

A Devotional Commentary on the Gospels

Arranged for family devotions,
for every day in the year.

By [Favell Lee Mortimer](#)

DECEMBER 1

Luke 23:39-43. *The two malefactors.*

No men who ever lived *died* in such remarkable circumstances as these two thieves. They were *crucified* with Christ. We know not whether they had ever seen Jesus before that morning, when they accompanied him to Calvary, and were compelled to pass many hours close to his side. What a different use each made of this precious though painful opportunity!

One of them took advantage of his station, to insult the Savior with his dying breath, "If you are the Christ, save yourself and us." This was not a prayer, it was a reproach.

He did not believe that Jesus was the Christ, or that he was able to save either himself or his fellow sufferers. And what did he mean by "Save us?" He meant only, "Release us from the pangs of the cross." He thought not of *eternal* misery.

But the other thief asked, *not* to be released from *present* suffering, but to be admitted into *eternal* life. He heard his companion blaspheming the dying Lord, and he raised his voice to rebuke him. We do not hear of any voice being lifted up to rebuke blasphemers on that day, except the voice of this penitent. But while he reproved his fellow, he did not forget to confess his own sins. He acknowledged they had been so great, that even crucifixion was not too severe a punishment. "We receive the *due reward* of our deeds." And then he bore a noble testimony to the innocence of Jesus—"This man has done nothing amiss." How did he know that? Had he not beheld his heavenly meekness, and heard his divine prayer—"Father, forgive them, they know not what they do?" But besides all this, the Holy Spirit, who had convinced him of his *own sins*, had convinced him also of the *righteousness* of Jesus. Thus his testimony was added to that of Judas, of Pilate, and of Pilate's wife, and it must have been heard by those who stood around the cross.

Some think that *this* thief, as well as the other, when he was *first* fastened to the cross, railed at the Savior. But others consider that though Matthew says, "The

thieves cast the same in his teeth," the expression does not prove that more than *one* acted thus wickedly. It seems probable that if the penitent thief had railed at Jesus, he would have confessed *that* sin, when he rebuked his companion for the same. But in whatever manner he may have behaved when on the cross, we are sure that he had led a very wicked life. His is the only instance recorded in Scripture of repentance in a dying hour. It has been well observed that *one* such instance is recorded that none may *despair*, and *but one*—that none may *presume*.

It was like the Son of God to close his life upon earth by an act of *especial mercy*—the salvation of a notorious sinner. It was like *Him*, who had once permitted an outcast to wash his feet with her tears, to listen to the prayer of the penitent thief—"Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

How much misery this malefactor must have endured, when detected, condemned, and dragged to execution! Yet—when all hope seemed gone—the prospect of endless happiness was suddenly opened to his view. He felt more joy while hanging in tortures upon his cross, than he had ever experienced when joining in wild uproar with his profane companions. He knew that in a few hours he would be with Jesus in paradise. His *body* indeed was cast in some detested grave in gloomy Golgotha, or was devoured by birds and beasts; but his *spirit* soared to the mansions of the blessed, and mingled with the innumerable company of saints and angels. What an evening to follow such a morning!

At a wonderful season the penitent entered heaven! The Lord's sufferings were just over—the conquest of Satan just achieved—the redemption of man just finished—when he joined the heavenly host. Perhaps he was the *first* who followed his Savior into glory. A brand he was plucked from the burning—a prey snatched out of the jaws of hell, by the all-powerful arm of his dying Lord. In *heaven* he shines a trophy of divine grace; on *earth* his history remains as an encouragement to every guilty creature to call upon the Lord for mercy. Though during his life he did no good, (except perhaps by his expiring words,) *since* his death he has been the means of bringing great glory to his Lord. Thousands when they meet him above will have to tell that they made the prayer he made, and trusted in the promise he received. But let *us* not wait until we are lying in our last agonies before we cry, "Lord, remember me," but let us now call upon this gracious Savior, that we may spend our lives in his service before we see his face in paradise.

December 2

John 19:25-27. Christ commits his mother to the care of John.

What a rich reward John received for venturing near his Master's cross! To him the precious charge of the blessed Mary was confided; to him the tender words,

"Behold *your* mother!" were addressed. We do not hear that Jesus spoke to any of his disciples while hanging upon his cross, except to John. How great a proof the Lord gave him of his love when he entrusted his mother to his care, and even authorized him to regard her as his own! He still gives similar proofs of his love. Those who desire to serve him shall not be disappointed. Some service suited to his powers shall be assigned to each. To one the charge of an orphan family may be committed—to another a post in a missionary field may be assigned. But no office is more honorable than the care of the aged and destitute saints. It is a distinguished favor to be permitted to watch over their declining years, and to close their failing eyes.

What holy communion John must have held with his Lord's mother during the rest of her life! How many incidents concerning her blessed Son, that are not recorded in the Scriptures, must have been treasured up in her memory! She had watched beside him when sleeping in the manger—had held him in her arms when traveling into Egypt, and had guided his steps when a child in Nazareth. Yet she had never seen him commit a single sin—had never beheld his infant face inflamed with passion—nor heard his lisping tongue utter deceit.

If parents love so fondly their *sinful* offspring, what must have been the affection of Mary for her *sinless* Son! We may also feel certain that Jesus loved his mother better than any other Son ever loved a parent. Though enduring the acute agonies of the cross, he thought of her desolate state. Did he not prove the infinite compassion of his heart by remembering her at such a moment? He would not leave her in this world without a home; he knew where she would be most tenderly loved, and most carefully watched over, and most highly honored; and therefore he consigned her to the care of the gentle and affectionate apostle John.

The Lord Jesus has taught children by his own example never to forget the kindness they received in their helpless infancy. When they are grown up they should use every exertion to provide for their parents a comfortable home. It is melancholy to see an aged father driven from his cottage to seek an asylum among strangers, while his children are enjoying many of the comforts of life.

But are there any who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and who yet fear lest they should be forsaken in their sickness or old age? Let them remember that their Savior once said, "He who shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and *mother*." If he provided for the support of his *earthly* mother's declining years, will he forsake his *spiritual* mothers, and brothers, and sisters? No, he will provide for their needs until their latest breath; and it is probable he will do it in the same *manner* as he supplied those of his earthly mother. Ravens were not sent to feed her, as they fed Elijah, nor did a never-failing jar and barrel sustain her life, but a pious friend was raised up to minister to her needs. He who appointed Joseph to nourish the aged Israel, and Ruth to sustain the beloved Naomi, and Onesiphorus to refresh the imprisoned

apostle, still puts it into the hearts of his servants to support his poor and afflicted people. It may be a son, or one dear as a son, or it may be a stranger who supplies their need; but by some means or other the promise is always fulfilled—"My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4. Is. 19.)

December 3

Matthew 27:45-49. *The darkness.*

When the Son of God was born, a great light was seen in the heavens in the midst of the *night*; but when he was *dying*, a sudden darkness overspread the land at *noonday*. The *shepherds* were sore afraid when they saw the *light*. How, then, must the *murderers* of the Lord have felt when they beheld the *darkness*! What was the cause of this darkness? Sometimes an eclipse of the sun will suddenly obscure the day. But an eclipse cannot occur at the time of a full moon. As it was at *that* season the passover was celebrated, it is clear this darkness was not caused by an eclipse. It was a *miraculous* event. It was a judgment sent by God. And why? To show his wrath against the murderers of his Son. Since the beginning of the world so dreadful a deed had never been committed, as the murder of the Lord of glory. The day in which the deed was done might well be distinguished from other days. The language Job used respecting the day of his birth might be applied to it. "Let darkness and the shadow of death stain it. Let a cloud dwell upon it; and the blackness of the day terrify it." (Job 3:5.)

The crowds who had flocked to Calvary could no longer gaze with unfeeling curiosity, or malicious triumph, upon the Lord's bleeding body and agonized countenance. The Father had drawn a thick curtain around his expiring Son. No circumstance is recorded that occurred during those solemn hours of darkness; but at length a voice was heard saying "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The enemies of Jesus knew the voice. They knew it was not the cry of one of the dying malefactors that they heard. But were they melted by the anguish of those tones? No, they mocked as before. Mistaking the word *Eli* (which means *God*) for the name of *Elijah*, they cried out, "Let us see whether *Elijah* will come to save him." The three hours' darkness had not changed their wicked hearts.

While the Son enjoyed his Father's presence, he could bear the insults of men without a complaint. But when that countenance, which had ever shone upon him, was hidden from his sight, then he uttered an agonizing cry. Other sorrows were familiar to him from his cradle; but this was a new and strange trial. Of him it is written that he "is in the bosom of the Father." What closeness of communion, what depth of love, are implied in that expression! Nothing could have interrupted this communion or deadened the sense of this love, but *sin*. Our sins were the cloud that for a moment hid the Father's face from his only beloved Son. For a moment it cast a deep shadow over the heart of the Son of God, and

then was blotted out forever in his atoning blood. From his Father's throne, he calls to us, and says, "O Israel, you shall not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and as a cloud your sins; return unto me; for I have redeemed you." (Is. 44:22.) But *each* sinner must come to him, that *each* sinner may receive pardon. Those who will not come will die in their sins. Then God will forsake them forever. When they call out, "*Why* have you forsaken us?" what will be the reply? Will it not be, "You *would* not come unto me that you might have life?" A child abandoned by its parents—a wife deserted by her husband, are regarded with pity, but the soul forsaken of his God is the most miserable of all beings. This is the misery of the lost spirits in hell. God has cast them away from his presence.

December 4

John 19:28-30. *The sponge of vinegar.*

When our dying Savior said, "I thirst," he revealed to those around the anguish of his *body*. He had before declared the anguish of his *soul*, by crying out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" His *soul* and *body* endured intense agony to ransom *our souls* and *bodies* from eternal torment. The pain of extreme thirst cannot be conceived by those who have not experienced it. A thick crust encases the inside of the mouth and renders the tongue stiff, while a burning sensation in the throat makes the sufferer feel as if a fire were consuming his whole frame. These were the sensations of the Savior, and they are described in the Psalms of the prophet David. "My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws." (Ps. 22:15.) "My throat is dried." (Ps. 69:3.) "My bones are burned as an hearth." (Ps. 102:3.)

Yet the Lamb of God would have endured all these pangs in silence, had it not been his Father's will that before he expired he should let men know that he was tormented by thirst. He remembered it was written in Ps. 69:21, "In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." Therefore he exclaimed, "I thirst." A vessel full of vinegar stood near the cross, designed probably for the refreshment of the soldiers. One of them dipped a sponge into this vessel, and fixing it at the end of a long and straight branch of hyssop, applied it to the Savior's mouth. The rest (as Matthew relates) continued to utter their profane mockeries, saying, "Let be, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." By this speech they meant to say to their comrades, "What is the use of your helping him? he has called upon one more powerful than you, even Elijah. Wait a little, and see whether *he* will not come to rescue him from his misery." We may imagine with what fiendish shouts of laughter these words were accompanied.

