system.

Taking up the cross is more public. The Lord uses the strongest word He could possibly use. The idea of crucifixion in those days was the most extreme shame and degradation that a man could be subjected to; it was a death only permitted by Roman law to be executed on a slave, and then only for some terrible crime such as the murder of his master. Think of the Lord taking that up! We are so accustomed to the word that we do not think what it meant; it was the extreme depth of shame and degradation. Now, the Lord says, you must be prepared for that; you must be prepared to carry your cross. There is a tendency with us to expect to be appreciated as Christians, but to be carrying the cross is that we are prepared to be "the offscouring of all things", as Paul says. We get very little of that kind of suffering now. We are living in such easy times; we are not thrown into prison or burnt at the stake as many of our brethren have been, but this principle in the soul would fortify us for the little bits of shame and contempt and reproach which come our way. Many of our brethren even now are facing cruelties and persecutions in some places of this world while we sit quietly here, but we need the same preparedness to face our little bits of reproach as they have to face greater things. We have to accept it as the normal condition, so that we are not taken aback or surprised if people laugh at us, revile us, or regard us with contempt. The carrying of the cross is an essential part of discipleship; the measure in which we are prepared to carry it is the measure in which we have come into the supper.

All this hangs together; there is the building of a tower and the king going to war. The Lord raised the question, Have you resources to go on with? Are you quite sure you can finish? It is one thing to begin, but it may be very superficial, and the Lord says, Sit down and consider. Have you resources? If you have not resources to meet the enemy, you had better surrender; it is the wisest thing to do. If everything for the delight of God is provided in Christ and if we have left behind everything of self to come in and enjoy it by the Spirit, then the more we sit down and consider the more we shall see that we have enough to begin with and *to finish*. The Lord says in verse 33, "Thus then everyone of you who forsakes not all that is his own cannot be my disciple". The question is, Are we going on with what is our own or with what is of God and of Christ? If we are going on with what is of God and of Christ, we have enough to finish. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" We have more with us than against us. If the enemy has twenty thousand we have *much more*. This whole question is a matter of relying on the faithfulness of

God in grace; He can bring us through if the power of the enemy is ten thousand times as many. God can enable us to conquer; there is no need to capitulate.

All these things are emancipating. I find I have something better than the sweetest natural relationship, and I have something better than any resources I could possibly have of my own. I have such a sense of glory in the presence of God that I am prepared for the deepest degradation. This is simple Christianity, and it goes along with the supper; this is the line of supreme satisfaction and victory. This is not depressing, but to a true soul it is encouraging, for in the light of the grace expressed in the great supper he would say, I have enough to finish.

The Lord's words about salt are very important; it is important not to apostatise. To apostatise from grace and faithfulness to God is most serious, because there is no recovery; if salt loses its savour there is no recovery. Salt is the principle of faithfulness which is applied practically in all the details of life so that no corrupting element is allowed to work. A good supply of salt is necessary. There is a scripture which speaks of "salt without prescribing how much" (Ezra 7: 22); there is to be an unlimited supply. The salt of the covenant was not to be wanting in any offering. For instance, if I am praising God for the meekness and gentleness of Christ — the meat offering — the salt of the covenant would make me feel that nothing else will do for me, that I must be set to maintain that character. I cannot praise God for it in Christ and not maintain it in myself. The thought is well expressed in the verse of our hymn:

"We wonder at Thy lowly mind,
And fain would like Thee be,
And all our rest and pleasure find
In learning, Lord, of Thee".

LUKE 15

Luke 15

There is a general statement here of tax-gatherers and sinners coming near to hear the Lord. It was just the kind of congregation that habitually gathered to Him and was pleasing to Him; the Lord gave such an impression of the goodness and grace of God to men as sinful, and they were interested in it. There is a note in the New Translation that indicates that it was the usual thing for this company to be gathered to hear the Lord; it was not that they only did it at that time. It was a discredit to the Lord in the eyes of the scribes and Pharisees that He should have such a company around Him and that He should receive them and eat with them. The point is to make a contrast between the mind of heaven and the mind of religious people on earth.

It was something for such persons to be told that they were of great value to God. I have often felt that we are very little imbued with the spirit of grace. We tell a man that he is lost and we mean that he is degraded and debased, and in a very unworthy condition; but the word is used in Scripture to show something of value. The Lord produced the impression of the interest of God in His creatures; it was a matter of great concern to God that He had lost His creature. It was not merely that the creature is lost, but who has lost him? We see notices sometimes about things lost, and the crier makes known sometimes that there is a reward, so we know at once that the person who has lost something is concerned about it. It is not worthless, but of value; the greater the pains the person takes to get it back, the greater the sense of the value of it. What is emphasised in this chapter is the value of the sinner to God; it is an object of concern to God that He has lost man. "What man of you having lost one sheep ... ?" It is not so much here that the sheep is lost, but that the owner has lost him.

This chapter serves to bring out the moral greatness of repentance. The one who repents according to Luke 15 is fully restored to God; the point here is the labour and trouble which divine Persons will take to bring sinners to repentance. Man, the sinner, is of great value to God; God has lost him, and He wants him recovered and restored. According to this chapter repentance is the restoration to God of the creature He has lost, so it gives repentance a great place. People may say that they are believers, but what moral effect has been produced in their souls? Repentance is a moral effect produced in the soul which changes the whole character of the creature in his relations to God; it is not believing certain things, but the man is changed. There is a moral effect in the soul that qualifies him to greatly appreciate God as known in

grace. If God is appreciated as known in grace He has recovered His creature, and he is brought back in such a way that it is joy to heaven. So this picture of the owner going after the sheep sets forth the length to which the Son of God would go in order to bring the sinner to repentance; it does not develop what He would do for the glory of God or to make atonement for sin.

When Paul woke up to the fact that the Son of God had gone into death for him it changed all his thoughts about God. The Lord Jesus came from Godhead's fullest glory to Calvary's depth of woe to change our thoughts about God. It is not that *God's* thoughts needed to be changed. I believe a great deal is left in our minds of the thought that Jesus came to change God's thoughts about us, but He came to change our thoughts about God; and that is repentance. It changes our thoughts to see that He would go after what is lost because it has such value in His sight; He would go to the extreme length to bring about repentance. The Son of God would come here and go into death to bring about repentance Godward in my soul; that gives one an entirely new thought about God. He would do anything to bring me to repentance. The lost sheep is found when repentance is brought about. After that the owner takes complete charge; he has found his sheep and takes charge of it, takes all responsibility.

We set God in the true light when we preach the gospel. God has lost man, because man has all sorts of wrong ideas about God in his mind, put there by Satan, and the natural unbelief of the heart of man as fallen clings to these wrong thoughts. But Jesus has come forth in marvellous love and grace. The Son of God has gone to the extreme point; He has gone into death in order that we might see what pains, what cost, what activities divine grace would take, so that we might be brought to repentance. When this is brought about it would solve a thousand difficulties that arise in the history of souls because they have never been found. You can show a man he is a sinner by preaching law, and so give him the knowledge of sin; but gospel repentance is self-judgment produced by seeing God's thoughts, and the wonderful interest that God takes in men. He would do anything, He would even give His Son to die, in order to bring men to repentance. The Shepherd has lost something and He cannot rest until He gets it back.

When the Lord gives us the moral force of the first two parables He tells us it is repentance. He says, "I say unto you, that thus there shall be joy in heaven for one repenting sinner". The sheep found is a repenting sinner; when the sinner is brought to repentance the seeking and saving Shepherd has found him, and that has settled the whole matter. I think the finding of the sheep is repentance; when the lost one is brought to repent he is found; the sinner has

now right thoughts of himself in relation to God, and of God as known in grace. From that point the Shepherd takes complete charge, puts him on His shoulder, and carries him home rejoicing; He has found His sheep and everything is settled. According to this chapter repentance is the restoration of the lost one to God; repentance is towards God.

Think of what was in the Lord's journey. That journey involved the bearing of sins, His being made sin, being forsaken of God, all the sin-bearing of the cross, and He would go that far to bring me to repentance. It is not the effect on me in the first two parables, but the thing is seen more entirely on the divine side; in the parable of the younger son we see something of the exercises that go on in the soul. It shows how much is involved in repentance; a truly repentant soul has the sense that God has found him — the One who had lost me, wanted me, and has found me; it cost Him much to seek me but He has found me. That is a very blessed sense to have in the soul; the one lost is astonished to find that it is a happiness to God to find him. It is wonderful to have a sense that we have caused joy in heaven; not only is God interested, but every intelligence in God's place is interested. I do not doubt there is a circle on earth sympathetic with heaven, a community of joy very different from the scribes and Pharisees. Verse 10 indicates the joy of God Himself, the joy of God in His grace which the angels have before them.

How wonderful to have the conscious joy of being recovered to God! Each repentant one would say, There is that brought about in my soul that has recovered me completely for God. He had lost me; now He has found me. There could be no greater joy than to think of the joy of God in having me; it breaks the back of the power of sin. Sin was that I could do very well without God; now I find that God cannot do without me, and that breaks the power of sin.

The Lord said of Paul, "Behold, he prayeth". What joy it was to God to see the enemy and persecutor brought to pray in the light of Christ glorified; the light in which he prayed was the light of a glorified Saviour. He had been hating and persecuting Him and seeking to stamp out His Name from the face of the earth, and now he found that, instead of an impostor, He is a glorified Saviour in heaven. Saul is praying with that light in his heart, and Christ had found him; he could say, Christ has possession of me.

Some of us have just tasted for a good many years the profound joy of thinking of the interest of God and heaven over each one of us individually. We may be, in the estimation of religious people, of no account whatever, or it may even be regarded as a pollution to have anything to do with us, but whatever their thoughts of us may be we are of deepest interest to God and

to heaven. It is a profound joy to us this minute, and I think I could say the joy is more to us now than when we first tasted it. True repentance should be deeper in every one of our souls now than it ever was before, and in a certain sense more joy to God and to heaven, because we thoroughly judge the state in which we were by nature, and we see the wonderful activities of divine grace. It is good to get into that atmosphere.

“What man of you having a hundred sheep, and having lost one of them, does not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness and go after that which was lost, until he find it”. The Lord intimates that the ninety-nine are persons who have no need of repentance — they are the scribes and Pharisees really; it is their own estimate of themselves. The Lord is bringing out the heart of God and the mind of heaven: the mind of heaven is one of great interest in sinners repenting; there is not the same interest in righteous persons who do not need to repent. It does not go into the question of whether there were any such really; there may be such nominally and in their own ideas. We often say to men, If you are not sinners, there is no Saviour for you. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, so there is no Saviour for persons who are not sinners.

The house to which the lost sheep was carried would suggest a place on earth where heaven’s interest was echoed. We are brought to what God is in grace, and that is our joy — it is all we have. As to everything else we judge and discard it; repentance is that we discard everything not deriving from God and grace, and that is perfect happiness. A great many Christians are not happy, or at any rate not as happy as they might be, because they are not in the good of Luke 15.

There is a divine Person here on earth acting through vessels in which He dwells, and there are marvellous activities of the Spirit constantly going on. It is not only the great length to which the Son of God has gone in going into death to bring us to repentance, but there are activities of the Spirit figured by the woman lighting the lamp, sweeping the house, and seeking diligently; these activities of the Spirit go on with the same end in view. It is the loss of the woman that is brought out. She has lost her piece of silver, and she says in verse 9, “I have found the piece I had lost”. A piece of silver suggests value.

I am not concerned that people should believe certain things; they often say they do, and we see no particular result; the person is not changed. If a person takes the ground of being a believer, you want to know what moral effect has been produced. Is he a self-judged person? That is the great thing. Then God is more and more before the heart and He is appreciated as known in grace, so there is the spirit of thanksgiving, and God is getting something

out of that soul, and the saints are getting something, too. The activities of the Spirit are going on through the saints; that is how the Spirit works in the setting of this chapter. The Holy Spirit in a Christian sense is dwelling in a vessel; the lighting of the lamp is the preaching of the word. The word is brought to bear generally through the saints; the light of the word is brought to shine on things. What the Spirit does in that way is done through the saints. Are we available to the Spirit for this kind of service? We must not put aside this wonderful privilege. I suppose very few are brought to repentance without coming under some influence from the saints; to put it simply, there is some influence emanating from those who are indwelt by the Spirit; it is the Spirit's activities but through the saints. Paul said, "He called you by our glad tidings"; that is, Paul preached, God was calling, and the Spirit "sweeping" — all was going on together.

It is an immense thing to get the sense of the personal character of this chapter. It is not simply that God so loved the world, but God was interested in me and wanted me. It is not the universality of grace here but the particularity of grace. God has found me, so I can tell Him I know how pleased He is to have me! It is a wonderful thing to have the consciousness that you are an object of delight to the heart of God.

I suppose this chapter would have special reference to those who have been in a place of privilege rather than to those who, like the heathen, have been without the knowledge of God altogether. The Jew was in a place of privilege; Christendom is in a place of privilege; and the children of believing parents are also. Those brought up under Christian teaching are in a place of privilege; and in such a sphere as that there are two classes. There are those who turn away from what they know of God and seek their own gratification without regard to Him; and there are others who observe certain proprieties and appear to have respect for God, but in result these are found to be farther away morally from God than the former class. The so-called prodigal represents one who distinctly turns away from what he has known; he would answer to the word in Isaiah 53: "We have turned every one to his own way". There has been a distinct turning away from what is of God to that which pleases oneself. To be a prodigal in that sense involves that one has been in the place of privilege; this gives it a very solemn application at the present time.

Adam and Eve went away from the known and enjoyed goodness of God; the garden of Eden was a place of privilege and blessing perfectly suited to innocent creatures, and Adam and Eve distinctly turned to their own way. That is the solemnity of it; it is not just the result of Adam's sin, but a path of

departure taken by an individual who has known something of God and His goodness. To turn away from God now is more terrible than it ever was; it is dreadful to see the children of believing parents turning away when they get to sixteen or seventeen years old. They want to go their own way; they have a feeling of restraint. All they have they owe to the providence of God, but they claim it as their own, and claim a right to take it and go away from God. I was brought up in a Christian home with every advantage that the Scriptures and a prayerful atmosphere could give me, but I found there was a distinct desire to turn away from it all.

The elder brother represents another class. They do not turn away outwardly; they apparently respect God; they do not walk in the ways of sin openly;; they go to church, chapel or meeting room; they read the Bible; they say their prayers, and do not do anything outwardly wrong. In the circle of privilege there are many like that, and yet it is possible for them to be morally farther away from God than those who act without any regard to God at all. These things throw a flood of light on the whole position. We see certain persons who claim to use everything God has given them as a right, to use it for themselves; they do not want the restraint of the knowledge of God; they want to get a long way off from it and gratify themselves at a distance from the God they have known in the place of privilege. And there are others who lead respectable, religious lives — they would say, “I have never transgressed thy commandments” — but the result proves that they have no real knowledge of the God of the gospel of Luke, and there is more hope for the first class than the second.

We see here the ways of God in allowing us to go to the length of our tether. The path of self-gratification becomes less satisfying every day; the pleasures of sin are constantly diminishing. A young man may find great pleasure in self-gratification, but he will find less the second time, and still less the third; and so it goes on until the time comes when the very things that gratify him most do not gratify him at all — he has spent all and got to the end. I believe morally every one of us has had to come to the end of finding satisfaction at a distance from God; we have all had to go this way.

The Lord gives us the extreme case because it covers all the other cases. We have all sought self-gratification and wasted our substance, for a life lived in self-gratification is a wasted life, whether it is done in a gross form or in a refined form. We see here the whole process laid bare; the process of departure and the process of recovery are depicted by a master hand. The prodigal had spent all; he had no longer any resources to go on. We have all come that way; we went on with the pleasures of sin in some form or other

until they ceased to give satisfaction, and the working of conscience gave us more misery than the self-gratification gave us pleasure.

The famine is sure to come when we have got to the end of our resources. We do not know anything else that we can turn to for satisfaction, and then we find that this country far from God is a place of famine. Then the prodigal goes a step lower; he joins a citizen of that country and finds himself in a place of great degradation. Very often that comes in the history of a soul; one in this case will go down to a depth of degradation that he could not have thought possible; he will get no satisfaction there, and no one will give him anything, not even swine's food. All this is the mercy of God. You may say, It is a terrible picture of self-will and departure, but the Lord brings it out to show that it is the way of God to bring about the consummation of the supremest blessing we could ever think of.

Man would have no power to gratify himself at all but for what he has providentially from God; if he had nothing from God he would have no power of self-gratification. It is just what he has providentially — his strength, his health, his capabilities, his means, are all derived providentially from God, and he takes it up and uses it for his own gratification. He has to come to the end of it on that line and then we find there is something deeper down in his heart than self-gratification. The self-gratification was there on the top, and one might say in the middle, but right down at the bottom there is something else. It was like that with the woman of Samaria; she lived a life of self-indulgence, and all the people of Samaria thought her a very self-indulgent person, but the Lord saw something else. He saw deep down under it all the thought of the worship of God, and the Messiah, One who was coming who would give light about everything.

"When he came to himself" — the true self of the man was quite different from the self-indulgence that he had been pursuing to the last possible point. The work of grace had brought that to the top. That is how it is with those who have been in the place of privilege: they have heard of the blessed God made known in the gospel of Luke, and we find that deep down at the bottom of their heart all through a life of self-indulgence. When everything fails it comes to the top; it manifests and asserts itself. It was there in the heart of the prodigal. "When he came to himself" is a striking word. It is the true self of the man; he had to come back to his true self. What is before the Lord here is the lost one being recovered, and all these experiences on the part of the prodigal are in the way of God to bring him to the point of repentance. The true self of the man was reached when he came to judge himself and recognise the abundance and satisfaction that there was in his father's house;

and he says, "I perish with hunger". There is a sharp contrast. He says, I know a place where the lowest servant, lower than a bondman, has abundance. He had the sense of that which he never lost. That is the great comfort. There are people we often pray for, those boys and girls who have sat on the benches and heard the truth of the God of the gospel of Luke; one has seen many of them who have turned away from that God, and gone on their own ways seeking to gratify themselves away from God. We pray for them because we hope that down at the bottom there has been something put that the devil can never take away. Many of the children of the saints profess faith in Jesus, but the test comes when the desires of the flesh begin to assert themselves, and the world offers its attractions; then there may be a definite turning away. "We have turned every one to his own way". It is a solemn moment, it is a heart-breaking thing, when a young man or woman comes to the point that they no longer care for the meetings; they prefer the world, its amusements and companions, and they gradually or suddenly break away. But it is a comfort to think that they are not finally lost to us; the true self may be there and an appreciation of the goodness of God. When I was a little child I had a wonderful sense in my soul of the goodness of God and the preciousness of Jesus; it was there before I began to go off to the far country, and in due time it became characteristic, it was the true self. I believe we must look at this from the side of God's sovereignty, and the true self of the man, even though he has been wasting his substance and has come to poverty, famine and degradation, is the sense of the blessed goodness of God. It greatly comforts me to think that when the rubbish is cleared away by sorrowful experience the true self comes to light. There must be true self-judgment, for, if I have turned away from the God of the gospel of Luke, I am one of the worst of sinners. Think of actually preferring to leave that God and turn to my own way! That helps to produce such a sense of sin; it produces a thousand times deeper sense of sin than all the thunders of Sinai.

This is presented to us from the responsible side, the outward history, but we can discern that underneath the outward history there is a secret working of God giving a sense of divine goodness. He says, There is abundance there. It is a wonderful moment in the history of the soul when the sense is borne in upon it that the lowest person that has to do with God is infinitely better off than the highest person in the world. This is not a mere notion, like people saying God is good. The reality of the thing comes out in movement; there is a definite turning from everything that constitutes one's life as in the world, and a turning to God. The moment that point is reached everything is accomplished. The Lord does not suggest that the prodigal took a single step. He said, I will arise and go, but we do not know that he took a step, for when

he was *a great way off* his father saw him. It is the same word as the *far country*.

There is a question before a soul who has judged himself to have sinned against heaven and in God's sight. "Sinned against heaven" is a remarkable expression. If my whole course has been contrary to the mind of heaven, and I have been sinning before God, that blessed God of the gospel of Luke, what reception am I to expect? If I have expected good from God, will He be as good as I expect Him to be? The Lord says, He will be infinitely more gracious than the largest expectation that I ever had. In the parable the father saw the prodigal a great way off, he had compassion, he ran and fell on his neck and covered him with kisses, the most ardent expression of affection. And this was before the prodigal had said a word of confession of any sort. This is the God we have to do with; there is no barrier, for as soon as we judge ourselves and expect goodness in God, He will do everything for us, lavish everything upon us, cover us with kisses. The only time that God is in a hurry is when there is a repenting sinner. The covering with kisses gives the consciousness of God's love; that is bound up in the gift of the Spirit.

It would help us much to get a profound sense of the joy God has in seeing us turned to Himself. Everyone who has judged himself and turned to God has ministered profound joy to the heart of the blessed God. That gives strength to self-judgment. In the far country the prodigal said, "I have sinned against heaven and before thee", but it must have been a ten times deeper self-judgment when the father's arms were round his neck and he was covered with kisses. The real basis of happiness and vigour spiritually is that we know how to judge ourselves in the presence of divine grace, so that we never look for anything from self but look for everything from God — then we are happy. Have you ever had the indescribable sense of the love of God and the pleasure He has had in turning you to Himself? God delights to give it; we cannot give it to one another. I do not think anyone could tell what it is, the indescribable consciousness that He loves me and that I am an object of delight to Him because I am self-judged and repentant, and I have turned to Him. The sense of that in the soul is by the Spirit; all the love concentrated at Calvary is now diffused in millions of hearts by the Spirit, and every one of them is conscious of having been kissed. We have the same word here — "the father fell on his neck" — as in Acts 11 — "the Holy Spirit fell" on all those who heard the word in the house of Cornelius. The love of God is brought into our hearts by the Spirit, so that the disposition of God towards us is known inwardly.

The basis of it all is reconciliation, but that is not brought out in this chapter. The only intimation of it is the fatted calf being killed, which suggests the

death of Christ; but it is the death of Christ as the basis of eternal joy in the house of God rather than reconciliation. It is all based on reconciliation, but reconciliation was effected in the death of Christ. There was such work wrought in the death of Christ that everything unsuitable to God was removed. Here in Luke 15 it is the experimental work in the soul by which we come into the fruit of reconciliation. All we get here is based on reconciliation. Colossians I says, "reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and irreproachable before him". The prodigal is presented thus, "holy and unblamable and irreproachable"; it is the fruit of reconciliation. If reconciliation had not been effected in the death of Christ, we should never have had Luke 15 in our Bibles.

The best robe indicates that one is set before God in a new status. When the father kissed the prodigal nothing could be added on the father's side; He *covered* him with kisses. He could do no more — the robe, the ring and the shoes are all subordinate to the kisses. If a person kisses me ardently, there is more affection in it than in giving me a coat. The kisses are the profound depth of the heart of God breaking out on this subject of love; the heart of God breaks out in all its fulness, and the prodigal feels that God loves him with all His heart. God covers him with kisses — what could be greater than that?

Then things are needed on the prodigal's side, so the robe, ring and shoes come in in order that the prodigal might be invested with conscious suitability to the One who had kissed him. The best robe seems to be connected with purpose; it is there in the house, and the bondmen know where to find it. It is there in purpose; as we should say, it was there from eternity. There was everything in that best robe that could satisfy the most exacting scrutiny of the eye of God. If one is conscious of being kissed, nothing would satisfy the heart but to be conscious of suitability to the One who has kissed me; so with the best robe one is invested with conscious suitability. The person who has been kissed is now graced in the Beloved. The bondmen are there to put on the best robe; it is their work to do it; they know the wealth and resources of the house. We ought to be able to clothe the prodigals when they come back.

The character of the reception is dwelt on in the parable; it does not finish by speaking of a sinner repenting, which is the great point in the case of the sheep and silver. Of course the truth of repentance comes out in this history, but the great point is the wonderful character of the reception. One would like to have one's soul filled with a greater sense of the wonderful reception that God accords to everyone who comes back. That is how the Lord presents the matter; we have a statement that could not possibly be made by anyone except the Son of the Father's love. God has such profound joy in it, and He

says it is *right* to make merry and rejoice. He justifies what He did, not on the ground of mercy and grace, but He says, "*It is right*". Paul's doctrine of the righteousness of God underlies this; that is, His grace is a matter of righteousness.

God would have us to apprehend the character of the way in which He receives us and all the perfection and blessedness of His own thoughts formed in Christ before the foundation of the world. Now spiritual history would invest us with that so that we might be presented, as Paul says, "perfect in Christ". Paul says to the Colossians, "Christ ... whom we announce, admonishing every man, and teaching every man, in all wisdom, to the end that we may present every man perfect in Christ".

That was Paul's labour, and Epaphras laboured too behind the scenes, that the saints might be clothed with the best robe, the ring and the sandals. The eternal thoughts of God in Christ have fully come to light so they can be ministered to those who believe on Him. The bondmen serve the one who has come back so as to bring him through the ministry of Christ to think about himself as God thinks of him.

In the beginning of Ephesians Paul speaks of God having chosen the saints in Christ before the foundation of the world that they might be holy and without blame before Him in love. Think of such a proposal! Think of the character of holiness and blamelessness that had taken form in the thoughts of God in Christ before the foundation of the world! It is not Adam innocent or fallen, or even Adam restored, but it is the kind of suitability to God that had taken form in His thoughts and heart in Christ before the foundation of the world. This wonderful robe was there from eternity, but it could not be brought out until these precious thoughts had taken form in Christ as risen and glorified. Now these thoughts have taken form in a risen and glorified Man, and God would have us to understand that He receives every one who turns to Him in the preciousness and value and infinite blessedness of these eternal thoughts of His in Christ. When one is clothed with the best robe one divests oneself of all thoughts of self, either good or bad; and one is invested with the precious thoughts of God that took form in purpose in Christ before the foundation of the world. We start from a new point altogether. One clothed with the best robe is entirely delivered from the world, the flesh, and all the religious order of things that is found here, because he is invested with something that belongs to eternity, to the eternal thoughts of God in Christ. This is the only way of getting completely free from self. There is no other way except by being consciously invested with God's thoughts which have taken form in Christ. The thoughts of God in Christ are ministered to us — administration

and teaching and ministry are all needed but the result is that saints are presented perfect in Christ. There is nothing unreal or artificial about it; it becomes part of one's moral being. I am conscious that nothing else will suit Him, or suit me if I love Him. Nothing is more important than that the saints should be clothed consciously with the character of holiness, blamelessness and irreproachableness such as God thought of in Christ before the foundation of the world. There is nothing less for us; I must have that or self; it may be good, religious, or reformed, christianised self, but self is not Christ.

Nothing is absolute on our side; things are absolute on God's side, but only in part on our side. Even an apostle could say, "We know in part", and it will never be otherwise; there will always be room for enlarged apprehension until we reach that which is perfect and then we shall know even as we are known. In the perfect state I shall know myself as God knows me, and that is the climax of blessedness.

The ring in Scripture seems to be connected with public honour. Joseph was given the ring by Pharaoh, and in Esther we read of the king putting his ring on Haman and then on Mordecai. It seems to suggest a place of dignity and public honour. When Pharaoh took off his ring and put it on Joseph he invested him with public honour as administrator of everything in Egypt — that is the honour that God has in view for His sons. The sons of God are to appear as those in a position of great honour with God, so that nothing that is undignified or mean would be suitable in persons who wear the ring. We could not descend to do anything of a mean or commonplace kind. We have to remember always that we are invested on God's part with the greatest public honour which is soon going to be displayed; when the sons of God are manifested they will liberate all creation. I wonder what we should be like if we moved in the dignity of that? Paul said to the Corinthians, Do you not know that you are going to judge the world, that you are going to judge angels, and yet you are squabbling about a little money matter? It is a rebuke to them; they had not the ring. The ring would make one conscious of dignity in the wonderful place of representation. When Pharaoh gave his ring to Joseph, it was as much as to say, You are to represent me. And when the king gave his ring to Mordecai he was set up to represent the king, so that he could seal any document with the king's seal. The ring represents the authority of the king. Think of the dignity of being set up to represent God in the universe!

We are sons of God now, and we have the same dignity with God now that we shall have in the day of glory. We shall not have dignity with God one whit greater in the day of glory than we have this minute. It will be manifested then, but now God would invest us with this dignity. We do not think enough

about ourselves; we think about ourselves on the line of flesh and nature, or of all that which marks us by imperfection and infirmity; but God would have us think about ourselves as He thinks about us, as He cherishes in His heart His thoughts which have taken form in Christ.

As far as we can we should like to relieve sorrow at present. When the Lord was here, He was the great reliever of every sorrow and pressure — that belongs to the ring. The Lord was here to administer all the wealth of heaven, and in measure we are set up to be representatives of God, to carry His signet. Think of putting the signet of God on things, so that how we touch them is worthy of God! It is humbling to think of how little we stand in the dignity of it, but God is not glorified if we do not.

