

A Devotional Commentary on the Gospels

Arranged for family devotions,
for every day in the year

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(1802-1878)

JUNE 1

Matthew 18:21 to end. *The parable of the unforgiving servant.*

How odious that servant appears, who after having received such exceeding benefits from his Lord, went out, and acted with such rigor towards his fellow-servant! Yet that unfeeling servant affords but a faint picture of the unforgiving sinner. For what was the obligation that he had received, compared to that under which we lie to God! His Lord had forgiven him a debt of ten thousand talents; but we are not informed, that in order to do this, his Lord had made any painful sacrifice. But before our Lord *could* forgive us, He was constrained by his own holiness to find an atonement for our sins, and that atonement was the blood of his Son. Now if after having received this gift, we should go forth, and willingly retain any unkind feeling against those who have done us wrong, how great would be our guilt!

We should also remember how infinitely greater the debt is that we owe to God, than any debt our fellow-creatures can owe to us. In the parable the disproportion is immense; *two millions* of pounds in the one case, and *three pounds* in the other; (according to the calculations of some;) but there is a still greater disparity between our debt to God, and man's to us.

Consider these *two* circumstances, which most aggravate offences. The *repeating* of them *often*, and after having received great *benefits*. Have not our offences against God these two aggravations in an eminent degree? Who can have provoked *us* so OFTEN as we have provoked God? from our birth until this moment, we have not ceased to sin against him in thought, word, and deed; and yet he is still willing to be reconciled to us. Who can have received such *benefits* from *us*, as we have received from God—not only *temporal* blessings, but the offer of everlasting life, and the gift of his Son!

If we had a more just idea of the nature and extent of our transgressions against him, we should be *ashamed* of thinking of the sins of men against us. Indeed,

perhaps, in *our* quarrels, we may be *most* in fault, and may really owe more than is owed to us; or though we may have been ungratefully treated by *one*, we ourselves may have ungratefully treated some *other* person, so that on the whole *nothing* may be owing to us. How it would quiet the tumult of our passions, if, when disposed to think of the *injuries* we have received from our fellows, we were to turn our attention to the insults we have offered to God!

But perhaps we do not feel that God has *forgiven* these insults. Perhaps we are still troubled by the dread of his anger for our past transgressions. Nothing would soften our hearts so much, as a sense of his forgiving love. Let us pray for this blessed assurance. Then we shall feel the force of the apostle's command, "Forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any—even as Christ forgave you, so also do you."

June 2

Luke 10:1-16. *Christ sends out seventy disciples.*

This charge to the seventy disciples very much resembles the charge to the twelve apostles, that we read some time ago. As it was necessary that the twelve apostles should be generally with their Master, Jesus appointed seventy other people to preach the gospel in various parts of the land.

He sent them to every place where he himself would come. Still he sends his faithful servants before his face. When they appear, we may expect to see their Master coming soon afterwards in the power of the Spirit. But as seventy men were too few to instruct all those who were perishing through ignorance, Jesus commanded them to pray that God would send forth laborers into his harvest. Is there not cause still to offer this prayer? There is too small a number of ministers and missionaries scattered over the world. When the Sabbath dawns, how few rejoice to see its beams!

Before the seventy went forth, Jesus informed them *what to expect* in their journeys. They were to expect sufferings, (v. 3,) "I send you forth as lambs in the midst of wolves." They were to expect their message to be sometimes rejected, (v. 10,) "Into whatever city you enter, and they receive you *not*." Those men who resembled wolves, would ill-treat the lambs of Christ. They were to expect that God would incline some to receive them, and to be kind to them. Were *all* to frown upon them, their spirits would be utterly cast down. But the Lord is too tender a Father to suffer his children to remain without any encouragement. At the needful moment a friendly voice cheers, and a friendly hand sustains.

The Lord Jesus also instructed his disciples *what to do* in their journeys. They were to carry no provision nor clothes with them, but to trust to God's promise to provide for them, (v. 4,) "Carry neither purse, nor bag, nor shoes." Missionaries

who lived after Christ's ascension, thankfully received gifts from their converts before they set out to teach heathen nations. (See John's third epistle, 5, 6.) It is the duty of Christians to provide for the wants of missionaries; but these seventy disciples were placed in *peculiar* circumstances, and received peculiar aid. They were to use haste in delivering their message, and to lose no time in showing useless civilities. "Salute no man by the way." They were to pronounce blessings on everyone who received them, saying, "Peace be unto you." They were to accept the food offered to them; but they were not to seek better fare by going from house to house. They were to confirm the truth of their message by healing the sick. They were to warn their enemies by shaking off the dust from their feet in departing from their city.

The Lord concluded his instructions by denouncing woes upon the favored cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. The traveler can witness how the Lord's predictions have been fulfilled in the temporal destruction of those cities, for their very names have perished. Why did he speak to the seventy concerning the guilt of those cities? To remind them how he himself, the Son of God, had been rejected by the cities in which he most frequently preached, and thus to prepare them for similar treatment. Our proud hearts are ready to rebel when we find that our instructions produce no effect upon the hearts of men. But can we repine at want of success, when we remember how our *Lord* seemed to toil in vain? Yet, there were a *few* who received him; the woman of Tyre, the weeping sinner, and the sorrowful father who cried, "Help my unbelief." How delightful to be permitted to strengthen *one* trembling believer, or to reclaim *one* wretched wanderer!

And this we should remember for our comfort, that if we do not behold the fruit of our own labors, those who come after us will reap the benefit; for the word of the Lord shall not return unto him void.

June 3

John 7:1-13. *The brethren of Christ reproach him.*

Such was the conduct of sinners to the Lord of glory when he was upon earth. His brethren (that is, his relatives) refused to believe in him, and treated him with scorn. They ventured to dictate to *him* who possessed all wisdom, saying, "Depart hence, and go into Judea, that your disciples also may see the works that you do." And they insolently hinted, that if he were really a great prophet, he would not remain in retirement; for they said, "There is no man does anything in secret, and he himself seeks to be known openly." How trying such conduct in relatives must have been! We know that it is easier to bear unkindness from strangers, than from near and dear kindred. But if the Lord suffered in this manner, his people ought to be patient under the same trials.

And how did the *world* feel towards Jesus? How did the rich, the great, the

learned esteem him? They hated him; they hated the express image of the Father; they hated the brightness of his glory. And *why* did they hate so lovely a being? Because he testified that their works were evil. The wicked cannot bear to be reproved. The most amiable behavior cannot secure a faithful Christian from the world's hatred. But is it not an honor to share the reproach of the Son of God?

And what did the *people* think of Jesus? They were divided in their opinions. Some said, "He is a good man." What faint praise to bestow on him, who was *goodness* itself! Was this *all* that *they* would say for him who was the fairest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely? Yes, they were ashamed to say more than "He is a good man;" while others dared to accuse him of deceiving the people. Thus have the servants of God been faintly praised, and falsely accused in all ages. How little worth must popular esteem be, when it is so often given to the worst of men, and withheld from the best!

How bright do the perfections of the Lord shine forth when viewed in contrast with the base qualities of human creatures! The Son of God remained unmoved in the midst of all the conflicting storms of human passions. His eyes were directed to his Father, whose will was his only guide, whose favor was his greatest joy. He met his brethren's insinuations by the calm and dignified reply, "My time is not yet come." He knew the *times* that the Father had appointed for all his actions. The time for him to go forth to meet his enemies, was not yet come. It came at last, and then he set his face as a flint, and boldly said, "I am he." But until that time arrived, he avoided danger. Jesus knew all things that were coming upon him. We, like Paul, must always confess that wherever we go, we know not the things that shall befall us there; but, like him, we may also say, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

The Christian *waits* the Lord's time, while unknown, and *welcomes* it, when known. The holy martyr Bradford languished long in prison, not knowing the day appointed for his execution, but patiently waiting the Lord's time. When he knew it, how joyfully he welcomed it! One afternoon the keeper's wife suddenly came up to him, troubled, and almost breathless, saying, "O Master Bradford, I come to bring you heavy news."—"What is it?" said he. "Tomorrow you must be burned, and your chain is now a buying." The martyr put off his cap, and lifting up his eyes to heaven, said, "I thank God for it. I have looked for the same a long time, and therefore it comes not to me suddenly, but as a thing waited for every day and hour. The Lord make me worthy thereof."

June 4

John 7:14-29. Christ defends himself for healing on the Sabbath day.

In these verses we have a fresh instance of the insulting manner in which Jesus

was treated upon earth.

He was despised for his want of a learned education. "How knows this man letters?" exclaimed the Jews scornfully, "having never learned!" Soon afterwards their insolence increased, and they cried, "You have a devil." This treatment gave Jesus an opportunity of displaying his meekness. Every circumstance that befalls us affords the *opportunity* of cultivating some grace. Disappointment affords the opportunity of exercising resignation; enjoyment of showing gratitude; when we are praised, then is the time for humility; when we are insulted, then is the time for meekness; every temptation to sin furnishes an occasion of manifesting faithfulness to God.

Jesus showed not only great *meekness*, but also great *wisdom*, in his dealings with perverse sinners. He knew what accusation they had against him, namely, that on the *Sabbath-day* he had healed the impotent man who lay by the pool. With wonderful skill he unveiled their inconsistency in accusing him of breaking the Sabbath by performing a work of *mercy*; for he said that even they themselves performed the ceremonies of Moses' law on the Sabbath-day. How easy it is for Jesus to show men the deceitfulness of their pretenses! At the last day those who profess to have the *best* motives for doing the *worst* things, will be confounded and speechless in the presence of their Judge.

What ignorance those people betrayed who said that Jesus could not be the promised Christ, because they knew whence he was. They *imagined* they knew whence he was; but they were mistaken; they did not know he came from God. So Jesus answered them by a *question*; for the words in verse 28 should be regarded as a question, "Do you both know me and do you know whence I am?" By this he meant to say, "You *think* you know whence I am, but you do *not* know."

Then Jesus added these words respecting his Father, "I know him!" How happy are they who can truly say of the Father, "I know him;" for the world does not know him, and no man *can* know him, except Jesus reveal Himself to his soul. But the meek and lowly Savior is willing to teach all those who desire to know his Father. He came into the world "to bring us to God."

