

## A Devotional Commentary on the Gospels

Arranged for family devotions,  
for every day in the year

By [Favell Lee Mortimer](#)

**MAY 1**

**Mark 6:30-44. *Christ feeds five thousand with five loaves and two fish.***

Behold another instance of the compassion of our Lord. See how ready he was to sacrifice his own ease and comfort that he might promote ours.

It appears that he longed to rest awhile with his disciples, and to hear them relate the things that had befallen them during their travels; and that for this purpose he crossed the lake, intending to land at some desert place; but the multitude, who saw him embark, ran round the lake, and were waiting to receive him at the place where he landed. Was he provoked by this interruption? No! he was moved with compassion for the destitute state of their *souls*. He regarded them as sheep without a shepherd, because their public teachers were ignorant of God. There is no outward deprivation which he pities so much as the want of a faithful ministry, and there is none which we should lament so much. A famine of the word of the Lord, is far worse than a famine of bread.

When evening came, the apostles wished to send the people away; but the people were willing to remain without food rather than to leave Jesus. They were rewarded for their anxiety to be with him by obtaining nourishment both for their bodies and souls.

Before Jesus broke the bread, he looked up to heaven. He knew whence every good gift came. Have we not often eaten our food without thinking of the Giver, and without considering his kindness in supplying our daily need?

Christ did not distribute the food *himself*, but employed the apostles in that service. This bread was an emblem of his own flesh, which he gave for the life of the world. The apostles were appointed to proclaim the crucified Savior to perishing sinners. It was necessary that they should believe that He could save by his death the souls of all believers. They now saw with their own eyes that He could make a *little* bread sustain a *vast* multitude. They would remember this in future days, when preaching his name to assembled thousands. This simple truth, that Jesus gave his flesh for the life of the world, has fed innumerable

souls, and will feed innumerable more until the multitude without number are gathered around the throne; and then the Lamb *himself* will feed them through eternity with food which we know not of.

After the simple meal was ended, Jesus bade the apostles gather up the remains. By doing this, it was made evident that the hunger of the multitude had been fully satisfied, and the greatness of the miracle was thus proved. But Jesus gave another reason for the command; he said, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." (John 6:12.) By this command He showed us how precious he esteemed even the least of the works of God, that we might not dare to waste the food that our heavenly Father has provided.

But if earthly bread is too precious to be wantonly trampled under foot, how inestimably precious must heavenly bread be! Every word that comes out of the mouth of God is bread for the soul. Yet how much is permitted to fall to the ground! How carelessly we sometimes read the Scriptures! How many heart-stirring sermons have we heard, and then immediately forgotten! It is not that our *memories* are too weak to retain them, (for we can recollect the news of the town, or the village,) but it is that our *hearts* are too indifferent. It would be a blessed custom, after reading or hearing, to gather up the fragments; that is, to recall to our minds what we have heard, and to apply them to our consciences, "that nothing be lost."

It appears that the twelve baskets contained *more* bread than there was at first, and that the store had been *increased by distribution*. In the same way, by feeding the hungry we shall often enrich ourselves; for God will bless our earthly substance, as He did in the case of the widow who fed Elijah. But how much more will he bless those who feed souls with the word of God! Those teachers who in a humble spirit search the Scriptures, that they may scatter the crumbs among poor little ignorant children, find rich nourishment for their own souls.

## May 2

### **Matthew 14:22 to end. *He walks upon the sea.***

This history contains a beautiful instance of the care of our Savior over his people. On another occasion the disciples were alarmed, because Jesus was *asleep* when a storm arose. How much more alarm they probably felt now that he was *absent!* Yet it ought to have comforted them to remember that he himself had *constrained* them to enter into the ship. They were evidently in the path of duty. How then should any evil befall them! It is a great comfort to *us* when we can feel sure that we are doing the will of God; for whatever trouble may threaten us, we can trust Jesus to bring relief in the storm. On the contrary, when we are acting wilfully, we have reason to be alarmed at every difficulty that occurs, and to be apprehensive that God will punish us for our waywardness.

Yet the faith of the disciples was so weak, that, though they knew they were in the path of duty, they were alarmed by the storm; and when they beheld Jesus walking on the sea, they were still more terrified, thinking that he was a spirit. They knew not that while he was praying on the mountain, he had seen them, "toiling in rowing," and was come in the most wonderful manner to their rescue.

Peter, who possessed a warm, eager disposition, said, "Lord, if it be you, bid me come to you on the water."

Why did Peter make this request? *Love* suggested it! Did he not affectionately desire to be with his Lord? *Faith* enabled him to comply with the command, "Come." Yet this love, and this faith, were mixed with self-ignorance and self-confidence. He knew not the weakness of his own heart; he fondly imagined that he loved the Lord more than his brethren loved him, and that his faith was stronger than theirs. Upon the waves he learned a humiliating lesson. His mind was not resting solely upon Christ; he partly gloried in himself, and soon the tumult of the winds and waves shook his faith, and he began to sink. But his faith, weak as it was, did not fail, for he called on the Lord to save him.

If Peter had taken a lesson from this event, he might have been spared the sharp sorrow, as well as dreadful sin, of denying his Lord. Had he learned upon the waves, to distrust his own heart, he had not in the *hall* experienced its deceitfulness. If we reflect upon the events of Providence, we shall find that God often causes those events to occur in *miniature*, which happen afterwards upon a *larger scale*. An act of willfulness in youth is permitted to produce evil results; but the same willfulness at a later period is again displayed, and is followed by worse consequences. The deceit that David practiced at the court of Achish entangled him in many difficulties; but the Lord extricated him from them all. He was guilty of a deeper and fouler deceit in the matter of Uriah, and was entangled in a net from which he was never extricated in this life. It is very profitable to review our past conduct, that we may learn the lessons the Lord would teach us, and avoid the evils we have already experienced.

Are we, like Peter, disposed presumptuously to venture into scenes of temptation, and to desire trials of our faith? Does not past experience show us how weak and foolish we are? It is those who *dread* temptation, who are supported when exposed to it. It is those who feel their unfitness to occupy important stations, who are strengthened when exalted to them. Let us not rashly ask Jesus to bid us come unto him on the *water*; but ask him rather to come unto us in the *ship*. Yet the Lord does not forsake his servants, even when their own temerity and lack of faith have brought them into difficulty. No! even *then* he hears them when they call. He who stretched out his hand to sinking Peter, will extend his mercy to each of us in *every* trouble. The cry, "Save me or I perish," touches the Savior's heart, even as the infant's cry awakens the mother's tenderness. Never then let us be discouraged from looking to Christ for help. No

past folly of ours can harden his heart against us, when by faith we come to him in our distress.

### May 3

#### **John 6:22-29. *The multitude seek Jesus from interested motives.***

It must be remembered that when Jesus walked on the sea to his disciples, he left a great multitude on the other side of the lake. These people had been fed by him in the evening; but afterwards many of them had remained near the mountain, to which he had retired to pray. They had seen with pleasure the disciples embark *without* their Master, in the *only* ship then upon the sea; and had felt certain of finding him near them in the morning. But what was their consternation, when morning came, at *not* being able to find him! They were at a loss to imagine *how* he could have departed.

While they were in this state of perplexity, some boats arrived. In these they joyfully embarked, and crossing the lake, soon reached the city of Capernaum. They sought there for Jesus, and found him teaching in the synagogue, (v. 59.) They expressed their surprise at the meeting, saying, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus, however, did not satisfy their curiosity, by answering their inquiry, but proceeded to unveil their hearts, and to expose the selfish, earthly motives that led them to seek him so earnestly. Could we have supposed that a meal of bread and fish was more valued by them than the precious words of the Savior! Yet this was the case. Though Jesus was the Son of God, and had the most valuable gifts to bestow, the earthly refreshment he had afforded was more prized by the groveling multitude than heaven and all its blessings.

The Savior reproved their earthly-mindedness by saying, "Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that which endures unto everlasting life." Did he mean to forbid honest labor for our living? By no means. It is commanded that if any will not work, neither should he eat. The expression signifies, "Labor not so *much* for the meat which perishes, as for that which endures unto everlasting life. Labor *not at all* for it in COMPARISON with the earnestness with which you labor for heavenly blessings." Do we obey this direction? Are we indeed *much more* eager and anxious about eternal things than about earthly pleasures, or comforts? What we are most anxious about will be uppermost in our thoughts. What is uppermost in *our* thoughts? Perhaps we are not as poor as these people were, and are not therefore as anxious as they were about one meal. But if it be wrong to be so much engrossed about *necessary* food, surely it is much *more* wrong to be engrossed by *unnecessary* earthly things—such as pleasures, even *harmless* pleasures—the favor of men—the increase of our property—or the success of our studies! There is *one thing* needful—the meat which endures unto everlasting life.

Yet we, helpless, sinful creatures, never could obtain *this* by our most earnest strivings, were it not entrusted to the Son of God to bestow upon us. God the Father has given eternal life to the Son for us, and *sealed* the Son. A king places his own seal upon his written commands, that men may know they are *his*; so God the Father sealed his Son, by enabling him to do miracles, and thus showed men that He had sent him. Our duty is to believe upon this Son, who can give us eternal life.

The people asked, in a self-righteous spirit, "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" They seemed to think that they could *do* something to entitle themselves to eternal life. This was impossible. Guilty, polluted creatures can do nothing really good. But there is a Savior to whom they may apply for pardon and grace. Jesus directed them to Himself when he said, "This is the work of God, that you believe on him whom he has sent." He calls believing a *work*. Yet it is not a work of *merit*; for it is the beggar coming to the king for alms; it is the criminal suing to the judge for mercy. This is the first work that each of us must perform. There is *one* who is able to save and to destroy—He is the Son of God. All power is committed unto him. Do we earnestly apply to him for salvation? How foolish only to ask Him for fading flowers, when he could bestow a crown of life! How foolish only to fear the pricking of the thorns and thistles, when the sword of eternal wrath is in his hand! Let us not insult this Savior by seeking his lesser gifts, while we neglect to implore *that* gift which he bought for us with his blood!

## May 4

### **John 6:30-34. *They ask him to give them bread.***

Our Lord frequently took occasion from *circumstances* to explain spiritual truths. Once, when sitting by a well, he instructed a woman who came to draw water, and exhorted her to seek for living water. Now Jesus was speaking to people who had shown a great anxiety for bread, and he took the opportunity to direct their attention to the bread that came down from heaven.

There was much unbelief and ignorance displayed by the Jews in this conversation. They pretended that they had not received sufficient proof of his authority, and said, "What *sign* show you then, that we may see and believe you?" He had already given them a most wonderful sign in the miracle of the loaves, yet they required more evidence; but this was not granted to them. They even ventured to dictate to the Savior what he *ought* to do, and referred in an insolent way to the miracle of the manna, as if they wished Him to understand that Moses, in giving bread from heaven, had wrought a greater miracle than himself. Jesus took no notice of the bad spirit they displayed, but showed them they were *mistaken* when they said that Moses had given them bread from *heaven*. The manna had not come from the heaven of heavens, where God's

glory is manifested, but from the *lower* regions of the skies; besides, *Moses* did not give that bread; *he* did not create it—nor was it *living* bread; it would not give life to the dead, or even preserve the life of the living. But there was a bread that could both give life to the dead, and preserve life for evermore—this bread was the Son of God.

