

## A Devotional Commentary on the Gospels

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

By [Favell Lee Mortimer](#)

### SEPTEMBER 1

**John 12:34-36. Christ exhorts the people to believe while they have the light.**

While ministers are preaching, their hearers are often answering them in their own minds. Satan never fails to suggest objections against the truth to all who are willing to listen to his whispers. He did not fail to attempt to extinguish the light of the truth when Jesus held it up. When those affecting words were pronounced, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me," the people, instead of receiving the truth, objected, saying, "We have heard out of the law that Christ abides ever; and how say you, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up;' who is this Son of Man?" This objection was not urged in a right spirit. If it had been meekly proposed, the gentlest of Teachers would have solved the difficulty. He could easily have explained it by saying, "The Son of man will be lifted up on the cross—then rise to live forever." The people were right in saying that the law had declared that Christ abides ever, because it is written in Ps. 41, "You set him before your face forever;" but they were wrong in the conclusion they drew. How diffident and humble we ought to be when we speak on divine subjects! Our understandings are so feeble, that we fall into mistakes continually. Our only hope of obtaining wisdom is by waiting with meekness on Jesus to be taught—"He will guide the meek in judgment."

Instead of answering the cavils of the people, the Lord gave them a solemn warning. He saw with sorrow that they were wasting the little time during which they would enjoy his instructions. Therefore he said, "Yet a little while is the light with you." They knew not how very little while that light would shine. If these words were uttered on the day of our Lord's arrival in Jerusalem, (that is, on Sunday evening,) then there remained only three days more for him to teach, and for the people to learn. On Thursday it appears all classes were engaged in preparing the Passover, and on Friday in gazing on the crucified Savior. After that day none saw him but his own disciples. He taught the people no more.

Who can tell how long he may retain the light he now enjoys? A child who has a godly parent knows not how soon that parent may die, and how soon the voice

may cease that now prays so often with him, and so much oftener for him! There are many who would tremble if they knew how shortly their only opportunity of salvation will end.

A minister who was preaching on the words, "Seek the Lord while he may be found," observed, "There may be some here who, if I had preached tomorrow instead of today, would then have been in that place where, if they sought the Lord, they would not find him."

A farmer's laborer was deeply impressed by the sermon, and sought the Lord that very night. The next morning, as he was with his horses in the field, one grew restive, and, in rearing, struck him with the iron harrow on the temple, so that he died. Had that man delayed to seek the Lord but one day more, he would have been forever in darkness. With what feelings must lost spirits remember the last opportunity they neglected, the last sermon they disregarded, the last conviction they suppressed!

## **September 2**

### **John 12:37-41. Some refuse to believe.**

"He has blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts." These words have perplexed many minds. Does a merciful God blind the eyes of his creatures? We thought it was He who took away the heart of stone, and gave the heart of flesh. And so it is. All good comes from him, and nothing but good. But it is good to inflict righteous judgment, and there is a sin for which blindness is a righteous judgment. When men love darkness rather than light, and obstinately refuse to come to the light, at length God blinds their eyes. For what use is sight to those who abide in darkness? Jesus came a light into the world; but there were many whose deeds were evil, and who refused to come to the light, lest their deeds should be made manifest. It was these whose eyes were blinded, and whose hearts were hardened, so that they could not see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts. The dayspring from on high visited them, to guide their feet into the way of peace, through the tender mercy of their God—but they turned away from the glorious light—from that light which fills all heaven with joy. How it must have astonished angels to see men turn away from the Son of God!

Isaiah once beheld his glory in the temple. He beheld the Lord Jehovah sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, attended by the seraphim, who cried one to another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is filled with his glory." This was the glory that Isaiah saw. The apostles also saw the glory of the Son of Man; but it was displayed in a different manner. They beheld one clothed in flesh, yet possessed of divine power—they saw him suffering insults and injuries, and yet conferring benefits, and promising blessings. The glory of the

Son of God did not shine more brightly from his heavenly throne than it did through the veil of a human form.