The sandals speak of how we are to move in conscious sonship. It was only sons who were allowed to wear sandals in the house. We are to move as sons of God, as persons led by the Spirit of God — “as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God”. The Spirit could never lead me to do anything like a natural man; it is the greatest reproach on us if we do anything like men. It was the reproach that Paul threw at the Corinthians — “ye walk as men”. We seem to take it as a matter of course that we walk as men, but that is all wrong; if we do we have not the sandals on. There should be something about the whole bearing of one who is brought to God that marks him off as one who is in the place of affection with God.

The liberty of sonship is ours; we are invested with what belongs to new creation. It is not Adam made better, or flesh made better, but new creation in Christ, and every part of it brought about by the death of Christ. It is an order of things which does not at all belong to the old creation. The best robe, the ring, and the sandals formed no part of the prodigal’s first inheritance, but he is invested with them, and then the fatted calf is killed and they sit down and begin to make merry. I have no doubt that the blessedness of this is intensified in seeing that it all comes through the death of Christ. That will be our festivity for ever when we are in the blessedness of new creation; we shall enjoy eternally with God the thought that it has all been brought about through the death of Christ.

The fatted calf suggests Christ as the One in whom we have seen the tenderness and excellency of love that would secure all the thoughts of God righteously in a way suitable to God; all is secured through death. If we know in any measure what it is to be clothed with the best robe, to have the ring and the sandals, how precious it is to think with God that it is altogether the fruit of the death of His Son!

There is a great difference between the house and the field. The field represents the place of God's providential mercies, all the good that God can bestow upon people as living on the earth. One might naturally consider that such a place was a very good place to live in; but it is not the house. In the setting of this parable I think the field would represent what would be enjoyed in the way of providential mercy. A great many people live in that place; they are thankful for the goodness of God and His mercies, for health and strength, abilities and means and all that speaks of God's providential goodness, but that is the field, not the house. The house is where the joy of grace is, and that is something quite different from providential mercies. I might have the best of health, and be well to do as to circumstances here, and I might be thankful for God's goodness to me, but that is not God's grace; it is the field, not the house. The house is seen here to be the circle of the joy of grace, and we want to come into that.

We are not told that the man in the next chapter was a wicked man; we are told he was wealthy and well to do, but he died and lifted up his eyes in hell. The closing section of this chapter is very important because it depicts the condition of a great many people and it shows where they live. The question is not raised at all as to the wickedness of the elder son; his life was, as we should say, a very respectable, orderly one; he could say, "I have served thee these many years and never transgressed thy commandment". The Lord presents him as a most exemplary man. As being in the field he is in the enjoyment of God's goodness and mercy providentially, but he is outside the house, and as far as the parable goes, he never goes in. The house is where merrymaking is, and where the music and dancing are; it is where the joy of grace is filling the whole scene with music. Now the question for us all is, Where are we living? Are we living in the house in the festivity of divine grace, or in the field under the enjoyment of God's mercies? In a country like England, our preaching has often to be addressed to those who are like the elder brother. The younger son had led a dissipated life, and wasted his substance on debauchery, but we are surrounded by a great many people who have not led that kind of life at all; they have behaved themselves respectably and religiously; they have done their duty, as they think, both to God and to their neighbour, but they do not know anything about the house.

God's providence to the world is based on redemption; every shower of rain that falls, and every ray of sunshine, everything that grows, all the health of men and every breath they draw, are founded on redemption. If Christ had not died there would have been none of it, but that is not the house. But for the death of Christ this world would have been blotted out thousands of years ago. God gives witness in providence to His goodness; man cannot eat his

dinner without having a witness to the goodness of God. People say, We get it by our own labour, but there is nothing in that. Suppose God gave no rain or sunshine, what is the good of man's labour? He is as helpless as a grain of sand. Everything comes from God in providential goodness, but that is the field; it is not the house.

An old brother used to say to me, Why do you preachers always preach about the younger son? Why do you not preach about the elder son? The wonderful thing is that God works in order to bring even such a one as that to the knowledge of Himself in grace. God is labouring all the time to bring these religious and respectable people who have never done anything wrong to know His grace. The Lord was addressing here the Pharisees who had complained that He received sinners and ate with them, so He describes publicans and sinners in the figure of the younger son, and the scribes and Pharisees in the figure of the elder son, but then He shows that the same grace is in the heart of God towards the one as the other. The disposition of the father's heart was precisely the same to the one as to the other — that was the object of Luke's gospel. God has not two different minds towards man; He has the same mind towards every kind of man; that is, that every kind of man should be brought to know Him in the joy of His grace. The way that an elder brother gets convicted of sin is by being brought to the consciousness that with all his goodness, respectability and religiousness he does not know God in grace, and he does not like God as known in grace — he was angry. The father deals with the elder son in such wonderful grace; he came out and said, "Child". There is a peculiar touch of affection in that.

God has fatherly feelings in regard of every proud Pharisee in this world; in a sense He has fatherly feelings towards every man in this world, for the disposition of God towards man is tender. Paul says to the Athenians, "We are his offspring". We are slow and dull to take in the disposition of God, that such are the feelings of His heart towards one who hated him for His grace. God has the most unbounded joy in grace, and He was hated for it, and He says, as it were, I have just the same feelings of grace to you. The whole of Scripture is a testimony to the parental feelings of God in regard to His creature man. The marvellous and unspeakable grace of God never comes out with such magnificence as it does in His dealings with the elder son.

The elder son was living in his own circumstances, and the joy of grace was entirely foreign to his heart. When he heard of it he called a lad. Every lad in the house knew his father better than he did! He was altogether outside it; he was angry when he heard the music and dancing — the whole place was alive with merriment — but he was outside and had to call a lad to tell him what

was going on, that his brother had come and they were killing the fatted calf for him. The elder son had no idea of his father as a giver. He said, "Thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends". He had a circle of friends, doubtless very respectable people like himself, a kind of mutual admiration society without any joy of grace in it; it was not likely that his father would provide anything for such a merry-making. It all showed he had not one thought in common with his father. Evidently there was in the house a whole system of things that the elder son knew nothing about; he knew nothing about the merry-making, the eating and drinking and the dancing; the treasures of the house, the best robe, the ring and the sandals — he was a complete stranger to the whole thing, yet the father goes out and entreats him. God does not leave the proudest Pharisee without the beseechings of grace. What is to become of one whom grace makes angry? If he does not alter he will find himself with the rich man in the next chapter.

The sphere of the joy of grace is the sphere of God's happiness. It is not the gain of the son who comes to Him, but God's gain in having him — that is the joy of heaven. The joy of heaven does not consist only in poor sinners being rescued from their misery, and being set up in endless good, but the joy of heaven is the gain of God. If God receives a sinner who has been estranged from Him, the joy of it reverberates through heaven above, and the house below reverberates with merriment. When a person professes conversion our real interest in it is to see how much God has acquired. The real question the preacher would want to ask when he gets on his knees would be, O God, how much hast Thou received?

When a brother stands up to bless God in the joy of grace, that is like the music — now are we prepared to dance to it? Does every heart bound, dance to the music? The Lord said to some, "We have piped to you and ye have not danced". If a note of praise to God on account of His grace is sounded in the house, do our spirits move in response? The psalmist speaks of praising God in the dance; it signifies lively movements in the affections. In the Old Testament, of course, these things were outward, but now all the music and dancing are spiritual.

The elder son says, "thy son", not "my brother". He was entirely out of harmony with his father; all the time the prodigal had been away he had never once sat down to listen to what his father had to say about him. He had never been in his father's company while the prodigal had been away, to know what his father felt, for he was so surprised at his reception of the prodigal. If he had been in communion with his father, he would have known what his father's thoughts were. The father says to him, "Child, thou art ever with me,

and all that I have is thine". The father in grace is, as it were, saying to him, My thought is that you should be with me; what is mine is yours, and I want you to be as much interested in this matter as I am. In spite of the hardness of heart, self-righteousness and self-centredness of the elder son the father is bent on using every means to bring him to know himself in grace, and to bring him into the communion of His joy in grace. There is nothing more touching than the way the father speaks to him; it was all there for him.

Romans brings this all out doctrinally; if we want to know the moral foundations of it we should go to Romans. We have not the doctrinal basis in Luke 15, but we have the spring of it in the heart of God disclosed — that is the great object of the gospels. In the epistles we have the gospel *taught*; in Acts we have it *preached*, and in the gospels we have it *illustrated* so that the youngest child can take it in. The pictures are drawn by a master hand.

No doubt the Jew had a certain advantage and the Pharisee too. The scribes and Pharisees had a knowledge of the Scriptures which the publicans and sinners had not. The elder son had an advantage over the younger in being outwardly at home, but we find that his real interests were in a communion which was as foreign to the joy of grace as the far country. There are two sons here both equally far from God, one outwardly near and the other a long way off from God, but when one is brought back to God the joy of the heart of God is secured.

Paul yearned over the Jews, having been an elder brother himself. The Gentile world was not a place where he could find elder brethren; he describes it in Romans I as a scene of hopeless ruin, corruption and debauchery. The Jew had the Scriptures, the temple, and all the favour of God; they were loved by the Messiah in spite of their condition and loved by God. Paul yearned over them, and his whole heart went out to them. He said, I have wished to be a curse for them; he went as far as a man could go. Paul thought, If they will not believe anybody else they will listen to me; I was standing by when the blood of the martyr Stephen was shed; they will know what a Pharisee I was, how I hated Christians and tried to stamp out that Name — they will surely listen to me. But they would not. We do not find that the elder brother listened; the father entreated and besought, but there is nothing to show that he listened.

We cannot honour God more than by thinking of Him according to truth; that is His grace to His creature. If we think of God according to truth we think of Him as the God who is set forth in Luke 15; we worship Him and praise and glorify Him, because we know Him in the truth of His grace. If I am brought to

that, God has more joy in it than I have, because God knows how far away I was, and He is the only One who knows.

If there is no knowledge of God in grace, man is dead as regards God; there is not a pulsation of life; and a man who goes to God and thanks Him he is not like other men, that he has been brought up religiously and respectably — that man is dead, Suppose for a moment that the elder brother had yielded and said to his father, I have been as bad and worse than my brother, and that the father kisses him and he comes inside, and they both have the best robe and the ring and the sandals,

and feast on the fatted calf, there is not a trace left of the prodigal or the Pharisee. They have come in on the footing of God's eternal thoughts of grace; there is no prodigal or Pharisee but one new man — that is the truth of the grace of God.

LUKE 16

Luke 16

The question of responsibility is not raised in chapter 15 — what God has lost is recovered, what is dead comes to life, and God's own joy in grace dominates the chapter from beginning to end. To the Pharisees and scribes the Lord vindicates the exceeding blessedness of divine grace, for the thought of God is to have sons in nearness and suitability to Himself. But then the Lord turns to His disciples and directly raises the question of responsibility. Sonship and stewardship have to be linked together; we are tested when it comes to stewardship. As we have remarked before, in Luke's gospel we see the most precious unfoldings of divine grace, and immediately after something comes in of the nature of a test.

This parable applies to man viewed as having the handling of something that he is not entitled to. Faithfulness is largely tested by how we act in regard to the mammon of unrighteousness. It is that to which we have no title; it belongs to another. All material things belong to another, and none of us could establish any righteous title to what is in our hands at the present time. The Lord speaks of mammon here; it is all that which gives man place in the present world. Money does not give man any place with God; it only buys him a place in this world, but it can be rightly taken up in stewardship. The Christian is entitled to view anything he has in the way of material wealth as belonging to God, so that it takes a new character, and it is important that it should not be wasted, but that it should be used with a view to our future advantage. To waste the Lord's goods could never be commendable, but the Lord says, If you will use it to secure your own future benefit, I shall be well pleased with you.

We have our riches and pleasure in the house. If I know what it is to be a son in the house my wealth is there; my portion, my joy, my all, are there. That is where I live, and in the sense of that I can come out to touch things here in the spirit of a steward. If we knew better what was our own, it would make us wonderfully independent of things here; we should not claim any sort of personal right, but we should touch all in the spirit of stewardship, If we look at things rightly we shall feel that any accession of the mammon of unrighteousness is an increase of responsibility; it is adding to our work, not to our means. The Lord looks at the mammon of unrighteousness as in our hands for the moment, and we are to make friends with it.

The mammon of unrighteousness describes the general character of possessions here. A man has no permanent claim to it; he is put in trust as a

steward. He cannot claim it as his own, for it belongs to another, and actually in the world it is used in an unrighteous way. Money in a broad sense is the mammon of unrighteousness, and the love of money is the root of all evil. It is no proof of divine favour to have a lot of money; what we have here is a test. I could not say of any money that I possess that God gave it to me to own permanently, but He entrusts me with the use of it. What God gives me for my own is in the house. I can boast in that as much as I like; what is outside of that is a test of stewardship. God was pleased to entrust Solomon with very great things, and he began by considering for God, but he ended in using all in a vain attempt to gratify himself; he had to prove it was vanity and pursuit of the wind. The whole of this world's system is carried on by money; nothing can be carried on without it. That is its broad character as the mammon of unrighteousness, but the Christian as a steward is allowed to handle it and make friends with it so that it secures him an entrance to eternal tabernacles. Those people get the true riches who are prepared to use what they have in a natural way in view of the future rather than of the present. God has great regard for persons who use their means in view of their own future advantage. In having to do with God the actual amount does not count: one person may be tested by having £2 a week, and another person by having £1,000 a week, but morally there is no difference. The small steward is tested in his sphere just as the large steward in his — they both have to give an account.

I do not doubt that the widow with the two mites will have a good place in the eternal tabernacles; she has enriched the whole church with the thought of what is true wealth. In God's account she was far more wealthy than Solomon. Gifts are not measured by pounds, shillings and pence; they are measured by the state of heart. The widow with the two mites was above the level of what is seen here; it was a question of devotedness with her, not prudence; she was devoted and she put her two mites into the treasury. God was worthy of it all in her thoughts. But here it is not a question of devotedness but of prudence. Here the steward is acting so that he might get a benefit later on; he was acting prudently, and the Lord says, I want you to be prudent. He calls attention to the fact that the sons of the world are more prudent than the sons of light — his lord commended the unjust steward's prudence. The sons of this world are often a rebuke to us; they know what they want and they go in for it. We often hardly know what we are after, and we go in for it so slackly.

Verse 13 is very serious; it shows that if we do not handle the mammon of unrighteousness in the spirit of stewardship, it will become our master — it dominates many. What is it that rules? What we are governed by is a test. The Lord says, "No servant can serve two masters". It is not possible to serve God

and to serve mammon at the same time, so a Christian could not be governed by monetary advantage as a motive. He would have to be exercised as to whether it was God's way for him; he would be governed by the will of God. If suddenly offered double money, he would have to enquire whether it was of God or whether it was a snare of the devil laid for his feet. The devil would gain his object if he got us to serve mammon. We do not want to contribute to the world's system; if money becomes our object and our ruling motive we have joined hands with the world and are helping to build up the world's system, but we can use things as stewards in such a way that it will be to our advantage by and by.

Then there is the need for faithfulness, which is a contrast to the steward in the parable. His prudence is commended, but his unfaithfulness is condemned. "If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who shall entrust to you the true? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another's who shall give to you your own?" It seems to make the enjoyment of what is spiritual depend on how we handle the material. I think we often put the wrong labels on the baskets! Most of us have two baskets and we have labelled them; one is *my things* and the other is *God's things*, but we get the labels wrong. *My things* are my money, and what I have here. No, these are not my things, they are God's things entrusted to me. Then in the other basket labelled *God's things* are all the spiritual things. No, they are my things; the heavenly things are my things. I have absolute proprietorship, an inalienable title to these things. I could not say that of anything here; my coat has been lent to me for a year or two; I could not say it was mine absolutely. The spirit of all this is so necessary; we have to hold what we have here in stewardship. I believe it is the answer to sonship. If I am a son inside the house, I come into natural things in the spirit of a steward. I have in my affections a whole system of what is my own, and I can retire into that as my own property. If I had a thousand acres of land I could not say it is mine; I am only a steward there, but I have property that is mine for eternity, and I have a genuine title to it through grace. The Lord seems to put it in this way: If you will be faithful in stewardship in earthly things, you will get great increase in eternal things. Do we want spiritual advancement? Then how are we handling the things that are in our hands providentially? Are we handling them for our own present pleasure and enjoyment, or in faithfulness as entrusted with them by Another — by God Himself?

The principle of the eternal tabernacles is surely realised now among the brethren when we get the enjoyment of our own things. We sing sometimes, "Eternity's begun". If eternity has begun we are in the eternal tabernacles, and again we sing, "In spirit there already" — that is the eternal tabernacles. The

glory has come in; it is not only in prospect but the heart of the saint is filled with it now. Peter, James and John on the mount were allowed for a moment to be filled with the glory. I admit they were not equal to it, but in principle it was there.

I do not think that giving away lavishly all you have is at all in the Lord's mind. You might be very imprudent in giving away money; nothing is easier than to give it away. You might do that and still be accused of wasting the Lord's substance. Suppose I gave to a poor person more than he needed at the time; that might lead him into temptation. I believe the kindness and benevolence of the people of God sometimes does harm; the thing is to be prudent and exercise stewardship. But we have to remember what John speaks of: "whoso may have the world's substance, and see his brother having need, and shut up his bowels from him", 1 John 3: 17. We must be careful not to do that. It might question our whole spiritual status. John puts it very seriously: "How abides the love of God in him?"

The Pharisees were evidently touched in conscience by the Lord's words; with all their religiousness they were really serving mammon. They were covetous, we are told, and they derided Him.

Serving God has a supremely blessed character now. There has been a continual increase in the way in which the pleasure of God has been known. The Lord has told us here that the things that are highly thought of amongst men are an abomination in the sight of God. If that is so, we do not want to be governed by those things; we want to know the character of service that is pleasing to God. The character of service that is presented here would be dependent on the kingdom of God being announced. There are progressive stages in which the pleasure of God has come out; first the law, then the prophets, who give an increasing measure of the knowledge of God's pleasure, and then after John the kingdom of God is announced. The full character of what is pleasing to God came to light when His beloved Son was on earth, and that gives character to the kingdom now — the whole pleasure of God has come to light. It has come out in the way of grace to men, but it has all come out in Jesus; what is supremely pleasurable to God just contrasts with what is abomination in His sight. I want to be exercised as to getting into the kingdom of God; the Lord intimates it is not an easy thing to get into it. He says, "The glad tidings of the kingdom of God are announced, and every one forces his way into it". It is not an easy thing to get into the kingdom, because the kingdom is the place where God has made known His full pleasure. The law gave a considerable amount of light as to what the pleasure of God was, and the prophets gave more light as to it, because the prophets bring out the

feelings of God and what the thoughts of His heart were. In the prophets we find the kingdom distinctly anticipated, but when the Son of God was here as Man on earth He brought in the full measure of God's pleasure. We could not think of anything more being added to divine pleasure when the Son of God was here. God has no further development; He has reached finality on the line of grace. It is an amazing thought to me that the full pleasure of God is out. Am I set for that, or am I prepared to go on with things that God was pleased to permit in His government? That is a real exercise for every one of us. It is a strenuous thing and calls for violence. A man has to be violent enough to force his way through every obstacle, and the love of money is the greatest obstacle there can be; you have to push your way through it and everything else, no matter what it is.

This sentence about a man putting away his wife and marrying another seems to be unconnected, but I believe the Lord is attracting attention by it to the difference between what God permitted in His government and what is according to His pleasure. He permitted divorce on very broad grounds under the law, but this is not according to His pleasure and has no place in His kingdom. The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. We are in another sphere now, the sphere of divine pleasure. I feel how little I know of it; I long to know more. For this we need power, but if I get on to the line of God's pleasure I can assuredly count on His power. The violence is not natural, but spiritual violence that is prepared to break through everything. There are things which God permits governmentally, many things not really according to His mind; He permits them and goes on with those who do them, but we do not want to be on that line. On that line we shall never reach Colossians or Ephesians, the heavenly side, and the great lesson of this chapter is that we reach the heavenly side — that is how I understand the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. It is open to us if we have courage; it means pressing into the kingdom.

Abraham represents the heavenly side; he is the father of the heavenly family. What would Abraham think of me if he were living on earth now? Would he say, My son, you are just after my own heart, come and lie in my bosom? The rich man is not presented at all as a wicked man according to human standards. So in chapter 14 the people who refused to come to the feast were not wicked; it was not their sins that prevented them from coming; it was a question of land and oxen and a wife that hindered them. The poor man here was outside; the rich man was having the best of it on earth and he had no interest in the heavenly; it is a continuation of the teaching of the gospel. Abraham was a man who was called to separation; God had called him to leave country, and kindred, and father's house. He obeyed, he believed God,

and took up the place of a stranger and sojourner; he had his altar and his tent, he waited for his city, and looked out for a heavenly country.

The Lord presents Abraham as the one who receives into his bosom every one of his sons; the angels know where to carry them. It suggests that the angels had recognised in Lazarus an heir of salvation, and though outwardly his only ministers were the dogs that licked his sores, yet in reality the angels looked after him and ministered to him; but even the ministry of angels did not alter his circumstances here. The angels recognised Lazarus as a proper subject of their attention, and they knew where to take him when he died; they took him to his father's bosom. The Lord is lifting the veil; He wants us to be intensely occupied with the unseen world. He would bring it before us very distinctly, and give us to see that the poorest man in this world can have supreme blessing of a heavenly character, and the richest man in the world may pass when he dies into unending torment. The Lord would have us to think of the seriousness of it so that we might live as Lazarus lived; this poor man full of sores lived in the light of the heavenly. The rich man does not appear to have any interest in him except in allowing him to be fed with the crumbs that fell from his table. There is none of the spirit of the covenant with him; he had covenant blessings outwardly but he had none of the spirit of the covenant.

There is a peculiar importance about this scripture; it is as if the Lord Himself lifts the veil. We might say no one has come back to tell us, but the Lord of glory has lifted the veil; no one knows about the unseen world as He does, and He has told us what is there. It is a gross blasphemy against the Lord to think it is necessary for anyone to come back when the Lord has told the truth — we have not only Moses and the prophets, but the testimony of the Lord of glory. This is the Lord's own description of the unseen world. The conditions are fixed; why should persons pray for the dead? If they are in Abraham's bosom, or, as we can now say, with Christ, we cannot add to them, and if they are in torment there is no getting them out, so the whole idea of prayers for the dead is of Satan. The Lord suggests to us here that in the unseen world there is the recognition on the part of the lost of all that was once available; it is terrible to think of it. This man, as we should say, lost for eternity, recognises Abraham. He recognises that principle of separation from the world and faith in God of which Abraham was the eternal witness. It is solemn to think that those who have never recognised the ways of God in grace in this world will have to recognise them in the unseen world.

Professedly this man was a Jew, and according to the flesh he was of the seed of Abraham, but spiritually he was not a son, and though in the parable Abraham called him Child, Abraham was not his father. It will form part of the

torment of the lost to be able to recognise what God has made available and to feel that it will never be available again. It will be the most bitter ingredient in the cup of sorrow that will be drunk by the lost, It is striking that this man does not question the justice of what he is suffering and does not ask that Lazarus might be sent to get him out; he only asks for some alleviation of his misery and that cannot be granted. The cause of his being there was that he was content with the good things of this life. He is not presented as a wicked man, but he had been content with good things and enjoyed them to the full, and had had no interest in what was of faith. He had been a complete stranger to the heavenly and therefore no companion for Abraham. It is a voice to us as believers that we should not be living in things of this life, but cultivating heavenly hopes and anticipations, and moving in the faith of our father Abraham. Paul speaks of those "who walk in the steps of the faith ... of our father Abraham", Romans 4: 12.

The Lord is showing all through this gospel that He is bringing in what is heavenly. He was introduced by a messenger from heaven, and when He was born there was a multitude of the heavenly host; it is heaven come down in grace. It is not improving man's circumstances here, not making him more respectable or better off, but bringing in heavenly joy. Chapter 15 shows the character of the heavenly joys that are brought in. Do they so attract our hearts that we are prepared to give up earth so as to go in for what is heavenly? Abraham and the patriarchs declared plainly that they sought a heavenly country.

LUKE 17

Luke 17

The disciples had been under the influence of Jesus, and He had been bringing before their hearts the blessedness of God as known in grace, and the blessedness of the heavenly system. Now He forewarns them that it was inevitable that offences would come; the enemy would make persistent efforts to ensnare the disciples and take them away from the spirit of little ones. Offences are inevitable. The word is often used as being caused by the Lord: Christ Himself is a rock of *offence*; "unto the Jews a *stumbling block*"; "the *offence* of the cross". Christ and the truth become an offence to the natural man. But here the word is used of things that are contrary to spiritual prosperity.

The Lord is looking at the disciples as little ones who are learning from Him to know God in grace, and to move in the light of the heavenly system. The offences here are things which tend to counteract the influence of the Lord.

Many of our difficulties when traced to their root are found to arise from self-importance. A sense of the greatness of God in grace is a marvellous reducer, but the enemy would ever seek to bring in offences, something to take the little ones away from the place of littleness. That is the way the enemy works all the time. The Lord prizes very highly that state of heart which thinks not of itself, but of the blessedness of God as known in grace, and of the heavenly system. He thinks very seriously of everything that would divert from it; the Lord takes a very serious account of any influence that would tend to take us out of the place of being little ones.

"O keep us, love divine, near Thee
That we our nothingness may know". (87:3)

There would be no hitches or jars if we all kept as little ones. The Lord saying "Woe" shows the serious view He takes of any influence that tends to counteract His own influence.

Disciples are those who come under His influence or instruction. He would make God as known in grace to be great to us, and all that is in the purpose of God, the heavenly things, He would make great to us. The very sense of that, if truly in the heart, makes us little. It is a reducing thing. We need to be exercised continually about this, in order to be preserved as little ones. Verse 2 expresses what a very severe judgment the Lord has on anything that would have a contrary effect to His own influence, and every true servant would

desire from the bottom of his heart that what is spoken of in verse 2 should happen to him rather than that he should exert an influence contrary to the Lord's. I am sure I would rather be thrown into the bottom of the sea than be left here to influence the saints contrary to the Lord. Of course, a man doing it deliberately would be an adversary to the Lord and would most certainly be judged.

It is a great favour to be small enough to give some expression of God; such a one is not self-assertive, but can bring in the influence of God. It is what we should desire; we all know how much there is that is contrary, but faith would bring in a power to enable us to set aside what hinders.

The Lord is telling us here what we may have to meet with; offences are inevitable, and we may be tested by a brother. He may be a naughty brother, but he is a valuable asset if we know how to take account of him, because he is an opportunity for active grace in the saints; if he sins there is a call for restorative action. The Lord knew all the conditions we may have to meet, and that a brother may be naughty enough to sin against us seven times in one day. Such a thing has never happened to me, but the Lord says it might happen and we are to take heed that even such a thing as that does not take us out of the spirit of grace that should mark a little one. The little one is not thinking of himself at all, but of the joy of grace; it is like the spirit of chapter 15 passed on to our brotherly relations.

Forgiveness cannot be administered apart from repentance; you cannot administer it, though it is in your heart. Therefore you are to rebuke your brother when he sins, not to get your due but that he may be restored. It is his need you think of, not yourself. The Lord supposes a brother in such a state, so far from a little one, that he can sin against his brother and do it seven times in one day. It might be said that if he had really repented he would not have done it again the same day, but the Lord supposes even such an extreme case as that. To deal with such a case makes a great demand on us. I do not know how I should answer to it if a brother sinned seven times; I might say at the fifth or sixth time, Well, I am tired of this; I see no alteration in you! This supposes a real sin; it is not merely that one has taken offence at nothing. If we get to the bottom of many things that cause trouble to the saints, there is nothing but the folly of self-importance. This supposes there has been real sin, and it is yet to be met in this wonderful spirit of service and grace. If a brother sins you cannot go on with him as if there was nothing; you are bound to hold a certain reserve until there is repentance. You rebuke him, but it is for his good, not to assert what is due to yourself. You do not stand off and want him to go down to immeasurable depths of self-condemnation; if

he repents you forgive; it is a free action of grace, a free-hearted forgiveness. A rebuke needs more grace than anything else. If ever I have to speak to a brother about something wrong, it is a very deep exercise because one needs a very extraordinary measure of grace before one can rebuke; one's soul must be steeped in grace because the flesh so easily comes in.

It is striking that it is the apostles who say, "Give more faith to us". They felt what a keen test this would be; they felt that this was altogether too much for nature with all its self-importance. They were not up to it. Perhaps we all feel like that. It takes a great deal of grace to be able to rebuke; it is so easy for the flesh to come into activity. I have been rebuked sometimes, and have felt the difference between a rebuke in the flesh and in the Spirit. Very few Christians could refuse the power of an appeal in the grace of Christ; they would be very hard if they could. It is a kind of exaltation for myself naturally if I see wrong in others. A rebuke in the flesh tends to rouse the flesh in us, but a rebuke in the Spirit subdues us. The Lord's reference to the sycamine tree referred to the deeply planted self-importance of the human heart. The Lord is warning us here against the things that would come in to interfere with the normal effect of the touch of grace. To carry out grace practically we must be very small; our trouble is we are too big, we are not small enough to carry out the principles of grace.