Do we desire to know God? Is this our *chief* desire? It may *appear* that we can pass away our time, and enjoy ourselves without knowing God; but what should we do at the last day if God should say, "I never *knew* you, O you that work iniquity!"

June 5

John 7:30-36. Christ speaks of going where his enemies could not come.

The discourse our Savior publicly delivered in the temple, offended his enemies so much, that they sent men to take him. These men found him preaching. Jesus knew for what purpose they were come, and he uttered a dreadful warning in their presence, telling them that he should be with them only a little while, and that then they should seek him, and should not find him, adding, "Where I am, there you cannot come." The Jews experienced the truth of these words when the city of Jerusalem was taken, and they looked in vain for the promised Messiah to deliver them—but found no deliverer.

It will also be fulfilled in the experience of *every* unbeliever, unless he repent. A time will come to all the ungodly, who die impenitent, when they will seek Christ and not find him, and when they will desire in vain to reach the place where he is. Such a day came to the rich man, when he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and saw Lazarus *afar off*, and heard that there was a great gulf between them, which none could pass. How dreadful it will be to see Christ *afar off*, and to find the compassionate Savior deaf to our entreaties! Such a day is spoken of in Prov. 1, "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me, for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord."

But Christ's enemies did not even understand the warning He had given. They only expressed to each other their wonder, "Can he be going to teach the dispersed Jews who live in Gentile countries," or can he be going to teach the Gentiles themselves?

They thought it a thing impossible that Gentiles should be taught; they imagined that they were unworthy of the least notice from God, and that they would be left to perish in heathen ignorance. But God thought not so; *his* thoughts were not as their thoughts; even *then* he had purposes of mercy towards *our* savage forefathers. He saw them wandering with painted skins among their forests of oak, and offering up their children to horrible idols. He saw them, He pitied, and He sent (if not an *apostle*) the *convert* of an apostle, to proclaim in their untutored ears his glorious gospel. Our fathers sought him, and they found him, and many of them are now with God. Where they are, and where Jesus is, we desire to come.

Jesus has not *yet* said to us, "Where I am there you cannot come." Shall he ever say it? He never will, if it is our heart's warm desire to be where he is. Has he not said, "Where I am, there shall my servant be?"

This was the sweet verse that an aged minister often repeated in his dying hours—

And when I'm to die,
"Receive me," I'll cry;
For Jesus has loved me,

I cannot tell *why*;
But this I can find,
We two are so joined,
He'll not be in glory
And leave me behind.

June 6

John 7:37-39. *Christ invites the thirsty to come to him.*

The Savior delights more in promises than in threatenings. In the presence of his enemies he often uttered most sweet and encouraging invitations.

On the last day of the feast of tabernacles, (even on the eighth,) it was the custom to pour large quantities of water upon the ground, as a type of God's promise of pouring the Spirit upon man in the latter days. It seems probable that it was in the midst of this ceremony, that Jesus stood and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." And what is the meaning of this invitation? Coming to Christ is believing in Christ; "drinking" is receiving the Holy Spirit into the heart.

Since Jesus uttered these gracious words, the Holy Spirit has been given in large measure; for when he was glorified and seated at his Father's right hand, he sent down the Holy Spirit. Until He had presented an atonement for sin, this great gift could not be bestowed upon guilty man. Those, indeed, who believed in Christ from the *beginning*, received a *measure* of the Spirit; but not so *abundant* a measure as those who have believed in him *since* he was offered up.

This is the substance of the preaching of every faithful minister, "If any man thirst, let him go to Jesus and drink." The whole world is suffering the torments of parching thirst. It is evident that they feel uneasy by their anxiety to obtain wealth, pleasure, and honors; but they know not the only fountain that can quench their thirst. They little imagine that the Holy Spirit would make them more happy than all the enjoyments earth can afford.

Not only would they be happy *themselves*, but they would obtain the power of making others happy. For out of them should flow rivers of living water to quench the thirst of their fellow-creatures. It is an inexpressible delight to make the wretched happy. None but true believers can do this. Kind-hearted, worldly people often try to make their friends and neighbors happy, but they never can succeed. The Christian has discovered the secret by which he can assuage human grief, and quiet the restless heart. None can conceive what will be the delight of God's faithful servants when they look around in the abodes of bliss, and behold those who once thirsted upon earth, but who now thirst no more, and when they remember that it was their privilege to persuade them *first* to taste of

the fountain of living waters. But happiness will be as nothing compared to the joy of the Son of God. This joy cheered his heart when he endured the cross. He knew that millions of souls would be made blessed forever through his blood. It is a pleasure to remember having saved the life of a fellow-creature. Have you ever seen a young person's eyes sparkle with delight at the thought of having extinguished the flames that were raging around her companion? Or have you heard an old man relate how in former days he snatched a poor child out of the water? The satisfaction that they showed may remind us of the infinite joy the Lord of glory will feel when he looks around upon the souls that he has blessed forever. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." (Is. 53:11.)

June 7

John 7:40 to end. *The enemies of Christ dispute concerning him.*

We here read of the effect of the discourse Jesus delivered in the presence of the officers that came to take him. Many people were there, and they expressed different opinions concerning him. Some thought he was *the prophet*, or the messenger that was to be sent before Christ, to prepare his way. (Mal. 3:1.) These people did not know that John the Baptist was *that* prophet. Others thought that Jesus was *the Messiah*. There was another party that made objections to this belief. They imagined that Jesus had been *born* in Galilee, though he had only been *brought up* there; and they did not know that he was of the family of David. They remembered that the Scriptures had prophesied that the Messiah should be born in Bethlehem, of the family of David; therefore they thought that Jesus could not be the true Messiah. But had they made diligent inquiries, they would have found that the reports concerning him were false, and that he had been born in Bethlehem, and was of the family of David. These people were much to blame for their negligence. How many people are now in error, because they have not made diligent inquiries! They believe the reports they hear against the ministers of Christ—they believe the objections that infidels make against the Bible, and they never examine into the truth of these reports and objections. They do not consider the importance of the subject, or they would not be able to rest until they had discovered the truth.

We find that the officers returned to their masters without having taken Jesus. The reason they gave for their conduct was, "Never man spoke like this man." They had been awed by the power of his words. When God pleases, he can make the words of his servants strike awe into their enemies, so that they dare not lift up their hands against them. Scoffers have sometimes entered into the assemblies of God's people with an intention to hurt them, and have been constrained to give up their designs. A daring sinner once prepared a weapon with which he intended to murder a holy man who came to seek the lost among the haunts of vice. He heard him read Isaiah 54. Struck by the words, "No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper," he renounced his purpose, and

even confessed his guilt.

In the conclusion of the chapter, we find an instance of the power of divine grace. Nicodemus, who was once so timid as to go to Jesus by night for fear of the Jews, was grown so bold as to acknowledge him openly in the midst of the council. He was himself one of that council, called the Sanhedrin, composed of seventy chief people among the Jews. There have always been *some* among the honorable of the earth who have done homage to the Lord of glory. Such people are exposed to sharper trials than those in humbler stations, and they require a very large measure of grace to enable them to remain firm amid the derision of their equals in power and grandeur. But God is with them when they stand up in the midst of their enemies, and he will defend his defamed servants. What would a Father feel who should overhear one of his children pleading his cause with rebellious brothers! Does not our God listen with delight to all who take his part when men rise up against him?

June 8

John 8:1-11. *Christ refuses to condemn a sinful woman.*

How much wisdom the Lord Jesus showed in the manner in which he withstood the artful designs of the Jews! The Pharisees had in vain endeavored to seize him by *force*—and now they sought to entrap him by *fraud*. Nicodemus, in the council, had inquired, "Does our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he does?" The Pharisees seem to have taken these words as a hint to find some accusation against the Lord. They thought that by bringing this woman before him they placed him in a difficulty from which he could not escape; because, if he *condemned* her, they might accuse him to the Romans of interfering in the government, and if he *acquitted* her, they might say he contradicted the law of Moses, by which she was sentenced to die.

But how completely all their expectations were confounded! They desired to hear the Lord pass sentence against the *woman*, but they were compelled to hear him pass sentence on *themselves*. For when he replied, "He who is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone;" the conscience of each accuser was troubled, and one by one the whole band of enemies retreated ashamed from his presence!

Conscience may slumber long, but it often suddenly awakes. God can arouse it when he pleases. Sometimes in this life, it stings a sinner and forces him to confess his iniquities. But its power will be better known at the day of judgment, when all the wicked will be made to feel the justice of their own condemnation.

While the guilty Jews were escaping from the temple, the Lord was stooping down to write upon the ground. It appears that he had not looked up to observe

their confusion. But after they were gone, he lifted himself up to speak to the sinful woman. There she was standing in the midst! How dreadful was her situation at that moment! She was in the presence of one who might have condemned her to everlasting destruction. Instead of condemning, he began to converse with her, "Woman, where are those your accusers? Has no man condemned you?" Her answer was full of reverence and awe. "No man, Lord." With what feelings must she have awaited the Lord's next words! They were full of mercy, and also of holiness—"Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more."

Jesus did not come into the world to act as an earthly judge; but hereafter he will condemn the wicked, as well as save the righteous. This woman will stand before him at the day of judgment; she will then hear either that she is pardoned or condemned. We know nothing of her history after this interview. Was her heart drawn to the Lord by his merciful treatment, or did she go from his presence to plunge into new crimes? It is a dreadful thing to abuse mercy. Can we remember any period in our lives when we seemed to be on the point of receiving the punishment due to our sins, and when the Lord, instead of dealing with us as we deserved, spared us? Ought not such forbearance to win our love? There was a dying girl who first learned to love the Savior from reading the account of his treatment of this sinful woman. Though she had never committed open transgressions, she knew she was a sinner, and needed pardon. When she read this history, she felt that Jesus was infinitely gracious, and she believed that he would not cast *her* out.

June 9

John 8:12-20. Christ declares that the Father is his witness.

We behold our blessed Savior again surrounded by those enemies who had so lately retreated *ashamed* from his presence. The *officers* had refused to take him, after hearing him invite the thirsty to come and drink. But the *Pharisees* persisted in their wicked designs, though they heard him say, "I am the light of the world—he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Instead of following the light, they accused him of speaking falsehood, and insolently said, "You bear record of yourself—your record is not *true*." They referred to words Jesus had once uttered, "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true," (John 5:31,) but by this he meant, "If I *only* bear witness of myself, and have no *other* witness, *then* my record is not true." But He had another witness, even the Father, who had declared by a voice from heaven that Jesus was his beloved Son, and who had enabled him to do astonishing miracles.