Many saints have expired in the midst of weeping friends; the Lord was surrounded by insulting enemies. But now the *last* insult had been offered. The Savior had filled up the measure of his sufferings, and had drained to the very

dregs the cup his Father had given him to drink. Knowing this, he cried out, "It is finished." This cry was uttered by parched lips and a dried-up tongue. And *why* were those lips parched, and that tongue dried up? That we might never need a drop of water to cool our burning tongues. The Savior was tormented by thirst, that we might quench ours in living fountains of water. We could never have atoned for *our own sins*. Our tears could not have washed them away. Our good works could not have made amends for them. Therefore Jesus offered up *himself* a sacrifice for us. But now his sufferings are over. When we hear of them, we have the comfort of knowing that they are *past*, and that they will never be endured again. It is not necessary that he should ever feel another pang, or bear another insult. Are we troubled by the remembrance of our sins? Let us look with faith on the Lamb of God, and our guilty consciences shall have peace. The Holy Spirit draws the sinner to the foot of the cross, and enables him to feel that the blood once shed has atoned for all his transgressions. A penitent who had long sought for pardon, found peace as she was reading the following words—

Jesus, our great High Priest,
Offered his blood, and died;
My guilty conscience seeks
No sacrifice beside.
His powerful blood did once atone,
And now it pleads before the throne.

December 5

Luke 23:46. *The last words of Christ.*

When we hear that a saint has left this world we wish to know what were his last words. How precious are the dying accents of a brother—a child—or a parent! We treasure them up in our hearts, and perhaps remember them as long as we live. At this moment some of us may recollect the last words of a friend we loved and lost. But whose words can be so precious as those of our Savior, our nearest and dearest friend? There are seven sentences recorded as spoken by him while on the cross. *Three* were uttered *before* the darkness overspread the land, and *four* near its conclusion. The first three concerned others, *not* himself. One was a prayer for his enemies, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do;" the next was a promise to a penitent, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, today shall you be with me in paradise;" and the third implied a request to a beloved mother and disciple, "Behold your mother," "Behold your son."

The last four concerned himself. One expressed the anguish of his *soul*, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"—another the anguish of his *body*, "I thirst;"—the next told of sufferings *ended*, "It is finished;"—the last of joys *begun*, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." These are the words of David in the thirty-first psalm. In *all* the scenes of our Savior's life his heavenly perfections

were displayed; but in his dying hours they shone forth with the greatest splendor. His forgiving love was seen in his prayer for his enemies—his compassion in his promise to the penitent—his faithfulness in his charge to John—his patience in his expiring cries—and his unshaken confidence in his *God* in his last words, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." As soon as he was nailed to the cross he called upon his Father, and when just expiring, he again said, "Father." In the moment of his greatest anguish he cried, "*My God.*" Thus he fulfilled the prophecy in Ps. 89:26. "He shall cry unto me, You are my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation."

Though Jesus was God, yet he was *man* also, and he felt as a man. Though without sin, he was tempted in all points like as we are. He endured the pangs of death. His soul was separated from his body. The moment of separation is called "death." Every human being feels it to be a dreadful moment. There is only one thought which can sustain us *then*; it is the assurance that God is our Father. He who has *doubts* on this subject, feels like a traveler who is going to tread an *unknown* path—to tread it in *darkness*, and to tread it—*alone*. But how can we know that God is our Father? The Scriptures answer that question—"You are all the *children* of God by *faith* in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:26.) "To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the *sons* of God, even to them that *believe* in his name." (John 1:12.) When we apply to Jesus for the pardon of our sins, *then* we are adopted into the family of God; then the Holy Spirit is shed abroad in our hearts; then we feel that God is *our* Father, because he is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and then we cry, Abba, that is, "Father." (Rom. 8:15.) We cannot trust *strangers*, but a child can trust his father. We have heard of the boy who was not afraid in the storm, and who said, "My Father's at the helm." Jesus trusted in God. Even his enemies said, when they scoffed at him, "He trusted in God." Worldly people cannot trust him, for they do not *know* him. To them he is a *stranger*. They often say they trust him; they often *think* they trust him; but they trust him with nothing that they *care about*. They cannot trust him to choose their *lot in life*; therefore they are always forming schemes of their own—nor to provide for them in *old age*; therefore they are often terrified by fears of poverty and desolation. They cannot trust him to guide them one step which they do not see, nor to give them one blessing which they do not already *hold in their hands*. This is *not* to trust him. But the children of God can trust him while they live with their *earthly concerns*, and, when they come to die, with their *immortal spirits*. O that they trusted Him more! Martin Luther, the holy reformer, was remarkable for his trust in God. Three hours a day he set apart for calling upon his Father, and he received the most wonderful answers to his prayers. When he was dying, he was often heard to say, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." These were *almost* his last words. He added, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish."

December 6

Matthew 27:51-54. *The earthquake.*

Men made no public lamentation for the Son of God when he expired. But his Father caused the inanimate creation to give signs of mourning; for the earth quaked, and the rocks were rent. These terrible events shook the hearts of the soldiers—those barbarous men who had continued to insult him until he drew his last breath. With grief and dismay they exclaimed, "Truly this was the Son of God." Had they known a little *sooner* who he was, they might have shown him pity—they might have implored his pardon—they might, like the dying thief, have obtained mercy. But another opportunity was granted to them—afterwards the apostles declared he was exalted a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins!

Whatever our sins may have been against Jesus, we can have the comfort of confessing them at his feet. It is painful when we have lost a friend, to feel that we cannot ask him to pardon any unkind act that we have done. What a relief it would be to a child, when he remembers his offences against a deceased parent, if he could but see him once more, to tell him how deeply he laments every word—every look—every thought, which was *not* affectionate—which was *not* reverential! But we *can* express to our Redeemer all the bitter regrets we feel for our past ingratitude and rebellion!

Let us now leave the scene of terror round the cross, and look at another scene in the temple. The veil was suddenly rent from the top to the bottom. At that very moment the priests were ministering in the holy place; for Jesus expired at three o'clock—when the evening sacrifice was offered. The veil had always hidden the *inner* chamber of the temple from every eye, except that of the high priest, who entered it once a year, when he approached the mercy-seat to make atonement for the sins of Israel. But all at once this inner chamber, called the Holy of Holies, was exposed to view, with the ark and the glorious cherubim. The veil could not have been rent without the exertion of *great* power; for it was four fingers in thickness, and thirty ells in length, and as a new one was hung up every year, it never became weak through age.

And what did the rending of this veil signify? The Holy Spirit has explained this mystery. (Heb. 10:19-22.) The veil represented the flesh of Jesus; the rending of the veil—his death. By his death the way into the presence of God is opened. Sinners may approach the mercy-seat without fear, because their great High Priest has atoned for their sins by the sacrifice of himself. But we have no reason to believe that the priests who beheld this wonder understood its meaning. Their hearts were hardened. They had resisted the instructions of the Son of God within that temple day after day—they had not been appalled by the confessions of Judas that very morning—and they continued to oppose the truth even when the hand of God wrought this miracle before their eyes.

There was another wonder that accompanied the death of Jesus. "The graves were opened." The Jews were accustomed to bury their dead among the rocks, and when the rocks were rent the graves were opened; but the dead continued to sleep in the dust until—their Lord arose. THEN—and not *until* then—*many* of the bodies of the saints came out of their graves. We ask, "*What* saints?" Were they saints *lately* dead, such as Simeon, or Anna, or John the Baptist, who had been known by some still living in Jerusalem? Or were they saints *long since* departed; saints who had seen Christ afar off, and had rejoiced in the prospect of his coming? We know not *who* they were. *Where* did they go? To the holy city—to Jerusalem. To *whom* did they appear? Unto *many*—we know not their names; but we may conclude that they were true believers; for Jesus, when he was risen, showed himself to none but them. What glorious interviews must have taken place between the righteous dead and the righteous living! How much we should like to know particulars concerning these meetings! But nothing is revealed. How *long* did these saints remain upon earth? Did they ascend to heaven with their Lord? We cannot tell *when* they left this earth, but we are sure that they are not *now* wanderers below. Where Jesus is there must his servants be. These saints are favored above other saints. They have risen earlier than their brethren, even *before* the dawn of day—they shine in their glorified *bodies* among the host of *disembodied* spirits. They were born from the dead on the same day as their Lord—his resurrection day was theirs also. But there will be *another* resurrection day, when *all* the sleeping saints will rise. Shall we appear among the shining company?

December 7

John 19:31, 32. *The death of the two thieves.*

It was the custom among the Romans to allow crucified people to remain on their crosses long after they had expired. But the Jews had a law which forbade this practice. God had commanded, "If a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain *all night* upon the tree, but you shall in any wise bury him that day, (for he who is hanged is accursed of God,) that your land be not defiled." (Deut. 21:23.) If it was wrong to allow a person to remain on a cross, or tree, on a *common* day, it was of course more improper to allow him to remain there on the *Sabbath*. The Jews had a peculiar reverence for *that* Sabbath which occurred during the feast of the Passover. They regarded it as a *high* day, and they were very anxious that dead bodies should be removed before it began. As they began their Sabbath at six o'clock on Friday evening, it was necessary on this occasion to use great haste.

The Jews, supposing that none of the crucified people might be dead so soon, besought Pilate to hasten their death, in the usual, but cruel manner, by breaking their legs. They knew not that the object of their hatred had forever escaped from their hands, and that they would never have the opportunity of inflicting another

pang upon his sacred person. How hateful to God was the worship of those men in his temple, on the approaching Sabbath! The words spoken by the prophet Isaiah applied to them—"When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; when you make many prayers I will not hear—your hands are full of blood." (Is. 50:15.) Their hands were imbrued in the blood of the Son of man. How could his Father bear them in his presence! Let us never imagine that we can please God by our services, while we are stained with unpardoned sins—sins not *abhorred*—not *confessed*—not *forsaken*. None can truly please him but those who are cleansed from guilt by faith in his Son.

When these wicked men commanded the legs of the malefactors to be broken, they accomplished the purpose of God. Jesus had said to the penitent thief, "*Today shall you be with me in paradise.*" Had that poor sufferer been left to hang upon the cross, he might have lingered several days. The soldiers broke his legs, and that *very day* he was in paradise with the Savior, in whom he had believed. The other thief was killed at the same *time*, and in the same *manner*; but we have no reason to think that he went to the same *place*. We do not hear that he was moved by the rebuke his companion gave, or that he offered the prayer his companion offered. Death is no release to an unpardoned sinner. The agonies of a cross are not to be compared to the torments of hell, where the worm never dies, and where the fire is never quenched.

We know not in what *manner* we may die, by what painful disease, or dreadful accident. We will leave all these circumstances in the hand of God, trusting in his mercy to support us through every fiery trial. But let us often ask, "What will become of our souls when they leave these bodies?" The friends who stand around a dying bed cannot see the spirit as it leaves its earthly abode, nor trace its course as it is carried by angels into heaven, or plunged among devils in the abyss of perdition; but when the last struggle is over, then we ourselves shall know where we shall FOREVER abide.