But the blind in heart could not behold this glory. None saw it but those whose eyes God had opened. There is no calamity so great as to be blind to the glory of the Redeemer. When we see a very enchanting sight, then it is that we pity the blind. When we look upon the beauties of the opening spring, or the splendor of the setting sun, then we feel compassion for those who can never be cheered by such lovely sights. When we behold the countenance of a dearly-beloved friend, a parent, or a child, then, above all, we feel for those who can never be delighted by seeing the objects of their fondest affections.

And when is it the Christian feels most for the blind world? When he contemplates the glories of his Savior, when he meditates upon his power, and faithfulness, and love, and thinks that there are men who never beheld these glories—who never will behold them—who do not desire to behold them. Though the wicked shall see the Son of man come with power and great glory at the last day, yet they shall never comprehend his greatest glory—which is his goodness. Moses once prayed, and said, "Lord, I beseech you show me your glory;" and God answered, "I will make all my goodness pass before you." And then he proclaimed his name as the merciful, gracious, patience God, who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin. This is the glory which believers behold with so much satisfaction, but which unbelievers cannot see. In another world they will feel the power of God, and, like the devils, tremble beneath its weight—but they will never, never know the God of love.

### **September 3**

#### **John 12:42, 43. Many who believe, refuse to confess Christ.**

It is very profitable to observe what temptations have overcome men in past times. None can estimate the force of temptation, excepting those who are actually under its influence. Even those temptations by which we ourselves have once been overcome, appear feeble and insignificant when we are removed from their power. We have read of a young ruler who refused to follow Christ because he had great possessions. Now we read of many rulers who refused to confess him, because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. What various reasons men have for not doing the will of God! But there is not one of all those reasons that will appear a strong one at the last day. "We cannot," thought these rulers, "confess that Jesus is the Son of God, lest we should be put out of the synagogue." There was a beggar born blind who endured the trial; why could not they endure it? When he was cast out, the Son of God found him and revealed himself unto him. Had those rulers acted as he did, they would have been comforted as he was. One word from the Son of God could impart more peace to the heart than the plaudits of a whole multitude, or the praise of the

whole Sanhedrin. But it appeared to these rulers an insupportable calamity to be put out of the synagogue. Not to be allowed to approach within an arm's length of any person, or to eat and drink with any for thirty days, was a trial they would not encounter. Then if, at the end of thirty days, they continued to confess Christ, a curse would be pronounced on them in the midst of the congregation, accompanied by the extinguishing of lights, and the sounding of trumpets. Then would follow destitution, and desolation, and disgrace. They would be deprived of their property, forbidden to hire or to be hired, to buy or to sell, to teach or be taught; when they died stones would be cast at their coffin, and none would follow them to the grave.

These things were sufficient to terrify a human heart; but yet what were they all, compared to the woes God will inflict on the unbelieving and the fearful! Not to be permitted to approach our fellow-mortals is not so dreadful as to be separated from saints and angels and God and Christ forever and ever. The sudden darkness in the synagogue, and the clangor of trumpets, could not be as appalling as the darkness of the sun at noonday, and the sound of the last trumpet!

But though these rulers believed that Jesus was the Christ, they did not believe with the heart. They did not love him. They loved men more than God; therefore they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. It is possible that a true believer may be tempted to deny his Lord—but then he will not continue in the sin. Peter denied Christ; but one "kind upbraiding glance" brought him to repentance, and made him go out and weep bitterly. These rulers were not like Peter. They could bear to see their companions insult the Lord day after day, and yet never take his part—they could bear to hear them plotting his death, and yet be silent. They were content to be on good terms with his enemies, and not to be counted among his friends. Could they have done this had they loved him? O no! had they loved him they would, on some occasion, have betrayed their feelings. Nicodemus could not sit in the Sanhedrin and hear the Lord calumniated. He exclaimed, "Does our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he does?" and thus he brought upon himself the derision of the assembly. Could an affectionate son hear his father insulted day after day, and never show by word or look how deeply he was wounded!