The Pharisees scornfully inquired, "Where is your Father?" How different from the request which an apostle afterwards made, "Show us the Father, and it suffices us!" These unbelieving Jews did not desire to know the Father; yet they

thought they knew him already. Jesus told them plainly, "You neither know me, nor my Father." Would He say this to any of us, if He were now to speak to us? No reasonable creature can be happy, who does not know his Creator.

If we were not sinful creatures, the first desire of our hearts would be to know God. A child desires to see his parent. If a mother were to tell her little son that his father, who had long been absent in a distant country, would soon return, would not the child be glad? But if the child were willful and wayward, and had heard that his father would restrain him from fulfilling his sinful inclinations, in that case he would not desire to see him return. Men have heard that God hates evil, and therefore they do not desire to know Him.

If they were not sinful, they would learn to know him from the works of *creation*. It is written, "That which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has showed it unto them." (Rom. 1:19.) How has he showed it unto them? "By the things that are made." By the earth, and sea, the sun, moon, and stars; by the animals from the enormous whale that agitates the ocean, down to the tiny insect that floats in the breeze. But men did *not* gain the knowledge of God by the works of creation. "They glorified him not as God." The works of *Providence* are even greater than those of creation. It is of those works that David speaks in the Psalms, when he says, "How great are your works!" (Ps. 92:5.) If men were not sinful, they would learn to know God from the works of Providence. Paul said to the Athenians, God "has made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him." (Acts 17:26, 27.) But did men feel after him? No—they wandered farther and farther from him.

But in the fullness of time God sent forth his Son.

And why did He send Him? That He might teach us to know God. And all who believe in Jesus Christ know the Father. They know Him to be the God of holiness, and yet of mercy; so holy, that he will not clear the guilty; and yet so merciful, that he will pardon the vilest sinner who trusts in the blood of his Son. But they never could have known Him, if Jesus had not come in the likeness of sinful flesh, and died upon the cross for their sins.

Do we know God? Do we *desire* to know him? How dreadful it would be to hear the Lord Jesus at the judgment-day declare, "If you had known me, you should have known my Father also." No one will be able to reply, "I desired to know God, but could not find him." O no, all who seek to know Him, shall find Him.

June 10

John 8:21-27. Christ warns his enemies against dying in their sins.

The Lord Jesus plainly told his *disciples* in their retired conversations, that he should be crucified; but he did not speak so plainly to his *enemies*—he only gave them hints concerning his approaching death. When he said, "I go my way," they understood him not. At last they formed a conjecture concerning his meaning, and said, "Will he kill himself?" They did not venture to put the question to the Lord himself, but consulted with each other on the subject. He knew their thoughts, and by his reply showed that he had alluded to his death. He would not indeed kill *himself*. Those who with wicked *tongues* now insulted him, with wicked *hands* would slay him. He would die upon the cross, but far worse would be the manner of *their* death—they would die—perhaps, in a bed, surrounded by weeping friends, but—in *their sins*.

When the Lord said to his enemies, "You are from beneath," he did not mean to say that they had ever lived with Satan in hell; but he meant that they partook of the nature of Satan, and were like him in pride, and hatred, and unbelief. All the inhabitants of this world are divided into two classes—of one it may be said, they are from *beneath*; of the other it may be declared, they are from *above*, having been born again by the Holy Spirit. An old writer observes, that though the children of different families are mingled in the day, when night comes on they return home to their fathers' houses. When the night of death comes, the children of Satan will go to their father's dark and horrible abode, and the children of God will go to their Father's light and glorious abode. And where shall we go? Remember the words of Jesus, "If you believe not that I am he, you shall die in your sins."

There is only one way of becoming the child of God—it is by believing in Jesus. The Jews scornfully inquired, "Who are you?" Let us *humbly* ask the same question. Let us say as Saul did when Jesus spoke to him from heaven, "Who are you, Lord?" He will reveal himself to all who desire to know him. He left his Father's house to seek us who were wandering about this world. He desires to bring us to his home. There is room for us, as well as for Him, in the palace of the great King. He said to his beloved apostles, "In my Father's house are many mansions." When night comes on it will be delightful to go to such a home. But what would it be to feel in dying that we were not going to God! A woman who had lived a careless life, expressed no fears on her dying bed, until the last day and night of her life arrived. Then she was heard to cry out repeatedly, "I am going, I am going—but *not* to God."

June 11

John 8:28-42. He instructs the new believers.

We have followed the Savior through scenes of contempt and insult; but at length we hear, that while he rebuked his enemies, many *believed* on him. The Lord did

not overlook these new believers. As the mother bestows unceasing care, and peculiar tenderness on her infant, especially when so weakly that its life seems doubtful; so the Savior turned towards those who had just embraced the truth, and addressed to them words of counsel and encouragement. Are there any of us who need such instruction? Let us consider the counsels of the all-wise Savior to his weak followers.

"If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." *Continuance* is the difficulty. To believe for a little while will not save the soul. There are many stony-ground hearers, who receive the word with joy. There are many thorny-ground hearers, who bring forth fruit, but not to perfection. These do not *continue* in the word.

What blessings are promised to those who, in spite of enemies, and temptations, and afflictions, *continue* in the word! Christ said to them, "The truth shall make you free." Are we not free by nature? Men think they are free—that they can *do* what they will, and *be* what they please. But they are deceived. The Jews misunderstood the nature of the freedom of which Jesus spoke—they thought that he spoke of national freedom. But they did not even possess *that* freedom; for though they *said*, "We were never in bondage to any man," the assertion was not true—at that very time they were in bondage to the Romans, and paid taxes to the Roman emperor.

But it was not of *national* freedom that Jesus spoke; he meant the freedom of the *spirit*. All sinners are slaves. "Whoever commits sin is the servant (or slave) of sin." Satan has power over the spirits of sinners. He stirs up the evil passions of their hearts, and urges them to commit sinful actions. God *restrains* him in the exercise of his power; but He has not yet *deprived* him of it. How then can sinners be made free? By believing in the Son of God. Then their chains fall off, their cruel master flees, and their gracious deliverer adopts them into his family.

A little parable seems to be contained in our Lord's discourse. In one large house there dwell together a numerous family. God is the master of this house, and knows the character of each member. This house contains all those who profess to believe in Christ. But some of its inhabitants are really the slaves of Satan, while some are the children of God. Shall Satan's slaves *always* remain in the house? No! they shall be cast out. But the children of God shall *never* quit their father's roof. "The servant abides not in the house forever; but the son abides ever." And when the servants of Satan are cast out, then the children of God shall ascend to the upper room, where their Father unveils his glorious countenance, and invites his elder sons and daughters to partake of the heavenly feast.

June 12

John 8:43-50. Christ accuses his enemies of being the children of Satan.

It may well excite dismay in the bosom of a human creature to hear these words; "You are of your father the devil." A faithful minister once preached from these words in a village church, to a numerous congregation of very poor people. Great was the consternation with which some of them heard, for the first time, that those who lived in sin were the children of the devil. Poor neighbors met one another, and lamented with tears over the dreadful truth. Nor did they lament or weep in vain; for some who were then the children of wrath, became by faith the children of God. One of these blessed converts, in extreme old age, would often lift up her withered hands, and thank God for having shown her the danger she was in.

And what are the marks by which the children of Satan may be known? The marks are the features of their father. He was a murderer and a liar from the beginning—even from that dreadful and mysterious hour when he departed from the truth; for he was created in the truth. God, who created all things, can create nothing evil; therefore Satan and all the wicked angels were originally good. *How* evil sprang up in them, no human creature knows; it is a deep mystery, not revealed to us. It is sufficient for us to know that Satan was good—that he became evil, and will continue so forever. After his fall, he was a murderer, and sought to murder the souls of Adam and Eve, by tempting them to sin, and to murder *in them* the whole human race—for in Adam all die. So dreadful a crime was never again perpetrated upon earth, until—Satan's own children, at the instigation of their father, murdered the Son of God, who came down from heaven to save sinners.

Satan is not a *murderer* only; he is also a *liar*. He commits his murders by *means* of lies—he used a lie to murder Eve, when he said, "You shall not surely die." And still he murders by lies; for he tempts men by *deceiving* them. He persuades them that sin will make them happy, and that it is not dangerous. Above all, he speaks lies of God. He endeavored to set Adam and Eve against their best Friend, by slanders; for he said that God had forbidden them to eat of the fruit of the tree, because He feared they should become wise.

Satan still speaks lies of God, representing him as a God whose service is bondage, whose promises are unfaithful, and whose threatenings are uncertain. Thus men are induced to keep at a distance from God. As long as men believe Satan's lies, they cannot hear God's words, or understand the Bible. But Jesus came to undeceive us, and to defend his Father's character. Why will not men *believe* his report? Shall we still be deceived by the lies of Satan, when Jesus tells us the truth! Satan has deceived *all* who have trusted in him; the Son of God has never deceived one. Who ever heard of a dying believer exclaiming, "I have been deceived—I trusted in the Savior, and I have found his promises vain?" No true believer, however afflicted, has spoken thus. All dying Christians have said by their *looks*, and many by their *words*, "He is a faithful God."

June 13

John 8:51 to end. *Christ speaks of Abraham.*

One of the most precious promises ever made, was received with the most insulting contempt. The Lord declared, "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." The Jews replied, "Now we know you have a devil." If they had not been themselves the children of Satan, they would not have uttered such language. They did not choose to understand the meaning of the promise. They said, "The prophets are dead." But to what did our Lord refer when he said, "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death?" He did not speak of the separation of soul and body. That is not death to the righteous, for the soul rests with God, while the body sleeps in the grave. He spoke of another death, called the second death. It is the separation of soul and body *from God* forever and ever. That is death. None shall taste it who keep Christ's saying. What saying? His saying concerning himself, that He is the Son of God and the Savior of men. For on another occasion he declared, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever *believes in him* should not perish, but should have *everlasting life.*"

When the Jews insolently inquired, "Whom make you yourself?" the Lord did not choose to tell them plainly who *He* was; but he told them who *they* were NOT. They professed to be the children of God. But Jesus told them that because they said "He is our God," they were "*liars.*" How dreadful is the situation of that man who cannot say, "My God," without uttering a falsehood! We pity the child who cannot say to any living person, "*My father,*" or "*My mother;*" but how much more ought we to pity the soul who cannot look up to heaven and say, "My God!"