December 8

John 19:33-37. A soldier pierces the Lord's body.

After the Lord had expired, no dishonor was offered to his sacred body. The Jews intended to dishonor it by breaking his legs, but their design was defeated. When the soldiers came to his cross, they found that he was dead already. They might have broken his legs, *though* he was dead; but the Scriptures had declared, "A bone of him shall not be broken." It is written in Ps. 34:20, "He keeps all his bones, not one of them is broken." The soldiers knew nothing of the prophecies; yet they fulfilled them, both by *not* breaking his legs, and by piercing his side. Jesus died at the time the feast of the Passover was celebrated, and he was the true Lamb whose blood atoned for the sins of Israel and of the world. It was commanded concerning the paschal lamb, "Neither shall you break a bone

thereof." (Ex. 12:46.) It was also commanded that its blood should be shed, and sprinkled upon the lintel and posts of the door. When the side of Jesus was pierced, his blood must have sprinkled the cross, and flowed in a copious stream upon the ground.

And what a stream it was—composed not only of *blood*, but of *water*. Some think that the water came from the pericardium, (the case in which the heart is enclosed,) and that it was a proof that life was extinct. It is all-important to prove that Jesus really died upon the cross; for if *he* did not really die, then *we* must die eternally. But we possess abundant evidence of his death. There was one standing by the cross who saw the spear enter into his side, and it is *he* who has recorded the fact. John did not leave the cross when his Master died. He lingered near to see what would become of his sacred body. If he had left it for a short time to take his Lord's mother to his own home, he had returned. Now that the darkness was past, he could see all that was done to his Lord's body. He saw the water and the blood, "and he bore record, and his record is true, and he knows that he says true, that you might believe."

There is a *spiritual* meaning in this stream of blood and water. The blood atones for sin. *Before* it was shed the penitent malefactor trusted in it, and was pardoned. One of our sweetest poets describes his case and his *own* also—

"The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day,
And there have I, as vile as he,
Washed all my sins away."

But sinners are not only *guilty*—they are *dead* in trespasses and sins. From Jesus flows the *water of life*—the Holy Spirit. He spoke of the Spirit under the emblem of water on the last day of the feast of tabernacles, when he said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." (John 7.) We cannot mistake the meaning of the invitation, for it is written, "This spoke he of the *Spirit*, which those who believe on him should receive." (John 7:39.) Let us come to Jesus for the *double* blessing—atonement blood and living water. Whoever shall look by *faith* on his pierced side shall receive both. The glorious wound adorns the *risen* body of our crucified Savior as the everlasting memorial of his love. Men look with wonder at the little spring which swells into the mighty Nile, and fertilizes half a continent. But with what amazement angels, as well as men, regard that wound, which is the fountain of blessedness to millions of beings throughout eternity!

December 9

John 19:38 to end. *The burial.*

What a contrast there is between the circumstances of the Lord's *death* and

those of his *burial!* Jesus died in a shameful manner; stripped of his garments, and exposed to the insults of the multitude. He was buried in an *honorable* manner; wrapped in linen, white and clean, and covered with a large quantity of precious spices. He died by the hands of *Gentile* soldiers; he was buried by two of the most honorable of the *Jewish* nation. He died in a *loathsome* spot, Golgotha, the place of a skull; defiled by the bones of malefactors; he was buried in a *new* tomb, in a rich man's garden, a spot untainted by the breath of corruption.

What was the reason for this difference? When he *died*, he was an offering for sin; when he was *buried*, the offering had been accepted. When he died, he was treated according to *our* deservings; when he was buried, according to his *own*. The prophet Isaiah foretold that he would be with the rich in his death; and he assigned the reason for this honorable treatment, "Because he had done no violence, neither was deceit found in his mouth." Jesus was executed upon a charge of violence and deceit. (Is. 53.) The Jews said he had stirred up the people against the Roman emperor, and that he had deceived them, by saying that he was a King. On account of these accusations he was sentenced to die. But it is *we* who have been guilty of violence and deceit. There is not one of us who can truly say, "I have never done any harm—I have never attempted to deceive." God, who knows all men, has said, "*Destruction* and misery are in their ways. They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking *lies*." It was for *our* sins that Jesus was put to death; but it was for his *own* righteousness that he was honored *after* death.

In old times the Lord often showed his displeasure against sin by causing the dead bodies of the wicked to be shamefully treated; thus he appointed dogs to lick the blood of wicked Ahab, and to eat the flesh of the more wicked Jezebel. The honorable burial of the Son of God was an open testimony of his Father's favor.

All that was done to Jesus was done to him as a *public* person. He was the surety for his people. He *died*, because *their* sins were imputed to *him*; *they* shall *never* die, because *his* righteousness is imputed to them. What a glorious exchange! Who would have made such an exchange but the compassionate Son of God! Why should the believer fear to descend into the tomb, since Christ has taken away his guilt! In the prospect of death he may say, in the words of a Christian poet,

"The place where once *your* body lay,
The place it did perfume;
There will I drop *my* breathless clay,
And rest within *your* tomb."

But it is possible that we may never taste even the *first* death; for the apostle has declared, "We shall not *all* sleep." There is a chosen number who, like Enoch and

Elijah, shall be caught up, while yet living, to meet their Lord in the air.

December 10

Luke 23:54 to end. *The women prepare spices.*

Though the Lord Jesus was not followed to the grave by a pompous train, yet some sincere mourners watched his precious body until it was hidden from their eyes. These were women who had lingered within sight of his cross, even after he had expired. It is written in Matthew's gospel, "And many women were there, beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him." (27:55.) These women had long known the Lord, and had enjoyed the distinguished privilege of supplying his temporal needs. How glad would they have been could they have obtained possession of his beloved remains! But how could they venture to crave such a boon! What must have been their joy when they beheld the two honorable counselors, Joseph and Nicodemus, take down the body from the cross, and wrap it in fine linen with spices! They followed to see where it would be laid, and Joseph did not repel them from his garden. Not only were they permitted to enter, but two of them continued to sit opposite the sepulcher, even after the stone had been placed at its mouth. These two were Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the mother of the two apostles, James and Joses, (commonly called Jude.) By the last beams of the setting sun, they beheld the sepulcher of their divine and adorable Friend. It is written in Matthew 27:61, "And there was Mary Magdalene and the other Mary sitting over against the sepulcher."

An affectionate heart is always devising means of showing its love by actions. The faithful women who had supplied their Lord, while living, with bread, desired now to embalm his sacred body. Though a hundred pound weight of myrrh and aloes had been bound up in the linen cloth, they were not satisfied. They thought it no waste to lavish an abundance of aromatics upon the torn, the bruised, the mangled corpse of him they loved. If odors of sweet incense continually filled the temple composed of *stones*, what could be too sweet, or too precious, to bestow on that more glorious temple, the body of the Lord! But they could not mix their costly unguents *immediately*, for the Jewish Sabbath began at six o'clock on Friday evening, and that hour had almost arrived when the Lord was laid in his tomb. They rested on the Sabbath-day according to the commandment, and deferred their preparations until six o'clock on Saturday evening, when the Sabbath was ended. What veneration these holy women showed for that holy day! They delayed to accomplish their ardent desire rather than break it. How does their conduct condemn those who permit any trifling incident to interfere with the sacred day of rest!

Of all the Sabbaths that have ever dawned since the creation of the world, surely *that* during which the Redeemer lay in his grave, was the most mournful to the

church of God. Many hearts have been wrung with anguish by the thought, "My mother is dead," "My child is dead;" but the disciples on that Sabbath could say, "Our *Savior* is dead." And when, on the following night, they prepared their ointments, how many bitter tears must have mingled with the precious spices! And why did they grieve? Because they remembered not the *promise* that the Lord would rise on the third day from the tomb. Had they remembered it, they would have passed their nights and days in singing praises, instead of in shedding tears. For lack of *knowledge* they suffered much sorrow.

And do not the children of God still suffer much anxiety, because they remember not the promises written in the Scriptures? When all appears dark around, how apt they are to fear that the light will never return! If we love God, we may feel sure that all things are working together for our good. And even when the great storm of the last days arises, the saints ought not to be cast down. When other men's hearts are failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth, they should remember the command, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, for *your redemption* draws near." (Luke 11:28.)

December 11

Matthew 27:62 to end. *The priests set a watch. around the tomb.*

The "next day that followed the day of preparation," was the Sabbath. It was on that holy day that the chief priests and Pharisees applied to Pilate to make secure the sepulcher. What a glaring instance of inconsistency their conduct affords! They who had always accused the Lord of breaking the Sabbath by healing the sick, now, to accomplish their own wicked ends, violated the holy day in a public and flagrant manner. How different from theirs was the conduct of those pious women, who refrained on the Sabbath from preparing ointments to embalm the Lord's body!

But it is remarkable, that while the *disciples* forgot the words of Jesus, "After three days I will rise again," his *enemies remembered* them. Sometimes the wicked possess more *knowledge* of the truth than the righteous; but their *hearts* are always wrong. The disciples *mourned* because they knew not that Jesus would rise from the dead—the Pharisees *trembled*, because they feared lest he should. What is the state of our *hearts* towards Jesus? Should we be *glad* to see him come in his glory, or do we *dread* the day of his appearing?

The Pharisees were not the *only* people who applied to Pilate respecting the body of Jesus. On the day of the crucifixion, the two honorable counselors, Joseph and Nicodemus, had made a very different request from that of the Pharisees. They had besought Pilate to permit them to take away the body, and had obtained their desire. We know that Pilate had condemned the Lord to death

against the convictions of his own conscience. Wishing to have no more to do in the mysterious affair, he permitted the friends of Jesus to take possession of his remains. It is evident that he was not pleased with the malicious request of the Lord's enemies; for he refused to give any commands on the subject, and replied, "You have a watch." There was a band of Roman soldiers, employed by the Jews to guard the temple. This band was placed around the tomb to guard the temple of the Lord's body. But the Pharisees were not satisfied even with this precaution. They thought it possible that the disciples might bribe the soldiers to open the tomb; therefore they sealed the stone.

"Vain the stone, the watch, the seal,
Christ has burst the gates of hell;
Death in vain forbids his rise,
Christ has opened Paradise."

The guards set to obstruct the entrance of the tomb, were designed by God to become witnesses of his power and glory. The schemes of wicked men against the Lord's anointed shall be overruled for the establishment of his kingdom. He who sits in the heavens laughs at their puny efforts. The day will come when it will be shown that all they have done to injure his cause, has only promoted his glory. But they will be punished for their wicked *designs*. Satan has not been able really to injure Christ; but he will be consigned to the burning lake because he made the blasphemous attempt.

December 12

Matthew 28:1-4. *The resurrection.*

In this short passage two very different scenes are described. One is a scene of sorrow; the other of joy. In one we behold weeping saints; in the other, a joyful angel. Yet there is a close connection between these two scenes. It was the same Lord who occupied the thoughts of those mourners and of that joyful messenger. But the angel knew more than the women did. He rejoiced because he was sent to unbar the tomb; they mourned because they thought there was nothing left for them to do except to embalm the body.