Perhaps we never hear men speak openly against Jesus himself. But do we not meet with many who speak against his laws and his people? It is before such persons that we are called upon to confess him. If we do not seem to approve of worldly amusements, if we show an attachment to truly religious people, if we refuse to smile at sin, and to admire what the world admires, the enemies of Christ will hate and despise us. Are we willing to bear their hatred and contempt for our dear Master's sake? Is Christ's approbation dearer to us than the world's admiration? These are signs that we love the Lord, and that he loves us; and that he will confess us when he comes in his glory with all his holy angels.

**September 4**

**John 12:44 to end. Christ declares himself to be the light of the world.**

The most glorious light that ever shone upon this world was now about to set. While his beams were still visible, a voice was heard saying, "I am come a light into this world, that whoever believes in me should not abide in darkness." This is the last invitation to an unbelieving world recorded as uttered by our Lord before his crucifixion. We know that he preached the gospel daily during the short remainder of his life of suffering; but we are not informed what other invitations he made; though we are informed of many parables he related, of many answers he gave, and of many warnings he uttered.

What infinite love breathed in this invitation! Jesus came a light into the world, not for his own happiness, but that whoever believed in him should not abide in darkness. He had beheld the world lying in darkness; he had pitied their dreadful state—and had consented to penetrate the dismal recesses of their abode, that he might bring to them the light of life.

How gloomy this world of sin must appear when viewed from those sunny heights where the saints abide! But darkness is not only gloomy, it is unwholesome. Plants cannot grow in the dark. It is only the boughs that drink in the light of day, that bring forth leaves and fruit. The flowers turn their lovely heads to the sun, and every branch bends forward to meet its rays. As soon as the infant has strength to open its tender eyelids it begins to seek the light. Those poor babes who are reared in dark alleys show by their pale and sickly looks that they have been deprived of the light that makes the whole creation bloom and rejoice. Darkness is dangerous as well as unwholesome. The traveler in the desert, if he is benighted, is exposed to pitfalls and wild beasts. The prince of the power of the air exercises his power in darkness; there he lays his snares; there he watches for his prey.

It was to relieve men in this deplorable state that the Son of God was manifested. He is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person; therefore he said, "Whoever sees me sees him that sent me." The King eternal, immortal, invisible, dwells in light which no man can approach unto; but his Son was veiled with flesh, and sent forth into the world clothed in such mild beams that men could approach him. But if men still loved darkness rather than light, if they shut their eyes upon the Sun of righteousness, and retired farther into their dark retreats, what would become of them at last! The words which Jesus spoke would judge them at the last day. That word, "I am come a light into the world, that whoever believes in me should not abide in darkness," that very word will judge all those who, having heard it, have not come unto the light. For when Jesus comes again he will not save the world. He will only save his people, and he will judge the world. All the invitations which the world have received are

recorded, and will be brought forward at the last day. They may forget the sermons they have heard, the chapters they have read; they may forget the faithful exhortations of their pious friends, and the fervent prayers of their fond parents, but God does not forget them; for all these means of grace were arranged by Him in his eternal counsels with his Son. He determined what they should hear, and He observes how they hear. The sinner's heart will thrill with terror when his Judge inquires, "Why did you not come unto me? Then you might have had light. Why did you abide in darkness?" What reason can a sinner give for abiding even one day in darkness, when light is come into the world? There is not a single soul who hears this invitation who might not enjoy light this very hour, if he would but lift up his heart to the Savior of the world with this earnest cry, "Enlighten my darkness, O light of life."

## **September 5**

### **Mark 11:11-19. Christ curses the barren fig-tree.**

Such is the history of the manner in which our Lord spent one of the last days before his death. It was, as we believe, on Sunday that he entered with triumph into Jerusalem. On the evening of that day Mark records that he looked round about on all things, and then went to Bethany with the twelve. And what did those holy eyes behold when they looked round about upon the temple? They must have looked upon the smoking sacrifices, upon the burning lights, and upon the white-robed priests. But these sights cannot have imparted joy to the Savior's heart; for he knew how those sacred ordinances were profaned by an unbelieving nation.