The people understood not what Jesus meant, when he spoke of the "Bread of God;" but ignorantly cried, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." How many have made prayers as ignorant as this, and have received answers that they little expected! The woman of Samaria knew not what she asked when she said, "Give me of this water, that I thirst not, neither come here to draw." But her petition, so blindly offered, was graciously granted, for she soon received the water of the Holy Spirit into her heart. We may also believe that those who ignorantly asked for heavenly bread, were satisfied beyond their expectations. If God did not deal thus graciously with sinners, who could be saved! For we are all found by Him in a state of ignorance and enmity—our first prayers resemble the cry of this people—"Lord, evermore give us this bread." Some of us perhaps can remember our feelings just before we turned to God. We felt the misery of our state, we longed to find something better than we had found; but we knew not what we needed. We had heard that there was help in God; we cried to him, but in such a manner that any Being less gracious than Himself would have disregarded us. But his ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. He pitied us in our low estate, and led us by ways that we knew not, to a knowledge of his Son.

## May 5

### **John 6:35-40. Christ declares himself to be the bread of life.**

Among the crowd who surrounded the Lord while he taught in the synagogue, there were *some* who believed *not*, (ver. 64.) But there were *some* who would come to him, and be his crown forever. *This* he knew—*this* was his consolation among all the taunts and jeers of the multitude while in the synagogue, and even afterwards when he was on the Cross.

It was to those people, who did, or would believe on him, that Jesus referred when he said, "All that the Father gives me shall come unto me." They had not all *yet* come unto him, but he knew they *would* come unto him, for his Father had given them to him. O what a gift it was! Polluted, guilty, helpless sinners were the gift the Father bestowed upon the Son as the reward of all his sufferings. It was the compassion of his heart that made the Savior value such a gift.

A family of poor children was once bequeathed by a dying parent to a rich man. The legacy was accepted. Many were astonished at the kindness and condescension of the rich man. What trouble, and care, and expense such a gift

involved! The children must be fed, and clothed, and educated, and provided for—the rich man was willing to do it all; and he *did* it all. And what will not the Savior do for those whom the Father has given to him! He will receive them, even as he said, "Him that comes unto me, I will in no wise cast out." When they come to him, however helpless and diseased and destitute they may be, he will graciously welcome them into his house of mercy, and place them at his children's table.

Nor is this all; he will *raise* them up at the last day. It is appointed unto *all* men once to die, (whether they believe in Jesus, or not;) but it is also appointed that *some* shall rise to everlasting life. Jesus promises to be with his children as they pass through the valley of the shadow of death, to receive their souls into paradise, to watch over their sleeping dust, and then at the sound of the last trumpet to raise them from their graves, to clothe them with glorious bodies like his own, and to welcome them into mansions of everlasting bliss. All this will Jesus do for everyone that comes to him.

And *why* will he do all this? He himself tells us *why*. Because it is the will of the Father that sent him. "This is the will of him that sent me, that everyone that sees the Son and believes on him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." The Son delights in doing his Father's will, even more than he does in showing mercy to sinners. It was the Father who *appointed* him to be the Savior of the world; and the Father knew how much the Son delighted in the work. When a person we love exceedingly gives us a command, we are ready to obey that command, however *painful* it may be; but when the work he appoints is that in which our soul delights, there is a double joy in obedience.

Ought we not to be astonished to think that the Father and the Son, who fill heaven and earth, should have interested themselves in our wretched race—should have cared for *you* and *me*! How guilty we must be, if we reject such wonderful mercy! We can have no excuse for not coming to Jesus, when we are so fully assured of a gracious reception. We shall not be repulsed, we shall not be upbraided, we shall not even be coldly received. Why then need we fear to come?

**May 6**

**John 6:41-58. *He promises to give his flesh and blood for the world.***

To what unbelieving earthly hearts Christ addressed this heavenly discourse! The Jews murmured, because they could not understand the truths he declared. They said that Jesus did *not* come from heaven, and the reason they alleged for thinking so was, that Joseph was his father. Had they inquired into his history, or meditated upon the prophecies, they could not have urged this objection.

They said also that Jesus *could* not give them his *flesh* to eat. The Lord did not attempt to answer their objections, because he knew they were not in a fit state of mind to receive his words. He replied to his enemies in a very different manner from that which might have been expected. (See ver. 44.) "No man can come unto me, except the Father which has sent me draw him." He quoted also this verse from the prophet Isaiah—"And they shall be all taught of God." *Who* shall be taught of God? His children. Whom does a father teach? His own children. God also teaches *His* children. *What* does he teach them? He teaches them their *need* of a Savior. None will come to Christ until they have been taught that they cannot do without him. It may appear strange that men do not find out this by themselves. But they do not. Starving people know that they are starving; but starving souls do not know that they are perishing, until God teaches them. They feel uneasy; but they do not know the cause of the aching void in their own hearts; and even when the bread of life is presented to them, they refuse it. But when God by his Holy Spirit has convinced them that they are in a perishing state, and that none but Christ can save them, then they thankfully accept the living bread. Has God taught any of *us* to feel our need of the Savior? Then may we say in the words of the poet—

Why was I made to hear your voice,  
And enter while there's room;  
When thousands make a wretched choice,  
And rather starve than come?

But Jesus spoke not only of *bread*, he spoke also of *flesh* and *blood*. He said, "Except you eat the *flesh* of the Son of man, and drink his *blood*, you have no life in you," (ver. 53.) The Jews were forbidden to taste blood, because it was the life of the animal. What did Jesus mean by eating his flesh and drinking his blood? He spoke of his own *death*. By his *death* sinners have *life*. Man has long been accustomed to kill beasts to preserve his own life. It seems fit that such creatures should die, in order that we may live. But how wonderful it is that the *Son of God* should die, that *worms* of the *earth*, such as we are, should live eternally. It would not be right that a man should die in order that *beasts* should live. Yet the Son of God laid down his life for *us*.

But his death will not save us, unless we *believe* in him. Believing in him is compared to eating and drinking. His flesh has been broken on the cross; his blood has been shed on Calvary; but has each of us believed in him? Have *I* believed in him? Have *you* believed in him? Eating bread and drinking wine at the Lord's supper will not save us. The sacraments are only *signs* of something greater than themselves. It was not until long after Jesus had spoken these words, that he ordained the holy communion of bread and wine, saying, "Do this in remembrance of me." He did not speak of that communion, when he said, "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you." No! he spoke of *faith* in his *death*. There is a supper to which he invites you—it is not administered in a church; it is not bestowed by human hands; it is

not received into the mouth. This supper is spoken of in this passage of the Revelation—"Behold I stand at the door and knock—if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him and will *sup* with him, and he with me." (Rev. 3:20.)

**May 7**

**John 6:59-65. He explains the spiritual meaning of this declaration.**

We find that many of the disciples of Jesus were offended by his discourse concerning his own flesh and blood. We must remember that *all* the followers of Christ were called *disciples*, whereas only *twelve* were called "*apostles*." The twelve *apostles* are *not* meant by the word *disciple* in this passage. Why did these disciples murmur? Because they could not understand how Jesus could give them his flesh to eat. They thought he meant that his flesh must literally be eaten; whereas he spoke of a *spiritual* thing; of obtaining life through faith in his death.

He told them that they would be still more astonished when he ascended up where he was before, even into heaven; for then it would be clearly seen that he did not speak of his *real* flesh and blood, as they would be changed, and return to heaven. "What and if you shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before!" What would you say *then*? Jesus proceeded to explain his words, as far as they *could* be explained.

He said, "The *Spirit* quickens, or gives life." Bread and wine cannot give life. No, the Spirit alone gives life. "The *flesh* profits nothing." By "*flesh*" forms and ceremonies are meant. They cannot profit the soul by any power in them. It is right to keep the ordinances of Christ, and to partake of the Supper he has ordained in remembrance of his death. Believers account it an unspeakable privilege to approach their Lord's table; but no ordinances, not even those of *divine* appointment, can impart *spiritual* life. Jesus directs us to his Father as the only source of life.

When he saw men did not believe, he told them, "No man can come unto me, except it be given unto him of my Father." Why did he declare this doctrine? Has it not often furnished unbelievers with an *excuse* for not coming to him? His reason for declaring it was that he might convince man of his danger and helplessness. Many have been alarmed from hearing it, and have been led to call out, "What shall we do to be saved?" A reasonable creature is often led to think, "Am I indeed in a state of death! And can I not raise *myself* from it? What will become of me, if the Father do not lead me to believe in Christ!" These are profitable thoughts, and often induce the sinner to call with earnestness upon God. A few years ago, the son of pious parents entered into a church. He had lately lost a praying mother, and his heart was softened by the event—but he had

not turned to his mother's God. The preacher set before his audience the declaration of the Lord Jesus, "No man can come unto me, except the Father which has sent me, draw him." The youth was alarmed, "What, is my mother dead," thought he; "is her voice silent, and am I still unconverted? And *what* if God should never bestow upon me his converting grace?" He offered up earnest prayers. The Lord heard him, blessed him, and chose him to be one of his faithful ministers.

What ought to be the feelings of believers when they reflect that they never could have come to Christ, if it had not been given unto them of the Father. Have we believed? Then what thanks can we render for our escape from perdition, and for our hope of glory! We would ever be "Giving thanks unto the Father, who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."

## May 8

**John 6:66 to end. *He asks the apostles whether they will go away.***

No minister ought to be surprised when people are offended by his sermons, seeing that some were so much displeased with this discourse of the blessed Jesus, as to walk no more with him. What was the doctrine that gave offence? It was this, "No man can come unto me except it be given him of my Father." This truth wounds the pride of man. It shows him that he cannot repent when he chooses, or turn to God at his own time. Proud sinners do not like to find that they are so utterly dependent upon God's mercy. Yet are we not dependent upon God for *everything*? For life, for food, for clothing, for health, for earthly happiness? Surely, then, upon God we *must* be dependent for eternal life and heavenly bliss. Happy dependence! for has not God promised to give these blessings to *all* who ask him?

Great was the folly of the disciples who forsook the instructions of infinite wisdom! Could the compassionate Jesus behold their conduct without feeling grief on their account! He looked at the little flock that still remained faithful, and addressed to them this tender appeal—"Will *you* also go away?" We may well conceive that it was in a tone of fatherly affection these words were uttered. They went to the heart of the frank and generous Peter, and drew from him (on behalf of the rest as well as himself) this earnest declaration—"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we believe and are sure that you are that Christ, the Son of the living God." Peter's warm expressions of love and fidelity were acceptable to his Divine Master. Though the world may deride *professions* of attachment to Christ, they were never reproved by the Lord himself.