What an honor was conferred upon that angel! With ease he rolled away the massive stone. The soldiers who surrounded the tomb could not maintain their post at his approach. It was not the *earthquake* that terrified them, but the sight of the angel. "For fear of *him* the keepers shook and became as dead men." The angel watches in their place; he sits upon the stone, as if to take possession of the place in the name of his Lord. A few words are used to describe his glorious person—but no words can give us a full idea of it. "His countenance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow." Both lightning and snow come from *above*, as the angel did, and when they come they excite our wonder and

admiration. The splendor of the forked lightning, and the purity of the driven snow, are not equaled by any other objects in creation.

If *angels* are so glorious, what must be the glory of their *Lord!* There is no description given of *his* appearance as he rose from the tomb. None of the inhabitants of earth were permitted to behold him issuing forth from his dark resting-place. The angel went before to lay the keepers low, that no profane eye might gaze upon divine brightness. Had the faithful women arrived at the place only a few minutes earlier, they would have witnessed the rising of their Lord. But God had appointed that none but heavenly beings should behold the rapturous sight. We know not whether any glorified saints were hovering near; whether Moses and Elijah were there; we do know that angels were present.

The light of day arose just before the Lord of glory. That light had hidden its head when he expired upon the cross; but it was shining forth when he lived again. It was appropriate that the sun should shine upon that joyful morning. The morning of the resurrection will be remembered throughout eternity as a *joyful* morning. There have been mornings which have *appeared* joyful at *the time*, but which have been looked back upon *afterwards* with deep regret. Events hailed with delight, have been followed by unforeseen evil consequences. But what glorious *consequences* have flowed from the resurrection, and will flow from it! How many dead souls have been quickened through its divine power! How many mortal bodies will be raised from their tombs! And why? *Because* Jesus rose again. What joyful shouts, what rapturous songs will then be heard! What happy meetings between brethren long separated will then take place! What new sensations of delight will then be experienced! What scenes of glory will burst upon the opening eyes of waking saints! All this joy will be traced to the resurrection of Jesus! As he said to his disciples, "*Because* I live, you shall live also." Shall we partake of this joy? We must first ask another question. Have we now the *life* of Jesus in our souls? Are we born again? In the new *birth* we obtain new *life*. If we have this life in our souls, then we may say, "When Christ, who is *our* life, shall appear, then shall (*we*) also appear with him in glory." (Col. 3:4.)

December 13

Mark 16:1-8. Three women visit the tomb.

These three women had watched the Lord while hanging upon his cross, and now they come together to visit his tomb. Their attachment to *him* united them to *each other*. Two of these women were mothers—the mothers of holy apostles. Mary was the mother of James and Jude, the relations of the Lord, and Salome was the mother of James and John, two of his most favored friends. How was it that none of these four apostles accompanied their mothers to the sepulcher? Why did they permit weak women to go alone, while it was yet dark, to a place where they were exposed to the assaults of enemies? Surely these mothers

exceeded their sons in love to their Lord. It has been said of woman by a poet—

"Not she with traitorous kiss her master stung,

Not she denied him with unfaithful tongue— *She*, when apostles fled, could
dare brave, *Last* at his *cross*, and *earliest* at his grave."

A *woman* was the *first* to eat the forbidden fruit. It was merciful in God to permit her to be the *first* to visit the sacred tomb.

These women were aware that great difficulties lay in their way. They had seen on Friday evening an enormous stone placed at the door of the sepulcher. They said to each other as they approached the place, "Who shall roll us away the stone?" How glad would they have been of the help of all the eleven apostles! But greater help than theirs was afforded. An angel had rolled away the stone. Had these women known that a guard of soldiers surrounded the tomb, their fears would have been much increased. But this obstacle also was removed before they knew it existed. The angel by the brightness of his appearance had laid the soldiers senseless on the earth. How often there seems to be a great stone in the way of pious undertakings. How apt Christians are to be discouraged, and to say, "Who shall roll it away?" Let their answer be "God." When He designs that a work should be performed, he removes every obstacle.

Affection inspired these women with so much courage that they ventured to enter the sepulcher. Theirs were the first human feet that trod the rocky floor after the Lord had arisen. They hoped to see the precious body, but they beheld on the right side of the tomb a young man sitting clothed in a long white garment. As angels never *die*, they are always *young*. As they never *sin*, they are represented as clothed in *white* garments. They have never known by *experience* either sin or death; but they have *seen* a great deal of both. An angel strengthened the Lord in his agony when he was bearing our *sins*, and struggling with our *death*. An angel comes and sits in his *tomb*. Strange place for an angel to rest in! But he had a message to deliver to the faithful women who were coming there, and he waited to receive them. With what kindness he addressed the trembling mourners! He showed that he knew why they grieved, and why they came, and what they expected to find. He was the *first* to declare that Jesus was risen. What joy a kind angel must have felt when uttering the words, "He is risen." He invites the women to search the empty tomb. "Behold the place where they laid him!" Then he sends a message to the apostles. He knew they had forsaken their Lord; he sees how backward they are to honor him; yet he remembers them; for he knew that his Lord loved them, and he must love them too. He sends a special message to *that* apostle who had sinned the most flagrantly—even to Peter. "Tell his disciples, and *Peter*." Though so liable to sin ourselves, how harsh we are in judging others! This angel had never forsaken or denied his Lord, yet he felt for those who had. He was anxious that their tears should be dried up without delay.

How did the women receive the heavenly tidings? It is written in Matthew's gospel, "They departed quickly from the sepulcher with fear and *great joy*." Their joy was *greater* than their fear. They trembled because they had seen angels; they rejoiced because they hoped soon to see their Lord. The *fear* was the consequence of human infirmity, the *joy* flowed from faith and love. There are many fears now in the hearts of believers, but they shall all pass away; whereas their joy shall increase and endure forever. When they have no sin, they shall have no fear; and when they see Jesus, their joy shall be full. Do *we*, who never saw him, long to see him? He comes with clouds. May we meet him in the air, and be ever with him!

December 14

John 20:1-10. *Peter and John visit the tomb.*

Mary Magdalene did not come *alone* to the sepulcher. We find from the Gospel of Mark that she was accompanied by two other women, Mary and Salome. But when she perceived that the stone was rolled away from the sepulcher, she acted in a different manner from her companions. Instead of approaching to examine the tomb, she immediately concluded that the precious body had been stolen, and ran back to Jerusalem for assistance. Christians, though they resemble each other in attachment to the same Lord, have different ways of showing that attachment. Some, like Mary Magdalene, are ready to give up all for lost in the first moment of alarm; while others, like Salome and the other Mary, continue to hope even against hope.

To whom did this sorrowful woman apply for aid? To those beloved apostles, Peter and John. We often find those two apostles near each other. It seems that a close friendship subsisted between them. Peter's shameful denial had not broken the bond. John had not said to Peter, "I can no more own you as a brother." He himself was not without sin—he had *forsaken* his Lord, though he had not denied him.

Mary Magdalene gave a very alarming account of what she had seen in Joseph's garden—she even asserted, "They have taken away the Lord." Peter and John set off with the utmost speed towards the tomb. John was the swifter. It is generally supposed that he was the younger. But Peter was the *bolder*; for when he arrived at the tomb he *entered*, whereas John at first only *looked* in, though he also entered afterwards.

And what did they see in the tomb? The linen clothes. This sight convinced John that his Lord's *body* had not been stolen; but that his Lord *himself* was risen. If enemies had taken away the *body*, would they have left the *clothes*? And if they had been suddenly surprised, and dropped the clothes in their haste to escape,

would those clothes have been neatly arranged?—and the napkin which had been round the sacred head, would it have been folded in a place by itself? No, it was evident that he who had reposed in the tomb, no longer wore the attire of death. We are not told in *this* place what effect the sight of the clothes had upon *Peter*; but from another passage it appears that the sight convinced *him* also. (See Luke 24:12.)

Both these apostles returned to their own home, without having seen either the Lord or his angels; without even having seen the women who had seen the Lord; and therefore without having heard their message. Why did they not still linger round the tomb, or search in every place for him they had lost?

It seems that the apostles, after their Lord's crucifixion, were afraid of falling into the hands of their enemies, and that on this account they kept as much as possible within their own doors.

There was one who now dwelt with John who was deeply affected by all that concerned the blessed Redeemer—it was his mother. We know that she watched her Son when dying on the cross, but we do not hear of her visiting the tomb. What sweet communion must have been held that day in the home of the beloved apostle! How the Lord's mother and his friend must have rejoiced together over his resurrection! *They* are happy who, living beneath one roof, delight to talk together of their blessed Savior! How can they who love him, forbear to speak of him, to retrace his kindness in times past, and to anticipate his glorious return!

December 15

John 20:11-18. *Christ appears to Mary Magdalene.*

Mary Magdalene enjoyed one of the highest honors that was ever bestowed on a human creature—while on earth. She was the *first* to whom the Lord appeared after his resurrection.

It is interesting to consider the conduct of this honored woman; for it must have been pleasing to the Lord. She lingered near the tomb after the apostles had departed. Her companions, also, who had seen the angels, were gone. She was *alone*. She was *weeping*. Others may have wept around the tomb, but *her* tears alone are mentioned. Perhaps it may have been on this account that many have supposed that she was the woman who once washed the feet of Jesus with her tears; but there is no foundation for this opinion. Stooping down, she perceived the angels, but felt no fear, for it seems she knew them not. There they were clothed in white, keeping watch in the tomb. The apostles had not seen them, when they had looked in. The heavenly watchers were mindful of Mary's tears, and asked, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She replied, "Because they have

taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." The angels did not attempt to comfort her, as they had done her companions, because a better Comforter was standing behind her. She had complained to *apostles*, then to *angels*, and now she complains to the *Lord* himself. "Sir, if you have borne him hence, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Grief is unreasonable. Had an *enemy* taken away the body, would he have *told* Mary where he had laid it? The mourner was so transported with sorrow that she knew not what she said, or what she did; she could not distinguish faces, nor remember voices; all was confusion and perplexity.

There are some who weep now, because they fear lest the enemy should triumph over their Lord's body. The saints are the body of Christ, his flesh, and his bones. The enemy has often trampled upon that body, but he can never destroy it. There are three islands, in distant oceans, which in our days have been openly assaulted by Satan and his hosts. The prisoners of Madeira, the patriots of Tahiti, and the martyrs of Madagascar, have endured a great fight of afflictions. Some have wept over their sufferings. Jesus beholds the tears of those who feel for his oppressed people, and he says to them with tenderness, "Why are you weeping?" He bids them weep no more, for he will soon avenge his own cause.