How sweet must the calm of Bethany have seemed after the tumult of Jerusalem! That lovely village, embosomed among the fruitful trees that adorned the foot of Olivet, contained some of the Lord's most devoted followers. Whether he spent the night in solitary prayer on the mountain, or whether he slept beneath the roof of some beloved disciple, we know not. However engaged, he was hid from the pursuit of his enemies. For it is said in John's Gospel concerning this period, "These things spoke Jesus and departed, and did hide himself from them." (12:30.)

On the morning of the next day, (which, we believe, was Monday,) the Lord again repaired to the scene of labor and conflict, to the temple at Jerusalem. The distance was about one mile and a half, and the way lay through a fertile valley, close by the Garden of Gethsemane, and over the brook Kidron. As the Savior walked he was hungry; for he had probably left Bethany at an early hour, and without taking refreshment. His hunger reminds us that he had a body like our own, and was subject to all our infirmities except sin. It was at this moment he beheld a fig-tree having leaves, and he approached it, but, finding no fruit upon it, he cursed it, saying, "No man eat fruit of you hereafter forever." There is one

thing in this account which it is difficult to understand. Mark observes, "The time of figs was not yet." It is natural to inquire, "Why did the Savior expect to find figs before the season was arrived?" This difficulty has been explained. There is a kind of fig-tree which always has leaves, and always bears fruit. The common sort of fig-trees in the early spring neither bear leaves nor fruit. When our Lord beheld afar a fig-tree having LEAVES, he knew it must be of the kind that bears fruit at all times; and when he found none, he cursed it for its barrenness.

But surely there must have been some deep meaning in this action; for a tree can neither deserve cursing nor blessing. It must have been to teach his apostles who then heard his words, and us who now hear them, that Jesus cursed the tree. This tree afforded an apt emblem of the Jewish nation. The leaves of a tree drink in air and moisture, and promote its strength and fruitfulness. The sacred privileges bestowed on the Jews may be compared to leaves. But when the Son of God came looking for fruit, he found none—no repentance—no faith—no love—no holiness—for though there were a few who believed, the nation, as a nation, believed not. He did not expect fruit from the Gentiles, for the time of figs was not yet come with them; but he had a right to expect much from those to whom he had given much.

When he entered the temple again that day, he found the buyers and sellers engaged in their profane traffic. It seems, from this account, that after having been driven away the evening before, they had returned to their old practices, and that the Son of man showed his power again in casting them out.

Jesus passed the day in teaching the people, while maliciously observed by the scribes and chief priests. And, when evening was come, he went out of the city, and sought again to hide himself from his enemies in his favorite retreat. Thus closed another of his few remaining days of sorrow. It seemed as if he spent his strength for nothing, and in vain; but his judgment was with the Lord, and his work with his God. (Is. 49:4.)

Do those who labor for our souls, whether they be ministers or friends, look in vain for fruit? May the Savior's dreadful sentence prove a warning to us. God can say to a man, as well as to a tree, "Let no man eat fruit of you hereafter forever." Is there anyone who could bear the prospect of never being a blessing throughout all the ages of eternity? Even those who are useless and hurtful now, hope that they shall one day be different. But opportunities are rapidly passing away. The trees, that are now bearing the lovely fruits of praise and holiness in the paradise above, began to bring forth fruit unto God when upon earth. Even that malefactor whose Christian course lasted but an hour or two, brought forth good fruit in his believing prayer to Jesus, and in his faithful reproof of his fellow-sufferer; while the aged apostle Paul was like a tree whose boughs are pressed to the earth under the weight of a fragrant and delicious load. Have we begun to bear heavenly fruit? If not, when shall we begin? Let us not delay—we cannot tell how soon God may fix our state forever.