What a testimony Jesus bore to his faithful servant Abraham! He said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad." The great joy of Abraham's life was not his beloved Isaac, but his more beloved Savior. It was that promised Son who was the chief object of his faith. When God said, "In your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed," then he looked forward to the coming of the Savior of the world. Then "he believed God, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness." Even *Abraham* was saved, not by his *own* righteousness, but by the righteousness of *another*. Like us, he was by *nature* a child of wrath, and it was by *grace* he became the friend of God, and the father of believers.

The Jews continued to distort the words of Jesus. Because he said, that Abraham had seen his day, they said, "Have you seen Abraham?" who had lived two thousand years before. And what was the Savior's reply? He did not say, "I have seen Abraham;" he said much *more* than that. He did not say, "Before Abraham I *was.*" He said more than that. "Before Abraham was, I *am.*" The

expression "I *am*," gives the idea of an existence that had no beginning, and will have no end. Such is God—the first and the last. No human understanding can grasp the idea of existence without beginning and without ending. But let us rejoice in the thought that before we were God existed. He ever lived. No plans could be formed against us, *before* He had arranged everything concerning us! "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." (Acts 15:18.)

June 14

Luke 10:17-20. *The return of the seventy disciples.*

In the first verse of this chapter it is recorded that the Lord sent out seventy disciples to preach. Now we hear of their return.

While they had been visiting the towns and villages, their Lord had been engaged in teaching at Jerusalem. We have heard to what trials he was exposed in that wicked city from the scoffs of his enemies. How great must have been the relief to his sorrowful spirit, when he found himself again in the midst of his attached followers! The messengers returned with *joy*. They rejoiced because the devils had been subject unto them through Christ's name. The Savior seems to have partaken of their joy when he uttered these mysterious words—"I beheld Satan like lightning fall from heaven." Could any sight be more suited to occasion joy to Satan's great enemy and conqueror? When a cruel tyrant is slain, the captives in his dungeons are set free. An interesting account has been written of the destruction of the Inquisition at Madrid in 1809. The wicked men who ruled over that dreadful prison were slaughtered by the French soldiers. At the same time the dungeons were visited, and were found full of miserable captives. Those who had been for many years pining under the fear of death, were suddenly restored to the light of day, and to all the enjoyments of life. Great was the joy felt by the soldiers who wrought this great deliverance!

But who can conceive the joy that our Savior felt when he looked forward to the consequences of Satan's downfall! Already the people of God are delivered from his power. The day shall come when the old serpent will deceive the nations no more. At the end of the world he will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, and "shall be tormented day and night forever." (Rev. 20:10.) This deliverance Jesus obtained for us by his own death.

Christ gave his disciples power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy. Did He mean *literal* serpents or *spiritual* serpents? Did He not mean *both*? The disciples were shielded from the attacks of all venomous creatures. In our Lord's parting charge he said to them—"These signs shall follow them that believe—they shall take up serpents." (Mark 16:18.) In the same charge he said also, "In my name they shall cast out devils." Christ must have alluded to Satan and his angels when he spoke of "all the power of the enemy."

Well might the disciples rejoice in the wonderful gifts they possessed. Yet they had a greater cause for joy. Their names were written in heaven. The Lamb has a book of life, in which he has written the names of all who shall never taste the second death. It contains not only the names of the *apostles*, but of *all* who love Jesus. As a father writes down in his great Family Bible the names of all his children, so God writes down in the book of his remembrance the names of all *His* children. A father may some day have to read, with a sigh and with a tear, the list of his family; but Jesus shall never lose one of the members of *His* family; *they* shall live forever who are written in the book of life. Is it our chief desire to have our names written there? If this be our *supreme* desire, we must be saved. Those who perish, perish because they *will* not come and ask for life.

O that this dreadful sentence might awaken those who are now unconcerned about their precious souls! "Whoever was not found written in the book of life, was cast into the lake of fire." (Rev. 20:15.)

June 15

Luke 10:21-24. *The Savior's joy.*

A man's character is shown by the causes of his grief and of his joy! We might learn to know ourselves better than we do, if each would inquire, "What are the things that please, and grieve me most?" We shall find that we are by nature selfish—that we are too much concerned about the events that befall *ourselves*, and too little about those that befall our fellow-creatures. Above all, we are naturally indifferent to the glory of God. None, except those who are converted, care in the least degree whether God is honored or despised.

The object that lay nearest the Savior's heart was the glory of his Father. He rejoiced in spirit, because his Father had revealed to babes the things concerning Himself, for by this means the glory of God is increased. If the wise and learned alone were saved, it would seem as if they had saved themselves by their own wisdom and learning; but when it is babes chiefly who are saved, then it is clear that God saved them by *His* great power. Those are compared to babes whom the world esteems foolish and ignorant. Most of the disciples were chosen from among such people. The world called Peter and John *unlearned*. (Acts 4:13.) The apostle Paul was *not* unlearned; but he did not trust to his own wisdom, but came like a babe to learn of Jesus. None can explain the *manner* in which God teaches the soul. We do know the *subject* of his teaching—it is Himself. We are by nature unacquainted with God. To know Him is the great object of life. To die without knowing Him is to perish. The Savior, in his prayer just before he was crucified, said to his Father, "This is eternal life, to *know* you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

No man comes to Jesus until he has heard and learned of the Father. Then he goes as a penitent sinner to the Savior. How does Jesus receive him? He has declared, "Him that comes unto me I will in nowise cast out." He teaches the sinner to know the Father; He shows him the Father's love in sending his Son to be the Savior of the world; he shows it to the *heart*, as well as to the *understanding*. It is with the *heart* we know our friends; it is with the heart we must know God. How different is the feeling that we have when we have become intimate with a person, from that which we experience when we have only heard him described, and have not known him *ourselves!*

We may hear a great deal about God, but until we listen to his voice speaking to our hearts we cannot know Him. It is sweet to hear him say, "Seek my face," but sweeter still to hear him declare, "You are mine." Then the heart, moved by the Spirit, answers as David did, "Lord, your face will I seek," and "You are my God."

Jesus has observed every desire that has ever entered into the heart of his creatures, and he remembers those of his servants of old. The ancient prophets desired to know him; there were even kings who esteemed the knowledge of God far above their earthly treasures. Such were the feelings of the great Melchisedek, and of the victorious David. But while they were on earth they never knew as much of God as the apostles did while they lived; nor did they ever hear as much as *we* have heard. Is it our desire to know Him better than we do? He observes the desires of *our* hearts—and he would be pleased to see in us the same feeling that Moses had, when he said, "I beseech you, show me your glory."

June 16

Luke 10:25-37. *The good Samaritan.*

This lawyer, who came to Jesus, was a man whose office it was to study the law of God, and to explain it to others. It was therefore to be supposed that he understood it well himself. And he *did* understand the *letter* of it, but *not* the *spirit*. He knew the words of the law, but he was ignorant of their spiritual application.

He came with the wicked intention of ensnaring Jesus, by asking him questions that should lead him to give some answer contrary to what Moses had written. But how completely was he foiled in his design! Instead of *answering* his question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" the Lord asked him another question, "How read you?" thus showing that he approved what was written by Moses.

The lawyer gave a correct answer. He said that the duty of man consisted in the love of God and the love of his neighbor. But what is this love? It far surpasses man's ideas. Let the angels tell us from their high abodes in glory, what it is to

love God. It is to delight in him perpetually, to show forth his praise, and to do his will without weariness and without fault. What is the love of the neighbor? Jesus explained it in the beautiful history of the good Samaritan. *On whom* had the Samaritan mercy? On a Jew—a man of a nation whom he had been brought up to detest. Neither did he act from a sense of *duty* alone; he had *compassion* on the poor traveler—he paid him *immediate* attention—he treated him with *tenderness*, binding up his wounds—he *expended* his property upon him, "pouring in oil and wine," he incurred *fatigue*, and perhaps loss of rest, for he took care of him at night. He made provision for his *future* comfort, by leaving twopence (or two days' wages of a laborer) with the innkeeper, and promised to pay whatever greater sum might be spent, putting no limits on the amount, though he could not know how long the sufferer might languish. And all this he did for a *stranger!* What must that man be to his friend and his brother, who treats a stranger with such generous kindness!

But if we are inclined to think the Samaritan overstepped his duty, let us remember the words of Jesus, "Go you and do likewise." And when we have done it, we shall still be unprofitable servants, and have only done what it was our duty to do. Remember, remember what HE did for us, who gives the command. The Samaritan showed mercy to a *stranger*, but he showed mercy to his *enemies*. And what mercy! He bore the wrath and curse of God to save us from destruction. None of us *could* bear what he did. But if we have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us, we shall walk in his steps.

There are at this moment in South Africa, two Moravian missionaries, who have gone to spend their days in a hospital for lepers among pitiable objects, whose hands and feet are falling off. No one who ever enters that hospital is permitted to leave it. The missionaries saw the door close upon them, and felt content to be banished from human society for the sake of the poor sufferers within.

Let us not be satisfied with admiring the devoted conduct of these men; but let us seek for objects on whom to show mercy. Do we know of none to whom we can be kind? Is there no fatherless child who needs our help? No widow, no stranger, no sufferer, whom we could comfort? Perhaps today we may meet with one that we never heard of before. May God put into our hearts the love that dwells in his own, that we may act kindly to every afflicted person we see this day.

June 17

Luke 10:28 to end. *Martha and Mary.*

When a monarch enters into the house of one of his subjects, his looks are observed in order to discover what objects pleased him, his words are treasured up, his minutest actions are noticed and remembered. If the Son of God were to enter into the family of a true believer, with what anxiety would his looks, his

words, his actions, be watched! Every sincere disciple would seek with trembling eagerness to ascertain whether the Lord approved his conduct.