Though Mary did not at first remember her Savior's voice, yet when he pronounced her *own name* she knew it. Shall we ever hear our own names uttered by our Lord? Are they now written in his book? Can we wonder that when Mary had found her Lord she was unwilling to part from him? He said, "Touch me not;" that is, "Hold, or detain me not; for I am not *yet* ascended unto my Father." As he was not going to ascend *immediately*, Mary might hope to see him soon again. Then he sent a message to his *brethren*. He called his disciples his *brethren*. This was the message—"I ascend unto my Father and your Father, unto my God and your God." What a message! How full of grace, of joy, of glory! It is a message to *us*, if we believe in Jesus. His Father is our Father, and loves *us* as he does *him*. (John 17:23.) Our elder brother has gone before us, to prepare a place for the younger children in his Father's house.

December 16

Matthew 28:9, 10. *Christ appears to the faithful women.*

The Lord Jesus appeared *first* to Mary Magdalene, after he rose from the dead; then he appeared to her two companions, Mary and Salome. He could transport himself, in one moment, from the place where he stood conversing with Mary Magdalene, near the tomb, to the spot which these women had reached. He met them as they were running *quickly* to bring his disciples word.

He met them with words of joy. He said, "All hail," or "Rejoice." He found them

rejoicing, but he bid them *again* rejoice. The *first salutation* that he uttered when he rose from the dead was, "Woman, why are you weeping?" His next salutation was, "All hail." He would not bid his people rejoice, if there were not great *cause* for joy. When he was born into the world, the angel said to the shepherds, "Behold I bring you good tidings of *great joy*, which shall be to all people." Since that time Jesus had passed through deep sorrow. And what was the *fruit* of this sorrow? Joy. What joy? The joy of saving souls from eternal death. This was the joy set before him, to gain which he endured the cross, and despised the shame. This is the Father's will, that every one that sees the Son, and believes in him, shall have everlasting life. (John 6:40.) Well might Jesus say to these believing women, "All hail!" If we could now hear Him speak from heaven, we should hear him utter those same words to all who believe in him. Though they might be languishing on sick beds, or weeping over newly-closed graves, he would say to them, "All hail!" But what would he say to unbelievers? He would denounce woe upon them, because they have not believed in the only name which can save them from the wrath to come. "Woe unto you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep."

Though the faithful women felt some fear at the sight of their risen Lord, they ventured to approach him, and to hold him by the feet. They must have seen upon those feet the prints of the nails. They loved him *before* he died, but surely they loved him better now. The sight of his agonies on the cross must greatly have increased their love. Everyone who has lost dear friends feels, "I never loved them enough while they were with me. The remembrance of their dying pangs endears them doubly to my heart." But what must these women have felt when they remembered all their Lord had gone through, and when they knew it was all for their sakes! Do we wish we had been in their place, lying low at his feet and worshiping him? If we love him, we may look forward to such a meeting.

When Jesus rose from the dead, his *enemies* were not permitted to see him. He appointed a place in Galilee where all his disciples from all parts of the land might assemble to meet him—but his enemies received no invitation. There shall be a place in the air where all who love Jesus shall behold him when he comes again. The *dead* in Christ shall rise *first*; then those who are alive and remain shall be caught up together *with them* in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the *air*. There will be no *parting* after that meeting. "So shall we be ever with the Lord." There will be no *sorrow* after that meeting. "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." There will be no *sin* after that meeting. "When he shall appear, we shall be *like* him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2)

December 17

Matthew 28:11-15. *The Pharisees bribe the watch.*

How short was the joy of the world! How soon it was turned into sorrow! Before

his crucifixion, the Lord had said, "The world shall rejoice." And they did rejoice during the day that he lay in the grave. The words that God once addressed to Moab concerning their behavior to Israel applied to them—"Since you spoke of him, you skipped for joy." (Jer. 48:27.) But what dismay they felt when they heard that the object of their hatred was risen from the tomb! Yet they persevered in their horrible attempt to deter people from believing in him.

When they learned from the frightened soldiers the wonders that had happened at the sepulcher, they determined, if possible, to conceal these events. The chief priests took the lead in this dark transaction; they summoned the elders, and consulted with them by what means they should smother the truth. They decided on bribing the soldiers to spread an invented tale. "His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept." The father of lies never suggested a more dreadful lie than this. It is his constant employment to teach sinners to hide their sins under a covering of falsehood. There are numbers to be found in every place who are contriving day after day new ways of concealing their old sins. Their tongues have grown so familiar with lies, that they can tell them without a blush. But unless they repent, they will feel the power of that tremendous sentence, "*All liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone.*" *All liars of every degree shall share in that condemnation.* The Pharisees were deceivers of the *worst* kind. What would be thought of the man who should willfully deceive his neighbors concerning the place where the fire-engines were kept, though he knew the town was in flames? Through such a man a whole town might be destroyed. The Pharisees were such men. They endeavored to deceive a perishing world respecting him who was the *life* of that world. The resurrection proved that he was indeed the Son of God. This was the fact that his enemies labored to conceal.

They found the Roman soldiers ready to unite in their scheme. There is nothing so wicked that men have not done for the sake of *money*. Some will even plead as an excuse for sin, that they should lose *money* if they did not commit it. Have you never heard people defend their disobedience to God's laws by saying, "I could not get a living if I acted otherwise?" Have any of us ever made such miserable excuses? There is one question which we ought never to forget. It is *this*—"What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

These soldiers incurred great guilt when they consented to *spread* the falsehood the Pharisees had invented. They had felt the earthquake, they had seen the angels, yet they did not declare the glory of the Lord. But God found other messengers. Feeble, though faithful women, first proclaimed the joyful tidings. Unlearned, though inspired apostles, confirmed their word, and spread it far and wide. We have heard the glorious truth, that the Lord rose from the dead on the third day. Have we believed it? God has promised to save all those who believe it *with the heart*. "If you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe *in your heart* that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved."

(Rom. 10:9.)

December 18

Luke 24:1-12. *Women visit the tomb.*

Those who have attentively examined the history of the resurrection have come to the conclusion that *two* companies of women visited the tomb. Matthew and Mark record the visit of the *first* company; Luke that of the *second*. The first company consisted of at least *three* women, Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, and Salome. We do not know how many women composed the *second* band, or what were their names; but it is probable that Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, was one of them. *Many* women had followed Jesus from Galilee, and had ministered unto him by the way. (Matthew 27:55.) It is not to be supposed that they all lodged in the same house in Jerusalem, or that they reached the sepulcher at the same moment. Those who came *first* saw *one* young man clothed in white *sitting* in the tomb. The *second* band for a time saw no one; but, when they were much perplexed, they beheld *two* men *standing* by them in shining garments. The first company, as they were running to bring the disciples word, met their risen Lord—but there is no account of the *second* company being honored with such an interview. By referring to the 23d verse of this chapter, we shall see that there were *some* women who only saw a vision of angels, and not the Lord himself, and *they* may have formed the *second* band.

How do angels address our fallen race? They speak to us as if we were but little children in comparison to themselves. These angels said to the women, "Why seek you the *living* among the *dead*?" It appeared to them an act of *folly* to look for the Lord of *Life* in the abode of *Death*. They felt that his followers ought to have known that he was risen. They repeated the very words that He had said to them, "The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and the third day *rise again*." Could any words be plainer than these? It was strange that all the disciples should have forgotten them. But while the angels must be astonished at the dullness and forgetfulness of human creatures, they do not exult over them with pride, or upbraid them with harshness. They instruct in a gentle and condescending manner. Let us try to teach like them when we meet with those who are more ignorant than ourselves. The heavenly hosts have been taught by Him who said, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart."

What a disappointment it must have been to these women when they found the apostles would not believe their account! But Peter went to the tomb to examine for himself. Whether this was the *same* visit recorded by John, or *another*, is uncertain. The sight of the linen clothes convinced Peter that the Lord's body had not been stolen. In the course of the day the Lord himself appeared to Peter. Paul declares that he was seen of Cephas (or Peter) before he was seen of the

twelve. (1 Cor. 15:5.) How wonderful that he who had denied his Master should be the first of all the apostles to behold him after his resurrection! Jesus knew that this weeping backslider needed this strong consolation. How the look which his Master had cast upon him while standing in the judgment-hall must have agonized his mind, until he saw again that injured Friend! Christ still pities the poor wanderer. It is not his will that such a one should "be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow." (2 Cor. 2:7.) It is the duty of his fellow-Christians to forgive and to comfort him, and to confirm their love towards him. How much more is it the delight of the compassionate Savior to raise him up, to strengthen him, and to wipe away his tears! Is there any sin which lies heavy on the conscience of any of us? Let us confess it at the feet of Jesus. He will not spurn us from his presence—no; but "He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us, he will subdue all our iniquities; and you will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:19.)

December 19

Luke 24:13-24. *The journey to Emmaus.*

Towards the close of the joyful day which saw the Lord arise, two of the disciples were walking together, oppressed with *sorrow*. The name of one of these men was Cleopas. The name of his companion is not revealed. It does not seem probable that *this* Cleopas was the husband of *that* Mary who visited the sepulcher; for if he had been her husband, he must have known that she had seen the *Lord*; whereas we find that he only speaks of the women having seen *angels*, (ver. 23.) It is also to be remarked that he calls them merely "certain women of our company."

Cleopas and his friend were walking towards Emmaus. This village was nearly eight miles to the northwest of Jerusalem. The way there was mountainous, and in many places almost paved with rock. The gloomy scenery—the rugged path—the lonely way—the declining sun, must have accorded with the troubled state of the disciples' hearts. The risen Lord beheld these two friends as they walked sorrowfully along, and he came to pass the evening in their company. Though he well knew the subject of their conversation, he asked them this question,—“What manner of communications are these that you have one to another, as you walk and are sad?”

When we are conversing together, if the Lord were to draw near and to make this inquiry, should we always be willing to reply? Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. Worldly people *never* take pleasure in conversing about their souls, or Christ, or heaven. They delight in talking of the trifling vanities of time. But even true Christians are apt to forget unseen things, and to waste their precious hours in unprofitable discourse. But when they do converse upon spiritual subjects, they receive a blessing from the Lord. In times of affliction,

especially, they should avoid the society of the ungodly. David when in trouble said, "I will keep my mouth with a bridle while the wicked is before me." (Ps. 39:1.) But they should open their hearts to each other. It was in a time of public calamity that the saints described by Malachi met together. "Then those who feared the Lord spoke often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it." (Mal. 3:16.)

There must have been something exceedingly gracious in the manner in which Jesus addressed the mourning disciples; for, though they took him for a stranger, they readily opened their grief at his request. What a grief it was! They had lost their Lord. Yet they had not *renounced* him. They looked upon him still, not as a deceiver, but as a "prophet mighty in deed and in word, before God and all the people." Their own negligence was the principal occasion of their grief. Though *many* had been to see the sepulcher, *they had not*. Had they gone they also might have seen angels, or at least they would have seen the linen clothes, and by them have been convinced that the Lord was risen. *Then*, instead of mourning together, they would have been rejoicing together. Christians are often unhappy only because they are negligent. They hear their brethren tell of joys which they themselves have never tasted, and they scarcely believe the report. But if they would use the same diligence in searching the Scriptures, and the same importunity in prayer as those happy brethren, they also would rejoice.