**September 6**

**Mark 11:20-26. Christ and his disciples pass by the withered fig-tree.**

After having passed the night in Bethany, the Redeemer, with his little band, left his retreat to resume his labors in Jerusalem. In the course of their walk a very impressive object met their sight. It was the fig-tree that had been cursed the morning before. On passing by the fig-tree in the evening, the darkness must have prevented the apostles from seeing it; but the morning light revealed its withered state. Peter called the attention of his Lord to the circumstance, by saying, "Master, behold the fig-tree which you cursed has withered away." From this remark we are led to conclude that the curse pronounced by the Lord did not produce an immediate effect upon the tree, but caused it gradually to consume and to perish. The apostles, who knew the reason for its withered state, must have looked upon it with feelings of awe and astonishment. They had never before seen such a display of their Lord's power. They had seen life bestowed by his word, but never had they seen even the life of a tree TAKEN AWAY. Had the Son of God exercised his power as he might have done, his enemies had long before been blasted by the breath of his nostrils—for it is God who kills, as well as makes alive. But he refrained from executing judgment, for He came to draw sinners to himself by the riches of his goodness, and not to appall them by the terrors of his hand. But it was well that his apostles should have proof that he could destroy his enemies. They would soon be exposed to a tremendous trial of faith. They would behold their Master apparently overpowered by men. The remembrance of the fig-tree ought to have convinced them in that terrible hour that he could have dried up the arms stretched out to take him, and struck mute the tongues that rose in judgment against him.

Nor was it Jesus alone who had power to subdue his enemies. He promised similar power to his apostles, even power to wither fig-trees and remove mountains. Matthew thus records the Lord's answer—"Verily I say unto you, if you have faith and doubt not, you shall not only do that which is done unto the fig-tree, but also if you shall say unto this mountain, 'Be removed, and be cast into the sea,' it shall be done." Matthew 21:26. It is evident that trees and mountains represent the difficulties and trials of the Christian life. By faith they may be overcome. The apostle Paul triumphed over the messenger of Satan sent to buffet him, and through faith learned to take pleasure in infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, distresses, for Christ's sake, because he found the grace of God sufficient for him. (2 Cor. 12:10.)

It is by believing prayer that such victories are attained. Therefore the Lord gave his apostles some directions concerning prayer. He knew they were going to spend another day exposed to the malice of wicked men, and he warned them against cherishing an unforgiving spirit, by saying, "When you stand praying,

forgive, if you have anything against any—that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." There are few who are not sometimes injured or insulted. It is not enough for us to endeavor to banish the thoughts of our enemies from our minds, we must think of them for the purpose of asking, "Have I forgiven them?" We must mention them in prayer as objects for whom we especially desire mercy. One who has himself been forgiven by God will be enabled to forgive others. The spirit of revenge may arise occasionally in his heart; but the remembrance of what has passed between Jesus and his own soul will quench the vindictive feeling, and will make him desire to meet even his enemies in glory, and to live with them forever in love.

## **September 7**

### **Matthew 21:23-32. The Elders question Christ concerning his authority.**

We are now beginning to read the account of the last two days of our Lord's public ministry—the Tuesday and Wednesday before his death. There are very ample records of the conversations he held on those days. None who heard him, knew that he would so soon cease to speak on earth; but we know that these were his last warnings.

Early in the morning he arrived as usual at Jerusalem, having conversed with his disciples on the way concerning the withered fig-tree, and the power of faith and prayer. He found his enemies much enraged against him, both on account of his words and his doings. They had witnessed the buyers and sellers, at his command, leaving their accustomed posts. The sight was a reproach to those who had so long allowed the profanation of the house of prayer. Having consulted together, they proposed a question which they imagined he could not answer without furnishing them with a new accusation against him—"By what authority do you these things?" If he should reply, "By the authority of God," then they resolved to accuse him of blasphemy; and if he said, "By my own," of rebellion. But the wisdom of the Lord easily confounded the cunning of men. He answered by proposing a question they could not answer. Therefore they were compelled to reply that they did not know whether John the Baptist was a true prophet or not. What a confession for teachers of religion to make! All who hear it might naturally conclude that those who did not know whether John were a true prophet, might not know whether Jesus was.