The Lord calls attention to faith here: "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed". The disciples wanted increase of faith, but the least bit of faith will introduce a new principle in the soul, so small as to be compared to the smallest of seeds, but powerful enough to involve the complete uprooting of the natural principle of self-importance that is in the heart of man. The Lord minimises faith here; sometimes He magnifies it, but here He makes it as small as possible. Faith brings God in, and when that gets ever so little a place in the soul it is power to get rid of self — self not viewed here as lawless or lustful but as great and important. There is power in God to uproot all the natural self-importance of a man and to dispose of it effectually. That is the marvellous effect of this divine principle of faith having its place even in the smallest degree in the soul; one cannot be important in the light of God. Faith brings God in as known in grace; God is revealed in grace in the gospel of Luke. The knowledge of what God has brought in may be very small, and the Lord supposes that faith may be small to begin with, but still there is power in it. Grace is to govern everything; every action, word and thought is to be governed by the revelation of God in grace. It is simple to say it, but it means much. So, if a brother sins, you can bring in what is of God for his restoration, not because you are injured or that you feel hurt by the way he has treated you, but that you might have the joy of grace.

If legal principles work with us, there is nothing more damaging, because they are principles that God has discarded as useless. We sometimes find there is great spiritual grace towards a poor sinner who is a drunkard or something like that, but very little towards an erring brother. That will not do. The legal system has been discarded by God as useless, and legal principles will not work in the assembly of God. Faith is the light of God as known in grace, and everything is to be governed by the light of revelation. Desires are not real unless formed by faith. In an earlier part of the gospel we have instruction as to prayer. Our prayers and desires are formed by the knowledge of God brought to us in the revelation and, if we are not praying in accord with it, it is not Christian prayer, for all prayer is formed by the revelation of God.

The Lord continues the subject and shows that we might become self-important through the diligence and faithfulness of our service, and think that we deserve some consideration. I once heard a man say that he had been serving the Lord for fifty years; he was claiming some kind of status, something due to him. I am sure all we elder ones can only feel ashamed of having grown so little; when we have done what we ought to have done we have to say, "We are unprofitable servants". The Lord anticipates that self-importance might come in in connection with one's desire to serve Him; it did with the apostles even. The Lord knew to whom He was talking and knew their hearts. He saw the self-importance which would dispute which should be greatest, and saw some wanting a special place. The Lord knew all about it, and says to them, You have to be bondmen sent to do what you are ordered to do, and then feel that you are unprofitable. It is no credit to you if you have done your work and done it well. We are to expect no consideration but just do what we are told. It needs great grace to be an abundant labourer and not to think anything of oneself. If God in sovereignty permits any of us to do the least bit of service, we are to make full proof of our ministry and do it as faithfully and diligently as possible; it is no ground for self-importance. I am just a bondman and it is no honour to me that I do what my Master tells me to do. The sense of whom we serve would keep us humble. If the greatness of God and of the Person in whom He has made Himself known in grace is before us, we shall not think anything of ourselves; if we feel any rising of that kind, we shall judge it in secret. No one must deceive himself and think these elements are absent from him; he would deceive himself if he thought so. But I can go on in the judgment of it with my God and my Master and Lord, and so I can tell my Lord that I think just the same about it that He does. The Lord will not fail to commend and praise, and reward even a cup of cold water, but this is what is in our own spirits. What do I think of myself?

"Deeds of merit as we thought them
He will tell us were but sin;
Little acts we had forgotten
He will tell us were for Him".

The servant comes back from his outdoor work of shepherding and ploughing to wait on his master, not to be honoured by his master. He comes back in the true spirit of a servant: "He that waiteth on his master shall be honoured". It is like the apostles in Acts 13; they were not busy in the field, but they had been, and they come together in the presence of the Lord; in the spirit of service they fast and minister to Him. A true servant would appreciate that, if he loved his master, it would be a holiday for him to wait on his master. The Lord does say sometimes, "Come ye apart and rest awhile", but it will be the busiest time we ever had after that.

Here there are ten leprous men who stood afar off. Man viewed as in responsibility has no status at all — that is the moral connection with the ten lepers — but as divinely cleansed there is possibility of God getting a place. God acquired a great place with the Samaritan leper; it is easier for men to feel their exclusion from God, and to wish to be relieved, than it is to appreciate God in the glory that He has in cleansing. It intimates that amongst the cleansed God only gets a tenth. The idea of cleansing is that God may get a great place with us. We may hear of a great many conversions in a place, and we do not doubt it, but what place has God secured in the hearts of these people? What is there for God? Many just go on with blessings like the nine lepers who got all they wanted; they were not deeply affected by God's immediate dealing with them through Jesus. We see the Lord here, not with apostles or disciples, but with ten leprous men. It is just what man is as having a system of approach to God which makes nothing perfect. They were standing afar off and seeking divine compassion. But God is to be known in glory that would cleanse so that He might be more to the heart than the system that He had inaugurated and which He still acknowledged. The tenth leper was greatly affected by the immediateness of God's dealing with him through Jesus, and that displaced everything else; God secured a place with him. We see here the immediateness and perfection of a divine cleansing with which the priest had nothing to do. If he had nothing to do with it there was no need for the one who appreciated the cleansing as being done directly by God in Jesus to go to the representatives of a system which was really set aside by the direct action of God in the midst of the people. The man who lost sight of the priest, because he was filled with an immediate consciousness of the direct dealing of God with him, was God's tithe.

There is a system on the earth today which holds the nine, but they were not cleansed by the system, nor does the system accredit them. It will not pronounce anybody clean. It may speak of absolution, but if you enquire carefully there is nothing in it; all is uncertain. The Lord felt this, for He said, "Where are the nine?" The tenth leper here got confirmation; he returned and gave glory to God. The Lord's supreme concern in regard to us is that God may have His place with us. The question is, What are my thoughts of God? Is He glorified in my affections? Then God gets His tithe.

LUKE 18

Luke 18

There have been "days of the Son of man", when the kingdom of God was presented in Him in the way of grace, and there will be "days of the Son of man" when all that is evil will be taken away at His coming again. Between the two comes the time of suffering and rejection (chapter 17: 25) in which God's elect have their part. This gives character to the present time. Everything is morally judged in the light of the days of the Son of man. The expression suggests the blessedness which attached to every one of those days in contrast with succeeding days in which the wickedness of man would mature. Faith would contrast all that with what marked the days of the Son of man. It is good to contrast the days of Christ's service here with the 1,260 days in Revelation 11. In the days of Christ here each one brought out some new feature of the grace of the heart of God. Now we have a new standard by which to judge everything far higher than that of the law and prophets.

In a time of rejection and suffering the great resource is prayer: "they should always pray and not faint". It is a question here (verse 7) of suffering wrong without redress. There is a cry day and night while God bears long. It is a time of God's forbearance, and He would educate His saints to bear long also. It is all before God for adjustment, but for the moment prayer, not retaliation, is our part. If an unjust judge who cares nothing for things morally would avenge to save himself annoyance, how much more God, who is so intensely interested in His elect, and so attentive to their cry! We see in verses 10 - 13 that the man who in self-humiliation casts himself on the compassions of God is justified. If there is a spirit of self-exaltation it only means that we shall be humbled. If we do anything in that spirit we shall be let down.

Nothing really humbles a man like the sense of sin. It is not pretending to be humble but true humbling. This is the way of divine exaltation — the reducing and pulling down of a man. We have to learn to make nothing of ourselves, and thus God would make something of us; justifying us first and then exalting us in the appreciation of God's compassions in Christ. He is the great expression of divine compassion. The tax-gatherer says "O God, have compassion on me, the sinner".

The only other instance where the word occurs is in Hebrews 2: 17: "that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest ... *to make propitiation* for the sins of the people". It is a similar word in 1 John 2: 3 and chapter 4: 10, and another form of it is "mercy-seat" in Romans 3 and Hebrews 9. It has in it the thought of propitiation. So far as it was possible at that time the man in verse

13 of our chapter had laid hold of the thought of the death of Christ as the expression of divine compassion and therefore the removing of all sin according to divine glory. It is not the ordinary word for compassion, which suggests tender feelings of pity and kindness, but here there is distinct reference to propitiation for sin. This man comes in on the ground of the death of Christ and he goes to his house a justified and exalted man. Now this is to be maintained in our souls, so that we are never on any other ground with God as to ourselves. It is the true ground of peace, and it puts us in the place of infants whom Jesus can touch, and to whom He can give the kingdom of God. It is viewed here as something to be received first and then entered into. I take it that the justified and exalted man is seen in Romans 5: 1 - 11. But receiving the kingdom of God would be to come into the wealth of what is in another Man according to Romans 5: 12 - 21.

The infants are viewed as having nothing in themselves but receiving all by the touch of Jesus. They were brought to get all the virtue that was in Another — the grace of God and the free gift in grace. Those who receive the abundance of grace and of the free gift of righteousness reign in life. They are in the supremacy of life — dead to sin, dead to law, superior to the flesh, living in Christ Jesus as married to Him and being indwelt by the Spirit, nothing in themselves and all by the touch of Jesus. The doctrine of it is in Romans, the living illustration of it in the gospel. The gospel is preached (Acts), taught (Romans), and illustrated (Gospels). In this way we come to the reign of grace in the soul of the believer; it reigns through righteousness to eternal life. That is entering the kingdom to enjoy the true life of the kingdom.

Now the ruler in verse 18 had not gone that way at all. He came as one good man to another; he had not learnt to humble himself in the consciousness of sin like the publican, and he had no thought of receiving like the little child, and therefore he was not prepared at all for the test which the Lord put before him. The Lord refused to be approached thus. He was here to be the blessed witness of good in God for man. He would not even Himself take the place of being good, but rather of receiving all good from God (Psalm 16). He could dispense it as receiving it. The ruler was evidently attracted by His dispensing goodness, and came as one good man to learn something from another good man. Receiving had never entered his head; he had no sense that he needed to receive. The Lord had to lay bare to him the real state of his heart: he was not good though he thought he was. He had nothing which would be a sufficient motive to surrender. The motive for surrender is the kingdom of God and he knew nothing about it. He loved himself and his riches; he was not prepared to surrender. None of us will move on the line of surrender until we have an adequate motive in the kingdom of God.

The Lord speaks of leaving home, parents, brethren, wife, or children for the kingdom of God's sake. You must see the value of the kingdom of God in order to be prepared to surrender here, and this man had never seen the value of the kingdom of God; he did not understand it. We need to understand what the gain of the kingdom is; it is a most advantageous thing, and it is something to be received. Little children receive it. If there is any self-importance with us we cannot receive it.

The Lord did not test this man by the commandments; He purposely avoided everything in the law that would expose him. The commandments he had kept had not really tested him on the line of surrender. "Do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honour thy father and thy mother. And he said, All these things have I kept from my youth". One might fulfil all these without any real surrender.

That is the third great principle of the kingdom. If you are after what is of God, are you prepared to give up anything for God? Is God worth anything to you? Have you such a wealth in knowing God that you are prepared to give up something? The young man was not prepared; he had done all those things which involved no surrender. Many people could say they have kept these things from their youth up. In this gospel the Lord brings out so constantly that things that are right in themselves can be a complete hindrance to the blessing of the soul. It is not here the question of positive sins, but things that are good and right in themselves that are a hindrance. If one is to have treasure in the heavens there must be surrender in some form here. Any kind of riches that a man may have which does not belong to the kingdom of God will hinder him from entering it; they naturally operate that way. The Lord does not contemplate bad things, but things in which one might be enriched even lawfully, which are not the kingdom of God. Such things give opportunity for surrender. Let us see if there is not with us room for a little surrender in connection with things which are legitimate but which are not the kingdom of God. We shall then receive "manifold more" now, and in the coming age life eternal, as the Lord said.

Eternal life is the proper life of the kingdom; when the kingdom is established publicly all who are in it will have eternal life — "in the coming age life eternal", verse 30. Eternal life is a gift, but it is also a goal and prize. The way to it is along the road of surrender; it is not by human effort but by the powerful working of God in the soul. This is impossible with men but possible with God. When a man turns to God and wants the blessing of God he finds there is something he must give up. The test is whether we are prepared to give up what is legitimate, what we might retain without any trouble of

conscience. It tests what value the kingdom of God has in our eyes. Is it worth giving anything up for? The disciples saw something in Jesus that made them willing to surrender; they left their boats and nets, and some of them left their father; they surrendered because of what they had got. They did not give up to *get* something, but they gave up because they realised the value of what was in Jesus.

This ruler was not under pressure; his difficulty was that he had too much and he loved it, and the Lord had to bring home to him that he was not good. He thought he had kept all the commandments and he was attracted by the dispensation of goodness in the hand of Jesus, but he had to learn a humbling lesson that he was not good at all, and it came about in this, that his own possessions were more to him than the display of goodness. We find out, if we are set to move in the ways of God, that there is something we have to surrender. A young convert finds it out from the first day of his new life, and if he does not move on that line he cannot go on with God. Paul on account of Christ suffered the loss of all things; he made complete surrender; he lost his reputation, his means and his friends. Everything was gone, but he says, "on account of Christ" — that was the motive.

As presented in Luke, the kingdom of God is all that system of grace which is embodied in the Lord Jesus. It is that reign of grace which has been set forth in Jesus so that those who receive it receive the gift of righteousness, abundance of grace, and eternal life, but it is all bound up in a Person — that is how the kingdom of God is presented in Luke. It must be seen and received first, then we can enter into it. Entering implies movement on our side. The Lord said to Nicodemus, If a man is not born anew he cannot see the kingdom of God. It requires new birth in order to see it, but then if it is seen there must be a move made to enter into it. I may see a beautiful garden, but it is another thing to *enter* it. The kingdom of God is seen first and then it has to be entered; we enter as we practically follow Jesus. It was only those who were subjects of the work of God who could see what was there in Jesus. It is just the same today; millions of people know something of Jesus, but they see nothing in Him that is worth making any surrender for.

The disciples say (verse 26) "Who can be saved?" Their natural thought was that the more riches a man had the more he was favoured by God, but the Lord brings out just the opposite here; He brings out that riches might hinder a man from getting the favour of God, so instead of being a proof of God's blessing they might be a proof that one was far from God. The state of man was all wrong; he was lost, and he needed the divine salvation. He needed Christ, and the more he had that was not Christ the less likely he would be to

receive Christ; practically this is always so. "Manifold more" at this time is not that which the natural man values at all.

God has taken matters into His own hands: that is the kingdom in a very simple way. He has provided in Jesus everything that would meet the need of man as a fallen and sinful creature; He has done it from His own side. All the rights of God have been maintained by Jesus; He has brought in the compassions of God; His goodness, His mercy and His salvation all subsist in Jesus, and when these are received a man is turned upside down. All His thoughts are changed about himself — the world, riches, and everything else. Man begins to live in the blessedness God has made known in Jesus. There is resource in the Lord and we can never get to the end of it. I have One who not only can save me from my sins and relieve me from fear of judgment, but He is a living resource, so that I can go to Him, commit everything to Him, and count upon Him — that is the kingdom.

The blessing of a soul, the entrance into the kingdom, and the possession of salvation, are impossibilities with man, but they are divine possibilities. We have to do with a whole system of things which are human impossibilities — that is the character of Christianity. In Christianity it is all a question of God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and everything that is an impossibility to man. When we come to God and Christ, things are available to all; it is not a question of the good or bad man, the rich or poor man, but it is a question of what God and Christ are for all men. It is also a question of the death of Christ, of which He begins to speak here to the disciples (verse 31). The disciples did not understand it, and I suppose there is nothing of which we know so little the meaning as the death of Christ.

The Lord had previously in this gospel (chapter 9: 22) told them of His being killed, and that He was to be delivered into men's hands, and we are told that "they understood not this saying, and it was hidden from them that they should not perceive it". They had discerned who He was as the Christ of God (chapter 9), but the necessity for His death they had never seen. I do not think it could be perceived apart from the Spirit. The death of Christ is so wonderful, and the depth in it so profound, that it does not appear that the disciples had taken it in at all, but this was not for want of God's taking great pains to make it understood — the Scriptures are full of it.

The Son of man could only take up His place of universal supremacy on the ground of the suffering of death. He was to be the great Sufferer by the grace of God. This incident shows how much true appreciation of Christ there may be, and even preparedness to surrender for His sake, without understanding the necessity of His death. By the grace of God He was going to place

everything on the footing of His death. He had indeed become Son of man for that purpose. The depth of it was beyond them; it could not be apprehended beforehand. The sufferings and death of the Son of man were an expression of the grace of God so wondrous, so deep, and so far-reaching in result that they could not be understood beforehand. The things written by the prophets were not understood by them, as Peter says.

The inability of the disciples to perceive these things is illustrated in the blind man. He had the faith of the Son of David and so had they, but they needed spiritual vision to see Jesus in the wider glory of the Son of man, and to see that He would take up all that belonged to man in God's purposes and counsels on the ground of His own suffering and death. John's blind man had his eyes opened to see the Son of God, but I believe Luke's blind man had his sight to see the Son of man and to follow Him. He was "Jesus the Nazaraean" to the crowd, Son of David to the blind man, and in receiving sight he received, in figure, capacity to see and follow Him as Son of man. The Lord here refers to Himself as the Son of man (verse 31). He was seeking to engage their hearts and ours with all that is connected with Him as such. He was about to take up the inheritance assigned to the Son of man on the ground of His death, and because He had completely cleared it of everything that rested on it through man's sin. The Son of man would be connected in the mind of the Jew with universal dominion according to Psalm 8; He was not only Son of David but Son of man. The Lord spoke of Himself very frequently as Son of man in the gospels; the title refers to Him as having universal rights of dominion, but the marvellous thing is that He is going to take it up on the ground of His own sufferings and death. He is going to relieve the inheritance of everything that has come in upon it through the sin of man.

It has often been illustrated by an estate heavily mortgaged, and the heir would clear the inheritance of every liability and encumbrance before entering upon it as supreme. Sin was there, suffering, cruelty, injustice, vanity, the bondage of corruption, death — a burden on the inheritance which none knew of or understood but the Heir, and the One who had designed from eternity that all should be His. The disciples did not understand how encumbered the inheritance was. They believed that Jesus was the Christ and was begotten of God. They saw He was able to meet in divine power all the evil that was here; they had seen samples of it every day, but they could not realise what a burden rested on the inheritance of the Son of man. All was His inheritance, but His own suffering and death alone could clear it of the encumbrance which rested upon it. This gives us a great thought of Jesus as Son of man. It needs peculiar spiritual vision to see the wide expanse of the inheritance of the Son of man, and to see the terrible nature of what has come in upon it by sin.

According to the counsels of God the Heir has undertaken to clear the inheritance; He will not leave a single thing to encumber it, so that when He takes it up there will be no reproach left upon God in the universe. And the saints will be His joint-heirs. The disciples thought that the power they had seen exercised in beneficent goodness would suffice to bring in the kingdom, but they needed vision by the Spirit to see that suffering and death were the divine way to bring about what was in the mind of God. All is now accomplished, and the Son of man has risen again on the third day. Though the inheritance is not cleared publicly yet, the work is completed by which it will be cleared. In the meantime the joint-heirs are joint-sufferers, but they suffer in full view of the coming glory.

The opening of the eyes of the blind was a miracle reserved for the Messiah. Jericho brought before the Lord's mind what had transpired there years before. There was something found for God even in Jericho; the work of God was there in the soul of Rahab. Wherever the Lord moved He brought to light the work of God in souls. Jericho was not only the stronghold of the enemy's power, but it was the place of the work of God, and it is evident there was a work of God in both the blind beggar and in the rich publican. So it is today; as the Lord moves about in testimony it brings to light the work of God. The blind man here represents those who by the word of Jesus receive ability to discern the import of His sufferings and death.

The Lord in passing by brought to light the work of God in souls. In these two incidents at Jericho (chapters 18: 35 - 43 and 19: 1 - 10) we find a crowd. The Lord did not forbid the crowd to follow Him, but His eye was upon the individuals in whom there was a work of God. Faith was there in the blind beggar, but he wanted sight. The disciples knew Christ after the flesh; to the blind man He was the Son of David. But He was going into death to rise again; He was going to take up all in the dominion of the Son of man. Vision was needed for that. Saul was to see and be filled with the Holy Spirit, in Acts 9. If the Lord brought to light the work of God He never left things as He found them. The blind man had, no doubt, been told that the Messiah would open the eyes of the blind; "the eyes of the blind shall see", Isaiah 29: 18.

The curse had been pronounced on Jericho, and, one might say, removed figuratively through Elisha's action (1 Kings 2: 19 - 22). The waters were healed and there was to be no more barrenness; that was like the lifting of the curse. Elisha represented the grace of God; his name means the salvation of God, and if the salvation of God comes where the curse has been, the effect is to remove it. It is remarkable that Jericho has such a history of curse and blessing; but the great thing is to see that the work of God is there. It was

there in Rahab, the blind man, and Zacchaeus. There was something working in their souls that was of God, and as the Lord moved about that came to light, just as now when the gospel is preached the work of God in souls comes to light and we find persons interested and attracted. In Jericho, the city of palm-trees, God secured His own victory; both the blind beggar and the rich publican became palm trees, and that place which spoke of all the power of the enemy and the curse of God became the scene of divine victory and triumph.

Jesus stands still (verse 40). There is a crowd, but His eye was on those who had divinely wrought exercises. Many come to the meetings, and the meetings may be like the crowd, with a certain interest in the Lord and His things, but no definite exercises; that is why we come and go and do not get anything. The Lord is always on the look-out for exercises in the heart, and if anyone comes to the meeting with real exercise the Lord is concerned with that one. He brings to light the work of God and never leaves that work where He finds it; He always adds something to it. If we have to do with the Lord with any genuine exercise, we may be quite sure He will add something to us. We do not believe how ready the Lord is; we seem to think we have to carry our burdens and work out our exercises, but He puts Himself at our disposal wherever there is room for Him to come in.

Nothing could be greater than that we should have the ability to see — spiritual vision. The power to see lies in the Spirit; it is by the Spirit we have vision. Vision is different from faith. This man had faith before he got sight; seeing is not believing — it is much greater. The prophet Elisha said, "Jehovah, open the young man's eyes that he may see". There was a most extraordinary assemblage of things actually present but unseen. We must have vision to see the wonderful character of the things that are now present. Paul speaks of these most marvellous things: "we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen" — he had ability to see the unseen things. I do not know any greater proof of divine favour than that we should be able to see God's unseen wonders connected with the Son of man risen from the dead.

Ananias said to Saul, "Jesus ... has sent me ... that thou mightest see". He was to see everything in a new way in company with the Holy Spirit. It is an entirely new faculty, and it is directly connected with the Spirit in John 14, when the Lord speaks of another Comforter and immediately says, "ye see me". The result of the Spirit being given is ability to see an unseen Person. The gospels give illustrations of things that were not realised in power until after the death of the Lord and the descent of the Spirit, but they are

presented in illustrations. To be able to see things is a very great privilege and a power conferred by God.

Scripture says, "Faith cometh by a report". It is a very blessed thing to get a report concerning God and Christ and to believe it, but the result of believing it is that one receives the Holy Spirit, and then there is divine power to perceive things spiritual. It is not merely that you believe what you hear, but there is ability to perceive — that is an important distinction. There is a new universe in Psalm 8 which is the dominion of the Son of man; He is going to relieve the inheritance of every encumbrance and trace of unsuitability, so that it will be worthy of God and of the Heir. Now the saints who have the Spirit see it, so that that universe is greater and more real than all the present things in this world. This world goes down in the judgment of the cross; the cross ends this world in which we once lived and to which we once belonged. Now we have another world, things "which eye has not seen and ear not heard, and which have not come into man's heart, which God has prepared for them that love him, but God has revealed to us by his Spirit". Paul's eyes were spiritually fixed on that unseen realm. We have not the universe of bliss yet, but we have the Person who is going to bring it in and fill it by the Spirit, and we are able to see Him. "We see Jesus, who was made some little inferior to angels on account of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour". It is only those who have the Spirit who can see Him. After Elijah was taken up, there were fifty men who wanted to help Elisha find Elijah. The sons of the prophets were doubtless very clever men, a kind of theological seminary, but they could not see; they were blind. They said that the Spirit of God had cast Elijah on some mountain or into some ravine — what a thought to have of God! He had been caught up and carried away to heaven, and they thought he was in some ditch somewhere and asked to go to find him! It is much the same today; people talk and discuss about Christ. The starting-point for us is, "we see Jesus". If there was more vision there would be more power. Scripture says, "Because there is no vision the people perish". Faith is not enough; we need power to see. If there is no vision, people have nothing but the letter of Scripture; but a whole system of things subsists, a blessed, spiritual world which stands in relation to the Son of man risen from the dead and glorified at the right hand of God. If one sees that, one has done with the religious world altogether. It is not that people have not the Bible today; they are being printed by the thousand every year, but to have vision one must have received the Spirit and give place to the Spirit, so that one is able to view things in the vision of the Spirit.

The Spirit gives vision of what is at the right hand of God. I have often said to people that if they want first information of what is going on, they must set

their eyes on the right hand of God. The first move will be there. The Christian with his eyes on Christ at the right hand of God will be the first one to get information as to God's movements down here. We are to look at the prophetic system in the light of the heavenly. It was said to John, "Come up here"; so to understand prophecy we must go to heaven and then look down. The Lord was going to Calvary, to suffer and die, and the blind man who received sight followed Him in that way. He was going out of the whole present system of this world in the company of Jesus.

LUKE 19

Luke 19

We have seen that in chapter 18 the Lord secures a man in Jericho with vision and that man follows Him; He becomes the great object for those who have vision. Then in Zacchaeus the Lord secures a house. The Lord knew there was a house where He would be welcome in Jericho. The Lord was going to Calvary — death, and the blind man got sight and followed Him in the way, in *that* way; he was going out of the whole present system in company with Jesus. Zacchaeus had a place where the Lord came to be entertained, and where He could abide and bring salvation. The work of God was there in Zacchaeus and he sought to see Jesus, and while he felt himself very unworthy and did not expect more than a look from the Lord, yet there was a house there held in relation to the Lord. These two incidents represent two important exercises: the ability to see what is altogether outside the present system of things, and then the privilege of having a house where the Lord can be entertained in the midst of present conditions.

The testimony of the Lord resides largely in the households of the saints, so that what goes on in the meetings depends much on what goes on in the households. I do not think we shall ever get anything of spiritual quality in the meetings that goes beyond what is found in the households of the saints. In the new meat-offering the wave loaves were brought out of their dwellings; it is a wonderful thing to have the millennium set up in the households.

We have been noticing how the Lord in passing through brought to light in souls the work of God; there was a work in the blind man and in Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was a son of Abraham, a true believer as we would say; he was of the faith family and was under reproach as being a tax-gatherer, but he had not really brought reproach on God. The reproaches of those who murmured were not justifiable. I suppose Zacchaeus referred to his past life when he stood and said, "The half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I return him fourfold". The fact that Zacchaeus had been behaving in such a way indicated that there was a work of God in him; his course was such as to avoid bringing any reproach on God — that is a great mark of the work of God. This did not take away from Zacchaeus the sense of needing God's salvation. The Lord spoke of Himself as having come to seek and save that which was lost, and He spoke of salvation coming to Zacchaeus's house; that is, He was received there as God's salvation. Zacchaeus felt the need of salvation like Cornelius in Acts 10. Cornelius was an exemplary man, his prayers and alms went up as a memorial

before God, and he did not resent being told that Peter would tell him words whereby he and his house should be saved. The more we are concerned to act worthily of God, the more we welcome the greatness of His salvation. This involves complete deliverance from the present system of things. Christ is God's salvation, and in receiving Him salvation is ours in all its completeness.

The household was to be the sphere where divine salvation would be found. Salvation comes to a house, not merely to individuals; one saved person in a house brings the salvation of God to that house. That would apply not only to the head of the house. Zacchaeus was the New Testament Rahab; there was a house in Jericho where the salvation of God was received. Rahab had a father; she was a subordinate member of the family, but she secured blessing for her father and for all her kindred. If God converts one person in a family He indicates that He has entered that family for blessing. We should regard it in that way, whether it is a parent or a child. God comes to a house for blessing; it is a rare thing that God is content to have only one. Salvation for the house is a great principle all through Scripture.

These movements in Jericho are significant in connection with the former triumphs of God there. The Lord brought to light the work of God wherever He moved; He was passing through on His way to take up the kingdom and the inheritance, and on His way He was bringing to light the joint-heirs. What was of God in all its fulness and blessedness as found in Jesus was brought into Zacchaeus's house; something entirely of God was brought in and that meant salvation from everything not of God. Salvation comes by the blessedness of what is of God coming in, so the soul is delivered from what is not of God.