December 20

Luke 24:25-35. *Christ makes himself known at Emmaus.*

Has anyone who loves Jesus ever read the account of the walk to Emmaus without wishing he had been there? How delightful it must have been to hear the Lord explain in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself! But has he not promised his Holy Spirit to enlighten us when we search his holy word? There are things concerning himself in *all* the Scriptures. In the beginning of the Bible we find him revealed as the Seed of the woman; and in the last chapter of the Old Testament, we behold him as the Sun of Righteousness; and in every intervening page we may discover him—as a suffering Lamb, or as a conquering Lion; as a tender shoot, or a strong branch; as a servant, or a king; as a child, or the Ancient of Days; now made low as a worm, and now declared to be the mighty God, the great Creator, the glorious Jehovah.

While the Lord was explaining this mysterious subject to his attentive companions, he arrived at Emmaus. This village was situated on the southern side of a fruitful hill, and commanded a view of the towers and pinnacles of Jerusalem. Lying exposed to the heat of the mid-day sun, it was refreshed by an abundance of cooling springs. Jesus would not have entered the disciples' dwelling had he not been entreated to stay. Whenever we return to our homes, let us make the prayer those disciples made, and say, "Abide with us." No home

is really sweet in which Jesus does not abide. Where he is, there are peace, and love, and joy.

The Lord acted as master of the house at the table of his host. According to his custom, "he took bread, and blessed it, and broke it, and gave to them." Then the disciples knew the Lord, for their eyes were opened. God exercises supreme power over our senses. He lets us see and hear what he chooses. In the next world He can open our eyes, and enable us to know saints we have never seen, and to recognize friends we have long lost.

What must the mourners have felt when they discovered that the wonderful stranger was their own beloved Savior! But they had no opportunity of expressing their delight to *him*, for he vanished out of their sight. After his resurrection the *Lord* neither came in nor went out as before. A glorified body is very different from the houses of clay in which our spirits are imprisoned.

The two friends could not remain at home after the joyful event that had happened! They longed to make their brethren partakers of their happiness. They had left them weeping; but when they arrived at Jerusalem they found them rejoicing. The Lord had appeared to Simon Peter. Though the *women's* report had been disbelieved, *Peter's* testimony had been received.

What was the subject of that evening's conversation? Was it not the various appearances of the Lord? Every particular concerning the interviews that had been enjoyed with Him must have been listened to with the deepest interest. About what do saints above converse? Is it not about their Lord, and how they first learned to know him, and how he manifested himself to them at various seasons of their pilgrimage? Even here, when saints meet together, they delight to speak on these subjects. Like the disciples of old, they have *different* histories to relate. Mary Magdalene might tell how *quickly* he revealed himself to her—Cleopas and his friend might describe how *long* he *delayed* to make himself known to them. *She* met him in the garden—*they* were joined by him in the way. *She* addressed him *first*—*they* were *first* spoken to by him. The dealings of the Lord with his people are still marked by different circumstances; but the *end* in every case will be the same. Though for a season they may lament, saying, "I sought him, but I found him not;" and inquire mournfully, "Saw you him whom my soul loves?" at length they will joyfully declare, "I found him whom my soul loves." (Cant. 3:2-4.) Those who love Jesus must find him, for *He* himself is seeking them.

December 21

Luke 24:36-43. Christ eats in the presence of his disciples.

During the course of the resurrection-day the Lord Jesus appeared to several of

his people either alone, or when two or three were together. But he crowned the joys of the day by showing himself in the evening to a larger assembly. The apostles, the disciples from Emmaus, and others besides, were all conversing about their risen Lord, when they suddenly saw him standing before them. Nothing could be more comforting than the words he uttered, "Peace be unto you." All his salutations to his people that day had been full of sympathy and encouragement. To the weeping Mary he had said, "Why are you weeping?" to the joyful women, "All hail!" to the mourning disciples, "What manner of communications are these that you have one to another, as you walk and are sad?" To Simon Peter we know not what he said; but we are persuaded that He who sent him a gracious *message*, gave him a tender *reception*. To his assembled apostles he said, "Peace be unto you." This peace he won by the pangs of death. Man lost it in Eden; the Son of man regained it on Calvary. He made peace by the blood of his cross, (Col. 1:20;) and he rose from the grave to bestow that peace upon his people. He still lives to bestow it on all who ask it. If there be any uneasy soul seeking for happiness, but not knowing how to obtain it, let that restless creature fall low at the feet of Jesus, and implore his blessing; peace shall sooner or later flow into that troubled heart. A sweet sense of pardon, a lively hope of heaven, and a fervent love to God—these feelings make up the peace that Jesus gives.

How touching it must have been to see the Lord showing his own wounded hands and feet to his disciples, and inviting them to touch his sacred person! God permitted these prints of love to remain after the wounds were forever healed. The apostle John, when he speaks of his Lord in the opening of his first epistle, alludes to the privileges he had enjoyed—"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, which our hands have handled, of the Word of Life."

The apostles enjoyed some privileges which we have never known. They heard that blessed voice, they saw that sacred form, they touched those precious limbs; but there are still higher enjoyments that we hope to share *with them* hereafter. The gracious Savior, who condescended to eat with his disciples after he rose from the dead, has promised to admit *all* his people to intimate communion with himself. There is no creature so lowly—no soul so ignorant—no sinner so lost, who shall, if he feel the desire to be with Jesus, be refused admittance to his presence. But not *one being* shall approach him in *glory* who has not loved him upon *earth*. To all who love him *not* he will say, "Depart." How would the entrance of an enemy have marred the joy of the evening which Christ spent with his apostles! Judas was not there. No doubt, in former days, he had stirred up many dissensions among the little band. There shall not be one enemy in heaven to interrupt the harmony. The weak believer shall be there; the restored backslider shall be there; the sinner, plucked in the *last* hour as a brand from the burning, shall be there—but not one hypocrite, not one self-righteous formalist, not one worldly-minded person, not one who does not *love* the Lord Jesus Christ. Let each of us ask his own soul, "Shall I be there?"

December 22

John 20:19-23. Christ bestows the Holy Spirit on his disciples.

This is the same appearance of the Lord as that recorded by Luke. It took place in the evening, after the resurrection. It is the *first* meeting recorded of the followers of the *crucified* Savior. It was the first of a long train of Christian assemblies. At this moment, in how many parts of the world congregations are worshipping him who suffered upon the cross! *Our* family is now meeting together in honor of his name. But do *our feelings* resemble those of the first disciples? Do we love Jesus? Do we earnestly long to see him? If he were now to stand in the midst of the room, should we be exceedingly glad? There are many who call themselves Christians, who do *not* love Christ. *They* would not be glad to see him.

When the risen Savior entered the room where the disciples were assembled, the doors were *shut* for fear of the Jews. It is evident that they were locked, or fastened, in order to keep out the enemy. It was easy for him who had just broken the bars of *death* to open those doors.

Luke relates, that on this occasion he *ate* in the presence of his disciples. This he did to show that he was *man*. But he also showed that he was *God*. He *breathed* on his disciples, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit." At that very moment they received the Holy Spirit, though not in so abundant a manner, as after Jesus ascended.

Christ never gives us commands without enabling us to fulfill them. He commanded his apostles to preach the Gospel, and to enable them to preach it, he gave them the Holy Spirit. By this gift their understandings were enlightened more than they had ever been before. But the apostles could not forgive sins. He alone, against whom sin is committed, can forgive it. Why then did Jesus say to his apostles, "Whoever's sins you remit they are remitted to them?" Did He not enable them to know whom *He* would forgive?

When the men who had crucified their Lord came to them in an agony of grief, saying, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" the apostles knew what to reply. They knew that Christ would forgive his murderers, and they answered, "Repent, and be baptized *every one* of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the *remission of sins*." They knew also whom God would *not* forgive. When Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit, Peter consigned them both to instant death.

What is the greatest blessing that sinners can receive? Is it not the forgiveness of sins? Do we desire to know whether *our* sins are forgiven? In the writings of the apostles we shall find rules laid down by which we may examine ourselves. Have

we with *real sorrow* confessed our sins, and asked pardon in the name of Jesus? Then we have obtained mercy. For the apostle John has declared in his first epistle, "If we *confess* our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9.)

December 23

John 20:24 to end. *Christ convinces the unbelieving apostle.*

Much benefit has often been lost by absence from the assemblies of the saints. Thomas, by his absence, lost an opportunity of seeing the risen Savior. While his brethren were rejoicing in the thought of the glory of their Lord, he was suffering the miseries of unbelief.

There is something daring and repulsive in the expression he used—"Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." Thomas little thought when he spoke thus that Jesus heard his words. How many speeches that we have uttered must have grieved the heart of our ever-present Savior! Were he to appear and remind us of them, we should feel overwhelmed with shame and sorrow.

It was just one week after his resurrection that the Lord came the *second* time to visit his assembled people.

He entered the room in the same wonderful manner as before, passing through the fastened doors. By two signs he showed that he was God. The manner of his entrance displayed his divine *power*; his repeating the words of Thomas manifested his divine *knowledge*.

When Nathanael was brought to Jesus, he was astonished to hear him say, "When you were under the fig-tree I saw you;" and he cried out, "You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."

Thomas felt in the same manner when he exclaimed, "*My Lord and my God.*" He did not say, (as Israel once had said,) the Lord he is *the* God; but "*My Lord and my God.*" He loved Jesus, and he knew that Jesus loved him; therefore he could say, "*My God.*" Those wounds in the Savior's hands seemed to cry out, "I loved you, and gave myself for you."

The sin of this apostle was the occasion of a blessing being pronounced on numbers then unborn. "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed." Thomas ought to have believed the *promise* that Christ would rise, before any witnesses had declared that they had seen him; but he not only doubted Christ's promise, but rejected the testimony of all his brethren. His unbelief was very great; yet it was not that fatal unbelief which reigns in the

unconverted, for it was accompanied by sincere love. The Pharisees *dreaded* lest Christ should rise. Thomas regarded his rising again as too joyful an event to be true. *They* tried to shut their eyes to all the proofs that were pressed upon them. *He* sought to obtain stronger proofs than he had yet found. Still Thomas would have been more blessed had he believed the word of Jesus *before* he had seen it accomplished.

Among those who sincerely believe in Jesus how much unbelief may be detected! How often they fear that He has forgotten them, though He has promised that He never will! If they would always trust him they would always taste that peace which passes all understanding. Jacob, though an eminent saint, in the midst of his fiery trials was tempted to exclaim, "All these things are against me;" but the Shunamite was enabled in the depth of her trouble to say, "It is well."

December 24

John 21:1-14. *Christ appears at the lake of Gennesaret.*

This is the *third* time that the Lord showed himself to several disciples assembled together after he rose from the dead. The *first* time was on the evening of the day of his resurrection; the *second* was a week afterwards, when Thomas was present. Both these appearances took place at Jerusalem. The *third* occurred in Galilee. The angel at the tomb had promised that Jesus would meet his disciples in Galilee. In this part of Canaan he had lived from his childhood, and here he had often traveled with his little flock, preaching the Gospel.