There was no insincerity in Peter's assurances, but there was more weakness in his heart than he was aware of. No temptation had yet occurred to induce him to forsake his Savior; but Jesus well knew that the day would come when *all* that little band would leave him in the hands of his enemies. The *doctrines* that He had declared had not offended them, but the *sufferings* that he must undergo—*these* would prove their stumbling-block. Peter, who was loudest in his professions of attachment, would not only *forsake*, but also *deny* his Master. Could he at that moment have foreseen his base conduct in the judgment-hall, he would have added *petitions* to his *professions*. In the Epistles he wrote many years afterwards, he speaks of the saints as "kept by the *power of God* through faith unto salvation." He found to his cost that he could not stand by *his own power*. In the same epistle he warns believers against the *enemy* who had nearly destroyed him, and says, "Be sober, be vigilant; for your adversary the devil walks about, as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

Do *our* hearts at this moment glow with grateful affection to our Savior? Are we ready to exclaim, "To whom shall we go, if we forsake him? No other teacher can show us the way of life; no other friend can comfort us in the hour of sorrow; no other advocate can plead for us in the day of judgment!" Yet let us remember that this love, we think so strong, will be *tried*. In what *manner* it will be tried, we cannot foresee. The devices of Satan are innumerable. He knows our characters, and understands how to assail us to the greatest advantage. He has succeeded in causing eminent saints to forsake their God for *a while*. Jerome of Prague, and our Cranmer, as well as the apostle Peter, were tempted to deny the Master they loved; yet at last all three laid down their lives in his cause; for the children of God are brought back by their loving Shepherd's rod into the fold whence they have wandered.

Jesus knew that all his beloved apostles would be restored, excepting one, who was "*a devil*." Judas was distinguished from his brethren by this dark token, "indifference to his Lord." It was *he* who so strongly objected to Mary's memorable act of love, the pouring the precious ointment on her Savior's head. Yet he so far succeeded in deceiving his fellow apostles, as to be intrusted with the bag containing their little all. The love and esteem of professed Christians for each other, are often very much misplaced. We ought not to solace ourselves with the thought that the best of men approve us, if our hearts are conscious that we do not *love* the Savior. Jesus is loved by all the saints in earth, even by the *weakest*—he is still *more* loved by the saints in *heaven*; he has been *ever* loved by the innumerable hosts of glorious angels. By whom then is he not beloved? By devils in hell; and by some ungrateful men, who, though they know he died for them, yet refuse to love him.

**May 9**

**Matthew 15:1-20. *Jesus eats with unwashed hands.***

It has often been observed, that in the character of Jesus, opposite qualities were united. We seldom (or perhaps never) see a man *remarkable* at once for meekness, and for boldness. Yet our Lord was remarkable for both. The incident we have just read, affords an instance of his boldness in dealing faithfully with his powerful and malicious enemies.

He would not countenance the custom of washing the hands before taking food. Yet was not this a harmless custom? Why did he not comply with it? Because, though harmless in itself, it was enforced on the people as a *religious duty*. The Jewish teachers taught the people that food defiled them unless eaten with washed hands. Now this was not a doctrine of God's word. These elders (or teachers) ought to have taught the truths contained in God's holy word. It was their office to explain the Scriptures to the people; but instead of doing this, they added commandments of their own. Jesus expressed his disapprobation of their conduct by not observing these human commandments. The custom of washing the hands before eating was innocent in itself; but there were other commandments taught by the elders that were very pernicious. Jesus gave an instance of one of these. God had commanded children to honor their parents. A child who honors his parents will provide for them in old age. But the Jewish teachers taught the people, that if they gave some money to the priests for the service of the temple, that then they might be excused from supporting their aged parents. They instructed children to say to their decrepit parents, "It is a gift; what I should have given *you* has been bestowed upon the temple; so that I can do nothing for you." Such conduct was exceedingly wicked; yet the Jewish teachers said it was right.

We see from this instance that it is very dangerous to follow the opinions of men concerning what is wrong, or what is right. What God commands is good—what he forbids is evil; and the word of God is the only rule of good and evil.

Of course the Pharisees were extremely enraged against Christ for exposing their false instructions. But Jesus had so much compassion for the poor ignorant people, that he chose to undeceive them; though by this line of conduct he increased the hatred of his enemies. Had we more compassion for the ignorant, we should have less fear of man. A father would not stand by and see his child poisoned, whomever he might offend by his opposition.

Jesus explained clearly to the people in the presence of their teachers, in what respect they were deceived. He called them, and said, "Not that which goes *into* the mouth defiles a man; but that which comes *out* of the mouth, that defiles a man." Yet even the *disciples* could not understand this simple truth, and Peter called it a "*parable*," and asked Jesus to explain it. It is very hard to get rid of prejudices which have long darkened the mind. The heathen, even when converted, are apt to retain many superstitious ideas imbibed in their infancy. We are all naturally disposed to think that ceremonies can profit our soul; whereas

none can sanctify us but the Spirit of God, and nothing can *defile* us but *sin*. Neither is it the sinful *action* only that pollutes—the sinful *thought* (which gives rise to the action) pollutes far more. It is not the *act* of stealing only, but the *desire* to possess our neighbor's property, that defiles; it is not the *words* of the lie merely, but the *WISH* to deceive, that stains the man; it is not so much the blasphemous expressions, as the irreverent *feeling* towards God, that constitutes the essence of profaneness. We perceive, therefore, that even if we have not committed gross and open transgressions, we are, notwithstanding, deeply polluted. Such defilement, no ceremonies can remove. Water cannot wash the heart. The blood of Christ alone can cleanse the inner man. It is a *spiritual* washing that we need; Jesus himself must wash us or we perish. He is gracious, and will pardon the vilest sinner that implores his mercy; he will not only pardon him but *sanctify* him, and give him a new heart full of holy desires.

**May 10**

**Matthew 15:21-28. *The woman of Tyre.***

It is very interesting to observe the various ways in which Jesus behaved to afflicted people. Some, he *offered* to relieve; saying to one at the pool of Bethesda, "Will you be made whole?" and to another with a withered hand at the synagogue, "Stretch forth your hand." Others he restored on their **FIRST** application to him—while he permitted the woman of Canaan to plead long and earnestly before he showed her mercy. Yet even this delay was the cause of her obtaining greater favor in the end; for it gave her the opportunity of proving the strength of her faith. Before he exposed her to this test, he knew that she could endure it. The compassionate Savior proportions our trials to our strength, and will bring upon us no temptation greater than we are able to bear. A sharp trial is often a sign that he confides in our fidelity. Had a weak saint been tried as Job was, he would have been overwhelmed; but God knew that his servant would prove faithful.

When we consider who this woman was, we have reason to be astonished at the attainments she had made. She was a Canaanite, a daughter of the cursed race. She was not descended from Abraham, the friend of God—she was not one of the nation of Israel. No! she was descended from ignorant heathen. She resided in the wicked city of Tyre; and she had been brought up in the Greek or heathen religion; yet it appears evident that she had obtained some knowledge of the true God, and that she possessed a hearty faith in his name. How could she have called Jesus the Son of David, had she not heard of the prophecy made unto David concerning One who should sit upon his throne? She was evidently a child of God, born again of the Holy Spirit, and bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit—faith, patience, and humility. She had such *faith*, that she believed that Jesus would have mercy on her, in spite of his apparent unkindness; she had such *patience* that she continued, notwithstanding repeated denials, to press her suit;

and she had such *humility*, that she could bear to be called a dog. Let us now observe Christ's conduct towards this woman. The disciples in a spirit of selfishness, and not of compassion, entreated their Master to send away the poor suppliant. Jesus is never weary of the cry of distress; above all, the voice of faith, though choked with tears and sighs, ever sounds sweet in his ears. The mother is glad to hear those cries which prove that her babe lives; and the Savior rejoices to hear those petitions which are the tokens of spiritual life.

Have we ever prayed as this woman did? Have not we as great requests to make as she had? She implored a *temporal* blessing, and received an answer. Had she never prayed for *spiritual* blessings? Her faith, her patience, her humility, prove that she must have prayed for them—whether beneath some fig-tree, as Nathanael did, or in some chamber of her heathen home—we know not. She was a true believer, and therefore must have been a secret worshiper. She had learned to trust in her God from his dealings with her in times past, and therefore she was not dismayed by her Savior's seeming sternness. *We* also must have secret transactions with our God. When we have experienced his pardoning mercy, we shall be able to trust him with *all* our concerns. It is indeed a comfort to a mother, when a child is sick, to have a God in whom to confide. Sometimes he may see good to take her child away; but He will in the end reward believing prayer by imparting unspeakable consolation.

**May 11**

**Mark 7:31 to end. *The deaf and mute man.***

We here find the Lord Jesus again visiting Decapolis on the borders of the lake. On a former occasion he had healed two poor demoniacs, who dwelt among the tombs. The treatment which he had received from the owners of the swine, did not prevent him from again visiting their shores. There were many sufferers there whom he designed to relieve and to bless. It is probable that his way had been prepared by that poor man who had desired to accompany him, but who had remained behind that he might tell "what great things the Lord had done for him." With what warmth that man must have spoken to his countrymen of the compassion of his Lord! Those who have lately experienced the loving-kindness of the Savior cannot speak of him with coldness. The testimony of one such person often produces a great effect upon the minds of many.

We know not by what means the friends of the deaf and mute man were induced to apply to Jesus. Though deprived of two valuable faculties, the afflicted man possessed the blessing of affectionate friends, who *besought* the Lord to heal him. We read of a paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, who had no friend to help him in his weakness.

The Lord did not relieve the deaf and mute man *immediately*; he first took him to

a retired place, where he might perform the miracle unseen by the multitude. He healed him in a remarkable manner. Before he uttered the words, "Be opened," he put his fingers in the man's ears, spit, touched his tongue, looked up to heaven, and sighed. These actions were, no doubt, designed to instruct the deaf and mute man. Though this man could not *hear*, he could feel the sacred touch, he could see the eyes uplifted, and perceive the deep-drawn sigh. The touch taught him that it was through the power of *Jesus* he was healed; the upward look that it was by the will of his Father in *heaven*, and the sigh, that the Savior felt compassion for his infirmities.

Had this man been cured by *natural* means, he would have had to learn the use of language *gradually*; but those whom Jesus healed were endowed with the power of using their restored faculties *immediately*. The mute man spoke plain. Thus the prophecy of Isaiah was in one instance fulfilled, "The ears of the deaf shall be unstopped, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly."

We have seen, in this miracle, that Jesus adapted the *mode* of cure to the *circumstances* of the afflicted man. By what *various* means he now cures the *spiritual* infirmities of men! He knows how to treat each case in the most *suitable* manner. There are many different states of mind to be found among the unconverted, and all seem to us cases very hard to cure. The wisdom of Jesus enables him to meet the difficulties of each case that he undertakes to relieve. He knows how to solemnize the light mind of one, and how to abase the proud spirit of another; how to tame the violent temper, and to enlarge the selfish heart. It is very interesting to consider the peculiar circumstances attending the conversion of each sinner to God.

"By *what* way has the Lord brought *you* to listen to his voice?" Have you indeed been brought to listen to it? Or are you still deaf to his gracious invitations?