Righteousness was the evidence that Zacchaeus was governed by what was worthy of God — his very name means pure. As the result of the work of God in Zacchaeus God was being honoured and no reproach was brought on Him by Zacchaeus's behaviour. People were reproaching the Lord and Zacchaeus was standing up for Him. It is a great thing to see a holy jealousy for the Lord so that we would not like to bring any reproach or see any reproach brought on His name.

The parable that follows (verses 11 - 27) would show what we are saved for. We are saved in order to handle the Lord's goods in a worthy manner as good bondmen.

The kingdom of God has not yet been manifested, because it was in the mind of God that His Son should be honoured and glorified in heaven before He was honoured on earth. The disciples were under a certain misapprehension: "they thought that the kingdom of God was about to be immediately manifested". The Lord gives them and us the light of His present, heavenly position, which

is a most important thing for us to apprehend. When the Lord takes up the kingdom or the inheritance He takes it up from the heavenly side. The whole of Luke's gospel from chapter 9 turns on the Lord's being received up. He was about to receive His kingdom, not on earth but in heaven. The "high-born man" had not received what was due to him — publicly He had the suffering of the cross, but the Lord gets all due to Him in heaven. We are just in this peculiar moment. The Lord is enthroned in heaven and He is coming back to take up His rights here, but in the meantime He has set us up in business on His account; He has given us capital to trade with.

The Lord has brought here something that was never here before; that is, the knowledge of God in supreme grace; and our great business is to handle that. The Lord has put it all in our hands and we have to trade with it; there is a spiritual commerce to be carried on — that is our real business. What we do for our living on earth is not our real business at all; our true business is to handle what we have received from the Lord in such a way that it increases, so that it is not the same with us now as it was two years ago. Luke puts things together morally, and the connection with the previous incident is that we are saved in order to take up what Christ has brought to us and put in our hands.

In Matthew 25 — the parable of the talents — the thought is sovereignty, taking account of different abilities; all do not receive the same. One gets more than another because the Lord sees the ability there is to handle it. Here we all have alike; from the point of view of this chapter I have just the same as the apostle Paul. It is a question of responsibility here and on that line we have all received the same; Paul, or Peter, or John had nothing more than we all have, that is, the knowledge of God in supreme grace as brought out in Jesus. It is not possible to have any more and it is not possible to have any less, so the test is now, What use are we making of it? Are we good bondmen or otherwise? We all have the same capital to work with. This parable gives an entirely new character of responsibility; the fact that there are ten servants and ten pounds would suggest the thought of responsibility, but responsibility of a new character conditioned by what we have received from Christ. The supreme grace of God revealed to us in this precious gospel is the same for all. On the ground of what has come to us from God in Jesus we are on a level with the apostles, and they are on a level with us.

Trading brings out whether we are good bondmen or not; we have a new kind of responsibility to take up. We are left here in the absence of Christ to deal with His goods, with things which have precious value to Christ and which He intends to be increased in our hands. It is a spiritual commerce, trading. Think

of the diligence of Paul in trading; he turned the capital over as often as he could.

If we shut ourselves up to ourselves we do not increase. There is a great danger of taking up the grace of this precious gospel as if it were intended for our comfort, assurance and happiness, shutting it up in our hearts; that is not trading. It is all given to us for trading, but we are all more given to hoarding what we can get. It is possible to go to meetings with the idea only of what we can get. Laying our pound up in a towel represents holding the truth correctly, but unproductively; it is inoperative. Orthodox Christendom holds the truth correctly and formally, would stand up for God's truth, but it is unproductive. If a brother keeps quiet who ought to take part, it is impoverishing himself. If he has something from Christ that is of universal value, and it is not traded with, there is no increase. The thought is that what is of God should increase, and it will not increase without trading. It is a great matter that what is of the Lord is to increase with us; we must turn the stock over.

We do not realise the value of things in the estimation of Christ. Each of us should have the sense of receiving something which is of the greatest value to the Lord Jesus Christ, and now we have to trade with it. The two things go together: our own personal diligence in regard to it, and then the turning it over in the way of trading; the spiritual commerce has to be carried on so that the capital may increase. The result of trading brought to light the diligence of each servant in regard to what was entrusted to him. It has nothing to do with gift; it has to do with what is common to all. Paul says to the Corinthians, "As fellow workmen, we also beseech that ye receive not the grace of God in vain" (2 Corinthians 6: 1), and then he goes on to tell them in that wonderful chapter about his own trading; he brings out what had characterised him in the handling of the responsibility of grace. He gives a long list of the way he had behaved himself and the different characteristics of his service and labours: "in everything commending ourselves as God's ministers, in much endurance, in afflictions, in necessities, in straits, in stripes, in prisons, in riots, in labours, in watchings, in fastings, in pureness, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in kindness, in the Holy Ghost, in love unfeigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God; through the arms of righteousness on the right hand and left, through glory and dishonour, through evil report and good report: as deceivers, and true; as unknown and well known; as dying, and behold we live; as disciplined, and not put to death; as grieved, but always rejoicing; as poor, but enriching many; as having nothing, and possessing all things". There is a man trading, and all this is for the ministry, he is handling Christ's goods in such a way that they are not in vain. Grace was powerful and

operative, and enabled him to go on in faith; it involved every kind of discipline and suffering, but he goes undauntedly forward, so that the treasure should be multiplied and that as many as possible should get the benefit. We are all to enrich one another; no one could say he has no capital. The wicked servant did not know anything about it, showing that it is possible to have the responsibility of receiving wealth which Christ has brought and left here without having any vital interest in it.

The Lord says, "Thou hast been faithful in that which is least". That which is great is connected with purpose, our names written in heaven, our calling, and nothing can invalidate it. It has nothing to do with being over cities; it has to do with being in heaven, a place in the Father's house, being Christ's brethren and joint-heirs — that is the greatest side. The responsible side is the least side. For instance whatever you could do in the way of service is a small matter compared with the place you have according to the purpose of everlasting love. You do your business diligently, whatever as to the grace of God has been committed to you by Christ. The bank would suggest that, if we have not energy to do business on our own account, we might help someone else to do it. But this man had no interest in the matter; he did not know his lord; he slandered him. Responsibility is a test of love. "If ye love me, keep my commandments" — that is, everything that has the character of commandment, and I suppose all responsibility has that character, but it becomes a test of love. That found out the man who did not love his lord. The point was that he did not love him; he made a lame excuse. When people make excuses they always become the ground of their condemnation — that is a divine principle from Genesis 3 right through to the end. The man who wrapped his pound in a towel did not love his lord; he saw nothing to love in him, only an austere man, exacting unduly: his apprehension of his lord was not such as to make him a lover. The question with us is, What sort of apprehension have we of the Lord? Such a One is enough to make us ardent lovers, but what is He to me? How do I view Him? That determines the whole position. If we have an unworthy thought of the Lord we shall be unworthy in everything.

If we apprehended God's purpose of grace given to us in Christ before the ages of time, if we saw that we are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, that the Father "has marked us out for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself" — it would give a wonderful impetus to everything on the responsible side. The more we are confirmed in all connected with divine purpose the more we shall be strengthened for responsible service here; but it does not do to confound the two things. When the seventy disciples came back and said to the Lord, "even the demons are subject to us through thy

name", the Lord says, "Yet in this rejoice not ... but rejoice that your names are written in the heavens". If I could do the most wonderful service, even to casting out demons, healing the sick, preaching the gospel so that thousands were converted, yet the Lord would say, Do not rejoice in that, but because you have a place in heaven. This adjusts us spiritually so that we know the difference between what is greatest and what is related to the least. It knocks a good deal of self-importance out of us, for we can get very self-important sometimes in regard to our responsibility. We have to remember that the responsible side is least, but it is important because it determines our place in the kingdom, though not in the Father's house. We must not give up service; we come out from our secret place to more service. What I know of God is to work out in the responsible life; it is to govern everything. If you are faced with a difficulty your first thought would be, My business in this matter is to be governed by the way I know God in grace. If it were so, there would never be anything uncomely in our relations with men or with the brethren. It would cost something, because we would have to give up the natural. But when we give the grace of God its proper place in our hearts there is great increase in our souls, so it pays to allow grace to govern us.

There are two sides to Christian responsibility. One side has to do with the reception of the grace of God, and then it becomes a responsibility not to receive the grace of God in vain, but that it should work out in trading. The other side is that the rights of Christ are to be maintained in testimony during the period of His absence; that is seen in the incident of the colt. In trading with the Lord's spiritual wealth, the knowledge of God in grace which He has committed to us, we must never forget as faithful bondmen that our Lord has gone away to receive the kingdom. His rights have been denied Him here, but He has gone to a place where all His rights are accorded to Him, and those rights have to be maintained in testimony; they are in abeyance, but as to testimony they have to be fully maintained. "The testimony of our Lord" is really the glad tidings, and the glad tidings not only include all that is for the glory of God in grace, but also involve the recognition of all divine rights.

What comes out in connection with the colt indicates how the Lord would secure the testimony of His rights. He would not do it in the way of pomp or of anything impressive; He rides on an ass's colt. The prophetic word said that the King was to come, just and having salvation — that is like the beginning of this chapter; but then He is lowly. We have to remember that the Lord is lowly at this present time, not personally, but in the character of His testimony. We need to remember that, for the higher up we get in this world, and the finer rooms we have and all that sort of thing, the more we get away from the true character of the testimony; it is a lowly testimony. I do think we should give

heed to that. It is the character of the testimony that the King is lowly. Though He is exalted above all heavens as to His place on high, yet as to His place here He is the lowly One. His testimony is marked by lowliness. He spoke to Saul of Tarsus from the glory as Jesus of Nazareth. He appropriated that lowly name. The Lord selects lowly material for the testimony. The testimony of the rights of Christ is an important subject and derives its character very much from the kind of material that is taken up to carry it. The blessed God is looking for the sort of material that will glorify Him, so He does not call the great, the wise, or the noble, but the calling is marked by a calling of persons of no account. Not that the wise and noble are excluded, because Paul says in I Corinthians I, "not *many* wise, not many noble". Lady Huntingdon said that she was saved by the letter M. But it is not the character of the testimony, for God chooses the poor of this world. He is looking for persons of broken spirit, of humble and contrite heart — those are the ones who are attractive to Him. That character of person lends itself to the testimony; what is great and pretentious and proud does not suit the testimony.

Luke presents the two sides we have been speaking of: there is the full expression of the grace of God to man coming down in condescending gentleness to make him great; but on the other side all the rights of God in Christ are to be maintained. As the scripture says, "He shall sit upon the throne of his father David".

This colt was retained specially for the purpose, and each one of us has been specially retained for the purpose of carrying the testimony of the rights of Christ. He puts His claim on us, and we are to answer to His claims and to recognise that we are born into the world with that in view. Paul said, "God, who set me apart even from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace" — God had that in view from the outset. This colt had never been broken in; it had never found its right place until it was requisitioned for the use of the Lord, and none of us are in our right place until we are subdued to Him. We were destined for that purpose from our birth. There is a certain protective restraint exercised over all those who are marked out to carry the Lord in testimony; a restraint is put upon them in the ways of God so that they are held. The ways of God do not begin with us when we are converted; there comes a moment when the Lord requisitions us. As we have often seen in this gospel, it is not so much that man needs God but that God needs man. So here the Lord had need of the colt; it was requisitioned for a special purpose. The colt was subdued — who would trust himself to ride on an unbroken colt? The fact that the Lord rode on an unbroken colt intimates that the power by which He is able to subdue all things to Himself has already subdued that which can carry Him in testimony.

In Bethphage and Bethany we have the contrast to Jerusalem and the nations at large, because both mean the house of figs, intimating that, if both Jerusalem and Israel were barren fig trees, there was a village, an obscure place, where the Lord did find fruit and where His rights were recognised. The masters immediately recognise the rights of the Lord and, one might say, the colt recognised His rights without any human breaking in; he is subdued for the Lord of glory to ride upon. Bethphage and Bethany were little places, but there was a testimony there; there were those there who did recognise the rights of the Lord. Jerusalem very much corresponds with the state of the Christian profession where the rights of the Lord are refused, but the Lord does secure something; He has His Bethany and His Bethphage, and His colt as well.

These two little villages stand literally at the foot of the mount of Olives, which signifies a spiritual and heavenly region. The Spirit has come down from heaven so that there is a region on earth that is imbued with the heavenly atmosphere and heavenly appreciation of Christ; it is fine to be in such a region as that. All the fatness of the olive tree is there — “the root and fatness of the olive tree”. The fatness is that peculiar richness and wealth which is found in the Spirit — He would bring us in our thoughts and affections into concert with the mind of heaven, and then we shall feel what a privilege it is to be singled out — requisitioned to carry in testimony the rights of Christ in a scene where those rights are despised and rejected on every hand. The colt was reserved for the Lord, like the guest chamber.

The disciples represent a company, a multitude, in concert with the mind of heaven, so they placed the Lord on the colt. They knew what they were doing in putting Him on the colt; they put their clothes on the colt. Everything that would distinguish themselves was subordinate now to the glory of Christ. What a wonderful picture! If there is anything that would give me a place and character and respectability in the world, I have this great privilege of subordinating it to His honour in testimony. Putting their garments on the colt would refer to what was done for the Lord Himself, but spreading the garments in the way would indicate more the course of the testimony. The testimony was going to take a definite course. The disciples are seen as contributing on the principle of surrender and self-abnegation; they are subordinating themselves to the way the testimony was taking. Many have missed their way by not being able to discern how the testimony was moving. The clothes had to be laid down in advance, implying that the disciples knew the way the Lord was about to move. The real test for us is to know intuitively beforehand the way the testimony is about to move. Sometimes it moves in a way we do not expect and we get altogether upset.

The priests in the wilderness did not keep their eyes on the tabernacle but on the cloud; and the cloud moved before the tabernacle. If we have not priestly vision we have to wait until there is movement of the tabernacle to see how things are going. A true priest would be able to see the movements of the cloud even before the tabernacle was moving. There are three distinct things. First, the priest had his eye on the cloud; he saw it move and saw it taken up. Then, secondly, the priest sounds the trumpet, and the sound of the trumpet sets the camp in movement. Thirdly, the Levites take the tabernacle down; each takes charge of his particular burden, and then the whole camp moves. There are three stages: the cloud moves, then the trumpets sound — the ministry goes forth, and then the testimony moves.

How do we know what will be involved in the testimony of the rights of Christ during the next five years? I believe if we were spiritual enough and priestly enough we could perceive beforehand by observing the movements of the cloud, and know which way the testimony was going to move in the maintenance of the rights of Christ. That is a purely spiritual thing. Then we should not be surprised when the time came for the tabernacle and camp to move; we should have seen the cloud move first. I say this to wake us all up to the privilege of it, so that we should be prepared to subordinate anything that would distinguish us here, take our clothes and lay them down in the way He is going. That way involves self-abnegation, the laying aside of my glory, anything that would distinguish me. I am prepared to put it down because that is the way in which the testimony of the rights of the Lord is going; He is moving that way.

His sovereign rights are maintained by the multitude; it is not the little flock here, but all the multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice. We have seen the multitude of the heavenly host in chapter 2, but now the character of that host is seen in a multitude of men here upon earth. The heavenly host in chapter 2 celebrate peace on earth: they look on to the ultimate result of the coming in of Jesus the Son of God; but the multitude in this chapter understand the peculiar character of the present moment, so they do not say 'Peace on earth'; they speak of peace in heaven. They are intelligent about the fact that all His rights are refused Him here. Jerusalem was not going to accord Him His rights, so the city that might have had peace has repudiated all the things that would have been for her peace. Peace is in heaven, and this multitude is in accord with the mind of heaven while the Lord is publicly despised and rejected. It is a most beautiful scene, an absolute necessity for God. If He could not find a multitude of disciples, He would make the very stones speak. It is an absolute necessity for God that His royal Son should be praised in His kingly glory.

I have referred before now to the three women who were martyred at Wigtown. On their monument it says, "They died to maintain the rights of Christ in the assembly". I do not know that anything more noble could be said of any saint than that. God does not keep people in the dark who want to move with Him. 2 Timothy would go with this, the maintenance of the rights of Christ. If we name the name of the Lord, we are to withdraw from iniquity or unrighteousness. Everything that does not maintain the rights of Christ is unrighteousness. The religious world does not maintain the rights of Christ; many profess His name but only to dishonour it. Now in contrast to that we are to "follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" — a company with pure affections.

The course of the testimony is determined by what the Spirit says to the assemblies at any particular moment. It is wonderful to think of all this having a present bearing so that we are called in grace to participate in such a celebration. Jerusalem ignores the Lord and derides Him, but there is a wonderful celebration of His glory going on. It is carried on by a people poor, despised and of no account, a people whose origin on the natural side was that they were born as wild asses' colts, but they have been subdued to Christ and requisitioned for His testimony, detained for it, and set for it in their affections. One longs to be on that line a little more.

At the close of the chapter the Lord is seen weeping over Jerusalem; it is most touching. He was coming as the most blessed King to His royal city, but it had no eyes to see Him, and it awakened in His heart those deep emotions which found expression in tears. It would suggest to us the kind of feelings that there are in the heart of the Lord at the present time — right through the period of testimony those are His feelings even to those who harden themselves. In the end of a day of peculiar privilege, a day that is distinctly the season of visitation, the tender feelings of the Lord come out. They come out to Laodicea: He says, "Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking" — there is a spirit of entreaty about it. This should find expression in His saints at the present time, for whatever attitude the Lord takes up in regard to things is a very safe one for us to take up. If we know what is near to men and the terrible consequences of not knowing it, we should weep. There is no hardness of spirit in the rejected King.

Weeping would seem to be a right feature at the end of a dispensation. Jeremiah in his Lamentations closes his dispensation with tears, weeping for the people. These would be the feelings of Christ when things have to be set aside. There is a danger of getting hard in thinking of God's rights being set aside and Christ rejected. We see the abounding wickedness of men, but the

Lord would not have that feeling dominant with us, but rather the thought of what is there for them and the awful sadness of the eyes blind to it. Jerusalem was very much in the place that Christendom is in now, having a wonderful day, a season of visitation, but having no eyes to see the things belonging to its peace. The heart of God was never more compassionate than at the present moment, knowing the full blessedness of what His grace has brought near, and seeing the terrible state of men's hearts in relation to it; it moves divine compassions deeply. So the Lord in dealing with Laodicea is still faithful to His own love. "As many as I love I rebuke and discipline" — it is a slighted Lover but a Lover still. And if Paul has to speak of the enemies of the cross of Christ, he does it weeping. We often become hard in speaking of enemies. We may know a great deal and understand the times of the dispensation and tell people very earnestly that judgment is just about to fall, but it needs nearness to Christ to be able to tell them so with tears. When we see things wrong, we become indignant, and that is right at times, but it is easier to be indignant than it is to weep.

The spirit around us today is boastful, arrogant and needing nothing, but the Lord does not leave things at that. At this point He enters into the temple, intimating that, notwithstanding all, He would maintain a temple character of things, that in which the mind of God could be known. All that is suitable to God, beginning with prayer, divine teaching, authority and what is due to God in relation to all great subjects, is to be maintained when the outward profession shows itself blind and indifferent to all that is of God. It is our privilege to resort to the temple. Indeed I think Luke's object in writing his gospel was to make us temple-dwellers; it is reached in the last chapter, where the disciples were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God, and having light as to the mind of God. The Lord will maintain that to the end; whatever becomes of the outward profession, all that is of temple character will be preserved.

"Entering into the temple he *began* to cast out those that sold and bought" (verse 45) intimates that it was the kind of thing He would go on with; the casting out of what was unworthy of God would be a continual service. It does not just say He did it, but He began to do it, intimating a continuance of it. Those who sold and bought were animated by selfish motives; they were corrupting the temple, taking away its true character. It was a mercenary and self-seeking spirit that is only too common. In contrast to this the first element of temple instruction that God would give us is the free-giving of God and how readily things can be obtained from Him. His house is a *house of prayer*. We cannot buy, but we can ask; things are freely given there. Prayer would be the condition of dependence which would make room for divine teaching. It is

important for us to come to the simple fact that prayer is the secret of getting things.

We should pray for more light. We often give thanks for the light we have, but it does not often dawn on us that there is a great deal more that we might have; we want the spirit of enquiry in His temple. If that spirit is not with us and we are not seeking more light we shall not make good use of what we have. The secret of all the decline and departure around us is that the people of God have ceased to enquire in the temple. There is always a tendency to think that we have reached finality. They thought they had at the Reformation and so they settled down to the light they had. There is always that tendency if God gives light, and then the spirit of enquiry in the temple dies, and there is no fresh light; the light received loses all its power.

The full revelation of God came out in Christ, and by His taking His place at the right hand of God and the Spirit coming down everything is complete. On the divine side everything is absolute and according to divine measure, but on our side things are limited and there is constant need for adjustment and accession of divine light. While it has all shone out it has not all shone in. In the epistles we see in the dealing of God with saints how incomplete things are, and how much has to be added and built in, and how development has to be promoted from every point of view.

LUKE 20

Luke 20

This chapter continues the subject of teaching in the temple, and connects it with the preaching of the glad tidings. "It came to pass on one of the days, as he was teaching the people in the temple, and announcing the glad tidings.." All temple teaching has the glad tidings character, because it always brings some increase in the knowledge of what there is in God for us, so that the light is never taken up in legality. We are never set to make bricks without straw. All teaching necessitates enlargement in the knowledge of God in His grace and in His love to men. If light came with a sense of obligation only, we should be overweighted, but it brings an increase in the knowledge of God, so that there is a sufficient supply to answer to the light given.

The teaching, if effective, must be imbued with glad tidings character. The teaching of 2 Corinthians — the new covenant and reconciliation — is connected with the gospel, but as needed by the saints so that they might be strengthened to sustain what is worthy of God in testimony, and so that the temple character might be maintained. Paul told the Corinthians in the first epistle that they were the temple of God and that the temple was not to be contaminated by human thoughts; it concerns divine Persons. The preacher ought to know, not only to whom he has come — wretched, needy sinners — but from whom he has come, the blessed God; the glad tidings concern His Son and are never to be left behind. Mr. Darby said, when asked if he did not find it necessary to go back to first principles, No, I never leave them.

It is important also that we should have this element of authority, which the Lord is set to maintain. Nothing is more needed than authority; the general weakness is that there is so little sense of divine authority. Lawlessness is the outcome of giving up the thought of authority. The Lord would impress on us in His temple that authority is here, but it is here in lowliness. He was here as the lowly King, not assertive in the sense of bearing down everything before Him, but authority was there. The priests and scribes and elders all felt it, for they said, "Who gave thee this authority?" They confessed it was there. It was not assertive, but felt. Peter says, "If any one speak — as oracles of God", 1 Peter 4: 11, Those who do not regard authority are manifested as being lawless. It is an authority not subjected to interrogation of men; it only recognised moral conditions which were entirely absent in these people. They had never repented; they had never submitted to the searching character of John's teaching, so they were morally out of court. The Lord would not stand at their bar for a moment.

It is becoming more and more a characteristic of religious teaching that things are all suppositional and only what men think, but that is not the mind of God. If we come to the temple we have the mind of God, and according to it things are authoritative; they cannot be gainsaid, but must be obeyed. "If anyone think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him recognise the things that I write to you, that it is the Lord's commandment", 1 Corinthians 14: 37. Paul would have them recognise the commandment of the Lord. What is said or done with divine authority stands. People may seem to be able to disregard it and trifle with it, but it stands. I would not care to say or do things that are thought to stand in man's universe, but it is blessed to be able to say and do things that stand in the moral universe so that they can never be undone. It is an authority connected with meekness and gentleness. Paul besought the Corinthians by the meekness and gentleness of Christ; personally he was prepared to take the lowliest place in service, even to go down to the feet of the saints, but he never forgot that he had authority.

There is no temple in the city in Revelation 21, for the whole city has temple character. It is no longer a question of a particular shrine in the city, but the light of God and the Lamb pervades the whole city. The overcomer in Philadelphia will be made a pillar in the temple, and he will never go out from the sphere of the mind of God. In Ephesians 2 we are said to be growing to a holy temple in the Lord — God is preparing that at the present time. It distinctly shows that we have not reached finality yet. When the temple is complete there will be finality; the mind of God will be seen in its completeness. We have to take account of the mind of God as well as of the heart of God. The mind of God would stand over against all merely human thought. In the temple we are apart from human thoughts, and have God's thoughts. Paul tells the Corinthians that they are the temple of God. He speaks of them as a *shrine*, a very intimate word, expressing the holy character that attaches to the saints in the mind of God.

In the light of all this we can see in the parable of the vineyard how what is due to God is secured. The fruits were due to God. We do not read this parable as referring only to the prophets of old and Christ coming and being refused, but the great point of the parable as far as we are concerned is that He has given the vineyard to others, and we are the others. There is a great deal more committed to us than was ever committed to Israel: they never knew a glorified Christ and they had not the Spirit. There is now the possibility of yielding to God what is due to Him. God will not allow what is due to Him to lapse. Are we set that God shall have all that is due to Him? That is the ultimate object of every servant sent to us and of the ministry. We are apt to think that God sends His servants to help us and minister to us, and we let it

stop there. The great object of levitical service is that all that is due to God may be rendered. The Levites were scattered through Israel to keep the people always in mind of what was due to God.

The vineyard represents what will give pleasure; wine "cheers the heart of God and man" (Judges 9:13; Psalm 104:15). God introduced in His early dealings with Abraham and his seed elements that were calculated to bring forth everything pleasurable to God. What a wonderful system of blessing and favour God introduced!

He revealed Himself to them in redemption; He brought a vine out of Egypt. He brought them to the wilderness and dwelt among them. He gave them manna from heaven, water from the rock, and a heavenly system put down in their midst — the tabernacle — all after the pattern of things in heaven. He brought them into the land, and promised them wonderful things. It was in that way He planted the vineyard, and then He put it into their hands to see what they would make of it, It was all calculated to bring forth such fruit as would be delightful to God; they should never have ceased praising Him for redemption, or giving Him thanks for His wonders in the wilderness and for bringing them into the land. There should have been perpetual praise for the way in which God has made Himself known.

The vineyard suggests to me a system of blessing and divine favour that is altogether of God. It actually came in the promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and it worked out in the ways of God with His people. You cannot see any part of God's ways with His people that was not exceedingly favourable. His government came in when they were naughty, but that was not what He proposed. Planting the vineyard does not suggest the legal principle; there was something far greater in the mind of God than that. The legal system is interwoven with the most wonderful display of divine favour and goodness, calculated to bring forth fruit that will please God. There is everything in the vineyard that could produce fruit, and God gives it to the husbandmen. Is it our great pleasure to render what is due to God? God would put that question to every one of us. He has provided everything, and His grace is sufficient. Are we willing to render what is due to Him? It all rests there. "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land". Just for a brief moment Israel did render fruit; Israel was fruitful and pleasant to God when the offerings for the tabernacle were brought.

There is a great danger of our looking at spiritual good as something for ourselves, and forgetting that all spiritual good must necessitate what is due to God. It came out so beautifully in connection with the tabernacle and the system of sacrifices. They had a lovely opportunity of bringing what was due

to God by His gracious favour to them, and they did not respond to it. If you study the characters of the Old Testament from Moses onwards you will see that every servant was concerned that there should be something for God. I believe that is still true; the burning desire of every servant God sends is that there should be something for Him. We can be very thankful if there is something of that when we come together. What characterises assembly prayer is that there should be something for divine Persons. Romans leads up to our bodies being presented to God as a living sacrifice and that we should “with one accord, with one mouth, glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”, Romans 15: 6. Peter tells us that we are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God — that is, something for God. If it is a question of ministry, he says, “If any man speak — as oracles of God ... that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ”. Paul gives the climax in Ephesians: “to him be glory in the assembly” — a vessel where everything is for God.

If I am not yielding what is due to God in connection with His grace in which He has revealed Himself to man, I am worthless. The Lord says, “Every one falling on this stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder”, verse 18. If Christ is rejected nothing is left for man but judgment. Christ becomes a stumbling stone; people fall over it and also it will grind them to powder — both are judgment. If the will of man is at work, Christ becomes a stumbling stone; Peter tells us He is that to the disobedient. The rejected Heir becomes the corner-stone, and everything is now tested by Christ; all the rights of God, all that is due to Him, are now set forth in relation to Christ.

The corner-stone is still connected with the temple. Peter speaks of it in that way, that there is a structure that derives all its glory and value from Christ. “To you therefore who believe is the preciousness”, 1 Peter 2: 7. Christ is the corner-stone, elect, and precious; the temple derives its character now from the prominence of Christ. People ought to discern when they come amongst us that Christ is prominent with us, and that we exalt Him and boast in Him. He is Head of the corner. Christ is the Heir of all that is due to God. God receives His due through Christ. He sets forth His rights in Christ and receives His due through Christ. If we honour the Son, we honour the Father who sent Him. If Christ is magnified and glorified, God is magnified and glorified. So what marks the spiritual house, the temple, is that Christ is honoured.