It must have been a trial to the apostles not to see their Lord as *soon* as they arrived there. It seems that they were reduced to great necessity while waiting for him, and that they were obliged to resume their old occupation of fishing. But they were not forgotten by him who had given his own flesh for the life of the world.

After a toilsome night, spent in vain endeavors to procure a fresh supply of food, they heard a voice calling out, "Children, have you any meat?" But they neither recognized the voice, nor the form of their Lord. Soon, however, the beloved apostle John discovered him by his wondrous *acts*. After following his directions, the apostles found their net laden with an enormous quantity of fish. Then John exclaimed, "It is the Lord."

On several occasions after the resurrection, Jesus made himself known by some word he uttered, or act he performed, without declaring plainly who He was. When he pronounced the name of Mary, he was made manifest as her Lord; and when he blessed the bread at Emmaus, he was discovered by the mourning disciples. There are many ways in which Jesus still makes his people feel that he

is present. When a soul is converted, then we know that he is near; when in the midst of trouble, comfort flows into the heart—when prayer is answered—when temptation is resisted—when sin is subdued—when death is welcomed—then we may feel assured "It is the Lord."

As soon as the seven hungry and weary disciples reached the shore, what a proof of their Lord's condescending care met their eyes! A fire of coals was kindled, fish was laid thereon, and bread was provided. Whose hands had kindled that fire and prepared that meal? Was it the pierced hands of the risen Savior, or those of angels, his ministering servants? We know not by what *means* the simple fare was made ready; but we know that it was the Lord who had condescended to provide this seasonable supply. The King of glory himself waited upon his poor followers. He who had washed their feet *before* he *suffered*, fed them with his own hands *after* he was *risen*.

Have his people cause to fear, lest they should be forgotten in the day of their necessity? Sometimes they are tempted to inquire, What shall I do, if my business should not prosper? What would become of me if sickness should lay me low? Who would take care of me, if I should live to be old and feeble? But these are unbelieving thoughts. Christ has promised each of his children—"I will never leave you, nor forsake you." When our minds are troubled with cares concerning the future, let us remember the Lord Jesus by the side of the lake, feeding his poor disciples with his own pierced hands.

Christmas Day

Suspend the course for the day, and read Is. 9:1-8; and Luke 2:1-15; or some other chapter suitable to the Nativity.

December 26

John 21:15-17. *Christ questions Peter concerning his love.*

"Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me more than these?" Why did the Lord Jesus ask this question? And why did he say *three* times, "Do you love me?" Peter had lately denied him openly *three* times. It is a great satisfaction to a penitent backslider, to have an opportunity of expressing his feelings. If Jesus had not made the inquiry in this pointed manner, Peter might have felt afraid of coming forward as he used to do. He might have thought, "How have I belied all my professions by my conduct!—henceforth I will keep silence;" but Jesus invited him to speak. Then Peter replied, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He had lost his self-confidence, but he retained his fervor. He no longer professed to love his Lord more than his fellow-disciples loved him; he no longer protested, "Though *all* men shall be offended because of you, yet will *I* never be offended;"

but he still felt that he loved his Master, and he still knew, that though *others* might suspect his sincerity, the Searcher of hearts never could.

Is it a comfort to us to reflect that Jesus knows our hearts? Do we feel assured that when he looks into them he sees there some—though not enough—gratitude for all his kindness? What should we think of Peter, if he had not loved his Lord! What should we think of him, if he could have beheld Jesus dying on the cross, and not have loved him! and if he could have received a generous pardon after his base denial—and not have loved him! and if he could that morning have taken the food from his pierced hands—and not have loved him! But has Jesus done nothing for us? Is there one person here present who can say, "I have no reason to love the Lord; he has done nothing for *me*; he has shown *me* no kindness; he has never fed *me*, nor pardoned *me*, nor shed his blood for *me*?" No creature knows how much Jesus has done for him; when all his goodness, and forbearance, and patience come to light, (as they will do, at the last day,) everyone who has not loved him will be overwhelmed with shame, and confusion of face.

It is the earnest wish of those who *do* love the Lord, to know how they can please him. Jesus told Peter how to show his love. He said, "Feed my lambs," and then "Feed my sheep." He had made Peter a minister of the gospel. In a minister's office there are two parts—the first is, "Converting sinners;" the second, "Instructing saints." When the Lord that morning had caused the disciples to catch a multitude of fish, he had shown them that they would, by preaching the gospel, *convert many sinners*. When he commanded Peter to feed his sheep and lambs, he taught him that it would be his duty to *instruct the saints*. A minister resembles both a fisherman and a shepherd. When he is exhorting sinners to come to Jesus, then he is like a fisherman enclosing fish in his net; when he is teaching believers, then he is like a shepherd feeding his flock.

The lambs are the first objects of the shepherd's care, because they are weaker than the sheep. All children who love Christ are his lambs; good ministers feed them with the fresh grass that grows by the still waters. When they tell them about the good Shepherd, who died to save sinners, then it is they feed the lambs. Jesus himself gathers them with his arms, and carries them in his bosom, and keeps them from the roaring lion who seeks to devour them. There are some aged people who have only just begun to believe, and these also are counted by Jesus among his lambs. It may be, that neglected by earthly shepherds, they have gone "from mountain, to hill," and had "'forgotten their resting-place." (Jer. 50:6.) When lo! in their declining years, they heard a voice saying, "Come unto me, all you that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." They obeyed the gentle call, and now each of them can say, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." There are many little children who have repeated this verse as soon as they could lisp; and many aged saints who have uttered it with their expiring breath.

December 27

John 21:18 to end. *Christ foretells the manner of Peter's death.*

None of us can foresee what will be the manner of our death. We know not whether it will be natural or violent, sudden or lingering, painful or comparatively easy; we do not even know *certainly* that we shall die; for some will remain until the coming of the Lord, and be caught up to meet him in the air. God in his goodness and his wisdom has concealed the future from his creatures, even those things that most nearly concern them. But occasionally he departs from his usual course. In *wrath* he revealed to Jehoram, the king of Judah, the manner of his death. There came a writing from Elijah the prophet, describing the dreadful disease which would cut short his days. (2 Chron. 21:15.) In *love* Jesus revealed to Peter the manner of his death. It was the most painful, and the most shameful, yet the most honorable, because the death his Master had suffered, even crucifixion. The Bible contains no account of the event, but it has been commonly reported that it took place at Rome.

If when Peter *first* began to follow the Lord, he had known that he should be called to endure such bitter sufferings for his sake, the announcement might have overwhelmed him with terror. But since that time his soul had been strengthened; and he was willing to encounter trials that once would have appalled him. In his second epistle he speaks with calmness of his death—"Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ has shown me." (2 Peter 1:14.)

God can make those events which once appeared *terrible—tolerable*, and even *delightful* to the soul. There may be great trials reserved for some of us. If we knew *now* what they were, perhaps we should say, "We cannot sustain them." But God will enable us to bear all that he has appointed that we shall suffer. He answered Paul's prayers for deliverance from his piercing thorn, by saying, "My grace is sufficient for you." His grace is sufficient for us also.

It seems that the Lord uttered the prophecy concerning Peter in the presence of the other disciples; but afterwards he called him to go apart with him. Encouraged by the favor shown him, Peter ventured to ask the Lord what would become of John, who was following their steps. It was natural that he should expect this question would be answered, for at the last supper, when he had asked John to inquire who should betray the Lord, a reply had been granted. But there was a great difference between these two inquiries. *Anxiety* to clear themselves of the foul crime that one of their number would commit, led all the faithful apostles to desire to know who the traitor was. But it was *curiosity* that induced Peter *now* to ask, "What shall this man do?" Such curiosity required a check. There is nothing revealed in the Scriptures to gratify curiosity. Man would like to know the history of the *angels*, but he is only told his *own* history; for this

alone concerns him—he would like to know who are the inhabitants of the worlds suspended in the heavens, but he is only told who *he* himself is.

It is not *curiosity* that makes Christians desirous to know *all* things that *Jesus* did. Love leads us to wish to hear all his words, and to learn the particulars of all his actions. But it was impossible that they could all be written in one book. Shall we *ever* know all those interesting facts? If we are made worthy, through the blood of Jesus, to enter his kingdom of glory, we may hear from the *lips* of apostles circumstances which their *pens* have not recorded. *Angels* were witnesses of scenes where apostles were not present; hereafter those holy watchers may describe events that occurred among the green hills near Bethlehem, and on the sultry plains of Egypt, in the lowly dwelling at Nazareth, and on the shady banks of Jordan, amid the dismal caverns of the wilderness, and upon the sorrowful summit of Mount Olivet, events which have never yet been heard by mortal ear. And may not the Lord Jesus himself condescend to reveal to his people some passages in his life, and some feelings of his heart, which are known to none but Himself?

December 28

Matthew 28:16 to end. *Christ meets his disciples on a mountain.*

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, he had no palace in which to hold his court. It was on a mountain in Galilee that his disciples met together to behold him after his resurrection. Why was a *mountain* selected as the place of meeting? Because the tops of mountains are retired spots. As the Lord would not permit his *enemies* to see him after he rose from the dead, he chose a secluded place in a remote part of the land in which to meet his friends. None but those who loved him were there. More than five hundred brethren were gathered together to see him. (1 Cor. 15:6.) Was such an assembly ever known before or since! It is common to behold a congregation of five hundred people. But do they all love Jesus? Are they all brethren in Christ? No! in such congregations the children of wrath and the children of God are mingled. But there was *not* one of Christ's *open* enemies among the five hundred on the mountain. Paul calls them all "brethren." (1 Cor. 15.) We know not their names. But we may conjecture that those who had been healed, and pardoned, and instructed, came from all parts of the land to behold their risen Benefactor. Bartimeus, the blind beggar of Jericho, and the blind beggar of Jerusalem, may have been there, as well as Joseph and Nicodemus, the honorable counselors. Though they are called brethren, yet doubtless *women* were included in the company. It is probable that the pious women of Galilee were present, and even Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

We should like to know what Jesus said to those assembled on the mountain. It is not certain that the words recorded by Matthew in this passage were spoken before that assembly. They contain the Lord's charge to his apostles. "Go you

therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." The word "*teach*," in *this* verse, means "disciple." "Go, and *disciple* all nations," or make them my disciples. How could the apostles do this? By preaching the gospel. Those who believed were to be baptized, not in the name of *Jesus* only, but in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the glorious Trinity. Thus Jesus showed that he was one with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

What an arduous undertaking the Lord assigned to his apostles! To go to a world full of the servants of Satan, to seek for servants for God! This was their work. How could they perform it! Their Master gave the encouragement they needed. He began by saying, "All power (or authority) is given unto me in heaven, and in earth;" and he ended by declaring, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." *He* who had all *power* would be with them! He who *lives forever* would be with them! What could they fear with such a guard! But would the *apostles* live to the end of the world? No! but Christ would raise up *other* men like them in *spirit*, to teach the same doctrines they had taught. He is still with his faithful ministers, to bless their labors and to comfort their hearts. What an assembly will one day be gathered together upon the heavenly mountain, of all those who have believed through their word! There may have been some *missing* from the mountain in Galilee, who would have been glad to be there; but not one who loves Jesus shall be absent from the mountain of the Lord's house. Some, knowing that Jesus had been lately crucified, *doubted* at first whether they really beheld the risen Savior; but there shall be no *unbelief* in heaven. In a *little while* the brethren were obliged to *descend* from the sacred summit; but the glorified shall *never descend* from the heights of the heavenly Zion. Shall we be found among that blessed company? Let us now often seek Christ where he has promised to meet us—in secret—in our chambers—the door shut, the world shut out, and the heart lifted up to that glorious mountain where the hundred and forty-four thousand surround the Lamb.