**May 12**

**Matthew 15:29-31. *Christ heals the multitude on the mountain-top.***

The miracle wrought upon the deaf and mute man brought a host of suppliants to the feet of Jesus. The mountain-top was his throne of mercy, and thence he rebuked the diseases of the imploring multitude. Could any occupation have more gratified his loving heart! Yes; there was one which would have been still more delightful to him. Had penitents implored his pardon as earnestly as these sufferers besought his healing mercy, he would have felt a deeper joy. The day shall come when *all* men shall apply to Him for the forgiveness of their sins; with weeping and with supplication shall they come, each one mourning for his iniquity.

It is to be remarked, that the poor sufferers were brought by their friends, who cast them down at the feet of Jesus. The afflicted creatures were not able to come alone. How could the lame have climbed the hill? How could the blind have found the way, and how could the mute have sued for mercy? But by the kindness of their friends they reached the blessed spot, and made known their wretched state. It may be we ourselves owe to the kindness of our friends, under God, in times past, the salvation of our souls. Was there no affectionate relative who expostulated with us in the days of our folly, who persuaded us to accompany him to hear some faithful preacher, and who encouraged us to forsake the world, and to serve the Lord? In some instances it was a mother's prayers, long offered to God in secret, with many tears, that drew down upon the soul eternal blessings. How much do we owe to such friends for all their love to us, and all their exertions for our good! *We* ought to show the same kindness to others, that *they* once showed to us. Have we no unconverted relatives to cast at the feet of Jesus by secret supplications? Have we none to whom we might send a letter of entreaty, or a book adapted to their case? Are there none whom we might draw to the house of God, to hear the gospel preached with fervor and with power? These services of love bind the hearts of the children of God to each other.

You may conceive how much the sufferers who had been cast at the Savior's feet must afterwards have loved those who had laid them there. When restored, did they not go to seek for others, afflicted as they once had been? There was no room here for strife and contention; there was enough virtue in Jesus to heal *all* who came. When *men* bestow gifts, there must be a limit to their extent, and this circumstance gives rise to competition and jealousy; but Jesus is like the sun in the heavens, who has shed his beams for ages upon benighted worlds, and is still as full of glorious light as when he first began to shine. There is no rivalry among penitent sinners. There is a fountain in which *all* may wash, and be clean; there is a heaven to which *all* may go, and be happy. In that abode of bliss, benefits received from our fellow-creatures upon earth will not be forgotten. There will exist in those worlds stronger ties than the nearest known in this. The converts who form the joy and crown of the blessed apostle Paul, are nearer and dearer to him than children are to any father upon earth.

But if saints entertain a grateful love towards *each other*, what must they feel for the Savior who died for them! Surely the mute, the blind, the maimed, whom Jesus healed, must have loved their gracious benefactor. It is recorded of a poor blind boy, that such was his affection for the physician who had couched his eyes and restored his sight, that he never saw him without shedding tears of joy; and that when disappointed of an expected visit, he could not forbear weeping. The saints on earth *begin* to feel this love for their Savior; but now they love imperfectly. In heaven this love will be the spring of all their thoughts. It is written upon the tomb of one of God's servants,\* this saying, which he had expressed in his lifetime—"To love is heaven; to love a little less imperfectly is the foretaste of heaven." \* See the Life of Gonthier, the Swiss Pastor.

**May 13**

**Matthew 15:32 to end. *Christ feeds five thousand with seven loaves.***

For three days seated upon a mountain, surrounded by the afflicted and the ignorant, our blessed Lord had manifested his compassion for our fallen race. At the end of that period, he displayed his beneficence by feeding the multitude. He had refused to feed them when they came *because* of the loaves; but now that they had been gathered together from other motives, he provided for their wants. It is so now. The Lord does not promise to provide for the *temporal* wants of those who attempt to serve him from *interested* views, but only for those who seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Is it not surprising that the disciples should say the *second* time, "Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?" How soon they had forgotten the five loaves and the five thousand! But can we remember no similar instance of forgetfulness in our own history? Has not the Lord on many occasions in times past gone beyond our highest expectations? And yet are we not prone in every fresh difficulty to doubt his power and his faithfulness? David remembered that God had delivered him out of the paw of the lion and the bear, and therefore he believed that He would deliver him out of the hand of the mighty giant. Whenever we find ourselves placed in difficulties, we should remember the "years of the right-hand of the Most High;" that is, we should remember the events of past years, and the deliverances we have received. How many fears have we entertained! Have they been realized? Has not the Lord been better to us than our *fears*? and better than our *hopes* too? The Lord, who fed the multitude, can supply the largest family with bread. The pious parent may trust Him to send provision for all his little ones. The affectionate daughter may feel assured that the Lord will help her to sustain her widowed mother. The weak in health, and declining in years, may confide in the Lord not to leave them to pine neglected and forlorn; for the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers.

The Lord is able to supply his perishing creatures with more enduring food than *bread*. The disciples ought to have known that the bread they distributed signified that flesh which Jesus would give for the life of the world; for they had lately heard their Master discourse upon this subject. The Lord has already raised up many faithful ministers who proclaim to his people the crucified Savior. This was his promise in days of old—"I will give you pastors according to my heart, which shall feed you with knowledge, and with understanding," (Jer. 3:15.) If all congregations had the same appetite for the bread of *life* that this multitude had for *common* bread, how joyfully would pastors exercise their ministry! But of what congregation can it be said, "They did *all* eat and were filled?" Too many people have no appetite for the heavenly feast; they sit as God's people sit, but they

partake not of the sacred fare—they go away to feed again upon ashes, and at length die without having tasted of *that* bread, which if a man eat, he shall live forever. But there is a congregation above, in number far exceeding *four* thousand, or one hundred and forty-four thousand—a multitude that no man can number, who are fed by the Lord himself with heavenly manna. They hunger no more, because the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne *feeds* them.

**May 14**

**Matthew 16:1-4. *Christ refuses to grant a sign to the Pharisees and Sadducees.***

It is not certain *what* the sign from heaven was that the Pharisees and Sadducees desired to see; probably it was some display of Christ's glory, such as he afterwards gave to his most favored disciples upon the mount. But whatever the sign required might be, the *motive* that led these men to ask for it was a very evil one—it was the *desire* not to believe. And why did they entertain this desire? Because they hated Jesus. It is our *desires* and our *feelings* that mark our characters in God's sight.

And what were the feelings of the Savior on this occasion? Mark records a circumstance which shows us what they were. In Mark 8:12, we read, "And he sighed deeply in his spirit." The hardness of men's hearts grieved the Savior more than all the sufferings of his life. It is a sign of grace in the heart when a man is deeply grieved by hearing of sin committed against *others*; but it is a still better sign when he is *grieved*, rather than *angry*, at sins committed against *himself*. There are some to be found among the followers of Jesus, who have imbibed this feeling from their Master. The most cutting reproaches have excited no other emotion than this regret—"Alas, he who hates me is blind, and knows not what he does."

The Lord condescended patiently to argue with these unbelievers. He proved that their doubts respecting his being the Son of God did not arise from want of *understanding*; for they showed their understanding by knowing the signs of the weather. Their *understandings* were good enough to enable them to know that he was the Son of God, because all the signs the prophets had described, had come to pass. We cannot now consider *what* these signs were. The miracles Jesus performed were among them; for Isaiah had prophesied that the tongue of the mute should sing when the Savior came, that the ears of the deaf should be unstopped, and that the lame man should leap as an deer, (Is. 35.)

Jesus declared that *one* sign only should be given to these unbelievers—the sign that God once gave to the Ninevites.

Jonas was cast into the sea, and was swallowed by a whale. Thus Jesus would

be cast into the grave, and lie hid in the tomb. As Jonas was delivered from the whale, so Jesus was raised from the tomb. As Jonas warned the people of Nineveh that their city would be destroyed in forty *days*, so Jesus warned the people of Jerusalem that their city would be destroyed in forty *years*; that is, before that generation would pass away. But whereas the Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonas, the Jews did *not* repent at the preaching of the Lord and his apostles.

The words which are recorded in the conclusion of this passage (verse 4) are dreadful—"Jesus left them and departed,"—left them in mingled sorrow and displeasure. To be left by Jesus is *almost* the greatest calamity that can befall a human creature! There is *one* calamity greater, which is this—to hear Jesus say, "Depart from me." If left by Jesus, we may implore his return; but when he says "Depart," we never can be admitted any more into His presence. Some, who have despised religious privileges while they possessed them, have learned their value after they have lost them; and *sometimes* God has graciously *restored* the blessings they had forfeited. But it too often happens that when Jesus leaves a people, he leaves them to their impenitence and hardness of heart, and that when they see Him again, it is to hear Him say, "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire."

**May 15**

**Matthew 16:5-12. *He warns his disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.***

We often find that people did not understand our Savior when he spoke of spiritual things under the image of earthly ones. Thus, when he spoke of living water to the woman of Samaria, the woman did not understand him. Neither did his disciples now understand him when he spoke of leaven. He did not *reprove* the woman of Samaria for not comprehending his meaning, because *she* had never enjoyed opportunities of instruction; but he expected better things from his own disciples, and he rebuked them, saying, "How is it that you do not understand that I spoke it *not* to you concerning *bread*?" And *how* was it that they did not understand? Had they not lived long enough with their Master to know his way of discourse?

It was unbelief which clouded their minds. Because they had taken no bread with them in the ship, they feared that they should suffer from hunger; though their Lord was in the ship, and though He had promised to supply all their need.

They did not express these unbelieving thoughts aloud; but their Master knew they cherished them in their hearts. Who ventures to go to God to express in words his secret unbelief? Who could say in prayers—"We cannot trust you in time to come? We think it likely that you will forsake us, that you will not care for

our tears, or heed our cries." We dare not *speak* thus to our heavenly Father. Why then should we *think* what we dare not *speak*?

Jesus was displeased with his disciples on *two* accounts—for their want of *faith*, and for their want of *spiritual understanding*. How could they suppose that the earthly leaven of the Pharisees was worse than any other leaven? Leaven could not be the worse for belonging to wicked men. Jesus had lately shown his disciples that nothing but *sin* could pollute; yet their minds were so much darkened by early prejudices that they could not receive this simple truth.

And what was the leaven of which the Savior bids his disciples beware? It was the false doctrine, or teaching, of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Both these sects taught errors; but *opposite* errors. The Pharisees *added* to the word of God—the Sadducees *took* from it. The Pharisees added to it commandments of their own invention; the Sadducees took from it *all* but the five books of Moses, and even these they did not fully believe, for they would receive nothing that they did not *understand*. The Pharisees were superstitious—the Sadducees were skeptical. The world is now full of people, who, though bearing different names, preach doctrines like those of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Papists resemble the Pharisees, and infidels the Sadducees.

Were even the *disciples* in danger of being tainted by bad doctrine? Ought we not to fear its evil influence? Bad doctrine, like infected air, finds entrance through the smallest aperture, and unseen spreads a pestilence all around. As leaven will change the nature of a whole lump of flour, so bad doctrine will injure *all* the powers of the mind, and all the feelings of the heart. The venerable Howells used to say, "Error in *principle* is the parent of vice in *practice*." If it be so, how carefully we ought to shun bad doctrine! Though we may be well instructed in the truth, yet we are liable to be corrupted by false teachers. There are some melancholy instances of people who had instructed thousands by their pious writings, receiving in their advanced years false principles into their minds, and attempting to pervert those whom once they had edified. Our constant prayer ought to be, "Hold me up, that my footsteps slip not."