And did not those who loved Jesus when he was on earth, experience these feelings? When they saw him approach their dwellings, they must have longed to obtain his company, and when he was seated beneath their roofs, they must have used their utmost endeavors to do him honor. The Lord's visits were, no doubt, hailed with delight by the beloved family of Bethany. Both Martha and Mary desired to please their heavenly guest, but they acted in a very different manner. Martha was so little acquainted with his mind, that she endeavored to provide a sumptuous entertainment; while Mary sat at his feet and heard his word. In the east it is the custom to sit upon the ground or on low couches; therefore there was nothing unusual in Mary's posture. While one sister was listening with devout attention to the words of Jesus, the other was offended because she was left alone to prepare the feast. So confident did she feel of the acceptableness of her services, that she believed the Lord would reprove her sister for not helping her. She said to the Lord, "Do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?" If she had been of a more loving spirit, she would have gladly served alone, that her sister at least might enjoy the Savior's instructions.

How many Christians fall into Martha's error! They imagine that much pomp and parade and splendor in religious worship are honorable to God, and they expend strength, and time, and money, in promoting these objects, while they lose many precious opportunities of growing in the knowledge of Christ—and, not content with acting in this manner *themselves*, they often blame those who devote their chief attention to the word of God.

How beautiful an example does Mary afford to those who are unjustly accused by their fellow-Christians! She remained silent, and left it to her Lord to answer for her.

Perhaps Martha was surprised at receiving reproof instead of commendation. The sister she blamed was praised, and the conduct she thought so admirable was censured. The Lord will pronounce many sentences at the last day that will surprise even his sincere followers. Though Martha was careful, and troubled about many things, we know that she was a real believer, but she had not so enlightened a mind or so devoted a heart as her meek and lowly sister.

Mary cared as much as Martha for the comfort and honor of her Lord. On another occasion she showed her love by expending her choicest treasures upon his precious body, for she poured the ointment on his head just before his death and burial. But she knew that the day-spring from on high had visited us, "to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death," and she opened her heart to receive those living beams.

Do we desire to enjoy the light of life? Let us get alone with Jesus, and speak to him in prayer, and hear what he will say to us in his word.

June 18

Luke 11:1-13. *Christ encourages his disciples to pray.*

How blessed must have been those seasons in which the Savior engaged in prayer with his beloved disciples! Once we find him praying with them on the mount of transfiguration—at another time in the garden of Gethsemane. On this occasion the name of the place is not recorded. Surely *that was hallowed* ground, where the Son of God offered up on the spotless altar of his heart the pure incense of prayer and praise.

After hearing his prayers, the disciples felt conscious of their own inability to pray. They were, like us, compassed with infirmities, and knew not what to pray for as they ought. In the spirit of little children they said to their Master, "Teach us to pray." This petition was pleasing to their Lord—it was immediately granted. The prayer he now taught them he had uttered in their presence when he delivered his sermon on the mount; but the disciples needed *repeated* instructions. It is a prayer for all that can make a human soul happy; no, *more*—it is a prayer for all that can make the *universe* happy.

The first three petitions may be called *prayers for God*, as it is written in the Psalms—"Prayer also shall be made *for him* continually." (Psalm 72:15.) The happiness of the universe depends upon God being established upon his throne. All creation would be filled with joy, if the name of the great and holy God were hallowed; if his kingdom were come; if his will were done; as it is written—"Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills be joyful together before the Lord, for He comes to judge the earth." Were any *other* being raised to this exalted state, he would neither be happy himself, nor would he make his fellow-creatures happy. No being but God is fit to be adored, to reign over all worlds, and to do what He will. Satan once aspired to sit in the seat of God—and what was the consequence? He became eternally wretched, and he plunged a host of his angelic companions in the same misery.

There are some petitions in this prayer suitable for *fallen* man alone, in all his weakness and his woe. We are made of clay, and we need *bread*; therefore we say, "Give us our daily bread." We have sinned, and we need *pardon*; therefore we say, "Forgive us our trespasses." We are liable to be conquered by sin and Satan, and we need *deliverance* from their power, and we cry, "Deliver us from evil."

If our hearts are in tune with this prayer, they are right in the sight of God. The unconverted *never* feel desirous for the things mentioned in this prayer, *except*

for their daily bread. And are they *satisfied* with daily bread? O no! they are not content with *necessary* things, with food, clothing, and a shelter from the storm; they entertain a thousand exorbitant wishes; they desire pleasure, or praise, or wealth, or some other worldly gift which God has not promised to bestow. Instead of cherishing these unreasonable wishes, the Christian longs for the pardon of his sins, and for his deliverance from the evil one. Will these desires be granted? Will an *ungracious* friend arise to grant a request that is urged in an earnest manner? And shall a *gracious* God refuse to hear fervent prayer? Will a *sinful* father give bread, and *not* a stone to a hungry child; a fish, and *not* a serpent; an egg, and *not* a scorpion? And shall our Holy Father give *hell* to those who ask for *heaven*? Since the beginning of the world He has never treated one of his children in this manner, and He never will.

June 19

Luke 9:37-44. *Christ exposes the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees.*

We never hear of the Savior refusing to visit those who besought his company. Yet no scene could have been more trying to his feelings than a Pharisee's house. The society of publicans and sinners was less revolting to Him than that of proud self-righteous Pharisees.

One of his first actions gave offence to his host. Knowing that the Pharisees imagined that washing their hands before dinner rendered them holy, He purposely neglected to observe this custom. The ruling desire of the Pharisees was the *praise of men*. No person can desire *earnestly* both the praise of men and the praise of God; for no man can serve *two* masters. Just in proportion as we seek honor from *men*, we shall be indifferent to honor from *God*. The reward the Pharisees sought was, a high place in the world's esteem. They loved the uppermost seats in the synagogue; (for the most learned and respected among the Jews were permitted to read the law on the Sabbath-days in their sacred assemblies.) When they entered the marketplace, the Pharisees were gratified at receiving tokens of veneration from the multitude; they were constantly seeking the gratification of their pride; and whether in the house of God, or in the public throng, they were thirsting for human honor.

What were the means they pursued in order to obtain it? They diligently observed all the forms of religion—they fasted and made long prayers, and even insisted on giving a tenth of the *smallest* herbs to the priests. But they neglected all secret duties. They were so much occupied in pleasing men, that they never thought about pleasing God. *Secret* prayers, *secret* charities, *secret* acts of justice, *secret* feelings of love to God—of all these they knew nothing.

To what did the Lord compare these vain-glorious men? To cups and covered dishes, that looked bright outside, but were full of corruption within—and to

graves that were grown over with grass, but that contained dead men's bones.

Are not each of us conscious that we have, *by nature*, a strong desire for the praise of men, and no desire for the praise of God? This is one of the effects of the Fall. Angels are not coveting the admiration of their companions in bliss; their eyes are fixed upon their Father's face, and in *His* smile they live and rejoice.

What confusion it would introduce into heaven were a creature to enter there who wishes to be admired! He would find, that though all the blessed inhabitants *love* one another, that they *admire* God alone, and are perpetually engaged in singing, "Blessing, and glory, and honor, and power be unto Him that sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, forever and ever." (Rev. 5:13.) How dejected a Pharisee would feel in such a scene!

Does our happiness depend upon our being noticed and honored? If it do, we are not fit for heaven. Job said, "Behold, I am vile." Isaiah said, "I am a man of unclean lips." Abraham said, he was but dust and ashes; David, that he was shaped in iniquity; and Paul, that he was the chief of sinners. Yet these were some of the brightest saints who ever lived upon earth. Do we feel, as they did, unworthy of favor and honor? The wicked boast, "I am not polluted; I am innocent." (Jer. 2:23, 35.) Some even dare to say to their fellow-sinners, "Stand by yourself, for I am holier than you." (Is. 65:5.) What does God say of such proud sinners? "They are a smoke in my nose." But of a penitent, washed in the blood of Christ, and clothed in his righteousness, He speaks thus—"His beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon." (Hos. 14:6.)

June 20

Luke 11:45 to end. *Christ exposes the wickedness of the lawyers.*

The meek and lowly Jesus took no pleasure in denouncing woes upon sinners, but he was too faithful to conceal from them his abhorrence of their crimes.

Among the guests at the Pharisee's house there were some lawyers. They were Scribes of the highest order, whose office it was to explain the law of God to the people. One of them having heard Jesus say, "Woe unto you *Scribes* and Pharisees, hypocrites," (verse 44,) replied, "Master, thus saying, you reproach us also." *Reproof* was by him considered as *reproach*. Instead of confessing his sin, and seeking pardon, he only desired to justify himself.

The Lord did not leave these Scribes in ignorance of what particular parts of their conduct he condemned. He mentioned three glaring sins which they committed.

(Verse 46.) "You lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and you yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers." This was the *first* sin

reproved. These lawyers taught the people that they must do many difficult things to please God, such as fasting, washing often, making long prayers; but they did not trouble *themselves* to do the same.

The *second* sin reproved was "building the sepulchers of the prophets." But how was this a sin? It was one branch of the hypocrisy of the Scribes. They did not build the sepulchers of prophets, because they loved their holy characters, but because they thought, that by doing honor to the pious dead, they should appear pious *themselves*. It was evident they really approved of their fathers' persecutions of the prophets. And how was it evident? Because they persecuted the *living* prophets. They *added* to their guilt, when, while their hearts were burning with anger against John the Baptist, or against the Lord Jesus, they desired that a monument should be raised to Elijah, or to some other old prophet. It is easy to praise the *dead*; they cannot offend us by their faithful reproofs, nor shame us by their holy examples. Many praise the reformers and martyrs of ancient days, who hate the piety of a brother, or of a companion.

The *third* sin of the lawyers was, taking away the key of knowledge. This was worse than binding heavy burdens on the people. The burdens might *oppress*, yet they would not *destroy*; but without *knowledge*, the people would perish. If a man took away the key of a place where the fire-engines were kept, and if the whole city were burned through this conduct, how much ashamed he would be to appear among the poor houseless citizens! And how much ashamed will those be at the last day, who have taken away the key of knowledge! Those are guilty of this sin, who keep the Bible out of the hands of the people; and those also are guilty of it who pervert the *doctrines* of the Bible, and hide from sinners the only remedy for their guilt—the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A *faithful* minister takes the key committed to him, and by unlocking the mysteries of God, saves souls from destruction. It is a blessed thing to go into the kingdom of God *ourselves*, and it is a more blessed thing to help *others* to come in with us. The Lord Jesus has declared, "Whoever, therefore, shall *break* one of these least commandments, and shall *teach* men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven—but whoever shall *do* and *teach* them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

June 21

Luke 12:1-12. Christ warns his disciples against hypocrisy.