December 29

Mark 16:15-18. Christ promises to bestow miraculous gifts.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem an angel declared to the shepherds, "I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to *all* people." Those good tidings are called the Gospel. Before Jesus left this world he charged his apostles to preach the Gospel to *all* people. He did not send *angels* to preach it, but men. He said, "Go you into *all* the world, and preach the Gospel to *every* creature." Then every creature ought to believe the Gospel. Have we believed it? We have heard it—but *hearing* it will not save the soul. The Lord has made this solemn declaration—"He who *believes*, and is baptized, shall be saved." There are many who have been baptized in their infancy who have not *believed* in Jesus. Shall they be saved? No! unless they *believe*, they cannot be saved; for it is written,

"He who *believes not* shall be damned." Dreadful words! Whether he be baptized, or whether he be *not* baptized, he who does not *believe* shall perish. What is it to believe? It is to receive Christ into the heart. There is an instance recorded in the Acts of a wicked man called Simon Magus, who believed, and was baptized. But he did not believe with the *heart*. His faith was not of the right sort—his *mind* was *convinced*, but his *heart* was not *changed*. After his baptism, the apostle Peter, reproving him for a blasphemous request he had made, said, "You have neither part nor lot in this matter; for your *heart* is not right in the sight of God. I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." (Acts 8:21-23.) None can be saved who do not believe with the *heart* on the Son of God.

When Christ sent out his apostles to preach the Gospel, he knew that the world would be ready to say that he had *not* sent them. Therefore he made this wonderful promise—"These signs shall follow them that believe. In my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover." (Mark 16:17, 18.) It was by the power of the Holy Spirit that believers would perform these miracles. When the Spirit descended upon the apostles at the day of Pentecost, he enabled them to speak with other tongues. (Acts 2:4.) When he descended upon Cornelius and his friends, he caused them also to speak in the same wonderful manner. (Acts 10:45, 46.)

The apostles possessed a privilege beyond other believers. They could obtain the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit for other men by laying on their hands with prayer. When Peter and John visited Samaria, they laid their hands on the believers, and the Holy Spirit was given. Philip the deacon, who had first preached the Gospel in Samaria, had not been able to *communicate* the heavenly gift, though he himself possessed the power of doing miracles. (Acts 8:13-17.) As none but the *apostles* could by laying on of hands cause believers to receive the Holy Spirit—after their death the power of working miracles ceased. The Gospel had then been preached to the ends of the world, and *sufficient miraculous* evidence of its truth had been given. (Rom. 10:18.)

But the most valuable gift that Christ bestows may still be obtained. It is charity, or holy love. Tongues have ceased, but love has not failed, and shall never fail. By this we may know whether we have true faith. Do we love God? and do we love the children of God? The apostle John has declared, "He who loves not, knows not God, for God is love." (1 John 4:7, 8.) If unholy passions, such as envy, wrath, and malice, are nourished in our hearts, then we may be sure that we do not believe in Christ with the heart.

December 30

Luke 24:44-49. Christ opens the understandings of his apostles.

The Lord Jesus remained forty days on the earth after his resurrection. During this time he often conversed with his disciples. It is written in the Acts, concerning the Lord and his apostles, "To whom he showed himself alive after his *passion* (or sufferings) by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." How much we would like to hear all that he said during these forty days! It is natural to inquire, "Where did the Lord abide when *not* present with his disciples, or was he always *present* with *some* of them?" But though we cannot ascertain these points, we may know on what subjects the Lord conversed with his beloved followers. He spoke to them of his own past sufferings. They had just witnessed his painful death at Jerusalem, and they could not understand how the righteous Father should give up his righteous Son into the hands of wicked men. But Jesus relieved their perplexity. He showed them from the Old Testament prophecies, that the Lord had laid on *him* the sins of men. What must the apostles have felt when they first understood that all the bitter pangs they had seen their Lord endure, had been inflicted for their sakes! He explained to them not only why he *died*, but also why he *rose again*. And why did he rise again? Because he had paid the ransom for our sins, even his own precious blood, and therefore he was set free from the prison of the tomb. Thus Daniel the prophet had declared that the Messiah should come "to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness." (Daniel 9:24.)

Were such conversations ever before held as these between the Lord and his disciples *after* his *resurrection*! How different from their conversation on the way to the garden of Gethsemane just before his crucifixion! *Then* sorrow had filled their hearts—but *now* joy. Then they could not understand many very simple truths. When the Lord said, "Where I go you know, and the way you know," Thomas replied, "We know not where you go, and how can we know the way?" But now the disciples understood his instructions. And why? Because *he opened their understandings*. No other teacher ever possessed the power of opening the understandings of his pupils.

Jesus still exercises this power. He bestows the Holy Spirit. The Bible perplexes those who are not taught by him. When they read the ceremonies of the law, they sometimes inquire, "Why was so much blood spilt?" When they read the histories of the saints, they wonder at their sins and at their sorrows. When they read the psalms and the prophets, they are astonished to find bitter complaints succeeded by rapturous songs. But the soul taught of God knows that *Christ is hidden in every part of his holy word*—that the ceremonies of the law point to *his* atoning blood—that the histories of the saints set forth the sins *he* bore, and the sorrows *he* sustained; and that the psalms and the prophets are filled with *his* mournful notes, and with *his* joyful strains.

The Lord conversed with his disciples not only about his *own past* sufferings, but

also about *their future* labors. He told them *what* they were to preach, and *where* they were to preach.

What were they to preach? Not vengeance but mercy. The gifts that sinners need are repentance and pardon. To be pardoned without repentance would be no blessing; for an impenitent sinner could not be happy in heaven. To repent, and yet *not* to obtain pardon, how terrible this would be! But it *cannot* be; for no true penitent shall be sent to hell, though many a bruised reed has feared lest this should be his own case.

And *where* were the apostles to preach? Among *all* nations, but they were to BEGIN at Jerusalem. The murderers were to have the *first* offer of pardon. Those who, like strong bulls of Bashan, had beset him round, who had gaped upon him with their mouths as a ravening and roaring lion, were to be the first to obtain mercy from the silent, slaughtered Lamb. How can any sinner despair after hearing of this wonderful grace? Millions once covered with scarlet and crimson stains are now singing, "Unto him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, be glory and dominion forever and ever."

December 31

Luke 24:50 to end. The Ascension.

The Lord Jesus had often walked with his disciples to Bethany. This was his last walk to that endeared spot. A last walk with a beloved friend is usually mournful; but though the disciples knew they were soon going to be separated from their Lord, they were not unhappy. Once when they had descended into the valley of Kedron, and crossed the narrow stream, they were much cast down. Then it was Jesus had said to them, "Let not your heart be troubled." On that occasion he stopped at the garden of Gethsemane to pray and suffer there; but now he passed beyond that sorrowful spot, and followed the path on the side of Mount Olivet which leads to the village of Bethany.

Have you ever passed by a place where you once endured great trials, and have you been able to say, as you looked at the spot, "God has been very gracious unto me; I was troubled, and he helped me; I sought him, and he delivered me from all my fears?" What gratitude the soul feels when it remembers the former anguish, and contrasts that anguish with the present joy! But who has ever suffered such pangs as Jesus endured in the garden of Gethsemane, while bearing the burden of our sins!

When he walked towards Bethany for the *last* time all his troubles were over. The Psalms record his thanksgivings to his Father—"Sing unto the Lord, O you saints of his; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness; for his anger endures

but a moment; in his favor is life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." (Ps. 30:4, 5.) Well may he call upon his saints to rejoice *with him*. All he *suffered* was for them. All he has *obtained* is for them. He needed nothing for himself—he had all things from everlasting—but he knew that we had lost all, and that he alone could recover all for us.

His last act on earth was an act of love to his people. "He lifted up his hands, and blessed them." "While he blessed them he was parted from them." It was a cloud that received him and carried him up to heaven. The apostles beheld him as he ascended, and continued to watch until they could see him no more. Two angels clothed in white apparel remained below to comfort them. And how did they comfort? By this promise—"This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so *come* in like manner as you have seen him *go* into heaven." The words of prophets and apostles agree with those of the angel. An apostle of the New Testament has declared, "Behold, he comes with *clouds*." (Rev. 1:7.) A prophet of the Old has said, "His feet shall stand in that day upon Mount Olives." (Zech. 14:4.)

How did the apostles feel now they had lost their Lord? We do not hear one word about their sorrow—we do not read of their shedding one tear; but we are told that after worshiping their ascended Savior, they returned to Jerusalem with *great joy*, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Though still in the midst of their enemies, they *rejoiced*—though deprived of the personal presence of their Lord, they *rejoiced*—though they knew that in the world they should have much tribulation, they *rejoiced*. And why? Because they believed the promises. They knew that Jesus was gone to the Father to make intercession for them, and that he would return again to make them blessed forever.

The apostle Peter in his epistle speaks in a triumphant manner of his Lord's exaltation—"Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels, and authorities, and powers, being made subject unto him." (1 Pet. 3:22.) And the apostle John, in the last page of the Bible, and almost the last verse, has recorded this prayer, "Even so, come Lord Jesus." Do we partake in the joy of these holy apostles? Jesus loves all who love him, whether they be the greatest of his apostles or the weakest of his lambs. "He *ever* lives to make intercession (not for *apostles* only, but) for *all* who come unto God *by* him." He will come again, not to bless *apostles* only, but *all* who have believed in him through their word, and He will say to them all, "Come, you blessed of my Father."

We have now traced the steps of the Son of God from his throne of glory into this dark world, and back again to the same bright throne. We, who have sat together day after day reading and hearing this affecting history, shall one day meet together before his dreadful tribunal. It is probable that circumstances will, sooner or later, part us in this life; we may move to other places, or we may be removed by death; but we shall meet again. It will then be known whether we truly loved this blessed Savior—whether we were washed in his blood, and whether we

were sanctified by his Spirit. It will then be decided whether we shall live with him forever, or be forever banished from his presence. "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near." (Isa. 45:6.)

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