By what mark may we distinguish good doctrine from false? By this mark; the true doctrine exalts Christ, and humbles man; it is summed up in these words—"O Israel, you have destroyed yourself; but in *me* is your help," (Hosea 13:9.)

**May 16**

**Mark 8:22-26. *He cures a blind man by touching him twice.***

There is one circumstance in this miracle which we do not meet with in any other—it is the *gradual* manner in which the cure was effected; the blind man was not *suddenly* restored to sight, but by *degrees*.

There are several other interesting circumstances connected with this miracle, though they are not *peculiar* to it. It is evident that this man did not belong to the town of Bethsaida, for after he was cured, Jesus desired him to return to his *house*, but *not* to enter the town. Bethsaida was one of those cities most highly favored, and most deeply guilty, for it repented not at the preaching of Jesus. On this account a woe was pronounced against it. "Woe unto you, Bethsaida." The friends of the blind man heard that the Lord was arrived at Bethsaida, and they went there, and besought mercy for the afflicted creature.

It often happens when the gospel is preached in a town, that while it is despised by the inhabitants of the place, it is valued by those who live in distant villages. The Lord showed his displeasure against the people of Bethsaida, by leading the blind man out of the town before he cured him, and by forbidding him to return there afterwards. Those who hate the gospel often take great pains to avoid hearing it, and God sometimes meets their wicked desires by taking measures to prevent their being troubled by the unwelcome sound.

How touching is the account of the kind manner in which Jesus conducted the blind man out of the town! "He led him by the hand." Behold the Son of God leading the blind by a way that he knew not, to the retired spot in which he intended to restore him to sight. Perhaps this blind man was but little acquainted with his benefactor, and was not fully aware of his power to cure his blindness. Thus many are led by Jesus to the place where they are converted. They know not where the events of Providence are guiding them; they know not why they are removed from one place to another; why one path is blocked up, and another opened before them, until at length they find that all was arranged to bring about this blessed end, the opening of their blind eyes.

Jesus cured this blind man by the use of outward means, and not by his word alone; He spat on his eyes, and touched them. Perhaps he did so that he might more fully convince him that *He* alone was the author of his cure; there was a virtue in his touch, a power in the simplest means when applied by Him, that could remove blindness. Thus it is now. The most trifling circumstances are made by the power of Christ effectual to open the eyes of unbelievers.

A few years ago, an infidel saw a child reading the Bible, and said to him, in a scornful manner, "You cannot comprehend that book, why do you read it?" The child replied, "I delight in it, and therefore I try to understand it." This simple answer struck the infidel so powerfully, that he was led to reflect seriously on the cause of his unbelief, and to apply to God for his Holy Spirit.

This blind man, it appears, had not been *born* blind, for he knew the names of surrounding objects. His sight was so imperfectly restored at first, that it was only by their movements that he could distinguish men from trees; he knew that those were men that he beheld, because they walked. Jesus would not suffer him to

*remain* in this state, but soon completely restored his sight. He laid his hand upon him the *second* time. Are not we reminded by this account of our own case? Has spiritual light been bestowed upon us? Is that sight *perfect*? Can we understand spiritual things distinctly and fully? We must reply, "No, we see through a glass darkly." Not through such a glass as in *these* days admits light into our rooms; but we see spiritual truths in the same confused manner that objects are seen reflected upon *ancient* mirrors, which were only made of polished brass. This is the state of the most enlightened Christian; he sees eternal things "*darkly*." How much more is it the state of *new* converts! They can just discern (though faintly) what it is most necessary to know; they see that sin is hateful, that God is holy, and that Christ is precious; but there are many important truths they cannot distinguish; and when they meditate on them they are perplexed and distressed.

What is the only remedy for the darkness of our minds? The touch of Jesus. Let him touch us by his Spirit the *second* time, and the *third* time. Let him continue to touch our eyes with his divine eye salve, until we can see him as he is, that we also may be like him. When the apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, though he knew they were converted, yet he told them that he constantly prayed that the eyes of their understanding might be enlightened, that they might know the hope of their calling, and the riches of their glorious inheritance. (Eph. 1:18.) These are the things that we so dimly discern. We do not behold the excellency of heaven with sufficient clearness. But the day shall come when those who now see *imperfectly* shall see face to face, shall know even as they are known.

"O glorious hour, O blessed abode,  
I shall be near and like my God,  
And flesh and sin no more control  
The sacred pleasures of the soul."

Those are indeed miserable who say, "We see," though they see not. Let us continually cry, "Anoint our eyes, that we may see more and more of your divine glory, O blessed Lord!"

**May 17**

**Matt. 16:13-20. He pronounces a blessing upon Peter.**

In this passage we are permitted to behold Jesus and his disciples in sacred retirement. The towns of Caesarea Philippi were situated at the northern part of the land, where the Lord was in some degree relieved from the pressure of the multitude. Such seasons he devoted to the instruction of his beloved apostles. With them he joined in holy exercises. We never hear of his praying with the multitude; but we know that he often prayed alone with his chosen flock. After his prayer, he conversed with them upon sacred subjects. He asked them, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" It appears from their answer, that the

multitude did not believe him to be the Son of God. But when he asked his disciples who he was, Simon Peter answered for the rest—"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

The Lord was pleased with this bold confession of faith, and he said, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona." When Peter first came to Jesus, Simon was his name, but Christ gave him the name of Peter which means a stone. Who was it had taught Peter that Jesus was the Son of God? Flesh and blood had not taught him; that is, no *man* had taught him; but the *Father* himself. Men can never make us believe in Christ; they cannot give us *faith*. It comes from God alone. Those who have not been taught by God, may *appear* to be religious; but they will forsake Christ in times of persecution. But Peter would in the end (though not at first) prove firm as a stone. Christ knew this when he said, "You are Peter."

But was *Peter* the rock on which Christ would build his church? No. There is only one rock, that is Christ himself. Peter had just declared, "You are the Christ." By believing this truth, sinners are saved. Peter, after his Lord's ascension, often proclaimed this truth. On one occasion, he said before the enemies of his crucified Master, "This is the stone which was set at nothing of you builders, which is become the head of the corner; neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:11, 12.) Have we believed in this name? Unless we do believe, we must perish.

True believers are called the church. It was of this church that Christ spoke when he said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." By the gates of hell he meant the powers of darkness, or Satan and his angels, who are now trying to destroy the church of Christ; but they never can succeed, because it is built upon the eternal rock.

Christ showed great favor to Peter, when he said, "I give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." Power belongs to God alone. He shuts, and no man opens, and opens and no man shuts; but Christ communicated some of his own power to his apostles. Before he ascended to heaven, he breathed on them and said, "Receive you the Holy Spirit. Whoever's sins you remit, they are remitted to them, and whoever's sins you retain, they are retained." The apostles proved their authority by the miracles they wrought.

It was not to Peter *alone* that power was given, but to *all* the apostles. We find from reading the book of Acts, that Peter possessed no authority over his brethren. Why then did Jesus on this occasion say to *him* especially, "I give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." The reason seems to be, that as it was Peter who had made the declaration, "You are the Christ," it was to him that Jesus replied. After the Lord had ascended, Paul became an apostle, and though he called himself the least of the apostles, he was in nothing behind the very chief of them; and he proved his apostleship by the signs and wonders which he

wrought.

The apostles were stewards of the mysteries of God. They had the keys in their hands, and they unlocked their Lord's treasury, and distributed among men his unsearchable riches. While many trample these pearls under their feet, may we count all things but dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.

**May 18**

**Matthew 16:21 to end. *Christ reproveth Peter.***

In our last reading, Peter was called "blessed," and was promised many privileges; now he is rebuked as "*Satan*." Yes, the meek and gentle Jesus uttered this severe rebuke, "Get you behind me, Satan." Thus we see that a true believer is liable to displease the Lord.

Peter was a true believer; yet on this occasion he acted the part of *Satan* towards his Master, by advising him not to endure suffering. No doubt he was partly actuated by affection, but his Master did not overlook the fault on *that* account. Peter ought to have had the glory of God more at heart than to have wished the Son of God *not* to fulfill his glorious work, even unto death. Christ therefore calls him an *offence*, or a stumbling-block. Those are not our best friends, who endeavor to persuade us to please ourselves, rather than to please God. We should be afraid to listen to them, and we should prefer the friendship of those who counsel us to endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Probably there lurked at the bottom of Peter's heart a desire himself to escape suffering *with* a suffering master; therefore Jesus told him plainly that he must deny himself, and take up his cross. Nor did he speak to *him* alone, but to each of *us*. "If *any* man will come after me, let him deny himself," that is, his earthly desires, for ease, pleasure, riches, esteem—"and let him take up his cross," that is, let him prepare even to die for my sake. The spirit of a Christian is the *spirit* of a martyr; he is *ready* to give up all things, even life itself, for Christ.

Many souls have been converted by this solemn appeal, "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" It was a sermon preached upon this text that first led the missionary John Williams to care for his soul. He was an ungodly youth at the time he heard it; but afterwards he gave up the world, took up his cross, and followed Christ. At length he lost his life in his service. Having landed upon the island of Erromango, in the New Hebrides, hoping to preach the gospel there, he was pursued by the natives. He had just reached the sea, when he fell down, was overtaken, and bruised to death by the clubs of the savages. His blood was mingled with the waves, his flesh was devoured by cannibals, and his bones made into fish-barbs. But will he regret the

choice he made, in the day when the Son of man shall come in his glory? When we consider what the Son of God gave up for our sakes, how little every sacrifice appears that we can make for him! Our *great* motive ought to be "*gratitude*" to him who shed his blood for sinners; and it is the great motive of all true Christians.

What did Jesus mean when he said, "There be some standing here which shall not taste of death, until they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." He could not mean that some of his apostles would live until he came to judge the world; for he has not come yet, and they have long been dead. Did he mean that some of them should soon see him in his glory? In the next chapter there is an account of his glorious appearance upon a mountain, in the presence of three of the apostles. Could men now see Jesus as he will appear when he comes in clouds as King of kings, and Lord of lords, how mean and worthless all earthly glory would appear!

**May 19**

**Matthew 17:1-4. *The Transfiguration.***

We lately read of Jesus conversing with his disciples respecting his *sufferings*. Now we read of his unveiling to them his *glory*. The prophet Isaiah foretold that his face should be more marred (or disfigured) than the face of any man. (Is. 52:14.) No doubt, therefore, he wore usually an aspect of care and sorrow; but on this occasion he permitted the glories of his divine nature to shine forth through his frail earthly tabernacle. Thus he gave us a glimpse of the glory which awaits *all* the saints; for when they shall see Him as he is, they shall be like Him, and their vile bodies shall be changed into the likeness of his glorious body.