There is a peculiar touch of grace in verse 13, “I will send my beloved Son: perhaps when they see him they will respect him”, suggesting that such an expression of favour could not be resisted. It is touching that the Lord should

put it in this way, as much as to say that God has gone to the extreme limit and surely men's hearts will be touched. It is solemn to see that these people were quite conscious that they had not rendered what was due to God. "They knew he had spoken this parable of them".

The next section (verses 20 - 26) introduces the great question of God's government in the world and how we stand in relation to it. We have to recognise Caesar and what is due to him, but the Lord says also, "pay ... what is God's to God". We are always to be governed by the thought of what is due to God.

The Lord maintained what was due to the authority that then existed, but also what was due to God. We have to do with an authority that is set up in the world, and we have a certain obligation in regard to it, paying to Caesar what is Caesar's, but what is God's is to be paid; it is a debt. These things are not left to free-will; there is every liberty afforded for free-will offerings, but certain things are not for free-will; they are obligatory, due to God. The principle of "O, what a debt we owe" is spiritually and morally right, and all is the fruit of His grace. If I do not pay my debts I am dishonest, as Malachi says, "Will a man rob God?" The recognition of obligation is an important temple lesson.

Nothing else is right but to render what is due to man and to God. Caesar has a place in the world and he is to have his due, and it is due to all men to treat them with respect and honour. If I do not, I am not righteous. Scripture tells us to honour all men; it is not optional. If anyone by reason of his person or office deserves any special honour, I must give him his due. And certain things are due to the brethren — am I giving them their due? If I am not rendering it to them I am an unrighteous person. Then there is what is due to God.

Romans is the great epistle of righteousness. There is no spirituality apart from righteousness; it is a fixed principle. The Lord loves righteousness and hates lawlessness; He loves what is right, and lawlessness is just the opposite of what is right.

The Lord spoke of Caesar first because He was answering their question. They came to catch Him. If He had said it was lawful to pay tribute to Caesar He was up against all the national feelings of the Jews, and if He had said it was not lawful He would have been handed over as a seditious person to the government, but the Lord answers in wisdom and silences them.

What is due to God would be that the immense obligation that His grace and love have revealed to us in Christ and made good to us in our hearts by the Spirit should have a suitable response. It is really connected with the service of God. Paul speaks of Christ singing to God among the Gentiles (Romans 15:

9). Christ is giving to God what is due, and it is the privilege of the Gentiles now to join in singing to God, rendering what is due.

The next lesson in the temple (verses 27 - 40) is the supreme importance of spiritual and eternal relationships; this can only be on the basis of righteousness. We come now to a subject of the deepest interest, that of resurrection, and the character of life which belongs to the resurrection world. The Sadducees' thoughts were all formed according to the pattern of "this world", but the Lord brings before us the spiritual character of "that world"; *this* world is marked by the natural and that world by the spiritual, and nothing goes into that world but what is spiritual. The Lord goes on to contrast the transitory character of the present age with the spiritual and abiding character of the coming age. It is good for us to accustom ourselves now to cultivate what belongs to the coming age and that is spirituality. There is nothing but what is spiritual in God's resurrection world. There are two worlds, the world of the natural and the world of the spiritual. The Sadducees asked a very foolish question, and only showed that their outlook on things was purely natural, but the Lord over-ruled this to give us precious teaching as to resurrection. Not only will what is unrighteous or wrong not go into the spiritual world, but what is natural will not go in. Even Adam if he had not sinned would not have gone in, because he was a natural man and as such could never have gone into the sphere of resurrection. The Lord in the temple would impress on us the supreme importance of the spiritual, and we should take great account of His words. We should think of what is going to be carried through to the spiritual world; natural relationships will not be carried through, and we should be exercised to be well furnished with that which will be carried through.

The natural is but for a moment; death comes in upon it, but resurrection will introduce those who are counted worthy to what is spiritual and permanent — to a state equal to angels, a permanent state of holiness and incorruptibility — as sons of God, sons of the resurrection.

The Lord speaks about being "counted worthy to have part in that world". There is a fitness about such persons for part in a spiritual world. What an exercise this raises in the heart of everyone who has the light and faith of resurrection! The natural gave no worthiness for that world; it is only as having spiritual features that we can be worthy to obtain part in a spiritual world. Scripture always presents the matter thus: see John 5: 29, Romans 2: 7, Philippians 3: 11, 2 Thessalonians 1: 5 - 7. There will be no one in that world who is not counted worthy to be there. The malefactor of Calvary will be counted worthy, for he judged himself, he vindicated Christ, and he owned

that all the right of the kingdom belonged to Him. God could not leave that out of His spiritual world.

The Lord would lead us in spirit outside the natural into that world where there is no death, and where we shall be equal to angels, beings who have been preserved by God's electing love and power in an unfallen state. They are holy beings and they are fellow-bondmen of ours (Revelation 22: 9), the obedient and delighted servants of God and of Jesus, unjealous witnesses of God's marvellous grace to men. They are spirits, beings of a spiritual order who are taken into divine confidence. "Equal to angels" is a very high and holy state of being.

Though our true Christian position is greater than that of angels, our present *condition* is not greater. It has pleased God to have a certain order of beings in whom everything is spiritual — "He maketh his angels spirits" — they are not and never have been natural; they always have been spiritual, and if we do not become equal to angels we shall never know sonship in its fulness. The natural world is marked by marriage; everything in this world depends on marriage, but there is another condition and that is spiritual.

In the actual history of the world God appears to have lost all that He brought in, even Christ, but He secures everything for His pleasure in resurrection. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob represent the calling, the promises and power, and the disciplinary ways of God, but all died. But hundreds of years afterwards they could be spoken of by the Lord as living; all live for God. All will come up in resurrection unencumbered by the natural, in all the spiritual features in which they live for God. The Lord speaks of the sons of God and the sons of the resurrection; nothing will come out in resurrection but what is spiritual. We may carry what is natural and carnal to the grave, but nothing will come out but what is spiritual — "it is raised a spiritual body" — what a blessed reality! In that world there is nothing but the spiritual. Let us challenge ourselves as to what we have that will come out in that world. Abraham had a great deal, Isaac had, Jacob had; these men will come out magnificently. God was not ashamed to be called their God; there were such spiritual features in them that God could not possibly leave them out of His world.

The spirits of Abraham, Isaac, David and many others will be perfected in resurrection, and that will not be one minute before we are. These men live for God. They have been buried, but it is a necessity that they shall be raised; if they live for God they must be raised. They are waiting to be introduced by divine power, even as to their bodies, to a spiritual sphere.

The point of all this is that we should cultivate the spiritual; that is part of the temple teaching. I may be a great man in this world and have many gifts, but

nothing will go into the resurrection world but what is spiritual. The natural is a perishing order, but the spiritual is going to abide. Sonship is purely spiritual and only to be taken up by spiritual persons; it is a conferred dignity but it means nothing to an unspiritual man.

LUKE 21

Luke 21

The Lord would have us acquainted with the public history of things while we await the kingdom of God. In chapter 21 we have the public history, and chapter 22 brings before us the private history, what has place in the inner circle where the presence of the Lord is immediately known. God has made every provision for the maintenance of things publicly. Think of the extraordinary wisdom found with persons who spoke in the power of the Holy Spirit! We see a very marked example of that in Stephen. He had no opportunity to prepare his sermon, and that is what marked the preachings in the Acts. Nearly all the preachings that took place as recorded there were under circumstances which precluded any possibility of the preacher preparing his discourse; every one of these occasions was unexpected. In the case of Stephen we see this blessed and holy man of God so furnished by the Spirit that there was no possibility of refuting him. Everything was in wisdom, not a single word out of place. They were not able to resist Stephen, they could kill him but they could not resist the power of what he said. When we come before men we are either vessels of the Spirit or fools; we either weaken our message, or we are vessels of the Spirit. I have often pondered the preachings in the Acts; it would be a real study for those who give any sort of public testimony to see how men spoke who were in the power of the Holy Spirit. These preachings were very short, very much to the point, not a word out of place, no repetition, everything in the greatest sobriety — that is preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit. There is a certain public history and we know what to expect; we have no need to read current books to know how things are going. The Lord has told us exactly what will happen in the public history of things. Many pretenders will come, and say they are representatives of Christ and will deceive people; there will be a spirit of deadly opposition so that even natural affections will be overcome by it. There will be a restless condition of things in the world; there will be wars; empires and powers will be shaken. We are not surprised when great wars break out. The privilege of faith is to be familiar with the sanctuary, and the Spirit says of the saints, "Ye are the temple of God". It is not merely that we have the privilege of going in, but we constitute the temple. The temple and the mount of Olives go together. While the Lord was filling the temple by day with spiritual light, He was resorting to the mount of Olives by night — that is the secret. It is a wonderful thing to be able to retire to a spiritual region on earth that corresponds with heaven; one would like to know something of resorting there. If we approached the public position from nights spent on the mount of Olives,

there would be power. Before Stephen began to speak they looked on his face and saw it was like the face of an angel; he showed the company he had been keeping. He had come straight from the spiritual region suggested by the mount of Olives, and heavenly radiance suffused his very countenance. We could not have a better commentary on this chapter than Stephen, because we see in him a man faced with the most diabolical opposition, yet he completely triumphed. They could gnash their teeth at him but they could not answer him. Stephen gave a solemn testimony. It was not exactly the gospel, for the time had come when the official leaders of the people were no longer regarded as unwitting manslaughterers. They were looked at by Stephen as deliberate murderers; therefore he does not present grace to them, but glory. In chapter 2 Peter said, "I wot that ye did it through ignorance", and he opens the city of refuge for them; he says, You have killed Him, but unwittingly, and he opens the door. But there is no city of refuge in chapter 7; the people had rejected the testimony of the Holy Spirit, and Stephen treats them as deliberate murderers of Christ. There is not a word of grace, but a last solemn testimony to a people who had forfeited all title to blessing. The reception or rejection of the testimony of the Holy Spirit was what decided whether a man was an unwitting manslaughterer or a deliberate murderer. If he were an unwitting manslaughterer he would bow to the testimony of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2 they say "What shall we do?" and Peter opens the city of refuge, but if the testimony of the Holy Spirit is rejected there is no city of refuge.

The Lord says, "It shall turn out to you for a testimony", verse 13. We ought to think more of opportunities for testimony. Some seem to have grace and tact to lay hold of every opportunity that presents itself, but it is not characteristic of all of us.

The things that happen are to be taken as an encouragement. The Lord tells us that when we see these things happening we are to lift up our heads because our redemption is drawing nigh. There may be violent opposition, but it is not to depress the saints. Stephen lifted up his head; he went out wonderfully. If there is opposition it shows there is something worth opposing; if there were no living testimony being rendered to Christ in heaven there would be no opposition.

It is remarkable that the Lord reserves what is connected with the public position to the end. We cannot jump over things in Scripture and particularly in Luke, because he writes with method. We have to take up the Lord's temple instructions step by step, then the different things spoken of will constitute the furnishing — we shall be furnished so that when we come to the public side we shall have men with some stamina in them, who have learnt what the Lord

has said previously. Because of the breakdown of everything that stands publicly for God, they are prepared to see not one stone upon another.

“The powers of heaven shall be shaken”. That has been characteristic of the time in which the Lord has been absent; there have been constant shakes and overturnings in the sphere of government in the world. Empires have been overturned and others have risen up; man’s lawlessness has been active instead of submissive to what God has instituted. There are plenty of signs in the sun, moon and stars today. There are certain authorities that God has set up, and certain powers that are the powers of heaven. These things strike consternation to men’s hearts — look at Russia and China today. The sun, moon and stars are fallen to the ground.

We can sit here comfortably and talk about these things, but in other parts of the world this is being carried out literally. In some parts of the world many Christians have suffered recently, and some have even died for their faith; we cannot separate ourselves from the Christian company and, if in this country we are not exactly in the presence of these extraordinary upheavals, our brethren are elsewhere.

The Lord assumes that the saints are going right through in the expectation of redemption, and in the hope of being taken completely out of the whole sphere of the activity of evil. We are going on to redemption in the full sense of the word. It is those who have that spirit in the public position that can take up all the exercises of the next chapter in connection with the feast of unleavened bread and the Lord’s supper. We are told in the epistle to the Hebrews that everything that can be shaken will be shaken, so it is well to see that we are going on with that which cannot be shaken. The danger is that we may be turned aside from the abiding things, as the Lord says in verse 34, “take heed to yourselves lest possibly your hearts be laden with surfeiting and drinking and cares of life, and that day come upon you suddenly unawares”. We have to see that we do not drop down to a life of self-indulgence.

“This generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled”. The word is often used in Scripture in a moral sense — not a generation in the sense of thirty or forty years. That character of generation which was present when the Lord was speaking will not pass away till all that the Lord said is fulfilled. The same generation is present now, for Peter says, “Be saved from this perverse generation”. It is still a perverse generation and people have to be saved from it. Paul in Philippians 2 speaks of being blameless and harmless, “children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation”. The world continues a “present evil world”. Some say the world is getting better, others say that it is getting worse, but they are both wrong. Scripture does say that evil men

and seducers will wax worse and worse, but that is in the sphere of profession. The world is the same as it always was; it is made up of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; and it always will be that.

The Lord has a generation: "It shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation". His generation does not Change either; it is just the same. The new man is just the same today as he was on the day of Pentecost; he has not altered one of his features and never will.

LUKE 22

Luke 22

In this chapter the Lord seems to pass to what is inward and connected with the circle of which He is the centre, that with which He would engage the hearts of His saints. He intimates that there is a place reserved which He calls His guest-chamber; certain things have their place there, things that are in His heart and which He would put in the hearts of His lovers. It is more private than public.

All the sweetness of His wondrous love came out in the private circle, although the traitor was there. We find Judas in the inner circle, for he was one of the twelve, yet that does not affect the character of what was before the Lord. It shows that there may be movements of hostility even in the circle that is nearest to Him. We need not be surprised if there are treacherous movements of hostility in the inner circle. Satan selects instruments that are suitable for His purpose; it was more to Satan's purpose to have the betrayer in the circle of the twelve than to awaken all the hostility of the scribes and Pharisees. It was a more deadly move of Satan to secure a tool or vessel in the inner circle.

The introduction of the passover intimated the holy conditions in which alone the Lord's death could be understood. The whole subject is introduced as being connected with the feast of unleavened bread; that is the character of it. It is called the Passover, but the prominent thought before the mind of the Spirit is the feast of unleavened bread; that is, it raises the question of condition on our side. The feast of unleavened bread involves that everything that Satan can act upon is to be excluded. Leaven would represent the corrupting and inflating principle of evil in the heart of man. It takes different forms: malice, wickedness, hypocrisy, and many other forms.

Paul says, "For also our Passover, Christ, has been sacrificed; so that let us celebrate the feast", 1 Corinthians 5: 7. This shows the conditions in which we can alone take up the Passover. We can only take it up in holy conditions; the first day of unleavened bread was when the passover was to be killed. We can only contemplate the death of Christ in passover aspect as having entered upon this period which is marked by unleavened character. It is presented thus in this gospel as showing how important it is for us to have these conditions of holiness. The thought of the passover being killed arouses intense feelings and emotions in the souls of the saints; and if the feast of unleavened bread is not kept we shall not know these holy moments.

Unless we know what it is to keep the passover assembly-wise we shall not reach the Lord's supper. At Corinth they were professing to take up the Lord's supper without the Passover, and it opened the door to every kind of moral disorder; in result they were not eating the Supper at all. While professing to carry on the institution they were not eating the Lord's supper. The real secret was that they were not keeping the passover or the feast of unleavened bread. It shows how important the exercise is as to ourselves. The apostle is writing to the assembly of God in Corinth, and he is speaking of the passover in an assembly setting.

In Egypt the passover was presented in a household setting — there was a lamb for a house; but in the land it is looked at from the assembly standpoint, because they were expressly told not to eat it in their own gates but in the place where Jehovah would set His name. That clearly gives it assembly character. But if we contemplate the people of God in Egypt, we do not get beyond the household thought; they had light in their dwellings. The people of God are viewed there as in the world, household-wise, not exactly assembly-wise. God introduces the household idea in the gospel: "thou shalt be saved and thy house". No one has the gospel only for himself, but for himself and his house.

In Egypt the great thought connected with the passover was that they were going out; it was to be eaten in haste, their shoes on their feet and their staff in their hand. The first eating of the passover is taken up in that connection; we are going out. The youngest child in the household is impressed with the fact that we are going out to be for God in the value of redemption; we do not belong to this world at all. That is a good start. The passover was also kept in the wilderness; things were taken up there in relation to the tabernacle of testimony, so the first thing they did was to set up the tabernacle and keep the Passover. They ate the Passover, not merely household-wise, but as identified with the testimony of God in wilderness conditions.

In the land the passover was connected with the place where Jehovah had set His name, where all His people were unified in their approach to Him; it is clearly on assembly ground. The entering into the thought of the death of Christ in passover aspect is infinitely great, too great in its fulness to be taken up individually; it requires the assembly to take it up — that is how it is put typically.

Every time the passover is presented something is added to what was before, and the final touch is in this chapter where the Lord adds an element which had no place in the Old Testament. He puts the crowning touch to the passover in introducing the cup. In Egypt the blood is prominent; in the

wilderness the fat; and in the land it is connected with the unity of the people of God in their approach to God — it is expanding all the time. When Hezekiah takes it up he has a very enlarged apprehension of the purification requisite to the Passover, so he prays for the people on the ground that they had not been prepared according to the purification of the sanctuary. He asks God to pardon them because they had not touched it in the exalted holiness that belonged to it, which was nothing less than the purification of the sanctuary. That is the development of the unleavened idea.

The Lord takes the initiative here; He sends Peter and John and put things in motion; He lays down all the conditions in which the passover was to be prepared, and then He tells them in the most affecting way how deeply His own heart was moved in regard to it. Finally He brings in this thought of the cup, which suggests the full joy of the kingdom of God. The passover to the Lord was the ground on which the full blessedness of the kingdom of God should be established. The passover was never eaten according to the full thought of God until this occasion. The Lord Jesus was the only One who knew what the passover was, and all that was involved in it and that would be secured by it. There was a full answer upon this earth in the heart of a Man to all that was in the mind of God when He instituted the Passover — it is most blessed. We lose much by the idea that the main thought in the passover was shelter from judgment. The main thought is that God was coming in according to His purpose to take a people out of the whole condition of evil that belongs to this world that He might have them entirely for His own pleasure; He was doing it all in the value of the death of Christ. So, as I understand it, the passover is greater than any of the sacrificial types in Exodus or Leviticus.

The Lord says, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer". It was much to the Lord to have a company that He could carry with Him in His own appreciation of all it meant. All this in its bearing on us intimates how the Lord would carry us with Him in the appreciation and appropriation of Himself in passover aspect. The passover is the great power of God in redemption to take a people out of the world to be for His own pleasure. Anyone understanding the passover would know that he was no more of the world than Christ; it would give complete deliverance from the world in spirit. You could find a great many scriptures referring to the Passover, and you would find that the great thought in all of them was God taking His people out of Egypt to have them for Himself. It is in view of sonship. Before God said a word about the lamb of the Passover, He said, "Israel is my son, my firstborn ... let my son go that he may serve me", Exodus 4: 23. The passover is the ground on which God secures His firstborn for Himself. The firstborn of Egypt was the strength and pride of the natural man

which was under the judgment of God, but the firstborn that God secures is for His pleasure in virtue of the Passover. "Let my son go that he may serve me" — the service of God depends on our being on the ground of redemption. The firstborn is hallowed, so holiness is connected with the passover; that is why unleavened bread is insisted on. In Exodus 12, where the instruction is given as to the Passover, we find there is much more about the feast of unleavened bread than there is about the passover lamb. God must have holy conditions. Peter connects holiness with redemption; it is holiness according to the divine measure. "Be ye holy, for I am holy". Why? Because you have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, who was "fore-ordained before the foundation of the world" — that is the Passover. The passover comes in on the line of divine purpose; the passover lamb was in purpose before the foundation of the world. Paul brings this in correctively to the Corinthians to insist on these holy conditions. How are we going to apprehend the greatness of the death of Christ except in holy conditions? God had put His wing over the people in the power of redemption, so He says, "Hallow unto me every firstborn".

Peter and John were sent to prepare the Passover, and they are the two men who tell us about it. Paul says, "Christ our passover"; but he does not speak about the lamb. Peter and John speak about the lamb; they tell us about Christ in passover character. The passover is great enough to remove sin out of God's world altogether for God's pleasure; the Lamb of God is the taker-away of the sin of the world. He is great enough to remove sin out of God's world, so that everything that remains is in a character that is suitable to the holiness of God.

The burnt-offering is more the ground of acceptance for a people upon the earth, as Israel will be in the millennium. The burnt-offering never takes anyone into the sanctuary; the blood of the burnt-offering never went beyond the brazen altar, but the blood of the sin-offering went into the holiest. The sin-offering is more in keeping with the passover than the burnt-offering.

The holiness of the setting of the passover is what impresses me, so the Lord indicates that there would be a man with an earthen pitcher of water. There will be purification. Here is a man concerned about purification; he has a pitcher of water. Now the Lord says, Follow a man like that. A man like that is very safe to follow.

I am inclined to think that this pitcher of water was what the Lord used to wash the disciples' feet; purification was in it as well as refreshment. The Lord gave Himself for the assembly that He might sanctify it and purify it by the washing of water. There is a purifying character about water. The Lord

indicated that where that water was carried in was the place suited to Him. There is a place reserved there for the Lord because there are exercises there in regard to purifying; the man would not have gone for his pitcher of water otherwise. The Lord never loses sight of the need of purifying, and if we do we are at a distance from Him. What a preparation this is for assembly privileges! The great exercise is the purification that suits God. If I am redeemed it is for God, and that necessitates holy conditions which require continual exercise as to purifying. All this is the moral basis for the truth of the Lord's supper.

God could not be served by any but a hallowed people. The thought of hallowing fills the book of Exodus. Righteousness is the subject of Genesis; we find the thought of righteousness in Abel, Noah, Abraham and others. Exodus takes up the thought of holiness; the subject constantly recurs because it is a question of God coming down. If God comes down, where He comes to is holy ground — we must take off our shoes. Exodus finishes with the glory coming down and filling the tabernacle; it requires holy conditions. I wish we were more exercised about holiness. I think if we observe the exercises which the Spirit gives us in secret, we shall find that He leads us greatly to desire holy conditions. The real exercise is that we find so much in ourselves not according to holiness, and the Spirit is the Spirit of holiness. David says prophetically, "Take not the spirit of thy holiness from me", Psalm 51: 11. No greater loss can be sustained by anyone than to lose the spirit of holiness. It is true that a Christian can never lose the sealing of the Holy Spirit, but I may grieve Him and practically lose the sense of His presence if I cease earnestly and prayerfully to pursue the thought of holiness and inward purity according to God. Without holiness we shall never see the Lord.

The passover introduces the thought of holiness, so that the holiness of God is celebrated in the song of Exodus 15. He has glorified Himself in holiness, and on that ground He brings His redeemed people to the abode of His holiness. It is in that abode that we can eat the Supper. The assembly viewed in the Corinthian aspect is the abode of God's holiness in this world, but then it requires an unleavened people. From the side of God's thoughts He could say to the Corinthians, "Ye are unleavened". Now let that appear practically. All that is a passover exercise.

The bearing of the passover is wider than the Lord's supper. My impression is that the Supper is an apprehension of Christ that will never be shared by any other company; it is taken up by those who are the body of Christ. I should doubt whether this particular character of the Lord's love expressed in death

will ever be entered into by any other family; whereas the passover will have its place in the millennium for Israel.

The furnishing is very necessary. The Lord had so influenced a man in Jerusalem that He could count upon him to maintain the conditions that were suitable for the passover; he represents the overcomer. The man, the master of the house, represents the responsible element, but he had been affected by the Teacher. "Say to him that the Teacher says..". He had been affected by the Teacher, and the Lord knew all about it. I dare say none of the disciples knew this man, but the Lord did, and He could say, 'That man has been so affected by My teaching that I can rely upon him to have everything suitable for the passover according to My thought of it'. The master of the house had a man with a pitcher of water; he was actively preparing conditions of purifying, and the Lord says, That is the man to follow. He must have been reading about Hezekiah thinking of the purification of the sanctuary in connection with the Passover.

What a unique man this must have been in Jerusalem! Everything was going on in the tide of religiousness, keeping the Passover, but here was a man who had been influenced by the Teacher. It is not the Lord or the Head, but the Teacher, and this man had impressions of Christ; not commandments but impressions. I understand that to be through the Teacher. We have to work this out individually first and then assembly-wise. How far have we impressions of Christ so that we shall have what answers to furnishing? This man had the room furnished. I have often thought how he must have looked round again and again to see if everything was in accord with the impressions he had got from Christ as the Teacher. I like the thought of the Teacher; we do not think enough of it. It is not lordship, not authority, and it is not exactly headship, but teaching, that is, bringing the mind of God to bear on us influentially so that we get impressions of what is suitable. It would do away with everything uncomely; if there is any uncomely conduct with any of us individually or assembly-wise it is for want of impressions from Christ as Teacher.

In the two previous chapters we see the Lord teaching in the temple and we have the characteristic features of temple light developed under the teaching of Christ. That would help us in regard to the furniture; we should have impressions of all that was suitable without a text of Scripture. A man who wants a text of Scripture for everything is missing something, for I believe there is such a thing as getting impressions from Christ, and we can check them by Scripture. The furniture would have a bearing on the order in which things are done. We could not say that in Christendom there is much furniture

suitable to Christ. We have to learn to get an entirely new idea of His pleasure. What separated saints from the disorder of Christendom was that they got impressions of what is suitable to Christ. The air is full of impressions which have not come from God and practically it takes a long time to escape from them. In suitable moral conditions the affectionate emotions of the saints can be liberated in the remembrance of the Lord. The Supper is personal: "my body which is given for you" — there is a direct personal touch, an affectionate touch.

For the first time the great and precious thoughts of God were known in the heart of a Man on this earth. Before the public result, before the kingdom comes or the passover is fulfilled in the kingdom of God, it was all known in the heart of a blessed Man on this earth, and He says "*with you*". As if He would say, 'I affectionately desire to share with you all that is in My heart as to My own death as the Passover'.

The Lord adding the cup to the passover seems to be the last element that is needed to complete the passover idea. It was not seen in the Old Testament, but the Lord added it here. The crowning touch in connection with the passover is brought in in the thought of the joy that would fill the kingdom of God in the knowledge of God. The Lord takes the opportunity of remarking on the peculiar character of the interval; there was going to be an interval in which the Lord would not drink the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God came. It indicates the Nazariteship proper to saints; that is, we do not take up joy now after a millennial pattern. We must take it up as bearing in mind the position of Nazariteship in which the Lord was as apart from all the joys of earth.

The Lord says, "before I *suffer*", to emphasise the thought that suffering was to be His portion here; not the glory of the kingdom, but suffering and, along with that, a detachment from the joys that are proper to the earth. The death of Christ has invalidated many natural joys for those who know its meaning. People say, What harm is there in this or that? There are what people call innocent pleasures, and I believe Christians are more submerged by things of that kind than by actual wickedness. They say, What is the harm? Well, is it consistent with the death of Christ? Is it consistent with His present position of Nazariteship at the right hand of God? There are many things that we cannot say are wrong, but they are not consistent with the position of Christ, and they would hinder us from moving on to the Supper. We could not touch the Supper if we are finding a source of pleasure in things which Christ at the present time has no part or place in. It is a question of where He lives; He has died to sin and He lives to God now, and He says, "reckon yourselves dead to

sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" — that is the whole Christian position. The joy of the Nazarite was that he was wholly devoted to God. In Numbers 6 the words "unto Jehovah" occur over and over; that is the idea. It is not a man setting out to be an ascetic, or distinguishing himself by a peculiar character of separation, but he is commanded from first to last by Jehovah. It was a privilege vouchsafed to lovers of Jehovah so that they might take this exceptional and extraordinary position "unto Jehovah", and that was the joy of the Nazarite that he was peculiarly dedicated. The Nazarite idea is distinctly suggested in the Lord's saying that He would not drink again of the fruit of the vine. This is the time of the Nazariteship of Christ. People say, You are too narrow and too separate, but how could separation to the Lord be too intense? Can anyone tell me I have gone too far in being wholly devoted to Him?