We have lately read the Savior's warnings to the Scribes and Pharisees; now we find him addressing his own disciples. An immense multitude had been collected by his fame, and were eagerly listening to his wonderful words. Before them all, He plainly said to his disciples, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." This was not the first time he had uttered this warning. On one

occasion his disciples had not understood what he meant by the leaven of the Pharisees; but now all understood, for he explained the metaphor, and declared that *hypocrisy* was the leaven to which he alluded.

And are the *sincere* disciples of Christ in danger of being infected by hypocrisy? Yes, even they may be *tainted* by this sin, though they cannot be given up to its power; for God will preserve them through faith in his name. Peter, and Barnabas, and several other Christians, were once guilty of an act that bordered on hypocrisy—it is called in Scripture "dissimulation." They dissembled with regard to eating with the Gentiles, and were publicly rebuked by the apostle Paul. (See Gal. 2.)

The Lord suggested a powerful motive to guard the heart against hypocrisy—the discoveries and exposures of the judgment-day. *Then* all that has been hid will be known. Not only will the mask be torn from the deliberate hypocrite, but the veil which has been cast over any part of the conduct of true believers will be lifted up.

The Lord foresaw all the temptations that would assail his beloved disciples, and he endeavored to strengthen them to meet their trials. One of their most powerful temptations would be (not to put on, as the Pharisees did, the *appearance* of religion, but) to *conceal* the love they really felt for their Lord. He knew that bloody crosses and burning flames would be used by their enemies to induce them to deny his name. How tenderly he addresses those who would be called to suffer for his sake! "I say unto you, *my friends*, Be not afraid of them that kill the body." He does not promise his disciples to preserve them from *death*—but he does promise to keep them from *hell*. He does not promise to prevent their being brought before rulers and magistrates; but he does promise to be *with* them in the painful hour, and to teach them by the Holy Spirit what to answer.

How little Peter thought that he should ever be tempted to deny the Son of man! How little he knew that there was comfort for *him* in these words—"Whoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him!" He spoke against the Son of man when he said in the judgment-hall, "I know not the man;" and when he confirmed his words by oaths and curses. Our Lord knows not only what *trials* we shall suffer, but what *sins* we shall commit. It is most comforting to think that though *all sin* will be followed by *sorrow*, yet that there is only *one* sin that cannot be FORGIVEN. It is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and consists (as we believe) in continuing to oppose the Gospel from deliberate malice, while, at the same time, the Holy Spirit has convinced the mind of its truth. This was the sin of the Pharisees. Though they were fully convinced that Christ was the Son of God, they were determined to hinder the people from believing in him.

Some of Christ's true disciples have been overcome by fear when placed before the bar of cruel judges, and have been tempted to deny their Lord. But how bitterly did Jerome of Prague, and our own Cranmer, bewail their sin; and how

fully did the Lord testify his forgiveness by the support he afforded them when bound to the stake! No human heart can conceive the Lord's tenderness for his persecuted people. Could a father forsake a child who had fallen into trouble on *his* account? Can Jesus forsake his people when suffering for *his* sake?

June 22

Luke 12:13-21. *The rich fool who was suddenly cut off.*

While Jesus was instructing his disciples in the presence of the multitude, he was interrupted by a man applying to him with this request—"Speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." This man's thoughts were engrossed by a *perishing* inheritance, while Jesus was pointing to that which fades not away.

Had the Lord come into the world to be a judge of temporal affairs, he would have attended to the administration of justice—but he had come for a different purpose, and he spent all his strength and all his time in finishing the work that his Father had given him to do.

He made the request of this man the occasion of warning his disciples against the sin of *covetousness*. He had warned them against *hypocrisy*, one of the chief sins of the Pharisees; and now he bade them beware of *covetousness*, another of their sins. He pointed out the *folly* of covetousness by describing the case of a rich man who was suddenly called away when he had been making plans for future enjoyment. We often hear of these sudden removals, but we do not know the *secret thoughts* of those who are thus unexpectedly cut off. He, who knows all the thoughts of all the men that have ever lived upon earth, has revealed to us what passed in the mind of a certain man just before his death. This man had grown rich through the fertility of his fields; his barns were completely filled with corn, wine, and oil; and he determined to pull down these storehouses, and to build larger. He never thought of distributing among the poor the overflowings of his granary, and it is too probable that much of his property had been acquired by the oppression of his laborers. He made plans for his *own* happiness, but had no desire to make *others* happy. He was so *foolish* as to believe that his *soul* would be satisfied by the abundance of the things he possessed. A beast indeed may be satisfied with a plentiful provision for its body; but a human creature has a *soul* that thirsts for some higher enjoyment than this world can afford. Sumptuous feasts cannot make him happy; nor lovely gardens and splendid houses, nor scientific knowledge and elegant accomplishments—no, not even affectionate friends and dutiful children. Nothing but communion with God can fill the aching void of the human soul. Adam was happy when he walked with God, but when by sin he lost that privilege, he became wretched. When man returns to God, he feels the first emotions of real bliss. David knew this, therefore he said, "Return unto your rest, O my soul." How different was David's command to his soul from that of the rich man, who said, "Soul, take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry!"

But even if the things of this world *could* satisfy an immortal spirit, there is *one* circumstance in our present lot that would embitter every moment. It is the uncertainty of life. Many a rich man remembers with uneasiness that he must one day (and he knows not how soon) leave all his possessions. This conviction is like a thorn in many a downy pillow, and in many a glittering crown. But he, whose history the Lord related, had contrived to smother this unpleasant recollection. He was deceived by the fond hope of many years' enjoyment of his riches. Well did he merit the name by which God called him, "You *fool!*"

How many lost spirits are now denouncing their own *folly* during the short season granted them on earth! What an opportunity we are now enjoying of securing real and eternal happiness! We might *now*, during this life, become rich towards God. Those are truly rich who have *faith* in the Lord Jesus. God has declared that some of the poor in this world are *rich* in *faith*. (James 2:5.) *Faith* is the gold that Christ offers to bestow on all that ask it—"I counsel you to buy of me *gold* tried in the fire, that you may be *rich*." (Rev. 3:18.) If *faith* is in our *hearts*, we shall never hear the summons, "You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you." But rather, we shall hear in God's appointed time a voice saying to our spirits, "Come up here." (Rev. 4:1.)

June 23

Luke 12:22-34. Christ warns his disciples against worldly carefulness.

Does the history of the rich man, whose soul was so suddenly required, concern the rich *only*? or does it concern the *poor* also?

It was to the *poor* disciples that Jesus turned after he had related the striking history, and it was to them these words were addressed—"Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what you shall eat; neither for the body, what you shall put on." Covetousness led the *rich* man to say to his soul, "Take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry;" and covetousness might lead the poor disciples to ask, "What shall we eat, what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?"

All sinners are inclined to *overvalue* the *creature*, and to *undervalue* the *Creator*. The rich man betrayed this disposition by delighting in his well-stored barns, and forgetting his all-sufficient God. The disciples were in danger of repining when their bags were empty, and of forgetting their all-sufficient God. If you heard a person lamenting greatly because there was no water in his cup, you would suppose that he lived in a dry and thirsty land, where water could not be found; but if you knew that a fountain was playing at his door, then you would be astonished at his lamentations. Is not God a fountain of good? and is He not always near, and able to supply all our need? He does not even limit his

goodness to those who acknowledge his benefits—millions of thoughtless beings are fed every day at his table—men who *will* not thank him, birds and beasts that *cannot*. How many He *remembers* who continually *forget* Him! And can He *forget* those who *remember* Him?

Has he not afforded us abundant proofs of his remembrance of *all* his creatures? Every little bird that sings among the branches, every painted flower that blooms among the grass, is a witness of the Lord's loving-kindness. Each seems to reproach the child of God with his unbelieving fears, and to say, "Be not of doubtful mind."

The Lord has so formed his living creatures that they need continual supplies of food to preserve their existence. *Why* has he formed us thus? Was it not to teach us dependence upon Himself? As we behold the throngs of people that pass along the street, the thought may naturally arise, "How have all these people obtained their bread this day?" The reply is, "Through the kind providence of God." *Some* of them, indeed, (unwilling to trust to this kind Providence,) have resorted to wicked means to gain their living; they have acted dishonestly and deceitfully. But had they all sought his kingdom and righteousness, would not their heavenly Father have fed them from *His* own hand? Undoubtedly he would. It is dreadful to think what sins people are led to commit through lack of trust in God; they steal, they tell lies, they break the Sabbath, they sell pernicious liquors, and corrupting books; because they believe, that if they did not use these wicked means of gaining a livelihood, they would be left to starve.

It is not surprising that those who do not *know* God should not trust him. The surprising thing is, that any who *do* know him should doubt his watchful care! Has he promised to give a *kingdom* to his little flock, and will he deny them daily *bread*? Has God had mercy on your *soul*, and will he neglect your *body*? Do you believe that He is *love*, and do you think that He will treat you as if He *hated* you?

In the land of Canada there once lived a mother, who in her eagerness to obtain intoxicating drink from a newly-arrived ship, left her babe upon the landing-place, and *forgot* to take it up again. It lay all night neglected and forlorn, and perished before morning. That mother was counted a *monster*. The Lord says to his children, "Can a woman forget her nursing child? Yes, they may forget, yet will I not forget you." (Is. 49:15.) Yet where is the Christian who places as much confidence in his Heavenly Father, as a little child places in his earthly parents?

June 24

Luke 12:35-48. Christ exhorts his disciples to watch for his second coming.

There are three short parables contained in the passage we have just read. In the first of them Christ compares himself to a master, and his disciples to

servants.

He is a master who is expected to return from his wedding to a feast prepared at his own house. It is the duty of the servants to be ready to *receive* their lord; therefore they must have their lights burning. They must also *wait* upon him, and therefore they must be girded, as men in the East are, when about to engage in active employment.

What a joyful view this parable gives of the coming of Christ! There is a marriage supper prepared for the Lamb who once was slain. The servants who are found watching shall be the guests at that feast, and their Lord shall condescend to serve them—they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, for the Lamb himself shall feed them.