The mountain upon which this change in the appearance of the Lord took place, is supposed to be Mount Tabor, in Galilee. This mountain stands alone, and its top is not pointed like that of most mountains, but broad and flat, and therefore well-suited for a resting place. Its height is not great. In one hour it may be ascended. In this retired and lovely spot our Savior was *praying* (as Luke informs us) with three of his disciples, when his form underwent a most glorious alteration. Have not many of his servants in all ages experienced a like glorious change in their *feelings* when engaged in prayer? Has not the gloom that oppressed them when they began to pour out their souls before God, been succeeded by the light of heavenly day?

The Savior was attended on the mount by two heavenly visitants, Moses and Elijah. Like their Lord, both these holy men, when on earth, had fasted for forty days in the wilderness. But all *their* sufferings were over, while the bitterest sufferings of Jesus were yet to come. These prophets were well prepared, by what they had themselves endured, to comfort their Lord in the prospect of his

agonizing death. That death was the subject of their discourse. The Savior could obtain no *consolation* from his apostles; their minds were still dazzled by hopes of earthly glory; but he could obtain the most tender sympathy from the discourse of his glorified servants.

The appearance of those departed saints on the mount, is calculated to comfort *us* also in the prospect of death. Are we not led from this fact, (as from many others,) to believe, that the spirits of the saints do *immediately* pass into glory, and that they do *not* wait for the general resurrection to be introduced into the presence of Christ?

How was it that Peter knew that the glorious people he beheld were Moses and Elijah? We are not informed by what *means* the discovery was made. But does not this circumstance give us reason to believe that we shall *know* the saints in glory—not only our *own* friends, whom we loved upon earth, but *all* the saints? How delightful is the prospect! What will be the raptures of fellowship with such a company! And yet this will be one of the *lesser* delights of heaven, for the presence of Jesus will be the *chief*.

Peter was delighted with the scene, and desired that it should never be interrupted. In the warmth of his feelings, he made an unwise request; he asked permission to prepare three tents, for the abode of Christ and his prophets. It was *unwise*, because Peter himself was not fit to continue in such a scene; flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; we must therefore all be *changed*, and this mortal must put on immortality. Besides this, Peter forgot the unwelcome truths that his Master had lately revealed; he forgot that Christ must be offered as a sacrifice for sin before he could enter into his glory, and that his disciples must *partake* of his *sufferings*, before they could partake of his *glory*. But though the request betrayed an ignorant mind, it showed an affectionate heart. Had not Peter's heart been full of love to his Lord, he would not have thought it such exceeding joy to behold Christ and his saints, and to hear their conversation. No ungodly man would feel satisfied in such company; he would feel anxious to escape to his earthly delights, and his congenial society. He would not say, "It is good for me to be here." It is a sign we have made one step in religion, if we really prefer the society of the godly to any other pleasure. Yet there may still be much that is weak and wavering in our hearts, as there was in Peter's. It is hard to attain to the feelings of Paul when he said, "I reckon that the *sufferings* of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Rom. 8:18.)

**May 20**

**Matthew 17:5-9. *The voice of God on the Mount.***

In the Old Testament, we read of God speaking to Israel from the top of Mount

Sinai. On that occasion there was blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; so terrible was the *sight*, that even Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake;" and so terrible was the *sound*, that Israel entreated that they might hear the voice of God no more. (Deut. 5:25.)

In how different a manner God spoke to the three favored apostles on the summit of Mount Tabor! And what was the reason of this difference?

The words that the Father spoke tell us *why* he laid aside his terrors, and arrayed himself in the mildest beams of celestial glory. He was well pleased in his beloved Son. His *wrath* against a guilty *world* was displayed upon Mount Sinai; his *delight* in his righteous *Son* was manifested upon Mount Tabor. Neither was his favor shown to his Son *alone*, but to those three trembling apostles who loved that Son; for they also entered into the bright cloud. Why then were they so sore afraid? Why did they fall on their faces? Because, since man became a sinner, he has never been able to bear the manifestation of the glory of Jehovah. The smoke and the torments of hell are not the only sights that would overwhelm a mortal man; the brightness and the joys of heaven would be more than he could bear to behold. Now Peter perceived how unwisely he had spoken when he had requested always to abide on that mountain top. But God, who knew the weakness of his dying creatures, did not prolong the glorious scene. In a little while the apostles were left alone with Jesus. Though they felt his familiar hand, and heard his well-known voice, yet at first they could hardly believe that the heavenly vision was past. Mark records that they "looked round about, and saw no man any more, save Jesus, with themselves."

Who can conceive the feelings with which those three apostles descended the mount! They had seen heaven come down to earth; how could they return to earth again! They had beheld glorified saints; they had heard the voice of the eternal Father; they had witnessed the glories of their beloved, yet despised Master. Who can doubt that their hearts were burning with the desire to describe the wonderful scene to their brethren at the foot of the mount, and perhaps even to declare it to the proud enemies that continually assailed them with taunts and reproaches. But Jesus imposed silence upon them. He said, "Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of Man be risen again from the dead." He knew that at this time they would have been disbelieved, if they had related what they had seen. It was enough for these blessed disciples that they themselves had enjoyed a glimpse of celestial glory. The recollection would help to sustain their faith when they should behold their Lord agonizing and bleeding in the garden; for it is remarkable that Jesus chose the *same* men to be witnesses of his glory and of his agony.

And why did he distinguish these three above their brethren? Was it not because they were appointed to endure *peculiar* trials? The Lord foretold that James and John would drink of his cup of bitterness, and be baptized with his baptism of suffering; and he prepared Peter for the painful and ignominious death of the

cross. Jesus knows beforehand what sufferings each of his servants will be called to endure, and he knows who most needs bright displays of his present glory, and near views of his past agonies. In acute suffering of any kind, the thoughts that most sustain the mind are the remembrance of Christ crucified, and the anticipation of beholding Christ glorified. How many have said, when in great pain, "What are *my* sufferings compared to the sufferings of Jesus for my sins!" How many when pressed down with sorrow have felt, "How soon will the sight of my glorious Redeemer make my present grief appear light as air!"

**May 21**

**Matthew 17:10-13. *Christ converses with his disciples respecting Elijah.***

As the disciples descended the Mount of Transfiguration, they ventured to enter into conversation with their Lord. They knew so well the condescension of their Master, that they even proposed a difficult question on a subject that perplexed them. It was this—"Why say the Scribes that Elijah must *first* come?" (that is, *before* the Messiah.) Their thoughts naturally dwelt upon the wonderful scene they had just beheld. They had seen the prophet Elijah. They remembered having heard their Scribes, or teachers, declare that God would send Elijah before his great and dreadful day. Nor had the Scribes been mistaken in this declaration, for it is contained in the last chapter of the Old Testament, in Malachi 4. Yet the appearance of Elijah on the Mount was not the real fulfillment of that prophecy. Our Lord himself explained this difficult subject, and declared that John the Baptist had been prophesied of under the name of Elijah. It is evident that this explanation surprised the disciples. Perhaps they had never heard that the angel had told Zacharias, (the father of John the Baptist,) that his expected son should come in the *spirit* and *power* of Elijah. There was a great resemblance between these two prophets; their characters, their offices, their habits, their afflictions, were similar. But in *one* point the difference between them was striking—their manner of departing out of this world; Elijah ascended, like a conqueror, in a chariot of fire; John was executed, like a criminal, in a prison. In this *one* point wherein John the Baptist *differed* from Elijah, he enjoyed the far greater honor of *resembling* his divine Lord.

The Savior, after alluding to the treatment John had received, added, "Likewise also shall the Son of Man suffer of them." The disciples were unwilling indeed to believe that their Master should suffer. Though *John*, who was a *mortal man*, might fall a victim to the malice of his enemies, they thought it impossible that the Son of God should thus end his glorious career. But the Jews always persecuted the *living* prophets. They venerated those who were no longer on earth; but they hated those who lived in their own day. The name of Elijah was much set by; but the name of the Baptist was despised. The Jews little imagined that the preacher in the wilderness, clad in rough garments, and followed by the poor among the people, was the representative of the illustrious, the glorified Elijah. Jesus truly

said of John the Baptist, "They *knew* him not." Even so it is now. The world knows not the servants of God. They speak with reverence of some holy men who are dead, such as the apostles, the martyrs, the reformers; while they often treat with contempt many of the *living* who most resemble those departed saints.

In their own day, how were the apostles regarded? One of themselves declares that they were counted as "the filth of the earth," and as "the offscouring of all things." (1 Cor. 4:13.) And how were the martyrs esteemed in *their* day? When that undaunted sufferer, Bennet, was burning at the stake near Exeter, in the reign of our eighth Henry, the men and women who stood around, ran with the alacrity of demons, to gather either a stick, or a bundle of furze; that each might have some share in the death of one whom they esteemed a "vile heretic."\* Truly "they knew him not." \* See English Martyrology, by Charlotte Elizabeth, vol. 1 p. 86.

## May 22

### Mark 9:14-27. *The afflicted father.*

When the Lord reached the foot of the Mount, he beheld a scene of sin, and sorrow, and suffering. There were the scornful scribes, the weak and wavering disciples, the poor demoniac, and the afflicted father, with the wondering multitude gathered around them. How unlike was this scene from that which the three apostles had just witnessed on the top of the mountain! There all was light and love, perfect bliss, and ineffable joy. Angels behold the same painful contrast, for as they gaze upon the glory of God, they also watch over the sorrows of men.

It seems as if our Lord must have retained a measure of brightness upon his countenance; for it is said that the people were greatly amazed when they saw him, and it is difficult to conjecture any other cause for their amazement. At that moment might be seen on one spot the effects of *heavenly* influence, and *hellish* power. The Son of God still shone with some lingering beams of the Father's glory; while the afflicted youth was reduced by *Satan* to the most degraded condition. How affecting was the sight! A human being, made in the image of God, lay on the ground, and wallowed foaming. Each of us stands now between two opposite states. Shall we ascend to a fairer world, where Christ and his glorified saints enjoy unspeakable bliss? or shall we sink into that place where the slaves of Satan suffer every sort of degradation and misery? Now is the time to apply to Jesus, as the sorrowful father did, that we may obtain deliverance from our great enemy. The same power that released this youth from Satan's chain, can free every other captive.

The case was a very inveterate one. It was one of long standing, and great malignity; therefore it was the better suited to display the Almighty power of

Jesus. He loves to save where it is most evident that no *other* hand but *His* can afford help.

The prayers of the father showed a *weak*, though a *true* faith. "If you *can* do anything, have compassion on us and help us." A severe master would have rejected such a prayer as this. But Jesus cherishes the tenderest bud of living faith. He answered, "If you can *believe*, all things are possible to him that believes." The poor man was encouraged by this assurance to offer up a still more earnest prayer than before. He cried out with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." Did not the Holy Spirit dictate this prayer? "We know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." (Rom. 8:26.) Have our hearts ever been so full of good desires that we could only speak a few words? And were these words half choked with tears and sobs? God has heard those prayers. He never despises the broken and contrite heart. He attended to the prayer of this poor man.