There is a tendency with us to be negative and think of what the Lord has removed rather than what He has brought in. The thought of His body for us is, as far as I understand it, a question of what He has brought in. The passover is what He has removed, but His body is Himself, what He has brought in from heaven. It is to be *taken* according to Mark and *eaten* according to Matthew, and if this is done the Lord can be the subject of affectionate remembrance. Luke is the only gospel that gives us the remembrance and the institution of the Supper. There is no institution in Matthew or Mark; one would not gather from them that it was ever to be done again. Luke gives the aspect of it which is in line with Paul's presentation in I Corinthians. Neither of these men saw the Lord on earth, so they could present it in a way which we can take up. We can never remember the Lord as the disciples did who saw Him on earth. Our character of remembrance is quite different because we have never seen Him. The disciples who had seen Him and walked with Him, heard His words and seen His acts, had a personal recollection of the Lord; we never did. The remembrance spoken of by the Lord in Luke and by Paul in Corinthians is a character of remembrance that can be taken up by people who never saw Him, people such as Peter speaks of who can say, "whom having not seen ye love", 1 Peter 1: 8.

The Lord instituted the Supper of remembrance, indicating to us how He would have the assembly think of Him. It is not only individuals cherishing His memory, but that He would be thought of in church affections. The Lord had been educating His disciples in regard to that figure which He was pleased to take up — "having taken a loaf". He had been previously educating them as to this particular figure of Himself; He had allowed them to see what He could do with five loaves, and what He could do with seven loaves, and He had also called attention to the thought of one loaf. In each case the loaves were figurative of Himself; He was the great source of supply.

I suppose the five loaves of the first feeding of the multitude would speak of the supply of grace that was in Him to meet all human need. Five is the human number and the number of grace; there was sufficient in Him to meet all human need, so the five thousand were all fed, and there was a surplus over for another day. In the second feeding of the multitude the seven loaves would rather indicate the spiritual completeness of what was there in Him. All that was of God as revealed in grace was there in absolute perfection, and perfection that never grows any less, because after the feeding of the four thousand, which indicates the universality of the provision, there were seven baskets taken up; the seven — perfection — remains. It is more the spiritual side of the supply, God's side of it, not only what met man's need, but what was perfectly adequate to set forth the grace of God that never diminishes.

Then there was another occasion when there was only one loaf in the ship with them; it was not a lesson for the multitude but for the little company in the ship. The thought of one loaf is exclusive; Corinthians gives us the one loaf, and in that connection the Lord bids them beware of the leaven of the scribes and Pharisees and of Herod. We do not want the leaven of the religious man after the flesh, or of the scheming of the man of the world. The thought of the one loaf is as if the Lord would say, Now I am to be exclusive of every other man; you want nothing but Me. All this was educative, to prepare the disciples for the figure which the Lord used when He took a loaf, His chosen simile of Himself as incarnate. The Lord presents Himself to the affections of the assembly in His unique blessedness, and He intimates that all that subsisted in Himself in manhood is for the assembly. It is not at all a question of what He removes but what He brings in, and what He sets before the assembly for appropriation. "This is my body which is given *for you*". It is a comprehensive word that would cover all the saints of the assembly. The Lord had in view the whole assembly, because Paul in giving the account of it which he had from the Lord in glory, says, "until he come", so that what the Lord instituted, what is "for you", covers the whole period till He comes.

The word "given" is omitted in Corinthians. I think it is characteristic of Luke's presentation. Luke does not say, like Mark, "take" or, like Matthew, "eat", but he dwells on the Lord's side of it; He gives us the Lord's act. We are told that He broke it and gave it to them; it is what the Lord does, and He says, "This is my body which is given for you". It is the giving of love that is emphasised, but it is to be appropriated. When Paul speaks of it he leaves out the word 'given' but says it is "for you", because the Spirit would emphasise the subsisting character of the thing; it is not merely that it is given but what is given subsists "for you".

Luke emphasises the giving as bringing out the Lord's own action in love, but then all the Lord has given in His body subsists for the assembly, so we can say at all times that it is for us. It has been given and it now subsists for us.

His body given brings out the greatness of what is given to us in Him as having become incarnate and having died. The reference to His body indicates the most marvellous thing that ever happened according to the eternal purpose of God — "in the volume of the book it is written of me". A divine Person has come into manhood and has taken a prepared body, and every feature that is delightful to God in man has been seen in that body, and that body has been given in love for the assembly.

There is a particular way in which He would be remembered, and it would not only minister great delight to His own heart but it would form the affections of the assembly. The Lord is bent on forming the affections of the assembly. The Lord wants a companion that He can present to Himself glorious, because she has every feature in moral suitability and in developed affections that are satisfying to His heart. One great means the Lord takes to bring about this development is His Supper; that is why it is of such great importance. It is not just an ordinance, something that we do because we have to do it, but it is what ministers to the satisfaction of the Lord.

It is possible that some who have been breaking bread a long time have never eaten the Lord's supper; we might never have taken it up according to the Lord's thought of it any more than they did at Corinth. They did not at Corinth though they had the elements and the service. Eating the Lord's supper is really entering into it as it was in the Lord's mind. The Lord took a loaf and gave thanks. I cannot imagine that anyone present on that occasion could ever forget that thanksgiving. I expect every word was engraved in the affections of those who heard it. I would desire that our thanksgiving should be in harmony with His. He understood perfectly what His love was binding up in that institution and He gave thanks according to His own perfect apprehension of it. The Lord gave thanks as Head; He had the perfect, intelligent apprehension of all that there was in His precious and holy body, which has been devoted in love for the assembly. I do not know any type that comes nearer to it than that of the Hebrew servant; I think that is why brethren are so often led to refer to the one who said, "I love my master, my wife, and my children". We are told in Exodus 21 that he comes in "with his body", a remarkable expression; the Spirit of God puts it that way. The wife and children are not represented as needing to be delivered from anything; they are represented as given to him by his master. His master furnishes him with objects of affection. How is he going to stand in relation to those objects

of affection? He dedicates himself altogether; he says, "I will not go out free". What could have been the effect on wife or children? Could they have looked on that bored ear without being moved to the lowest depths of their emotional being? They could never forget the character of His love, how he devoted himself. That is how the Lord would have the assembly to remember Him as dedicated in love. He might have retained all His greatness, His manifold excellence and perfection as here in flesh, but He gave all up; He gave His body for the assembly. He came into that body to devote it in love to the assembly. The assembly lives in the appropriation of it; that is the very life of the assembly. His devotion to the assembly is scripturally secondary to His devotion to His Master; that is, He comes in at all cost to Himself as dedicated to the will of God, so it is as viewing Him in relation to the will of God that we get the right apprehension of His devotion to the assembly. He gives Himself for the assembly because it is His Father's will that He should. It was His Father's commandment that He did it — this gives a peculiar touch to the whole thing.

My impression is that the type of the Hebrew servant does not go beyond the present time. It is a peculiar moment when the devotion of Christ to His God is being witnessed spiritually in a remarkable way. The assembly at the present time is the witness, the spectator, of His devotion to God; that is a wonderful thing. Before the Lord takes up His place of supremacy, He comes into His household; that is the thought of the wife and children. The Lord's supper is for the household. Mr. Darby said in reference to Luke 24 that He took the housefather's place and broke the bread. Now we are His household; we are in the peculiar intimacy of a circle of affections which God has secured for Him before the day of His public rights.

One brother breaks the bread, but he does it as representing all and serving all. He does it in the spirit of what the Lord says here: "I am among you as the one who serves". He does it as an act of lowly service to the brethren, but it is the act of all; we come together to break the bread.

We ought to take account of the cup as well as the loaf; we must not miss the great thoughts bound up in the institution. To see the place of the loaf, as setting forth the Lord's body devoted in love, helps us to apprehend the character of the cup; it is what is conveyed in the thought of the new covenant.

The force of "after having supped" is to stress that this was after the passover supper. It is another aspect of things that must not be confounded with the cup of the Passover. We are told a verse or two before that He took a cup which was connected with the Passover, but what He now speaks of is after

the passover supper; it is another character of things. In the other gospels there is not the distinction, but in Luke there is the thought of doing it for remembrance.

Now the Lord would have us to think of Him in His mediatorial glory; that is what I connect with the cup. In giving the cup He is taking the place of Mediator. The reference is clearly to Exodus 24, where Moses takes the blood and sprinkles it upon the altar and the book and all the people, and says, "This is the blood of the covenant". That is the scriptural basis of the reference to the blood of the covenant. What follows upon that is that Moses and Aaron and the elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel and the sapphire pavement under His feet as the body of heaven in its clearness. They went up into the very presence of the glory of God; they saw the God of Israel. The idea of the blood is that there is nothing at all to hinder; such a basis has been made that God can bring out everything that is in His own heart, and His people can go up. The effect of their going up into this scene of glory was that Moses came down and gave all the instruction about the tabernacle. The whole structure of the tabernacle was set up in the power of the blood of the covenant, so that all that the assembly is as the tabernacle of God, as the shrine of the ark of the covenant, stands in the power of the blood. "This cup *is* the new covenant in my blood" — the Lord opens this out to us if we have hearts to appreciate the immensity of it.

The cup is not a descent; we do not come down from the loaf to the cup. It is the way up, "That way is upward still". We find the thought repeatedly in the Old Testament of *going*

up to worship. We come into a system of glory known mediatorially; glory that shines, not with a splendour that blinds us, but with holy attractiveness shining in the Man at the gate of the city of Nain, and at Sychar's well, and at Bethany. Glory shines in the Mediator and attracts us.

The Lord, having instituted the remembrance of Himself in all its precious import, would have us to know the conditions which would be found in the actual history of things until the moment of His coming again. It is necessary for us to be sobered and steadied by the consideration of what we may expect to find in the actual history of things. In the circle where His love is known intimately there may be found a treachery more dreadful than anything that could be found outside. The Lord could calmly take account of things, not that He did not feel them, for John tells us He was troubled in spirit. He was conscious of that being present which had the character of the darkest treachery. The Lord raises the question with the disciples that it was one of *them*. Which of them would do this thing? It is like Paul saying to the Ephesian

elders, "from among your own selves shall rise up men speaking perverted things", Acts 20: 30. That is the exercising thing. Among those who know the Lord and have been intimate with all the expressions of His love there may arise a treachery that is more dreadful than anything that could be found outside. No doubt that is an element which has been present more or less ever since the Supper has been instituted. There have been those who have given themselves up to Satan and who have used the knowledge they have obtained in the place of intimacy in order to further the designs of Satan. It is terrible to contemplate, but very necessary for us, so that we may not be surprised or dismayed at things which may actually come up. John speaks of the peculiar character of antichrists; they are characteristic antichrists, not personal, and what is characteristic of them is that they arise in the bosom of the assembly — he says, "They went out from us".

We read in the Psalms, "For it is not an enemy ... then could I have borne it", Psalm 55: 12. The Lord felt it very much as arising with one whom He regarded as His familiar friend. I think the Lord feels things in proportion to the circle in which they arise. The more intimate our relations with the Lord — and the relations of Judas with the Lord were very intimate — the more He feels what is untrue to Himself, and what is utterly wanting in love. He says, "the hand of him, who will deliver me up is with me on the table" (verse 21), but He did not send him away till the Supper was over. The Lord allowed it in order to show that the flesh in the most wonderful privileges, in the greatest intimacy and in the most touching circumstances, is not at all affected by the love of Christ. That is my flesh, for Judas is in every one of us, a man who is unaffected by the most precious and most tender disclosures of the love of Christ. I suppose the real character of the flesh is a tool readily surrendered to Satan; it is never seen so fully as in Judas. This chapter is in keeping with 1 Corinthians 11, where we see all the blessedness of the Supper, and then it says, "let a man examine himself". You must not only go up but you must go down. Here the Lord is taking us down. It seems as if He said, 'That is what I am and what God is, but you must not let even that lead you to forget what you are'. This comes out in different ways; here it comes out in the most intimate circle of divine love — the treachery of Judas, the self-importance that was striving as to who should be greatest, and the self-confidence of Simon — all these elements were there and the Lord lets us know that He knew it, but it is to bring us into complete harmony with Himself. It is not to discourage us; the object of it is to encourage us and to put our joy on a solid foundation, so that we do not lose our confidence and do not get any intrusion of the man of failure; we learn to judge that man in every phase of his activities. This is essential to our rightly taking up the Supper.

Peter had to come back to what he began with. The Lord says, "When thou hast *returned back*" — that is the real word. He began with the consciousness that he was a sinful man, and in chapter 9 he said of the Lord that He was the Christ of God. These two things settle the whole thing, and Peter as brought back to that could confirm his brethren, All this is given us to confirm us, not to dishearten us. The darkest treachery that Satan can introduce into the inner circle of the Lord's love cannot interfere for a moment with God's designs: "the Son of man goes as it was determined". The full weight of the responsibility is left on the head of the one who yields himself as a tool of Satan, but the determinate counsel of God goes on.

Judas was never truly of the disciples; he was there and he was one of the twelve, but he was never a partaker of the divine nature; he had never any affectionate appreciation of Christ. Those who are like that will assuredly go out, and they carry a principle out with them into the world that is worse and has more of the spirit of apostasy in it than ever was in the world before; it makes the world worse than it ever was before. This is sobering and exercising. The present moment is the night of His betrayal; the Lord would never have us to forget that that is the character of the moment. Judas has given character to it. We can never eat the Supper without being reminded, not only of all set forth in the Supper, but that it was the same night in which He was delivered up. We are never allowed to forget it, and it would give a subduedness and sobriety to the occasion that would be very becoming.

The disciples striving who should be greatest was a much less grave character of evil; it came out in them all, for they seem all to have been engaged in this most unholy strife. But it is most touching how gently the Lord handles them; we might have expected Him to rebuke them most severely, but He does not. The Lord's way of dealing with things was so like Himself; their strife was far removed from the spirit of the One who had dedicated His body for service, and it was altogether out of keeping with the Supper. I believe the Supper is intended to be corrective and adjusting; we should not merely look at it as a privilege. We may eat the Supper and go away the same as we come, but the Lord intends that we should be spiritually adjusted, and that we should be deeply exercised to be in accord with the loaf and the cup. The very action of eating and drinking means that the thing enters into us inwardly, so as to bring us into correspondence with it. That would effectually lead us to the judgment of any desire to be greater than our brethren.

In Corinthians it is remarkable that we hardly get away from the corrective aspect of the Supper; there is not a word of the privilege side, not a word about the presence of the Lord in the midst, or of Christ singing praises to the

Father. All would have been unknown to the Corinthians; they were not in a condition for it, but Paul gives them the Lord's table and the Supper correctively. My impression is that in the mind of the Lord we are never expected to eat the Supper without a very great change being brought about in our spirits and whole bearing. He gave Himself for the assembly that He might sanctify and purify it by the washing of water by the word, and there is no moment when He does it more than at the moment when His own love is so distinctly brought before us. He reminds us that His is a sanctifying and purifying love, as well as a nourishing and cherishing love.

The Lord shows here that He was prepared to serve. That is true greatness. Another man may be more thought of than I am, and probably deservedly so, but, even if unjustly so, that does not hinder me from serving. "I am among you as he that serveth" — that is the spirit of service. We judge that self-important man who would like to be great, and would like to have a place and rule and be in authority. There will never come a time when the most matured saint can afford to come and eat the Supper without examining himself. We can never be so matured and sanctified that we need not do that. How beautifully the Lord puts Himself before us! He never works on negative lines; He does not simply hold up the mirror for me to look at and see what a wretched creature I am, but He always displaces what I am by what He is. He shows Himself and there is positive gain; He displaces me and I love Him more than myself I look at myself and see hideous deformity; I look at Him and see surpassing excellence, glory and perfection that exceed my power to compass. He calls attention to Himself; He says, "I am among you as the one that serves", and the greater is to be as the younger. There is to be a spirit of deference. A man does not say, 'I have been breaking bread for forty years and you must listen to me'; he is as the younger. How beautifully Paul exemplifies this when he spoke about the Lord's table! He said, "I speak as to intelligent persons; do ye judge what I say", 1 Corinthians 10: 15. That is a very happy way to bring one's exercises before the brethren — I have this exercise and I submit it to your judgment. It shows the beautiful spirit that belongs to a great one, as he tells us he did not care to use apostolic authority; he would rather reach things morally. Paul was greater than his gift. So the leader leads, not in the spirit of being better than the rest, but in the spirit of service and in the spirit of Christ. In faithfulness Paul deals with conditions as they were, but one can see that all the time in the mind of Paul he was thinking of the greatness of the saints. He begins by speaking of their greatness, and all through his epistles where he has so much to say of an admonitory nature we see the greatness of the people,

as if he said, 'Do you not know how great you are? Do you not know you are the temple of God, that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, that you are members of Christ?' He is seeking to bring them to realise their greatness as he did. If I think of the brethren as a poor low-down lot that want a tremendous lot of pulling up to make them what they should be, I could not serve them very well. We are to serve in the sense of the greatness of the people we serve. God's people are a great people; there is no such august company in the heavens or the earth as the assembly of God; one of the greatest privileges we can have is to serve them, and the servant is a servant, not a master. Moses, though he had to speak with great severity at times, and justly so, yet never forgot what a great people the children of Israel were. Moses could even stand in God's way and check Him from proceeding on account of what the people were. The people had an extraordinary place with God, and Moses reminds Him of it. The Lord regards the saints here in the highest possible character; He says in the next verse, "Ye are they which have persevered with me in my temptations". The Lord is the model here; the whole spirit of a servant is exemplified in Him; He regards the saints in the most favourable light possible. He serves them in the sense of their greatness; they were "the excellent" to Him. That is the spirit in which we are to regard the saints.

I have often felt how good it is to take note of the perseverance of the saints. We may say that they are a poor, feeble lot, and that there is not much spiritual power with them, and that they do not seem to take in divine thoughts as they ought to; but see their perseverance! They go on year after year; they do not miss any opportunities that come their way for getting the ministry of Christ and the fellowship of the brethren; they have pleasure in the word and in prayer. They go on, some of them, thirty or forty and perhaps sixty years; they might have been all that time in the world and had a place in many circles, but they have deliberately persevered in a path that has involved more or less trials, and difficulties, and exercises. They have persevered. Is that nothing to the Lord? It is a great thing to Him.

Another feature comes to light in Simon, an element of self-confidence. I suppose Satan had been observing Simon, and what was in Simon was in them all. Satan had observed it, and demanded to have them — "to have you". The thought that Satan observed us would strike terror into us if we did not know the Lord as Intercessor. Satan observes us and knows what tendencies there are in our flesh, but the Lord knows it all perfectly. The Lord in His love saw that it was necessary for Simon to be put into Satan's sieve and sifted, and He prayed for him. It was the flesh in its finest form, very different from Judas. In Judas we see the flesh in its vilest form, but in Simon in its best

form, assuming to be able and willing to die for the Lord. The Lord prays for him that his faith fail not. It is very touching that the very tendencies in my flesh become the occasion for the Lord's intercession. I may be allowed to fall into Satan's hands, but I am the subject of the Lord's intercession, and Satan cannot give the sieve one shake more than he is allowed to. Peter is recovered and he makes it clear in his epistles that the divine nature is the only thing that comes through. No part of Scripture is more confirmatory than Peter's epistles; they are the result of what he went through under the intercession of Christ. All this is most sobering for us in relation to the holy things of God. We have to do with them as those who have acquired in the ways of God a real knowledge of ourselves.

It was a severe test for Peter, but he was recovered through the prayer of the Lord. The Lord's service continues: "He ever liveth to make intercession for us". The Lord will not allow us to go through any sifting without praying for us. He prays that our faith may not fail; the flesh is going to be exposed; its utter untrustworthiness must be brought to light, but faith is there as well as flesh. There was faith in Peter and the Lord was set on sustaining the faith. The Lord may allow us to go through deep humiliation, but it is to expose what the flesh is in order that we may have done with it. The sifting is necessary. The Lord says to Peter, "Satan has demanded to have you". Satan had been taking account of Simon; he had been observing that there was something in him that he had never seen in the Lord. Satan had never been able to observe any self-confidence in the Lord, but he observed it in Peter and he demanded to have him. The Lord allowed Satan to sift him, and bring to light all the chaff that was there, but the work of God remained for the Lord's service, and for the strengthening of the brethren. Peter was busy strengthening the brethren when he wrote his two epistles.

The Lord addressed him as Simon in verse 31 and as Peter in verse 34. I suppose *Simon* would have more in view what he was naturally, but *Peter* would remind him of what he was according to divine calling. It was very sad that Peter should have to be told that he would three times deny the Lord. It was intended to bring home to him what a terrible defection it was, how contrary to what should have marked a stone. *Peter* means *a stone*, and what should have marked a stone was stability, but he showed himself to be the most unstable of all of them. "I have prayed for thee" comes before the temptation — that is a great part of our service amongst the brethren. It is a very blessed form of service. If we see weakness or defect in the brethren, does it lead us to criticise them or to pray for them? Flesh can criticise but faith prays for them. If we saw any mark of infirmity or defect in a brother and it led us to pray for him, the poorest brother might be elevated. We do not

want to notice the brethren's defects except as a reason why we should serve them. The spirit of service does not take up any place of superiority. Every sister can serve as well as every brother, and a very great feature of the service is that ye pray.

If we are to be commissioned we have to learn the character of the moment. That comes out in verses 35 - 38. A great change has taken place through the Lord not being here. When the Lord was here He could send them out without purse, scrip or sandals; they went out without a single resource other than His own word; they simply had to go in obedience to Him. The Lord was here on earth, and He was their sufficiency; to have had anything else, even a purse, scrip or sandals, would have detracted from the testimony of the Lord's sufficiency. He said, Did you lack anything, and they said, Nothing. But now, He says, it is all different. We have now to take up the exercises of having resources; the Lord is not here, and we need to have resources in ourselves. The Lord says, "The things concerning me have an end" — now we are going to be cast on our own resources. It is a complete change; the Lord is numbered with the lawless. He is going into death; the things concerning Him have an end, and now the service is to be carried on on a different principle. I have no doubt that when the Lord spoke in verse 28 of purse, scrip and sandals, He was not referring to such things literally, but with a spiritual significance. I believe He was referring to that which the saints would have in the Holy Spirit; the resources which they would acquire through their own exercises so that they are furnished. We talk about empty vessels; sometimes we say we have not anything. That is not a spiritual exercise. The Lord is turning their attention to what they must acquire through exercise. I do not think anybody is any good for service if he is not furnished. What is the good of moving about amongst the saints if you have nothing to give them? You want a purse, a scrip, and a sword.

The scrip is the food supply, the vessel in which the food is carried. The Lord suggests that if you are to serve you need to be furnished with spiritual wealth, and with food, and with power for conflict; and we have to see to it that we get it. You may say, Everything is in Christ, but the Lord says, 'That will not do for you now; it has been like that in the past but now you must have it'. There are wonderful resources available now in the Spirit by which the Lord's people can be enriched. What a big purse Paul had! How often he speaks of riches in connection with the ministry! He had a large purse and he tells us how he came by it in Ephesians 3; he says, 'I have written that you might understand how I came to be so wealthy; I have a commission to minister to the nations the unsearchable riches of the Christ'.

The food supply is very varied; there is milk for babes, and meat for grown up people; there is a measure of corn in season, and pasturage for the lambs and sheep. A great deal of service lies in the way of having some food for the people of God.

The sword has to do with conflict. The disciples did not enter into what the Lord was bringing before them; they were looking at it in a material way. Peter used the sword when he ought not to have used it; the Lord is speaking here of a spiritual sword. Paul speaks about the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word; we need that. The enriching of the people of God and the feeding of the people of God can never be carried on without conflict. There never was a time when the possession of a sword was more needed than now. These three things go on together: the ministry of wealth and food on the one hand, and the ability to engage in conflict on the other. The Lord is speaking of spiritual equipment; it is His closing word before going to the garden and the cross, so there is great importance attached to it. The Lord would leave behind Him a company provided with everything necessary to carry on the service.

"He that has none let him sell his garment and buy a sword", verse 36. The garment suggests what might give us some kind of advantage; there is to be a readiness to surrender it. I do not think anyone can really be in conflict without being prepared for a good deal of humiliation. Conflict involves humiliation; you are prepared to be of no account so that the truth is maintained. Paul did not mind what the Corinthians thought about him; he was prepared to be regarded as a reprobate so long as they were right. Power for conflict involves readiness to pay the price, to sell your garment — that is, something you would naturally value very much.

"The things concerning me have an end", verse 37. All connected with Christ after the flesh was coming to an end. It was a unique period when the Lord was here on earth; there never was anything like it, nor ever would be again. It was not intended to continue; it came to an end, but there are resources in the Spirit which we must make our own or we shall not be equal to the demands of the service.

The mount of Olives has a great place in this gospel. The Lord does not seek here that His disciples, should watch with Him; His thoughts with regard to them were thoughts of grace and thoughts for their preservation, and we might say, for ours. The Lord twice says, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation". He had in mind that there was a time of supreme testing coming, and that nothing would qualify the disciples or us for such a moment but being with God. It was for want of being with God that they said, "Shall we smite with the sword?" It was distance from the Lord that led one of them to cut off

a man's ear. It is said that one of them did it, as much as to say that they were all minded to have done it. They had gone beyond a stone's throw; it is a terrible thing to go beyond a stone's throw from the Lord.

The Lord intimated that He was not altogether out of man's range even at such a moment as that. There was a distance between Himself and them; the intensity of His conflict and prayers and the strengthening ministry from heaven were peculiar to Himself. There was a distance, a stone's throw between Himself and them, but it was not a distance that put Him altogether out of their range. A stone's throw is the measure of a man's range. I think the Lord had placed Himself near enough to them to be a model for them, and He was a model in prayer. In presence of the power of darkness His whole resource was prayer; He was with God. We see in the blessed Lord a Man with God, and therefore an absolute overcomer; the Father's will determined everything. The Lord's mind was that none of His disciples should go beyond a stone's throw from that; that was the secret of safety, and especially in man's hour and the power of darkness.

The Lord gives the disciples the secret of preservation; the secret for them and for us is nearness to God. Prayer, if it means anything, means being with God; if not, prayer is of very little worth. The habit of prayer is to be cultivated; otherwise, when the moment of pressure comes, it is too late to begin to pray. That is often the mistake with us; we think we can begin to pray when the pressure comes, but that will not do. He went *as His custom was* to the mount of Olives. It must be a customary thing to retire into the nearness of heaven and the presence of God — that is the only preservation in man's hour and the power of darkness. It is a very solemn word for us.

The disciples slept; they were not with God. The Lord was with God; we see a Man with God — that is the wonderful sight — and a Man strengthened from heaven. The Lord held perfectly the place into which He had come; He came into man's place and He held it and was strengthened from heaven. Now we are never to get at a distance from that; if we do, the power of darkness will test us. The power of darkness is a terrible thing. The moment I give up the thought of Christ as a model and of being like Him I drop to my own level; that applies from the first thing in the morning to the last thing at night. We must hold to the thought of a model; nothing will do but being like Christ.

The Lord had pressure that will never come upon us. There was an intensity about it that we shall never know — that is why the stone's throw comes in. It is not like the two thousand cubits between the ark and the people as they crossed the Jordan — that was a great distance. It was a question there of the power of His Person when He met and annulled the power of death; He is not

a model for us there. All is effected there in the power of His Person. I can pass over in the strength of His victory, but He is no model for me there. But the stone's throw brings in the thought of model. The disciples were far off morally; they had gone beyond the length of a stone's throw. Peter was far beyond it when he sat in the house and warmed himself and denied the Lord. The Lord says, "rise up and pray". Sleep here is contrasted with prayer; a praying saint is never asleep. The only way to keep awake is to pray; if we do not pray we go to sleep. We become indifferent the moment we give up the thought of the Lord as our model. It is not simply a privilege but a necessity that I should be like Him; it is my only safety. It is possible for us to be strengthened from heaven as He was, and we need to be when the power of darkness is permitted to act upon us. There is nothing more blessed than to be strengthened from heaven, to feel that there is such an overwhelming power assailing you that you are certain to go under if you are not with God. That makes you pray intensely, and then you find that you are strengthened from heaven; instead of going under you are an overcomer.

The angel brings in the ministration of supplies from heaven. It is not exactly the Spirit, for He is already here, but an angel coming is a fresh contribution of supplies from heaven. That is a blessed reality. Not only am I sustained by the Spirit who abides here, but at the moment of pressure there is an angel sent, a direct messenger from heaven. If we had that we should never think of resorting to any carnal means of defending the Lord. If He could appreciate a strengthening from heaven by an angel it must be a wonderful thing.

We should know how to meet things; the disciples did not know, so they began to talk about smiting with the sword, and Peter actually cut a man's ear off. They did not know how to meet things; they were not with God, and when we are not with God we use altogether wrong means to promote the Lord's interests. The disciples thought they were promoting the Lord's interests, but they used wrong means.