The next parable compares the coming of Christ to the coming of a *thief*, who always endeavors to attack the house at an unexpected moment. What a *dreadful* view this parable gives of the coming of Christ! How unlike it is to the *first* parable! Will the coming of the Lord be to *some* like the breaking in of a thief? The apostle Paul declares that just when the ungodly are saying, "Peace and safety," then sudden destruction comes upon them; and they shall not escape. "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake *you* as a thief." We see, therefore, why two such *different* parables were used by our Lord to represent the *same* event. He intended to teach us that while some have reason to *rejoice* at the expectation of his coming, others have reason to *tremble* at the thought.

It appears that Peter was alarmed by the latter parable—for he asked this question, "Lord, speak you this parable unto us, or even to *all*?" His Lord answered the question by relating another parable on the same subject as the former. In this parable he spoke of one servant who was set over the rest, and whom he called a *steward*, and who would be *most* guilty if he betrayed the trust reposed in him. The apostles were stewards, and all ministers are stewards. The word of God is the food, which they are to dispense to the rest of the household. Now, if a steward in his Lord's absence were to begin to ill-treat the servants, and to waste his master's property in rioting and drunkenness, how very much displeased his lord would be with him when he returned! The Scribes had reason to tremble as they listened to this parable; for though it was not *spoken* to them, it *applied* to them.

What idea would lead a steward to conduct himself in a disorderly and oppressive manner? The idea that his lord would not return *soon*. He would say, "My lord *delays* his coming." He might not go so far as to believe he would *never* return at all, and say with the scoffers, "Where is the promise of his coming?" but he would not be less guilty than those scoffers; he would be *more* guilty, because he is *intrusted* with more. To abuse *confidence* is to commit the worst sort of injury. In human laws the crime is always considered great in proportion to the

trust that had been reposed in the criminal. A servant who betrays his master is counted more guilty than if he had been a stranger. There will be *degrees* in the misery of the lost; and the *deepest* degree of misery will be endured by him who abused the *highest* privileges.

Now let us, like Peter, ask this question—"Speak you this parable unto *us*?" Surely the Lord speaks to *us* in *all* these parables—for though we may not be stewards in the same sense that ministers are, we all have *some* charge committed to us. Are we acting *now* as we should wish we had done, if tomorrow we were to find ourselves on the brink of eternity? Is there any sin we are practicing, which we should renounce if we thought this day was our last! Who can say that it may *not* be our last! With some people this is the last *day*—with many more it is the last *week*—with thousands it is the last *month*—with millions the last year. Are we prepared to meet the Lord? If *not*, why do we not prepare immediately? There is a fountain opened for sin, in which we may *immediately* wash. Yet how many have never washed in it! If Christ were to come now, he would find them in their sins. Say not, "He will not come *yet*;" for remember it is very dangerous even to think, "My lord *delays* his coming."

June 25

Luke 12:49-53. Christ foretells that the Gospel will occasion divisions.

The Lord Jesus is called the Prince of *peace*; yet he did not come to bring *peace* upon the earth, but rather *division*.

Is not this surprising? How can we understand the song of the angels, who joined in chorus at his birth, saying, "*Peace* on earth, good-will to men?" The difficulty, however, may be explained.

Jesus came to bring *divisions first*, and *afterwards peace*. And why did he bring *divisions* first? Why not *peace* from beginning to end? It was because the *wickedness of man* opposes the peaceful doctrines of the holy Gospel.

Can anything show in a stronger light the depravity of the human heart than the manner in which the Gospel has been received by the world? If any doubt whether man is *very* wicked, and *very far* gone from original righteousness, let them reflect on this fact. If pardon were now offered to the evil spirits in darkness, could they reject the boon with more contempt than the *world* in general has rejected the offer of pardon in the Gospel? But the world has not been satisfied with *rejecting* it—they have persecuted those few happy people who have accepted it. Even now there is scarcely a large family to be found, *all* of whom have embraced the gracious offer. In many families there are *none*; in others, there is *one* or *two* who have believed, while the rest despise both the message and those who believe it. Sometimes it is a pious parent, who is despised by his

thoughtless children—sometimes it is a pious child, who is opposed by his worldly parent. *Nations* are divided in the same manner as families. No *wars* have been so bitter as *religious wars*; no persecution so bloody as *religious persecutions*, or, rather, the persecutions OF the religious. Shall we think ill of religion because it produces these effects? As well might we deem the medicines of the physician hurtful, because at first they often increase the sufferings of the patient. The Lord Jesus, who foresaw all events, *rejoiced* that his Gospel would be preached in every land.

He said, "I am come to send *fire* on the earth, and what will I if it be already kindled?" What is the meaning of these words?

"What will I?" Do I wish it to be otherwise?

"If it be already kindled," if even *now* the Gospel has begun to create confusion.

The Prince of peace was willing that for a while confusion should prevail, in order that happiness at length might fill the earth, and endure forever. He was willing himself to encounter the most bitter sufferings, in order that afterwards he might be exalted to God's right hand. The baptism he desired was a baptism of blood. Bathed in his *own* blood, he suffered for our sins in Gethsemane and Calvary. He was straitened until this baptism was accomplished. He longed to finish his work, and to receive his reward; and now he longs for the period when the earth will be no more steeped in blood, but covered by the waters of righteousness. He has commanded us to pray for that glorious time, and to say, "Your kingdom come." In those days shall "the righteous flourish, and *abundance* of *peace* as long as the moon endures." (Ps. 72:7.) When Jesus comes the second time, he will put an end to all divisions, whether in families or between nations. "Violence shall no more be heard in your land, wasting nor destruction within your borders." For this delightful day the saints earnestly hope, and "with patience *wait*." (Rom. 8:25.)

June 26

Luke 12:54 to end. *Christ reproves the people for not discerning the signs of the time.*

The long discourse contained in this chapter was addressed to the *disciples*, excepting these few words at the conclusion. They were addressed to the *people*—to the immense multitude who surrounded the Savior, and who were pressed so closely together that they trod upon each other.

The Lord had spoken to his own disciples with *tenderness*. He had called them his "*friends*," (see ver. 4.) "My friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body." But he spoke to the people with *displeasure*. He called them "*hypocrites*." This was the name he had given to the Scribes and Pharisees. The people were like

the teachers they admired. Blind leaders have blind followers. *Hypocritical* teachers have hypocritical disciples. The Scribes would not discern the signs of the time, and the people who revered them would not discern them either. "Like people, like priest." (Hos. 4:9.)

As there are certain appearances by which close observers are able to foretell the kind of *weather* that may be expected, so there are certain signs by which reflecting minds might discover the kind of *time* that is approaching. When the time for the deliverance of Israel from Egypt drew near, the parents of Moses knew it was near, and Moses knew it also; but the Israelites understood not the signs of that time. When the captivity of Babylon drew near, the people of God knew the time; but the world knew it not. When the time for Israel's release approached, Daniel knew it; but many of the captives knew it not. When, in the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son, some were prepared to receive him. Simeon and Anna knew the signs of the time, and spoke of Jesus to those who *looked for redemption* in Jerusalem; but the world knew not the signs of the time.

Thus it shall be in the *last* time. It is prophesied in Daniel, that the wise shall understand, but none of the wicked shall understand. (See Dan. 12:10.) The wicked shall go on doing wickedly, just as the people did before the flood.

Had the Jews of old understood the *time*, they would have repented before it was too late. They knew not that their opportunity would be so short. The Savior would remain with them but a little while, the apostles would preach only for a few years, and then their city would be destroyed, their temple burnt, and their country laid desolate.

Their compassionate Lord knew that their day of grace was fast hastening to a close, and he related a little parable (which he had before related in his sermon on the mount) to warn them of their danger. He compared the nation to a criminal on his way to the judge. While on his way, the criminal had the opportunity to entreat his enemy to be reconciled; but if he neglected this short opportunity, he would be tried, condemned, and cast into a prison, whence he would never escape.

The Lord knows for how long a period we shall enjoy the privileges we now possess—He has numbered our Sabbaths, our meetings together as a family to read and pray, our interviews with pious friends, our opportunities of secret prayer. In mercy He often gives signs before He removes these sacred privileges. Sometimes the signs are terrible judgments inflicted upon others, and gracious deliverances granted to ourselves. Thus the Lord said to Israel, "I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah—and you were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning; yet have you not returned unto me, says the Lord." (Amos 4:11.) "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel." The Lord Jesus is now easy to be entreated, and ready to forgive; but when He is on his throne of judgment, he will hearken to no entreaties, and grant no forgiveness.

In the lone land of deep despair,
No Sabbath's heavenly light shall rise—
No God regard your bitter prayer,
No Savior call you to the skies.
Now God invites, how blessed the day!
How sweet the gospel's heavenly sound!
Come, sinners, haste, O haste away,
While yet a pardoning God is found.

June 27

Luke 13:1-5. *Christ speaks of two dreadful events that had lately happened at Jerusalem.*

It is most interesting to us to know what passes in heaven respecting ourselves. In this passage, some of the light of the other world is let into our dark prison.

The discourses of the Lord were often interrupted by the questions and remarks of his hearers. On this occasion some of those present spoke of an dreadful event that had lately happened in Jerusalem. Perhaps they thought that this event was unknown to the Lord until they told him of it. But all things that ever had occurred, or ever would occur, were *known* to him, for they were *appointed* by him. He knew of this appalling transaction, and he knew its secret causes.

Some of the men of Galilee had lately rebelled against the Roman power. Pontius Pilate, the governor, had sent officers to apprehend the rebels. In what place were they found? In the temple. How were they engaged? Offering sacrifices. Though rebels, they continued to approach God; but their services were odious in his sight. The Roman officers respected neither the place nor the employment, but slew the rebels, and mingled their blood with the blood of the beasts that were ready to be sacrificed. Many people who heard of the event concluded that because these men perished in so dreadful a manner, they were sinners of the *deepest* dye. But is this the rule of God's government? Does he mark out the *most* signal transgressors for the *most* signal judgments? In human courts of justice it is the *ringleader* who is condemned, when his accomplices often escape punishment. No doubt God also would act in this manner, were this *earth* the *place of judgment*. But there is *another* place of judgment—*there* sinners are punished in exact proportion to their guilt. He who knew his Lord's will, and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes. But in this world some of the most daring offenders live at ease, and die in apparent peace. The rich man in the parable, who lifted up his eyes in torments, had lived in luxury and been buried with honor; while the faithful Lazarus, covered with sores, had languished at his gate. Jonathan, the generous friend of David, fell in battle, and his body, as well as the wicked Saul's, was exposed by the Philistines. When we hear of

shipwrecks, and of fires, we often find the wicked and the just have shared the same fate. Sometimes one out of a great number escapes alone. Is he the best, the most approved by God? Perhaps he is the most guilty. When Saul slew the priests of the Lord, one alone escaped. It was Abiathar. Was he a faithful priest? No! he became a rebel and a traitor. Then what are we to learn from the judgments of the Lord? To fear THAT God who CAN destroy *all* his enemies. It is love that arrests his arm, and causes him to suspend the blow that is ready to descend.