Satan showed his malice against the youth who was going to be delivered from his power. The evil spirit rent the youth sore, before he came out of him, and he left him as one dead. Many have found that Satan has pursued them with the most painful temptations, just as they were escaping from his bondage. The tenderness of Jesus is as striking as the *malice* of Satan. The Lord took the poor youth by the hand and lifted him up.

It was the *father's* faith that had obtained the restoration of his son. Here is an encouragement for parents. If Jesus showed so much compassion to one who prayed for a *bodily* cure for his son, how much more must he feel for those who implore *spiritual* blessings for their children!

**May 23**

**Matthew 17:19-21. *Christ speaks to his disciples on the power of faith.***

It was very right in the disciples to inquire *why* they could not cast out the evil spirit. Whenever we have been foiled in an attempt to overcome sin, we ought to inquire what is the *reason* of the failure, and we shall find that the cause was the unbelief of our hearts. Perhaps before the Lord came and showed his power in casting out the spirit, the disciples thought that the obstacle to success was in the *father*. But it had been clearly proved that the father was in a fit state of mind to receive the mercy he implored. The hindrance was in the disciples' hearts—they had not *faith* enough in the power of God to enable them to exercise the miraculous gifts that had been bestowed upon them.

The Lord, after having told them of their unbelief, added these remarkable words—"If you have faith, as a grain of mustard-seed, you shall say to this

mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and *nothing* shall be impossible unto you." It is supposed that our Savior in this declaration made use of the words of a proverb, well understood among the Jews. A mustard-seed was a term used to represent a very small quantity; because a mustard-seed is the smallest of all seeds, in *proportion* to the size of the tree it produces. A mountain was a term used to represent a very great difficulty; because a mountain cannot be removed by the power of man. The meaning of our Savior's words appears therefore to be this—"If you have even a small degree of real faith concerning the gifts that I have bestowed upon you, you will be able to perform astonishing miracles." It was the duty of the disciples to believe that God would help them to work miracles. And why was it their duty? Because Christ had *promised* to enable them to perform them. Faith is the belief of God's *promises*. It is *not our* duty to believe that God will help us to work miracles. And why not? Because God has *not* promised to give us that power. But he has given us *other* promises, exceedingly great and precious; and if we possess *true* faith, which, like a mustard-seed, will *grow* continually, we shall at length be able to overcome every difficulty that stands in the way of our salvation.

*What* difficulties has God promised to enable us to overcome? He has promised to enable us to overcome the *world*. "Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4.) He has promised to enable us to overcome *the body of death*, that is sin. Paul said, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. 7:24, 25.) He has promised to enable us to overcome the devil—"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." God will fulfill *all* his promises to us, if we have faith. And how is faith to be obtained, and increased? By prayer, and, in some cases, by fasting also. It appears the disciples had neglected to pray and fast. The evil spirit that possessed the youth was of a peculiarly malicious and violent kind, but still even *that* kind might be cast out by prayer and fasting. Let us therefore never complain that we cannot overcome *any* sin; for if we prayed earnestly we should obtain help according to our need. There is nothing too hard for God to do, and there is nothing too hard for *believers* to do, when called and assisted by the Lord. Paul declared, "I can do *all* things through Christ which strengthens me."

**May 24**

**Luke 9:43-46. Christ foretells his sufferings.**

The Lord Jesus took every opportunity to prepare his disciples for his approaching death. He knew what a fearful trial it would prove to their weak faith. When men succeeded in apprehending him, and in crucifying him, it would appear to human eyes as if he could not be the Son of God. How could he preserve his disciples' faith from failing at that very time? By showing them that he knew beforehand all he should suffer.

It is in the same way that the Lord now seeks to preserve the minds of his followers from discouragement. Does it perplex a young convert to find that true religion is despised by the great and the learned? Is it not written, "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called?"—Is he staggered when he detects hypocrites among the professed followers of Christ? Is it not written, "Not everyone that says unto me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven?"—Is he dismayed by meeting with numerous temptations and difficulties in his own path?—Is it not written, "In the world you shall have tribulation?" Thus the Lord has mercifully prepared his people for every trial of faith that can come upon them.

Yet there is need to say continually to them, "Let these sayings sink down into your ears." We are disposed to pass over lightly those things which we do not like to hear. The disciples could not bear to hear of their Lord's painful and ignominious death. Each display of his power and glory filled them with fresh hope that nothing but success and triumph awaited their beloved Master. Therefore, after every such display he reverted to the unwelcome, but profitable subject. When descending from the Mount of Transfiguration, he spoke of his sufferings; when he had wrought one of his most splendid miracles, (the deliverance of the furious demoniac,) he dwelt upon the mournful topic of his death. Yet the disciples could not receive this truth into their hearts. They believed it in a degree, for Matthew says, "They were exceeding sorry," but they believed it in a very faint degree. Whence arose this dullness of understanding? The Lord needed not to impress *all* truths upon them so repeatedly. They understood that he was the Son of God, and that he was able to conquer all his enemies. They understood these *joyful* truths, because they *loved* them; but they understood not those *mournful* truths, because they did *not* love them. Their hearts were still full of worldly desires. Instead of being humbled by the want of faith which they had lately betrayed, they disputed, as they followed their Master, which should be the greatest.

If our understandings are dull in spiritual things, it is because our hearts are sinful. Every wrong feeling is like a film over the eye of the mind. Until we are converted we can see *nothing* of the glory of God; but even after conversion we see indistinctly; because much sin remains in our hearts. If we would grow in the *knowledge* of Christ, we must grow in *grace*. Peter concludes his second epistle with these words—"Grow in *grace*, and in the *knowledge* of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To whom be glory both now and forever. Amen."

When God would teach his servants, he often first sends them afflictions to subdue their sins, and then he instructs them in his heavenly truths.

**May 25**

### **Matthew 17:24 to end. *Christ pays tribute.***

We now find our blessed Lord returned to his own city, Capernaum, and to the house where he generally lodged. The collectors of tribute-money called at that lowly abode, and seeing Peter near it, asked him whether his Master would pay the sum required of him. This tribute was *not* to be paid to Caesar, the emperor, but to the *priests*, for the sacrifices of the temple. Every person above twenty years of age was required to pay yearly half a shekel, or about one shilling and threepence of our money. The Lord Jesus, as the *Son of God*, might have excused himself from paying this tribute for the service of his own Father, because *kings* do not demand taxes from their *own* children—yet he would not use this privilege, because he knew that it would be made a matter of accusation against him. The world would have misunderstood his motives. They would have suspected him of indifference to the service of the temple. He knew this was an occasion on which to exercise his miraculous powers. His divine attributes now shone forth in a most glorious manner. He displayed his *Omniscience*, for he described the circumstances of a certain fish then swimming in the lake of Gennesaret. He showed his *Omnipotence*, for he caused that very fish to come to Peter's hook. He showed also his *love* for his disciple; as the piece of money found in the fish was a *whole* shekel, (in value about half-a-crown,) and would suffice to pay Peter's tribute as well as his Master's.

This miracle was calculated to strengthen the apostle's weak faith under approaching trials. It was evident that He, who knew all about an insignificant fish, must foresee the manner of his own death; it was evident that He, who could direct the movements of that little animal in the depths of the sea, *could* escape from his own enemies, if he pleased to exert his Almighty power.

And surely this miracle must be a comfort to all God's people. The most minute circumstances concerning ourselves are seen by that eye which discerned the little fish in the water—the smallest incidents in our lives are ordered by that hand which brought the fish to Peter's hook. Why then should we fear? What evil can betide us, if we belong to Christ, and trust in him? We know not what a day may bring forth; but *He* does. We may (like him) be reduced to our last piece of money, but he can supply us with more at the needful moment. How can any be so unwise, as not to seek the favor of the Governor of the whole universe? What a privilege it is to belong to his family! What a comfort to be under his fatherly care!

**May 26**

### **Mark 9:33-37. *Christ teaches humility by the example of a child.***

It is interesting to hear what the Lord Jesus said to the *multitude* in his *public* discourses; but it is still *more* interesting to hear what he said to his *disciples* in

his *private* conversations. In these retired scenes we behold, and admire, not only his wisdom, but also his *patience*.

How displeasing it must have been to the Lord, while he was talking of his sufferings, to know that his disciples, who were accompanying him on the road, were disputing who should be the greatest! Yet he *patiently* waited for a seasonable opportunity of reproving them.

When he was come into the house he asked them, "What was it that you disputed among yourselves by the way?" Their own consciences told them that they had acted wrong, and they were ashamed to acknowledge their fault to their Master. What a dignity the Lord preserved among his most familiar friends! Though gentle and condescending, he made them feel ashamed of sin.

Seated among his disciples, as a father among his children, he began to explain to them their error. What was it he disapproved? It was the *feeling* whence the dispute arose. It was the *desire* to be first. Eve ate the fruit with a desire to be as God. We, her children, inherit this wicked desire. The grace of God alone can root it out of our hearts.

In order to make a stronger impression upon the disciples' minds, the Lord took a little child, and set him in the midst of them, as an example of humility. A very little child has not understanding enough to desire to be first; the thought never enters into its mind. It follows its mother from place to place, caring not whether she be a queen or a peasant. It never looks for admiration, and shrinks from the notice of all, but its beloved parents and nurses. The Christian, also, ought to be indifferent to earthly distinctions. He is, in fact, a pardoned criminal, and should be too deeply penitent for his transgressions against his Lord, to wish for honor among his fellows.

Observe what affection Christ showed to the young child. He took him in his arms, and while he still held the little creature in his embrace, thus spoke to his disciples—"Whoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receives me." The humble, the contrite, and the penitent, are *such* children. If we wish to please our Lord, we shall show great tenderness to his *humble* disciples. Whatever crimes they may have committed in past times, we shall forget them, because the blood of Christ has blotted them out. It is *not* those who have committed the fewest open sins that God loves best; but those who are the least in their own eyes; these are his dearest children. It is our honor to be allowed to comfort them.

**May 27**

**Mark 9:38-42. Christ directs his disciples not to forbid the man who cast out devils in his name.**

When our Savior was instructing his disciples, he permitted them to ask him questions, and to express their doubts. While he was teaching them the duty of humility, a doubt occurred to John's mind respecting his own conduct on a late occasion.

It was frank and ingenuous in the apostle to *express* this doubt to his Master. He suspected that he had acted wrong, but he did not on that account conceal his conduct. How apt we are to conceal from the friends we most revere, those actions which we fear have been faulty while, if we were frankly to acknowledge them, we might obtain valuable counsel.

Though it was *John* only who *mentioned* the circumstance, yet it appears that *all* the disciples had united in forbidding the man to cast out devils. Nine of them had very lately, from unbelief, failed in working a miracle; and yet they ventured to forbid a man whose faith was evidently greater than their own. Did not this conduct betray much presumption? How dreadful, too, was the calamity from which this man released his fellow-creatures, even from Satan's bondage! Could the disciples see the poor demoniac just before writhing and foaming, now peaceful and thoughtful, and forbid a brother to attempt to deliver *others* from their sufferings? Yes, they were so blinded by one false notion, that they overlooked all other considerations. They imagined their Master would set up a temporal kingdom, and that it would consist of those only who were called (as they had been) to follow him from place to place. But our Lord had servants who were not required, or even permitted to follow him, as the apostles did; yet *they* also were dear to him. They were dear to him, because they would not lightly speak evil of him. The world spoke evil of Christ, of his words, of his works, of his people. Those who did *not* speak evil of him, spoke *well* of him; for there is no such thing as being *neutral* in the cause of Christ.