In Matthew and Mark Gethsemane is named; these gospels present the actual dealing of God with sin; they refer to the forsaking of the Lord, That is not brought out in this gospel. Here it is rather the tremendous power of evil that is opposed to the manifestation of God in grace. Luke does not speak of the judicial dealing of God with sin in the Lord's atoning sufferings. The aspect of the death of Jesus in Luke is that by the grace of God He tasted death for everything. His death in Luke is a widening out of His personal glory as the exponent of divine grace; it is not a straitening but an enlarging, In this chapter we see in the presence of the power of darkness the personal glory of Christ in ever increasing fulness. We see His personal glory widening out. He is

the Christ, the Son of man, the Son of God; all this comes out in the council. That council chamber was illuminated with the whole splendour of His personal glory; it had never shone out in such effulgence before. What a wonderful scene! It was a spectacle for angels and men, and everyone was made to feel it.

The Lord is instructing us in grace; He has put the overcomer's key into our hands — would we not all like to have it? The Lord gives us the overcomer's key and it is prayer; and then He shows us the lamentable results of sleeping instead of praying. The result is that we adopt carnal means to further the Lord's interests, and we cut people's ears off. The Lord shows here how to overcome opposition; it is not by using human or carnal means but by bringing grace into evidence, so He says, "Suffer thus far", and He heals the man. He is our model. I should like to be more skilful in touching needy persons in grace. The Lord never did anything with us except in pure grace. We do not touch the power of darkness with grace, but men have been misled by the power of darkness, and it is a wonderful thing to be able to touch a man's ear who had never had any interest in the things of God, to touch him so that from that moment he begins to listen to the precious story of grace. If we use any natural means to further the Lord's work, we only come down to the level of men, and there we find Peter. Peter was found using the sword, and he was found sitting with men on a level with them.

The disciples were "sleeping from grief"; they really loved Him, but they were not with God, and the very fact that they loved Him brought them into danger. If Peter had not loved the Lord he would not have followed Him at all. It was Peter's genuine love for the Lord that brought him into danger, because he was not with God. It is possible so to feel the pressure that we give up and go to sleep; we find a way out of it in forgetting it. I have heard a saint say, If I do not put it all out of my head I shall go out of my mind. That is not taking it to God; if you take it to God you will not go out of your mind but you will get God's mind. But such is the weakness of nature that we may really sleep out of genuine sorrow. We feel for the Lord and His interests, but we have not a sense of nearness to God, and we sleep. Distance from God is the secret of all weakness. A Christian is the biggest piece of inconsistency that one can think of! I do not think any one of us loves the Lord as much as Peter did, and yet he denied Him three times. The Lord looked at Peter, and that saved the situation. The Lord overcame in grace; He overcame the power of darkness and all the weakness in Peter.

The grace of God continues to be livingly expressed in those who are after the model of Christ. The moment I give up in my heart the thought of Christ as

model and that I must be like Him, that moment I drop to the level of what I am, and then there is no testimony. We may continue to come to the meetings and take part, but there is no testimony; it is only people who are like Christ who are in the testimony. The grace of God is really all modelled in Christ. It is a blessed reality that there is the substance of Christ in every saint — one delights to think of that. Now the thing is to let that have liberty; to put the sharp knife on what is of the flesh and nature and to let that which is the substance of Christ come into evidence. That is the law of liberty.

The Lord was now brought into the presence of the assembly of Israel. It was no longer the crowd or the individual rejection of Him, but in His being brought into the presence of the elderhood of the people, the chief priest and those interested in the law, the whole nation was there officially and representatively. The assembly of Israel was convened, and it was convened for the purpose of condemning to death God's Anointed. It was a question of His Person. It was the anointed Vessel of grace, whose course has been delineated before our eyes in this gospel by the Spirit of God. How little reason they had for saying, "If thou art the Christ, tell us"? He had been telling it for three and a half years in unmistakable tones, There was determined purpose to get rid of God's Anointed, and that on the part of the most enlightened assembly that could then be convened on the face of the earth. It is exceedingly solemn. It served to bring out that all that had been expressed in Him produced no effect save to arouse hatred in those led by the power of darkness. The full compass of divine light was in His Person; He is the Christ, God's Anointed, and He is the Son of man destined for universal dominion, and the Son of God, a divine Person in manhood — the whole light was concentrated in His Person and the whole power of darkness was concentrated in what was officially the assembly of Israel.

It says in another gospel that they sought witnesses to put Him to death; their whole object was that. There were many witnesses who might have been called: cleansed lepers, blind men who had their eyes opened, dead men who were raised, thousands who were healed. There were plenty of witnesses that He was the Christ, yet the elders could say, "tell us". This Person is the great test, not religious beliefs or knowledge of Scripture. I suppose every man in that council was fully conversant with Scripture, but that Person was the test. No one who ever came in contact with Him had failed to be convinced that all that He said and did was of God. "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him", Acts 10: 38. There was no possibility of question, and yet they say, "tell us". It was too late to ask such a question. The position was now definitive; there was no hope of any change

being produced either in His judgment of them or their judgment of Him. He had declared His judgment of them in chapters 11 and 20 and they are now gathered together in solemn assembly to declare publicly their judgment of Him. There is not a single feature in God's Anointed that commends itself to the religious man; we have to accept that fact in all its solemn reality. So the more we could demonstrate that Jesus was the Christ, the more definite and deadly would be the opposition aroused in the natural and religious man. People do not need to be convinced; we think if we could only present truth convincingly it would be all right, but the more convincingly it is presented the more hatred comes out. There was never truth more convincingly presented than in God's anointed Vessel; His works and His teaching set forth the truth in word and deed, and set it forth convincingly, but the fact that it was set forth so convincingly brought out the enmity of the human heart. We speak of man as fallen and lost and at enmity with God, but I wonder how far we believe it.

The rejection of the Christ does not obstruct God in His wonderful designs; it does not frustrate God in any way, so the Lord could say definitely of them that they would not believe, or let Him go; they would not desist from the course they were pursuing. On the other hand God would not desist from His course; if the Son of God was rejected, the Son of man would move into a wider sphere of universal dominion.

We shall not read this scripture aright if we do not see it is a dark background, but we see God's purpose and counsel moving on to its blessed end in spite of all. The testimony of grace as regards Israel officially is at an end; they had defined their position; the assembly was convened for condemning God's Anointed. What marks the Lord in this scene is silence; His words were extremely few. "He was oppressed and he was afflicted, but he opened not his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and was as a sheep dumb before her shearers, and he opened not his mouth", Isaiah 53: 7. It is striking how little He has to say; His silence in man's hour and in presence of the power of darkness was an expression of divine grace. He had expressed it in word and in deed and now He expresses it in silence. In the presence of hatred, injustice and violence, grace would take the place of silent suffering. He stands in that attitude as model for us, and as we contemplate it we learn grace in the suffering Lamb. As we do so we become qualified in nature and affection to form part of the bride of the Lamb. We are soon to be in the most intimate union with that blessed One, and nothing could be united to Him that was not in keeping with Him; His bride must be His counterpart. His words were few, but they are just the confession of the truth of His Person; He would be the Son of man at the right hand of power. No doubt the Lord's words (verse 69) were a reference to Daniel 7, which every man in that assembly

would know. "I beheld till thrones were set, and the Ancient of days did sit: his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was flames of fire, and its wheels burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came forth from before him; thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened" (verses 9 and 10), and then "I saw in the night visions, and behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like a son of man, and he came up even to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed", verses 13 and 14.

Now everyone in the council knew that scripture and knew that the Lord was referring to it. The Ancient of days is one of the most majestic titles of God that Scripture contains, and it says of the Son of man that he was brought to the Ancient of days. It is strictly, as the margin reads, "he reached unto the Ancient of days", that is, the Son of man is Jehovah's Fellow. He reaches to the Ancient of days; there is no disparity, no inferiority, between the Son of man and the Ancient of days. The Son of man claims, as to the rights of His Person, equality with God. They knew it well. He is going to have universal dominion. No middle course is possible; if we think of the rights of the Lord's Person it is impossible for any human being to be neutral. If we could bring home to men the truth of the Lord's Person, they would either have to fall at His feet and worship or gnash on Him with their teeth; men must either submit or reject Him. In preaching it is important to press the rights of His Person, to assert the dignity, majesty, and universal dominion that attach to His Person. Every man is tested by this Person. Is He God's Anointed? Is He the Son of man? These people quite understood that, if He were the Christ and the Son of man, He was Son of God, a divine Person in manhood. No one could reach to the Ancient of days but a Man who was His Fellow; it meant to these people that He was the Son of God. The presentation of the greatness of His Person is of vital importance in these days when He is being unclothed of every glory that attaches to Him.

"The Christ" involves the testimony of grace, that testimony which had been sounding forth, echoing through the whole land from the Dead Sea to Lebanon. He was God's Anointed, the Vessel full of divine grace and blessing, available to all. The rejection of Him as God's Anointed is the complete rejection of grace. But the Son of man involves the glorious supremacy which attaches to Him; He will have universal dominion, and every knee will have to bow to Him. We must present that with the other. A man hearing the gospel

and having it brought home in the power of the Spirit could never say, I will think about it. He must either worship or reject the Son of man. So the Lord asserts absolutely His place of dominion, authority and power as Son of man. They had rejected Him as Christ, so it was folly to ask Him who He was; and then they rejected Him as Son of man. They realised that no one could be Son of man who was not Son of God. Christ and Son of man are official titles, but behind that lies His personal glory as Son of God.

LUKE 23

Luke 23

Here we pass from the council to Pilate's hall of judgment. We see in Pilate the character of the last beast of Daniel 7; a power ordained of God, but influenced by policy. Pilate was not, like the Jewish leaders, marked by hatred of Christ. He represents a large section in this world, for he could discern that the One before him was not a criminal. He could form a judgment that there was no fault, nothing worthy of death found in Him; but his conduct was governed by policy, by what was advantageous under the circumstances that then existed. We also may be governed by circumstances in which we are found. If I hold my peace when I might confess Christ because I think it might bring me into trouble or not be acceptable to those I am with — I am standing beside Pilate. Are we prepared to stand by Christ in any circumstances? If Pilate had any true appreciation of Christ, he would have stood by Him at all costs. He was afraid of a tumult with the Jews, for he had a good deal of trouble with them and did not want any more. He was allowed of God to express his own righteous judgment publicly as to Christ, but at the same time he exposed himself that he was governed by policy. There are more Pilates than we think. But we cannot be neutral; we must be for Christ or against Him. Our position is that we are here for Christ; we are to stand by Him. His grace is so wondrous, His authority and power so great, and His personal glory so transcendent, that we must stand by Him at all costs. That is the position, and no neutrality is possible. I feel humbled in saying this, for we all feel how much neutrality there is about us.

In the beginning of Acts we see men who had all forsaken Him and one who had denied Him three times, but they are standing in the immovability of a rock as thoroughly identified with Him. Whether it is opposition, tumult, prison or death, they stand by Him without a shade of neutrality. They pray, for we can only stand in such a position by prayer. Pilate was afraid of opposition and tumult, but they were not afraid, they stand by prayer, and we see in Acts 4 that the place where they prayed was shaken — God gave a manifest token that His power was with them. God supported them so that nothing could stand before them; all the powers of darkness fell before them.

Herod was a man with no conscience at all. He was only looking for some entertainment; he hoped to see some miracle done by the Lord. Pilate had a conscience, but he was governed by policy; Herod had no conscience. The Lord called him a fox; he was slyly seeking his own interest, and his desire to see the Lord was only curiosity. The Lord had nothing to say to Herod; He

would not minister to curiosity. When people try to make Christianity attractive to the natural man, it is just like bringing Christ before Herod, and in the end the result is He will be mocked and derided. God does not work that way, and we should not appeal to that kind of thing. If a man is only influenced by natural curiosity, the Lord has nothing to say to him.

Everything takes its predetermined course in view of the cross. The actions of men were all subservient to the design of God that His grace should be perfectly set forth in this world. Man's hour and the power of darkness only served the purpose of bringing to light wonders that could not have appeared before. It is like the falling of darkness upon the face of the earth, which gives the opportunity for the splendours of the heavens to be disclosed, so that we can look up and see the handiwork of God. We can behold wonders and glories that cannot be seen in the light of day; the darkness gives them occasion to shine forth. As the power of darkness manifested itself in opposition to Jesus, it was just the time for the glory of God in grace to come out in all its holy splendour. The evil thoughts in the heart of man only served to bring out the precious thoughts in the heart of God.

It is very suggestive that the Lord should have been *crucified*, for this was not the divinely appointed death for a blasphemer, which was stoning. As we know, the Jews came on several occasions ready to stone Him, but that was not to be. It was divinely ordered that He should be put in the place of one who is under the curse, for he that is hanged is a curse of God, but He was to be there by the grace of God. The idea of stoning is that each individual concerned expresses his detestation of the sin committed, whereas a crucified man is made a public spectacle; he is publicly in the place of curse. The Lord came there in pure and perfect grace, to redeem us from curse by His becoming a curse, so that the blessing of Abraham might come to the nations in Christ Jesus, "that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith", Galatians 3: 14.

The wickedness of man did not obstruct God in the least; it only brought about His determinate counsel so that through the work of redemption blessing should flow out to all. John tells us in his gospel that Jesus bore His cross. He is presented as sustaining all in the greatness of His Person. As lifted up He was to be the great gathering centre for all. In John it is not so much this aspect of the shame of the cross, but the elevation of it as the way that divine love and power would take to accomplish God's blessed end. But in the other gospels Simon the Cyrenian is seen as bearing the Lord's cross, not of his own will but as compelled by the enemies of Jesus. He was evidently a man of African race, brought casually, as men would say, to that spot, for Mark

says that he was a passer-by, coming from his daily toil in the field. He was evidently a man whom they thought fit for such a purpose; they would not have selected a scribe, or a Pharisee, or a doctor of the law.

Mark tells us that he had two sons, Alexander and Rufus, intimating that he had a name among the brethren. I have no doubt that he was a disciple and that it was ordered by God that he should be on the spot at the right moment, when someone was needed to bear the cross. It is good to be, in God's ordering, a passer-by when Jesus is in reproach, and to be such that His enemies lay hold of us to bear His cross. To be classed with Jesus, to be selected as only fit to bear His cross, is as great an honour as this world can confer upon us. Are we such in our walk and ways that the world would select us for this honour?

Then there is the multitude who wailed and lamented Him. The Lord wants, not the pity of men, but their faith. He knew all that was coming upon them and He says, "If they do these things in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" It was the green tree of God's greatest privilege, and it was all being rejected nationally. But the tree was still green; it lost none of its freshness even by His crucifixion. "Father, forgive them", He could say. The green tree is the full presentation of God in grace, and this was seen still at Pentecost and all through the Acts.

The dry tree is when man is left to himself without God, Christ or the Holy Spirit; it is really the time of complete apostasy, when God withdraws Himself from those who have given Him up. "He saved others", the rulers said in derision, but He would not save Himself, for He was there in kingly grace.

The repentant malefactor discerned this; he feared God and recognised that Jesus was there, not on His own account, but in grace, and that He was coming again in His kingdom. This is the way of blessing, for he becomes a companion of Jesus, to be with Him in paradise. We might regard the malefactor as the interpreter of all that was going on; he was able to interpret all as none of the apostles could at that moment. He was possessed of divine light on the situation, and could interpret it for the benefit of his fellow-malefactor, and for our benefit too. He recognised the whole truth of the position. There were three men under judgment: two of them well deserved all they were receiving, but there was Another there in the place of judgment, and He was known to the malefactor as the One who was to have the kingdom; He was to that man's soul the Christ, the chosen One of God. If He who had the rights of the kingdom was in the place of judgment, He was unmistakably there in grace.

The malefactor's confession shows that the precious work of God in his soul had made him fit to be a companion of Jesus in paradise. His words — "this man has done nothing amiss", and his reference to the coming kingdom, are in keeping with what Gabriel said to Mary at the beginning of the gospel about the holiness of Jesus, and he was in accord with what had come out of heaven. There is nothing that is going into heaven but what has come out of heaven. Through the infinite favour of God he went into paradise in perfect accord with the place he went to, and in perfect accord with the Person he went with. It shows how rapidly the work of God could be accomplished.

This man who was a reviler stands forth now amid the scenes of Calvary as giving a divine interpretation of all that was going on. He is one of the most remarkable men in Scripture. He came forward to declare Christ's generation. There was no uncertainty or ambiguity about his own state; he judges that perfectly, for he says, "we indeed justly, for we receive the just recompense of what we have done; but this man has done nothing amiss". That must have been divinely given. Everything that the Lord did was amiss in the estimation of the scribes and Pharisees, but the malefactor justifies the Lord in every way; to his soul He was the Christ, the chosen of God, and if He was in the place of judgment it must be in grace. The thief interpreted it perfectly. He felt that, if the One who was to have the kingdom was on the cross in grace, he could count on grace towards himself, He had light on the whole situation; he was in the light of the Person. He was in the light of His death, of His resurrection, of His ascension, His kingdom and His coming again in glory. The eleven apostles might have sat at His feet and learned wonders! It reminds me of the Lord's own words, "the last shall be first".

Paradise suggests God's delight and complacency; it means a garden of delights. It involves association with Jesus. To have man in the place of His delight is the full result of what grace was accomplishing. In this gospel we see that God needs man for His own delight. Paradise is the place of His own delight, and God is saying to man in Luke by the death of Jesus, I want you in nearness to Myself. The Lord says, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise", so that he goes there even before resurrection. It brings out the value of the death of Jesus that a man can go into paradise with Jesus before resurrection. The Lord's spirit went to paradise the moment He died, and in the value of His precious death the malefactor went there too as an object of delight to God.

Luke does not leave out the darkness; it shows the impenetrable character of the work. If reconciliation is effected it is through the One who knew no sin being made sin — it is on that basis. But Luke does not bring in the forsaking because that would not be in keeping with the tenor of his gospel. God is

shining here in extreme favourableness to men. "The veil of the temple rent in the midst" (verse 45); it is not said that it "was rent" as in Matthew and Mark. It almost suggests that it rent of its own accord. It was God giving expression to His own nature in grace through the death of Jesus. It is not here the stroke of divine judgment that fell on the devoted Messiah. In Luke it is rather the bringing out of all that was in the heart of God for men. In Luke the Lord speaks of Himself as straitened: "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished?" All the grace was pent up until now, but now it bursts forth; the veil rending gives outlet and relief to all that was there. All the grace of God to men expressed itself through the flesh of Jesus in His precious death.

God has removed everything that would hinder man from being retained for His pleasure. God has come out through the death of Jesus to retain us for His pleasure in all the value of the death of His Son. This is something that never came out before; the Old Testament showed how God could clear man to live in His favour on earth, but it never gives us anything beyond that. But now through the death of Jesus man can be retained for God's own pleasure in the place of God's delights.

Some have objected to the hymns which refer to Christ shedding His own blood, because it was in fact a Roman soldier who shed it. But there are only three Scriptures which speak directly of the shedding of Christ's blood, and they are the Lord's own words at the supper table in Matthew, Mark and Luke. *Shed* is the same word as *poured out*; He came for the very purpose of pouring out His blood. The love of God was poured out. Surely this is what was in the mind of the Lord and not the act of the soldier. It is quite in keeping to speak of His shedding His blood; He came in view of that pouring out; it was an act of divine love. The word 'shed' is used of the Spirit in Acts 2: 33; *shed forth* is really *poured out*. The shedding of blood was an act of love on the part of God and on the part of Christ, just as it is in divine love that the Spirit is poured out, and it is poured out so that the love displayed at Calvary should be diffused in millions of human hearts. Sometimes under the plea of literal accuracy we lose the spiritual life of a thing.

Darkness suggests what is inscrutable. There is a depth in the way that reconciliation is effected which we cannot penetrate; it is the, subject of wonder. Who could come near to trace it out? We must stand aside with unshod feet.

The Lord's word to the Father, "into thy hands I commit my spirit", suggests divine complacency. The Lord, even in the article of death, is seen in perfect confidence in the Father. It shows, too, how entirely He has taken the place of

man, because His spirit was Himself. The truth is that He is God and has become Man: that is the incarnation. He who was in the form of God, and was God as to His Person, has become Man and will remain Man eternally. He has come into that place so that there may be new delight for the heart of God; He has filled that place with absolute perfection.

The Lord came as a babe into this place of trust — “Thou didst make me trust upon my mother’s breasts”, Psalm 22: 9. A divine Person has come into manhood and remains Man for ever. He, the One who was God, has come into manhood so that there should be new delights for the heart of God, not only in Himself but in those who are His companions, As Babe He came into the place of being the subject of divine care. It is touching to see that His being wrapped in swaddling clothes by His mother was the first expression of divine care, and the last was that He was wrapped in fine linen by Joseph. He is cared for in infancy, in manhood and in death. It is most touching to see that the care of God for Jesus from the very beginning was often expressed through the saints. Think of it being permitted to a woman to take that holy Babe and wrap Him in swaddling clothes so that through tender holy hands might be expressed the care of God! Then think how God’s care for Him was expressed through the women who followed and ministered unto Him! We might say, Would that I had been one of them! The opportunity remains; we can still express the care of God for Him — He is in His saints and we can minister to them. Then the angels ministered to Him; that was the care of God. Even the devil knew that He was the subject of divine care, for He said, “He will give his angels charge over thee”. And it is a touching conclusion of the divine care that His precious body should be wrapped in fine linen.

Luke does not tell us that Joseph was a secret disciple, for he is occupied with the grace of God in Joseph. The grace of God comes to light in him as it came to light in the thief. Fear was gone when he went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. He is ready when the opportunity comes, and in figure he brings his appreciation of Christ. Joseph had learned in Jesus the character of the kingdom of God and he waited for it, and the appreciation of it in his soul came out in the fine linen. In handling that precious body he had a divine conception of what was bound up therein. It cost Joseph something; Mark tells us he bought the linen. If you have anything that is worthy of being wrapped about Jesus it has cost you something, some breaking down of the flesh. This was the breaking down of Joseph’s whole life; all was now sacrificed to Jesus. He put Him in his own tomb, and morally he went there too, for we could not conceive Joseph returning to the place he had originally occupied. What would people have said when they passed by and saw the tomb closed at last and the stone rolled to the door? They would have said,

Joseph is gone at last — and so he had. I have no doubt that Joseph was never seen again in the council.

Then we come to the women. Luke tells us how they prepared the aromatic spices and ointment; they had their appreciation, but they came too late to fit into the divine movements. It is a great matter to be on the spot at the time. Simon the Cyrenian was on the spot when he was wanted, and Joseph, and the thief — all filled their place in the divine movements of grace. But, like the women, we may have precious spices and ointments but come too late for the critical moment. They never had the privilege of putting their appreciation on the body of the Lord, as did Mary of Bethany. Mary anointed Him for burial *beforehand*. It is a wonderful thing to move spiritually beforehand in the way that God will move. Others cast their garments before Him when He entered Jerusalem; they represent souls who know exactly how the Lord is going to move. That is spirituality.

LUKE 24

Luke 24

We have in this chapter the loosing of the bands of death (see Psalm 18: 4; Psalm 116: 3). The Lord had come by the grace of God into the place of death, and all the might of death, all its strength, was put forth upon Him. There is no feature of the power of death that He has not been subjected to in grace. The bands of death were very really and truly bound around that blessed One, but God loosed them all. The Spirit of God speaks in the New Testament of the "pains of death" (Acts 2: 24), intimating to us the anguish of soul which was involved in the grace of God finding expression in death. The word involves extreme anguish; it is the same word translated 'throes' elsewhere. It shows what the manifestation of grace involved to the Lord Jesus. In Hebrews we read that He by the grace of God *tasted death*. He not only went into the article of death but He tasted in His soul all the bitterness of death. The loosing of the pains of death is the testimony on God's part that in grace the penalty has been so borne that it is now annulled.

I think we see death here in a new character. There is divine testimony that the penalty is gone and the One who bore the penalty of sin in the way of grace is liberated; it is God's testimony to the completeness of grace. That is one side, but Peter on the day of Pentecost adds: "it was not possible that he should be holden of it". Being God's "gracious One" and moving into death entirely in the way of grace, it was not possible that He should be holden of death. There could be no true and adequate expression of the grace of God in the death of Jesus if there had not been the full weight of the penalty. It is well not to underestimate what was there. We must never lose the sense that the full weight of the penalty was on the Lord Jesus; it draws our hearts to Him. How touching it is to be able to say, He died for me! The sting of death is sin, and that calls for the extreme penalty. In that character, for us who sit under the shadow of a risen Christ, the penalty is completely removed; the pains of death have been loosed. Every question has been settled so that the Lord can move through the "gates of righteousness" into a new position as Mediator of the all-blessing grace of God.

If the penalty is fully borne and in that sense death annulled, all the might of death as vested in the hands of Satan through man's sin, and all the power of Satan, are brought to nothing. We come here to the complete triumph of grace: sin, death, Satan, are all annulled, 'Annulled' is a powerful word; it means made as though it never existed. That clears the way for the Lord to bring to light life and incorruptibility; they come to light for the first time in a

risen Christ, and there we see God's thought for man. That is the positive side of the death of Jesus; the setting aside of the penalty is one side, but we have to look at the death of Jesus in another way; it is also the way through which the Lord enters this new place in which He can be the Dispenser of the grace of God universally. Death is the way in. In resurrection God opens to Him the gates of righteousness, and He goes into this new place as the Mediator of all the grace of God. That is not exactly the place He had in the days of His flesh, for He said, "how am I straitened!" There was the restriction of grace there, but now having moved through the gates of righteousness the Mediator is perfectly free for the administration of grace to all men, and He has reached that position through death. According to Psalm 118 the gates of righteousness stand in relation to His becoming the Head of the corner, and He introduces a new "day which Jehovah hath made". It is full of gladness and rejoicing for men because it is the day of grace to them. This is the new day which we have in Luke 24, a day into which no shadow of death can come.

According to Psalm 16 the Lord has come here as God's gracious One. It was not possible that One like that could see corruption. God's gracious One passed through this world of sin, and now He has gone through the gates of righteousness into this new position. That is the new day, the day that Jehovah hath made, and it is marked by gladness and rejoicing.

The aspect of the death of Jesus in Luke is that He is moving through death into the place of unchallenged supremacy. In Acts it is repeatedly said that God raised Him, but the gospels give us the Person — He *is risen*. It implies that there is inherent power in that victorious One which made it impossible that He should be holden of death; He must rise. No power can challenge the rights of His grace. He could say, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up", In Hebrews 2: 9 we read that "he was made some little inferior to the angels on account of the suffering of death", but this was on the way to being "crowned with glory and honour". He has universal rights of grace; He can give the promise of the Father, He can do everything; repentance and remission of sins can be preached in His name to all nations.

It could not be necessary to roll away the stone to let such a Person out, but the stone was rolled away that death might be uncovered as the place of divine triumph. The women could look into the place of death and see nothing there but the evidence of the triumph of grace. They found not the body of the Lord, but His clothes are there, the testimony that the Lord Jesus has been there, If we look into the uncovered place of death we are made conscious that the Lord of life and glory is not there; He was there in the way of grace, and now the first order of man has been ended.

It is a fine spectacle to see men in shining raiment; they are not here said to be angels. Now that the stone is rolled away we have at once the thought of *men* in a new condition altogether, men in shining garments, men suitable for a new condition which is outside of mortal life. The risen One is to have associates in His new condition. There are *two* men, for testimony is in view. God would have us to see these wonderful sights, to look into the grave as lovers of Jesus and to see that He has been there in death in the way of grace, and that now He is out of it, and men can be in shining raiment as a result. Here upon this earth where Jesus died there are to be men standing in shining raiment. It is the answer to Luke 2: 14, for it indicates that the pleasure of God in men is to be secured in this new condition. His pleasure is not found in men as part of the system of this world; shining raiment is not for such. No man had ever been seen before in shining raiment except the Lord on the mount of transfiguration; such raiment is in accord with the resurrection world.

This is the crown of God's pleasure in men. The Lord could delight in repentant sinners; they were to Him the excellent of the earth; they were His associates in the days of His flesh. But the full pleasure of God was not reached, and God was not satisfied, till men were set up as suitable associates of the *risen* One. In the beginning of Acts we see companies of men who were associates of the risen One.

The shining ones were men of understanding, and they address the women as those who have intelligence — "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen". They were to understand that, in order to reach His true place, the Lord had to go through death; He had to go out of the place of limitations into a large place of liberty.

All this is presented in testimony in these first twelve verses, but it is not entered into. The Spirit of God sets it before us to show that even a *divine* testimony does not bring us into the good of anything; we enter into things only by the personal service of the Lord. This casts us upon His active grace. The Lord in the following part of the chapter undertook to bring the disciples into it by His own personal service, and He would do that for each one of us. He Himself would draw near to us in all our ignorance and unbelief and lead us into what has been presented to us in testimony. Unbelief marked the women, and also perplexity which results in slowness to take up the comfort of what is there. We have to be prepared to understand the importance of the resurrection of Christ, for it was the most wonderful movement of the testimony that had ever taken place, a movement from Christ known after the flesh to Christ in resurrection. The disciples were not prepared for it; they had

to be divinely prepared and so do we. Many today are not prepared for the moral import of the resurrection of Christ. They may believe it as a fact — they are not Christians at all if they do not — but very few understand it. It is a wonderful change in the ways of God. In Luke 23 we see man given a new place in paradise, but now we find men standing on the earth in a new condition as associates with a risen Man. It would completely break the power of the world for us if we understood that that is our place. We shall know it is our place when we are actually raised, but what will mark the saints then actually is to mark them now morally. At Pentecost the whole company was seen morally in shining raiment, with not a grain of selfishness left.