Though the righteous are slain with the wicked, they are not involved in their *destruction*. To them sudden death is sudden glory. Those who have witnessed their behavior in the midst of storms, and in the approach of death, have testified to their calmness and their joy. When the Pegasus was wrecked, there was a pious minister on board, named Mackenzie, whose voice was raised in intercessions for his companions in danger, until the billows overwhelmed them all. It was beautiful to behold him, surrounded by the shrieking crew, composed, and peaceful in the midst of the tumult of the waves. Was *sudden* death a *judgment* to this holy man? But it *was* an dreadful judgment to those who had despised the gospel, and neglected their own souls. Whenever we hear of these calamities, God is speaking to us in a voice of thunder, and saying, "Except you repent, you shall *perish*."

June 28

Luke 13:6-9. *The parable of the fig-tree.*

With this dreadful parable the Lord concluded his discourse to the innumerable multitude who were pressed together around him.

It seems to have been uttered as a warning to the whole Jewish nation. That people had long enjoyed distinguished privileges, but their greatest had been the ministry of the Lord Jesus. It had now lasted about three years. How had they profited from it? They were still "*hypocrites*," (12:56.) But the Lord was unwilling to give them up. During the course of the coming year further efforts would be made for their salvation. In a few months the great sacrifice for sin would be offered, the great triumph of the Son of God by rising from the dead would take place, and the Holy Spirit would descend in flaming fire upon the disciples, and the gospel would be preached in power at *Jerusalem*. Would the nation repent when they saw and heard these things? No, they would not. The sentence would then go forth, "Cut it down." The sentence has been executed. That fig-tree, the Jewish nation, has been cut down, but the ROOTS are yet left in the earth. The words of Job may be applied to that afflicted people—"There is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branches thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; yet through the scent of *water* it will bud, and bring forth boughs

like a plant." (Job 14:7-9.)

The water from heaven shall at length descend upon the chosen nation, and the dry stump shall send forth green shoots; Israel shall bud, and blossom, and fill the face of the world with fruit; the Jews shall return to their own land, and worship their crucified Redeemer. But does this parable apply to that *nation* alone, and does it not apply to *individuals*? There is not one *single* plant in God's vineyard that is not watched over by the great husbandman. The Lord exercises great patience towards each; but at the same time he will not allow unfruitful trees *always* to encumber the ground. He had great patience with Saul, the king of Israel, but after giving him repeated trials, and repeated warnings, He *took away his mercy from him*. (2 Sam. 7:15.) We are not permitted to hear the counsels of heaven respecting ourselves, but we know that our state of heart and our conduct are observed by Him who sees all things.

The gardener is slow in determining to cut down a tree that he has nurtured with care. How much more unwilling is the compassionate Savior to cast off those whom he has blessed with great privileges! Many who pray not for themselves, are prayed for by others; their time for repentance is lengthened out—but not *forever*. A *sudden* stroke often cuts off those who have long refused to hear the gentle invitations of the gospel—"He who being often reproved, hardens his heart, shall *suddenly* be destroyed, and *that without remedy*."

But there are no sinners more provoking to the Lord than those, who when they hear His threatenings, say in their hearts, "I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart." These presumptuous transgressors are likened to roots that bear, instead of fruit, gall and wormwood. And how will God deal with them? His anger, and his jealousy, will smoke against them, and he will blot out their names from under heaven. (Deut. 29:18-20.)

June 29

Luke 13:10-17. *Christ restores a woman who was bowed together.*

The objects that attracted the Savior's eye were those that the world overlooks or even derides. A poor creature bowed down, and in nowise able to lift herself up, would incur many a contemptuous glance from the thoughtless and unfeeling. Some poor cripples are afraid of venturing out of their houses, lest they should meet with scornful looks or hear unfeeling remarks. But this afflicted woman was not restrained by such fears from entering the public congregation. With pain and difficulty she must have reached the place of worship. There are pious people who love the house of God so well, that they drag their decrepit frames along the toilsome way, resting now upon a bank, and now upon a stone, rejoicing when they reach the threshold, as a voyager when he lands upon a distant shore. Souls that thirst after God, spare no pains to get a refreshing draught from the

wells of salvation.

How must this poor woman have felt when she heard the Lord Jesus desire her to approach! She did not apply to him for relief; perhaps she did not know that he would be at the synagogue; and as she could not lift herself up, she may never have seen his gracious countenance. But when she heard his voice, she refused not to come near. The Savior laid his hands upon her and healed her. Her first act was "to glorify God." There were some present who, instead of being touched by the sight of her joy, were filled with indignation. The ruler of the synagogue was one of these. He had not dared to prevent the Lord from teaching in the synagogue, because he knew the admiration in which he was held by the people. But now he could no longer restrain his rage, and he angrily addressed the congregation, saying, "There are six days in which men ought to work; in them therefore, come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath days." The people had *not* come to the synagogue *in order* to be healed; they had come to worship God. The ruler knew this, but he only sought for some *pretense* to hinder the glorious triumphs of the Redeemer.

It was foolish ever to attempt to argue against the Lord of all wisdom. By one word he could confound his most subtle adversaries. He exposed the hollowness of the ruler's heart, by showing that the compassion exercised towards a *beast* on the Sabbath-day must surely not be withheld from a *child of Abraham*. How many arguments are now brought forward against various plans of doing good to souls, that the Savior would overturn by such an appeal as this!

The same reply that stung the ruler to the quick, must have poured consolation into the poor woman's heart. The Lord called her a *daughter* of Abraham; and he acknowledged none to be the children of Abraham except those who did "the *works* of Abraham." Could the straightness of her body afford her as much joy as the assurance of the safety of her soul?

She discovered also the *cause* of her affliction. It was the power of an evil spirit that had bound her for eighteen years. If her faith was now like that of Abraham, we see it had been exercised by long and heavy trials. But those trials had not been longer nor heavier than was necessary for the perfecting of her faith. From the beginning of her affliction the day of release had been known to the Lord, though unknown to her. The glories of that day must have made her forget the long period of her sorrow. Was not *that* day glorious in which she was called, and touched, and commended by her Savior? It seems an emblem of that more glorious day when the people of God will be made free forever from the bondage of corruption, and will receive from their Lord the assurance of his everlasting favor. How *light* all the afflictions of this life will then appear! how *short* their period! Whether they lasted eighteen or *eighty* years, the time will then appear as a *moment*.

June 30

John 9:1-5. *The man who was born blind.*

The disciples asked a very singular question, when they said, "Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was *born* blind?" How could they suppose that any sin of the man could cause him to be *born* blind? It appears that they must have entertained a superstitious notion common among the Jews with regard to the soul. Some of them imagined that souls passed from one body to another, and that when they had acted wickedly in one body, the next time they were born into the world, they received some punishment. This was an idea taken from the heathen, and was very false and absurd. How dangerous it is for men to follow their own imaginations respecting things unseen! The Scriptures give us a true account of all things; if we would follow them alone, we should be spared many tormenting ideas. How *painful* it must have been for men born blind to think that their blindness was the punishment of sins they could not remember, and which, in fact, they had not committed! How it must have added to the weight of their calamity, to find themselves regarded by their fellow-creatures as objects of God's especial *displeasure*!

But the Lord Jesus viewed this blind man with *especial tenderness*. Those most afflicted in their bodies are sometimes the most honored, and the most beloved of God. There are many people who could testify that it was through the loss of a limb, or of sight, or of hearing, they were brought to know the Savior's power and grace.

And why did the Lord take a deep interest in this blind beggar? Was it because he felt compassion for one who had never beheld the light of day? No doubt he did feel this compassion; but there was another feeling, stronger even than *compassion*, that filled his heart. It was the desire for his Father's glory. He knew that in this blind man his Father's power and grace would be shown forth. Therefore, when the disciples asked the reason of the poor beggar's blindness, he told them the reason was, "that the works of God should be made manifest *in him*." When affliction is sent, let each of us reflect, "Perhaps this trial has been appointed that God's power may be shown in sustaining me under it, or in delivering me from it." If we love God fervently, we shall be willing *to suffer* in order to promote his glory.

One mode of promoting it is by *suffering* his will; but there is another mode—*doing* his will. When we are not pressed down by the weight of some affliction, we should be seeking for opportunities of doing good to our fellow-creatures. How impressive are the Savior's words—"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day—the night comes, when no man can work." The Lord Jesus knew the exact period when the night of death would put an end to his labors of love upon earth. But we know not *at what moment* that night will overtake us, and deprive us of the opportunity of serving God any more here below. Have we

begun to do the works of God? The first work is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Are we spending our days in *pleasing* ourselves, or in *pleasing* God? How many are now wrapped in the shades of night who misspent the short day in which they might have served the Lord!

Sometimes, when night comes on, we remember some business that we have omitted, and that we ought to have done during the day. We think to ourselves, "We will do it to-morrow." But when the night of death is at hand, we shall not be able to make that resolution. What has been left undone, can never be done at all by us. If the *great business* has been left undone—if the *one thing needful* has been forgotten, how miserable will be our condition! But if we have obtained pardon *ourselves*, this will not satisfy us. We shall wish that we had helped our fellow-creatures out of their misery by directing them to the Savior. How blessed were the last hours of Count Zinzendorf! They were spent in praising God for having converted so many of the heathen. "I only hoped," said the Count, "to do a little good, to see a *few* poor heathen turn to the Lord, and behold *thousands* have believed." It filled him with joy to think he was going to meet some of them in heaven—Indians, and Negroes, and Greenlanders, whom he had never seen upon earth, but to save whom he had sent missionaries to distant lands. Many who saw him die were heard to say, "May my last end be like his."

If we wish to die as he did, let us now remember the command, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might." (Eccles. 9:10.)

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