What did Jesus mean by these words—"He who is not against us, is on our part?" He meant, that there is no such thing as being *neutral* in religion. All men are on one side, or the other. There are many who *wish* to keep neutral. They are afraid of being on the side of Satan, but they have not resolved to be on the side of Jesus. The devil reckons these among his most trusty servants; such cowardly spirits are *less* likely to escape from him than those who *openly* do his work.

But the man who cast out devils in the name of Jesus was not one of those undecided characters. At a time when all the rich and great were joined together against the Son of God, he was not ashamed to acknowledge him. Such are the men respecting whom our Savior declared, that those who give them a cup of cold water shall be blessed. How careful we ought to be never to discourage the least of God's servants! They may not belong to *our* party, but they may belong to Christ. They *do* belong to Christ, if, instead of speaking lightly of him, they take delight in praising him before an ungodly world; and especially, if by the power of his word, they release sinners from the bondage of Satan. We must wish those to

prosper, who convert sinners from the error of their ways, save souls from death, and hide a multitude of sins.

**May 28**

**Mark 9:43 to end. *Christ warns his disciples against the unquenchable fire, and never-dying worm.***

The Lord ended his private conversation with his own disciples in this dreadful manner. He knew that ambition was not cast out of their hearts. It was *ambition* that led them to dispute who should be the greatest, and that caused them to forbid the man who followed them not. They were full of self-importance, and of worldly desires. Though they did possess some living faith and some sincere love; yet how weak was that faith, how cold was that love!

Their Master knew that if they continued to cherish a worldly and proud spirit, they could not obtain a place in his kingdom; therefore he earnestly warned them to mortify the sinful desires of their hearts. He compared those desires to hands, feet, and eyes; because it is as painful for a person to mortify a darling passion of the heart, as to cut off a precious limb from the body.

Are there any desires in our hearts that must be subdued in order that we may escape eternal fire? Though we may have tasted of God's grace, yet we may need these warnings. Do we desire to be much praised, and highly thought of? Do we desire to rise to a higher station than that we now fill? Do we impatiently desire to possess some earthly good which God has seen fit to withhold? Are our affections engrossed by some creature, so that we are more anxious to please that creature than to please God? Let us carefully examine our own hearts, and then implore God to give us strength to strive against these earthly passions. We need not (as Papists often do) *reject* the gifts of God, because we are prone to *abuse* them. We need not dress in sackcloth, live upon the coarsest fare, or withdraw from human society, in order to become humble. The evil lies not in the *objects* that surround us, but in our own *hearts*. The struggle against sin will be severe and painful, but the danger is so terrific that every effort should be made. An unquenchable fire, an undying worm, must be the eternal portion of those who *continue* wilfully to harbor sinful passions in their hearts. Had the disciples persisted in their sins, they would have perished. One of them did persist in sin; he still indulged in the love of money, and he perished. He was the son of perdition.

Our Savior, in concluding his admonition, uttered these remarkable words— "Everyone shall be salted with salt." What did these words mean? The sacrifices, offered in the temple, were salted with salt. (Lev. 2:13.) Thus the condemned in hell will be kept from being consumed, even as things are preserved from corruption by salt. God's *wrath* will be as *salt*, to render them capable of enduring

eternal sufferings. But God's *grace* is also like *salt*—it preserves the soul; therefore Jesus said, "Have salt in yourselves." It was grace the apostles needed to keep them from destruction.

Then our Savior concluded with these words—"Have peace one with another." No longer dispute which shall be the greatest, but love and serve each other. If we have the salt of *grace* in our hearts, we shall have the fruit of *peace* in our lives. "Only by pride comes contention." (Prov. 13:10.) Let us crucify at the cross of our dying Lord all those evil passions that disturb our peace now, and which would, if cherished, destroy our souls.

## May 29

### **Matthew 18:10-14. *Christ declares how precious the little ones are in the Father's sight.***

These verses form part of a most interesting conversation that our Lord held with his own disciple in his house at Capernaum. Some passages in that conversation are calculated to alarm the stoutest heart; but others are of the most soothing and endearing nature. How delightful it is to know that God regards with the tenderest love even the little ones of his family!

These *little ones* are true believers, however weak in faith, and imperfect in knowledge. They have angels for their servants. "Their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." We understand what is meant by this verse, from the declaration of Paul concerning angels—"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation?" The angels are ministering spirits, or servants—they serve the heirs of salvation—believers upon earth. They may be compared to the nurses of infant princes; for they wait upon those who shall hereafter be greater than themselves. Believers shall, in some respects, rise above angels in the world of glory; they shall stand nearer the throne, and sing that song which none can learn, but those who are redeemed from the earth, even the song of redeeming love.

Do we believe that each saint has angels for his servants? Can we then despise *any* saint? An unconverted *monarch* may have lords and ladies to attend on him; but a converted *beggar* has angels to wait on him. How much higher is his state! These angels shall shortly convey his soul into the assembly of the saints, and at the last day shall separate him from the wicked forever and ever.

But there is a still higher light in which we may view the saints;—as those whom Christ came to seek and to save. Each saint is the purchase of Christ's blood. As the shepherd with anxious care seeks for his wandering sheep; so the Son of God, by his Spirit, has sought for each believer when wandering among the dark mountains of sin and death, and has brought him into the fold of grace, and has

bidden angels rejoice over him. If we ourselves are among the children of God, we have been the objects of all this care. There is none of us that has not gone astray; the holy angels alone have never wandered. We never should have *desired* to return, had not God sent his Spirit into our hearts. We never should have been *able* to return, had he not borne us home in his own loving arms. Having taken all this care for us, will he permit us to perish? No! it is not the will of our Father in heaven that his little ones should perish.

But for what *purpose* did Jesus speak of his love to his little ones on this occasion? To remind the disciples of the love *they* ought to bear to *all* the saints. The ambition still cherished in their hearts, led them to despise many other believers, especially those who followed not with them; therefore their Master set forth in their hearing the tender love his Father bears to *all* true believers. Could *they* despise those whom the Father honored? Whenever we see a believer, however weak and mean, we should consider, "Here is one whom angels serve, whom Jesus came down from heaven to save, whom the Father will not suffer to perish, but whom He guards with his all-seeing eye."

**May 30**

**Matthew 18:15-17. *Christ directs his disciples how to treat an offending brother.***

What a privilege we possess in having these directions how to behave towards a fellow-Christian who has done us wrong! But how seldom are any of these rules observed! How much more apt we are, either to indulge in sullen spleen, or to break out in angry invectives, than mildly to remonstrate with an offending brother! We ought to go, in the first place, and tell him of his fault *alone*. That would be the most probable way to win him. Perhaps we might discover that we had suspected him unjustly; or, if *not*, that he was ready to change his conduct, when he found that it displeased us.

Directions like these are given in Lev. 19:17, 18; "You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall in any way rebuke your brother, and not suffer sin before him. You shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people."

But if the offender should persist in his evil conduct, we are directed to take two or three people with us; and if he should still persevere, to tell his fault to the Church, that is, to the public congregation of believers; and then the people we had taken with us would be witnesses of the truth of our report; so that, through them, our words would be established. If the offender should refuse to obey the church, then he must be cast out of the society of believers, and not permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper.

We find, from the epistles, that the apostles and the early Christians pronounced this sentence of exclusion, when great offences were committed by professed Christians. We read of a man in 1 Cor. 5, with regard to whom Paul gives these directions—"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, and *my spirit*, with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto *Satan*, for the destruction of the *flesh*, that the *spirit* may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Some, on hearing these directions, may reply, "How can we follow these commands?" But do we follow them *as far* as we can? When a professing Christian behaves ill to us, do we in the first place tell him his fault *alone*? There are many called Christians who take delight in exposing the faults of their brethren. Sometimes they will even tell them to the *world*. The *Church* weeps over iniquity, and prays for the sinner; the *world* rejoices, and blasphemes the name of Christ.

When we have used all the means in our power to reclaim an offending brother, and all the means have failed, then it is our duty to show by our conduct that we disapprove the course he is pursuing. Whether the offence is committed against ourselves, or against another, or against God alone, we must not encourage sin. It is better that the world should know of the sin, than that they should think that Christians approve of it. The first missionaries in Tahiti acted on this principle. They refused to hold communion with one of their number, named Lewis, because he had married a heathen woman. The backslider speedily came to an dreadful end—he was cut off suddenly by an unknown hand.

When an offender repents of his sin, then we ought "to forgive him, and to comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow." (2 Cor. 2:7.)

## May 31

### **Matthew 18:19, 20. *Christ promises to hear the united prayers of his disciples.***

Do the Scriptures contain a more encouraging promise than this? "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

There are some promises which are addressed to the *apostles* in particular. It was to *them* that Christ said, "Whatever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." That promise has been fulfilled; the apostles' words have the same authority as those of Christ himself. Their writings form part of the Holy Scriptures. But did Christ speak to the *apostles* alone, when he said, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father

which is in heaven?" This promise is ours as much as theirs—for it is added, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." It is *not* said where two or three *of you* are gathered together, but where two or three. It may be two or three apostles, or it may be two or three peasants, or two or three women, or two or three children; yet, if they are gathered together in the name of Christ, he will be in the midst of them to bless them, and answer them. Praying together greatly helps Christians to love each other. If those who live beneath one roof would meet together, not only in the regular family worship, but also by two or three, they would often find their mutual love increase, and they would live in greater harmony, and enjoy more happiness, and obtain richer blessings.

There are some petitions which are especially suited to be presented to God by several of his children in united prayer. If one has committed a fault, then he may confess it to his brethren, and ask them to accompany him to the throne of grace to plead for mercy. James, in his epistle, says, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray *one for another*, that you may be healed." It is when we wander from God, and *most need* his mercy, that we are the least able to implore it. Then how comforting it is to have a Christian brother to lead us back to God!

Sometimes a particular favor is desired by the members of one family. It may be the safe return of an absent brother, or the conversion of an unbelieving relation. Six youthful sisters have met together every morning to implore a blessing upon an aged parent. They have prayed that the light of truth might shine into his benighted soul.

When God answers the prayers of several believers, his name is more glorified than when he answers the prayer of one alone; for then there are *several* witnesses of his truth and faithfulness.

Towards the end of the last century, six or seven pious ministers of the Church of England, (Mr. Romaine being one,) agreed to meet together at a certain hour to entreat God to raise up more faithful preachers of the gospel in their own church. They could not all meet in one *place*, for many of them were separated from each other by great distances, but they all met at one time at the throne of grace. Before their course was finished, they beheld the answer to their prayers. Instead of six or seven, there were six or seven *hundred* clergymen of the Church of England, of like spirit with themselves.

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