The account which Luke gives us of the two disciples who went to Emmaus brings out in peculiar sweetness the grace and service of the living One. The men in shining raiment had spoken of Him as the living One. Now what kind of activities belong to the living One? We have here a beautiful picture of them, whether in relation to true lovers who are not moving in the line of His thoughts, or to the company as gathered together. The living One is moving in the service of grace and love.

These two disciples really loved the Lord, but they left Jerusalem to go to Emmaus “that same day”, and we should gather they went to their own home. We find too, that Peter, after visiting the sepulchre and seeing the evidence that the Lord was risen, went to his own home. Now that is where the trouble is: we get certain impressions of Christ, but then there is something else that governs the movement of our feet. There may be true love, as there was in Peter and in these two disciples going to Emmaus, but in going to their own circle their movements were not governed by affection for Christ. It is often so with us. The Lord Jesus went after these two and brought them back to that one circle that was identified with His interests and with Him as risen. It was in view of their being found together with their bonds in a Person who is altogether outside the life of this world, and who can notwithstanding be known intimately in that life, as Peter says in Acts 10: 41, “who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead”. It suggests the closest intimacy in association with One whose life is entirely outside and apart from the whole course of this world.

As He broke the bread He was made known to them. It was no doubt a significant figure of His death when He took the bread and blessed it, and having broken it gave it to them. It was an act which corresponded with what He had done in the upper room when He instituted the Supper, though it was not actually the Supper. The two recognised Him; it was a peculiar and unmistakable touch that they recognised as having known it before. Who

could bless as He could! What an extraordinary thing it must have been to hear the Lord giving thanks or blessing! Their eyes were opened and they recognised Him — it was Himself. The most wonderful exposition of Scripture that ever was failed to turn their feet, but when He was known in the breaking of bread their feet were set in movement at once; they must find their company. They had an intuitive sense that He had a company and, though it was too late to go any further, it was not too late to get back to Jerusalem.

It is generally the Lord's way to give us enough to make our hearts glow, and then He puts us to the test as to what effect it has produced. The Lord does not thrust Himself upon us. It is a very serious matter to get a manifestation of the Lord or any touch from His own hand, because the test is sure to follow. In Mark 6 we read that He walked on the water and would have passed them by; He put Himself within their range, and it became a test for their hearts. Peter answered to the test; he says, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come to thee on the water". In Revelation 3 the Lord says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock" — why did He not open the door? He will not do that; He leaves it to you and me to open the door; there is no intrusion. So here He gives them this wonderful exposition of Scripture and makes their hearts glow with fervour, and then He made as if He would go further. They constrained Him; they would not let Him go. It is like the beloved in the Song of Solomon showing himself through the lattice. There is a setting forth of His moral loveliness, His personal attractiveness and glory, to set us in motion, and then He waits to see whether we will respond. In the Song there was not response and the beloved withdrew himself, so that when the sluggish heart of the bride awakes to want him, he has gone. That is how we miss things. The Lord may give us a touch of ministry, or as we read the word or come together we may get a touch that makes our hearts burn. There is that about the saints that is easily set on fire; they are inflammable material. He works, He ministers, He serves, to awaken some kind of movement on our part. How delightful it was to Him to find them conversing about Him and reasoning! It is a fine thing to work things out that are connected with Christ, to understand their relation to one another, to reason them out affectionately. Going back they contributed to the assembly; they came back with peculiar impressions of Christ. What good are we in the assembly if we do not bring some impressions of Christ? We are more or less a drag; but every brother or sister who comes to the assembly with some impression of Christ contributes to its wealth.

There is no limit to the spiritual possibilities that are available for the individual lover; we are only limited by the desire of our own souls. In spite of the terrible state of things in the Christian profession, there are unlimited

possibilities for hearts that love the Lord; but then what we get individually is to qualify us for our position in relation to the brethren.

The Lord delights to give manifestations, not merely thoughts that refresh and stimulate, but distinct manifestations so that the Lord becomes known in a new way. Every manifestation gives a new impression of Christ; He is so great that I do not think He ever manifests Himself twice in quite the same way. There is such a diversity of glory that every manifestation has its own unique character. We should always be on the look-out for it, for it is the choicest thing within our reach. We should look for manifestations particularly when we come together to eat the Lord's supper.

Our efficiency in service depends very much on the way the Lord has manifested Himself to us. The Lord said to Paul that he was to be a minister and witness of the things which he had seen and the things in which He would appear to him. He gives us manifestations in order to constitute us ministers and witnesses. So these two disciples could go back and report to the assembly — the eleven and those gathered together — and tell them how the Lord had manifested Himself. They brought wealth to the assembly. Nothing can be purely individual; what is granted to the individual is intended for the blessing of all. There is no New Testament writer so individual as John, and yet there is no writer that so insists that we should love one another.

The Lord is seen in this chapter in the wonderful character of interpreting all the Scriptures. It would seem to suggest the great spiritual wealth that is brought into the assembly.

It all clearly had in view the new circle of communion or fellowship which the Lord was about to set up, and which would stand in relation to Himself as the risen One, altogether outside the life of this world. All the wealth of the Old Testament Scriptures is gathered up and substantiated in the risen One. The assembly has been enriched by the interpretation of the Old Testament which the Lord has given to the saints. The Lord would impress on us, as on the two disciples, that all the favour of God as made known in the Old Testament requires resurrection to give it body. Its substance depends on the resurrection of the Messiah.

It had pleased God by the mouths of Old Testament prophets to develop in wonderful detail a vast number of things, as it is said here, "He interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself", verse 27. And again He says, "All that is written concerning me in the law of Moses and prophets and psalms must be fulfilled", verse 44. That suggests the immense scope of the Old Testament, and I believe the Lord would have it to be an experience with which we are familiar to walk with Him through the Old Testament from

Genesis to Malachi. That was a real journey outwardly, for they walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus, but spiritually they were traversing the whole range of the Old Testament. Think of the immense detail. It is a great safeguard against the wretched infidel notions that are about, to go through the Old Testament in company with Christ. As the wealth, substance, and power of it, the wonderful variety of spiritual thoughts concerning Christ, come before us, we are lifted up to an elevation from which we can look down with absolute contempt on the infidelity of man. No one who has walked through the Old Testament in company with Christ will open his ears to the infidel thoughts that are broadcasted today.

There were a multitude of thoughts of divine favour expressed in the Old Testament and they were precious to faith, but all the people who cherished those thoughts died — there were two exceptions only. For men to be in death was no expression of divine favour, so in faith they must have reasoned it out. In the New Testament they did not come directly to resurrection, but faith reasoned it out that there must be resurrection, If God had such precious thoughts of divine favour and yet all men were under death, there must be resurrection. That the Lord was to suffer and to enter into His glory was the great theme, and the Old Testament made it clear that He would be victorious. The serpent was to crush His heel and it was through His sufferings that the power of the serpent was to be annulled. Now God shows that His favourableness to men was greater than all the poison of the serpent's bite. The Old Testament was full of favourable thoughts on God's part towards men, but as men were under death they could only be substantiated in resurrection. Now the Messiah has come in as the One on whom death had no claim and upon whom death could have no power, for He was the Prince of life; and yet such a One as that came into death. The supreme expression of the favour of God to men was that His own anointed One came into death, but He could not be holden of death; He passes through to resurrection, and every gracious thought of God was substantiated in the risen One. The Lord is just the same today as when they walked with Him through the Old Testament.

This gospel is characterised throughout by grace, and the Lord, whose feet had been beautiful in His journey through this scene in the days of His flesh, shows that they were still beautiful with grace in resurrection, as He walked eight miles with two disciples who really loved Him, though they were not moving in correspondence with Himself. He went with them and led them along this wonderful road and enlarged them. How they must have been enriched! These were true lovers in sympathy with each other, and they conversed with Him. If we were more marked by such features, I think the

Lord would draw near and converse with us, and He would lead us along this same road that He led them.

What wealth they brought to the assembly! We should pray that we might get individually and household-wise such impressions from the Lord that we are qualified to contribute wealth to the assembly. That thought runs through the whole of Scripture. In the Old Testament we have the thought of going up to the place where Jehovah set His Name; they did not go empty, but all Israel brought their tithes and their offerings. They all came as contributors and poured their wealth into the treasury of the dedicated things. These two enriched the assembly; they had a manifestation of the Lord and brought it to the assembly. They must have contributed greatly. The report had reached the eleven that the Lord had risen and had appeared to Simon — that was something — but how much more these two could bring! “They related what had happened on the way”. It must have taken a long time as they told the eleven about this wonderful walk through the Old Testament. Then they crowned it all by telling how He was made known to them in the breaking of bread; He had disclosed to them His own thought for the moment. Added to the wealth of the Old Testament He had taken bread and blessed and given it to them, and that is His thought for the present moment right down to now. How the eleven and all the rest must have listened! Perhaps it took them an hour or two to tell them only a little outline.

People complain sometimes that there is no fellowship. We are called upon to insist that there is a fellowship, and it is the most blessed thing that ever was. The Lord has formed it; He has given it character; He is Himself the substance of it, and it subsists and is available for all His lovers. It is for us in the spirit of Christ to bring these impressions to bear on our fellow-Christians, as the Lord brought them to bear on these two. He calls attention to the fact that there is a fellowship of divine character, and if we once get the sense of it we shall want to find a spot where that fellowship can be enjoyed. It is a fellowship of blessing and happiness. We come together because we are divinely and spiritually happy, and we long to be in the place where our happiness will be shared by others, and where our joy will be appreciated and welcomed. Those who complain of lack of fellowship are not in correspondence with the Lord. The Lord is not complaining of lack of fellowship; He is seeking to bring before His saints the supremely blessed character of the fellowship that exists. If I find a cold saint who has come under the influence of the world and I want to do him good, I must not complain of his condition but bring before him in spiritual power what he is missing, and that will surely affect him.

When we come together to remember the Lord, a brother gives thanks at the table for the loaf, and I learn from what he says to the Lord what he thinks about it. He put it in my hand with confidence that I have the same thoughts of it as he has. Then I pass it to a brother or sister with confidence that he or she thinks about it as I do. We pass the bread and the cup from one to another as all having common thoughts and appreciation of it; and we delight to sit among people who, some in small and some in great measure, think of Christ exactly as we do — that is the fellowship. What a wonderful sight for the eye of heaven to look down on — people all thinking the same thoughts about the precious body of Christ devoted in death, and thinking the same about His precious blood! The youngest babe would have the same thoughts as Paul; they would be a good deal smaller, but the same thoughts as have developed to maturity in Paul. That is the communion. If we had the most intelligent brother on the earth at the Lord's supper and he gave thanks, a person converted last night could say Amen to every word he said. He might say, It is wonderful and beyond me, but it is precious — that is the communion. One who can say Amen is a contributor: "Let all the people say Amen:" Every one is a partaker of the preciousness of Christ. The Lord in taking the loaf at Emmaus intimated that He was forming a communion; there were at any rate two participants. The Lord formed a communion which derived its character from the fact that He had by the grace of God tasted death; He gave His body in death. The whole thing takes character from their recognising Him as living. If they had not recognised the Lord as living they would not have had any right thought of His death.

If the taking of the loaf and cup were spiritual realities with us, any bad terms between brethren would be settled before another Lord's day. Such a pang would go through our hearts as we passed the loaf to the brother with whom we were not on good terms that we would feel that we could not do it again. We get into the way of doing it formally, and all kinds of things have place which would disappear in twenty-four hours if we knew what it really means to take the bread and the cup. It is a serious thing to get into a kind of fellowship that is unreal. Then on the other hand we have to be careful that what belongs to personal infirmity and peculiarity does not influence us in relation to the fellowship. We all have personal peculiarities, and when we sit down together to partake of the bread and the cup we should have grace from the Lord to rise above these things. Perhaps a brother is quick-tempered and has said a hasty word — what are we going to do about it? We have to seek the grace of Christ, His wonderful priestly grace from His uplifted hands, so that when we come together we think of that brother in no other way but in pure

and holy feelings of grace. Of course there are a thousand things which call for meekness, forbearance, lowliness and long-suffering:

all these things test whether we have the grace of Christ. We often find that we have not the grace of Christ, but this sends me to Him to get the supply that I need. I realise that this brother who annoyed me has the same thoughts of Christ that I have, and in all the things that constitute the fellowship we are absolutely one. I have known a brother come on Saturday night to say how sorry he was for having said a certain thing in the week; he was not free to come to the breaking of bread without saying it. These moral questions should never go over the week. That was the intention of the Lord in setting up the fellowship; it was not to be touched in an unholy or unrighteous way, but it was to adjust all moral questions.

The Lord desires that we should find our way to the assembly as contributors, as those who have precious substance in the knowledge of Himself and who realise that there is a company where that substance will be appreciated and welcomed. The assembly is the place where there is an outlet for all the precious thoughts concerning Jesus that have been indelibly engraved on our hearts. God has provided a suitable vessel to contain all the precious and holy worth of Jesus; and that vessel is the assembly. That assembly will miss something if I do not bring my contribution — every saint should feel that. It is the only place where there is an outlet for the appreciation of Jesus.

The aspect of the assembly that Luke brings before us is not so much the assembly in the privilege of family relationships, but as enriched with the all-various grace of God, every element of which has been disclosed in Jesus.

The Lord came in as they were saying these things: "He himself stood in their midst, and says to them, Peace be unto you", verse 36. They were confounded and frightened and supposed they beheld a spirit. That shows how the presence of the Lord brings to light the actual conditions that were there. We often talk about the presence of the Lord in the midst of His own, but I have often wondered what the effect would be if the Lord actually came into our midst. I believe it would bring to light every element not in correspondence with Himself. Here they had accepted the testimony that Christ was risen, but they were not in correspondence with it. We may receive a good deal as divine testimony without the heart being brought into real correspondence with Jesus.

It was because of the conditions that the Lord said, "Peace be unto you.... Why are ye troubled, and why are thoughts rising in your hearts". They needed this word of peace. It is according to the grace of this gospel that the Lord takes account of the actual conditions; but He does not leave them where

He found them; He brought them into perfect correspondence with Himself before He had done with them. We all know what it is to require a good deal of adjustment in our spirits. Our true spiritual inwardness is often much behind the measure of light that may have come to us in testimony. The Lord wants to bring us inwardly into correspondence with the light He may have given us. The Lord never loses sight of the actual state, though we often do. If His saints are troubled and thoughts arise in their hearts, the Lord knows it and He would meet it with the gracious word, "Peace".

If we are not in the present, conscious peace and joy of that which is substantiated in the risen One, we are not suitable to the assembly. He would have the precious grace of God, substantiated and verified in Him, so known by us that we are undistracted, and no thoughts arise in our hearts. We are in the peace and joy of all that has been brought to us in Jesus; then we are in correspondence with Him.

The disciples had been walking with Him for about three-and-a-half years, and they had seen marvellous things and heard marvellous words. The grace of God to men had been set forth most blessedly to them, but they did not at this moment identify it with the risen One. He was not at that moment the substance of it to their hearts. So He says, "Handle me and see; a spirit has not flesh and bones as ye see me have", verse 39. I believe there is a spiritual apprehension that answers to handling. Handling is not hearing or reading about Him. "Handle me" — there is substance here. Many of us have known what it is to say: "Lord Jesus, make Thyself to me a living bright reality". We have had certain thoughts of Him, but they were more or less misty. To many believers Jesus is a spirit, a vague, intangible personality, but the Spirit of God would make Him very real. It was not a spirit that called them to follow Him and find in Him the all blessed grace of God; it was not a spirit that had died for them.

His hands and His feet suggest everything that the disciples had seen in Him in the days of His flesh. His hands covered all His service of grace, and His feet covered all His movements of grace. Those hands had been active all through; there are fourteen references to His hands in this gospel. They were always moving in the service of grace. Then His feet — what wonderful footprints! We can mark them all through this gospel. And now He identified all this with Himself as risen; they are the same hands and feet, but they are now in resurrection conditions. Nothing of the grace that was expressed in Him in the days of His flesh has been left behind in the grave; it has all gone through in resurrection in the risen One. It is all in the risen One this moment and the Lord makes it tangible to us now.

In John 20 reference is made to *His hands and His side*. His hands in John are viewed differently from His hands in Luke. In John His hands held everything for the Father; He holds the sheep for the Father — it is on the side of divine purpose in John. It is divine grace in all its activity manward in Luke, but in John what comes out is that His hands are strong enough to hold everything in the Father's purpose; the pleasure of Jehovah prospers in His hand.

The movements of His feet were connected with the preaching of the gospel. He brought the glad tidings, He was the great Evangelist; but His hands were occupied in skilful touches on the souls of men. Now those are the two sides of the service of grace. There is what we may call the testimony side, the wonderful grace of God carried by One whose feet are beautiful, and there is the other side, the skilful touches of His hands on individual souls. I cannot believe that anyone who has been touched by the hands of Jesus would ever forget that touch; I believe every one carried some impression of the skill of the hand that touched them. The assembly is made up of persons who have not only believed the glad tidings brought to them by Jesus, but who have come under the personal touch of a divinely skilful hand. What a wonderful company! Our touching Him is the other side, the exercise of faith, and it draws virtue out of Him, but His touches suggest the plenitude of grace. "He healed every one of them" — such was the power of His touch.

In the assembly everyone is to be a contributor. If I have heard one precious word from His lips, I must cherish that and bring it as wealth to the assembly; and if I get a touch from His own hand I must cherish that too, and bring it to the assembly. The Lord is seen in this chapter as Interpreter of all the Old Testament Scriptures, showing that all was concerning Himself. I believe that all true interpretation of Scripture is the interpretation of Christ. He is the great Interpreter, and He is the Preacher, for every gospel preaching is the preaching of Christ. He takes up this and that one as a mouth-piece, as Paul says to the Corinthians, "Since ye seek proof of Christ speaking in me". Christ is the Speaker, the Evangelist, the Teacher, the Prophet, the Pastor. Every gift is an expression of Christ.

In Moses and the prophets we have the divine testimony, but in the Psalms we have the spiritual emotions of the saints; so when the Lord found the company He spoke of the Psalms. In the Psalms we have soul-history, experience, not simply light from God. Moses gives us what is inaugurated and has to do with the setting up of things, and the prophets give light suitable to a day of departure, but then all kinds of exercises and spiritual emotions, whether of sorrow or joy, are produced in the soul, and they are found in the Psalms. The effect of the Lord's service would be to put us all in tune so that we should be

ready to sing. It is a great matter to the Lord that He should have a singing company before He comes back. I am sure He thinks much about the hymns we sing when we are together, for it is said that He sings in the midst of His assembly.

The Psalms speak much of the sufferings of Christ, they should have a great place among us when we are in assembly, but I doubt if we are much up to it. We are to think of the exceeding sweetness of the love that would suffer so much. The Lord is cherished in His suffering love, but that means that we are perfectly free from all thought of ourselves. We are not thinking so much of what the Lord did *for us*, but we are thinking of the path of unmeasured sorrow and suffering which He traversed in order to bring to us the grace and love of God. The Psalms rightly give prominence to that, and it is always so in spiritual affections. There is no subject in Scripture so profoundly spiritual as the sufferings of Christ. Everyone ought to read J. N. Darby's wonderful book on the sufferings of Christ; it would do the saints good to read it once a year. The Lord was the holy Sufferer all the way through; the whole Scripture testifies to His sufferings. The whole testimony of Scripture was that He would suffer and enter His glory.

The Lord had evidently drawn the attention of the disciples to the Scriptures; He had given the Scriptures a very great place. "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was yet with you" — so that in attaching very great importance to the sacred writings of the Old Testament we are following the Lord, which is always a safe thing to do. The Lord connected the testimony of the Scriptures with the present testimony of grace; He brought in all the Old Testament Scriptures as having an essential place in connection with the present testimony of grace, so that we are quite justified in preaching the gospel from the Old Testament. There is not a single part of the Old Testament writings that ought not to be brought into the assembly's wealth. There is an immense wealth of spiritual detail brought out in the Old Testament in the form of types and figures which is needed. We should be surprised to find how much we lost if we limited the wealth of the church to the New Testament; we should find that we had lost a very large part of the testimony of God concerning Christ.

The Old Testament has a present bearing on us, so if God says, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn", Paul says, For whose sake did God say that? For the ox? No, "altogether for our sakes", 1 Corinthians 9: 10. Such a scripture as that is altogether for the assembly. It is very striking. The Lord has shown that not a word of the Old Testament Scriptures can be broken. If God says of His servants and judges of old, "Ye are gods", it is as if

the Lord would say, Whether you can explain it or not, the Scripture cannot be broken. In the first half of the book of the Acts they had no Scriptures save the Old Testament. We should not shrink from dwelling on a matter of this kind on account of the thoughts that are abroad in the air, and Christians are in danger of becoming affected by them, and of thinking that certain parts of the Old Testament have no value.

If God gives us communications and we do not read them, it is like contempt of the Writer. The risen Lord reminds His disciples that He had told them before that all things written in the Scriptures must be fulfilled. Then He opened their understanding to understand the Scriptures, which is a necessary spiritual operation. That would preserve us from reading the Old Testament in the letter. He opens their understandings to let all the wealth of the Old Testament come in. The Lord did much for His disciples when He was with them that afterwards was the work of the Spirit. It is by the Spirit that the Lord opens *our* understandings to understand the Scriptures.

It is very beautiful that the Lord should have eaten before them (verse 43). He wished to show that there was that with them which He could appreciate. Nothing frees us more than to know that there is that with us that the Lord can appreciate. In grace He values, and takes a part of, what we have, though it is small. "They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and of a honeycomb". The Lord said, "Have ye anything here to eat?" It was wonderful grace, as much as to say, 'If you have, I should enjoy it and will partake of it'. It suggests the perfect grace in which He makes Himself known, and puts Himself so near to us, even if we have things only in part. None of us have things in completeness. Paul himself said, "we know in part and we prophesy in part" (1 Corinthians 13: 9), and that distinguishes the fish and honeycomb from the loaf. What the Lord presented to them, as everything from the divine side, is marked by completeness; the loaf is a complete entity. On our side it is only in part, but such is His grace that He will eat of it. The broiled fish would suggest the saints as taken out of the general mass of mankind for the pleasure of God. The broiled fish had been taken out of the sea and been subjected to the action of the fire. Nothing found with the saints is palatable to the Lord if it has not come under the action of the fire.

Then the honeycomb represents what the saints are in mutual love and activity. There is nothing that more aptly represents combined labour for a common end than the honey-comb. It has been the work of thousands of bees and everyone contributed his little bit; it is the evidence of united and co-operative labour on the part of many saints.

The Lord ate before them, so that Peter could say, "We did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead", Acts 10: 41. It was a remarkable proof which Peter brought out to show that He was a living Man.

All this qualifies the saints for testimony. There are the Scriptures and a company of living witnesses in verse 48, "the promise of my Father" in verse 49, and the leading out to Bethany and priestly blessing — all that qualifying them for the testimony of grace. The assembly is left here for the testimony of grace. The Lord gives them to understand the Scriptures, a very necessary equipment. The testimony was to be carried on by those who were led out as far as to Bethany, the place where the glory of God had been seen in resurrection, and I think this answers to the Colossian position.

In Matthew the Lord is seen with His disciples in Galilee, the place of reproach, the place that was looked down upon by all the religious leaders of the day. That would answer to being identified with the reproach of Christ. In Acts the ascension is at the mount of Olives, because the object of the Spirit in Acts is to bring out the testimony to One in heaven — the mount of Olives is heavenly association. But in Luke He led them out as far as to Bethany; it is the place where there had been the witness of resurrection power, the place where the Son of God had been glorified in resurrection power.

The Lord gives understanding and we should look for that. What is the good of reading a chapter and saying, I do not understand it at all? But suppose you knelt down and said to the Lord that you did not understand the chapter but that He had expressly undertaken to give understanding and that you wanted Him to do so — I am sure that Scripture would open to your understanding and become radiant with light and with discoveries of divine wealth. I have found it to be so. I think the Lord honours the regular reading of Scripture; it is astonishing how one gets what one needs through reading the Scriptures regularly.

The Lord had in mind that there should be a company of living witnesses: "Ye are witnesses of these things", verse 48. The Lord shows that, consequent on His suffering and rising again, repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. It is the full width and scope of the testimony of grace. Repentance is preached as a wonderful bestowal of grace on God's part; the preaching is part of the grace of the gospel.

Then the Lord says to them, "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" — showing that the ability to understand is a separate thing from power. There is nothing more needed now than power. I believe the Lord would exercise us about power. He has helped us greatly in

the understanding of the Scriptures, but what about power? We need power in a hostile world; we cannot stand up without power or we shall let the cause down instead of promoting it.

In their case the secret for obtaining power was tarrying in Jerusalem, and we know how they spent their time. They spent the ten days in prayer and supplication. If brothers and sisters all continue in prayer there will be power, for power is the result of prayer. The Lord does not propose to us now that we should wait for the Spirit, but the disciples had to spend ten days in unceasing prayer and supplication, and there is something for us to learn in that. It connects the power of the Spirit with the dependent state. We cannot have the power of the Spirit apart from a dependent state; even the Lord was anointed with the Spirit as He was praying. I believe power is a thing the Lord would have us conscious of. I know the difference between being naked and clothed; if I put on my clothes I am conscious of being clothed. Now the Lord says, Tarry till you are clothed. It is surely possible to have the consciousness of being clothed with power. I think we ought to wait before we launch out in any testimony until we are conscious of being clothed with power.

It is “power *from on high*”, suggesting the heavenly character of the power; it is not what will distinguish us as men upon the earth. It is a power that belongs to heaven. I wish I knew more about power out of heaven. I can understand a man with great fervency of spirit, great zeal and eloquence, and a knowledge of Scripture; but real effectiveness lies in what comes out of heaven. The power of the Spirit is a very real thing, as we see in Peter in the Acts. There was not a vestige of cowardice about him — the very man who had quailed before a serving girl! He stands up in the utmost boldness. They saw the boldness of Peter and John and they could not understand it; it was a power from on high. When we come face to face with the devil we want power. Peter had power; he could say, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk”, Acts 3: 6.

In heavenly power the testimony of grace would go out unhindered in all its blessedness. God has made the preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins as attractive as possible by sending it forth in the name of this wonderful Person whose life is recorded in the gospel of Luke. God takes pains to make it attractive by the personal charm of the kindness of Jesus. He sets it forth in the most attractive way possible in the Name of Jesus. We read in Proverbs, “The charm of a man is his kindness” — that is the text for the gospel of Luke.

The disciples saw the Lord *carried up*. The Lord is not said to have been carried up in John; there He says, “I ascend”. It is the glorious majesty of His own inherent power. But in Luke He is carried up; they see the blessed Man

who has been the dependent vessel of grace carried up by a power not His own. He is carried up to heaven as the dependent Man — what a lesson! And the power that carried Him up is the power that can carry us on. As led out to Bethany they are outside the life of this world altogether. That is like the epistle to the Colossians; they are not carried up but led out as far as to Bethany. Bethany is not the place of reproach. We can pass outside the life of this world to a sphere where there is no reproach; it is a spiritual region, and in that region we come under the priestly blessing of the One who was carried up. It is a wonderful climax to the gospel of Luke. It is blessing flowing out unhinderedly on persons suitable to receive it. The Lord would bring us outside the death sphere altogether. In John 12 they made Him a supper; Martha served, Lazarus sat at the table, and Mary anointed Him. They were outside the life of this world altogether; they were in the sphere of resurrection life. They were not living in the world, as the apostle says to the Colossians, "Why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?" They are on earth but not in the world. Bethany typifies our true spiritual place on earth, though it is not our heavenly place. Our true spiritual place on earth is to be outside the life of the world. The priestly blessing is known there.

Luke presents things spiritually, and this reference to the temple is, I believe, a spiritual reference because it is a place they occupied in praising and blessing God. The temple is furnished with a suitable company of worshippers. In a material sense it was left to Israel, but in a spiritual sense it was furnished with a company of worshippers praising and blessing God. These people could have sung psalms. In the beginning of this gospel the multitudes were praying without, while Zacharias was exercising priestly functions within; he was representing a praying multitude without. Now in chapter 24 we have the Priest gone within and a company here so full of all that had been brought out in this precious gospel that they are praising and blessing God. For a moment they are outside the region of prayer. They are praising and blessing God because they are in all the wealth of the priestly blessing of the One who has been carried up into heaven. They had reached the point that David reached when he could say, "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended", Psalm 72: 20.