But while his enemies were suffering under the confusion of their defeat, the Lord related a parable, which must have confounded them still more. There were often gathered around the Savior a class of persons whom the Pharisees considered as the dregs and scum of the earth. They were penitents who had once led wicked lives; they were such persons as the rich tax-collector and the weeping sinner. Once they had openly disobeyed the command of their God, and had insolently answered, "I will not;" but afterwards they had repented; while the

Pharisees, with all their professions, had never yet really obeyed the will of God. It was easy to say which of these characters was the most guilty. Even if the open transgressors had never repented, they would not have been so wicked in God's sight as the false pretenders to religion. But they had repented, and, therefore, they were fully forgiven, and were as much beloved by God as angels that have never sinned. Their repentance added greatly to the guilt of the Pharisees, for the very sight of these penitents ought to have convinced them of their own need of repentance.

But the proud have no feelings to vent at the feet of Jesus. There is no sin that hardens the heart so much as pride. Open sins, though they expose to shame and misery in this life, sometimes render men more willing to humble themselves before God. A liar, who blushes because of the lies he has told, will, perhaps, listen to the voice of mercy, while the proud truth-speaker rejects it, because he rests upon his integrity. Of all sins let us most beware of pride. It is Satan's first-born. It possesses the wonderful faculty of occupying the space of any other sin which is cast out of the heart. If intemperance be cast out, then pride swells and fills the room that intemperance occupied before. Often pride will arise and by its own strength cast out some other vice, in order that it may have more room to grow in, and more food to feed upon.

Most of all, pride dreads the entrance of the Son of God into the heart. Then it knows its reign will be at an end. How it bars and bolts the doors of the heart, against the rightful owner! Yet Christ has broken through even these bars. Saul of Tarsus was a proud Pharisee, when Jesus spoke to him from heaven; but he became as lowly as that penitent tax-collector, who said, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner."

## **September 8**

### **Luke 20:9-19. The parable of the rebellious husbandmen in the vineyard.**

In this parable the base conduct of the Jewish nation is plainly set forth. When the conduct of men towards God is represented in parables, we perceive its ingratitude and treachery more clearly than we did before. And why? Because there is no being whose claims are so little understood by men, as the claims of God.

Everyone will admit, that the lord of the vineyard had a right to demand a portion of its fruits, as rent, from the husbandmen. But God has a right to all our obedience, and to all our love. To him we owe all we enjoy, or ever can enjoy—indeed the very power of enjoyment comes from him. But how do men behave towards Him? In the same manner that these husbandmen behaved to their lord. They not only refuse to obey God, but are angry with those who reprove their disobedience.

Like these husbandmen, unconverted men become hardened in sin. The husbandmen treated the servants worse and worse. They beat the first servant, shamefully treated the second, and wounded the third. Thus sinners increase in wickedness—for every sin committed and not repented of, prepares for the commission of a greater.

If any of you who have been converted to God, look back upon your days of rebellion, you will perceive that you grew worse. There was some docility in your childhood—some fear of evil in your early youth—which were lost as you grew older. If God had not interfered by his grace, you would, by this time, have reached a higher pitch of iniquity than you ever before attained. There is even in the converted a tendency to return to their former state, and there is need constantly to apply to God for fresh supplies of His Holy Spirit, or, like a wheel upon a sloping bank, they will slide back into their old sins.

When the Savior had concluded the parable, he declared the punishment the Lord would inflict on the husbandmen. "He will come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others." This prophecy was intended as a warning to the Jews, who had persecuted the prophets, and were now plotting the death of the Son of God. The people understood that the warning applied to themselves, for they exclaimed, "God forbid." If they had been as anxious to avoid sin as they were to avoid suffering, they would have escaped both. What must have been the expression of his countenance when Jesus looked upon those who had answered, "God forbid;" for it is said, "He beheld them?" It must have been a look that seemed to say, "Your sorrows are nearer than you suppose, and greater than you can bear."

He now changed the figure from a vineyard to a building, and alluded to a passage in Ps. 118, in which it is said, "The stone which the builders refused has become the head-stone of the corner." Great was the folly of the builders who knew not the value of the finest, firmest, most precious stone that had ever been hewn out of a quarry; and great would be their punishment. That stone, while it lay upon the ground, would be a stumbling-block, and those who fell over it would be broken; but it would not always lie upon the ground; it would be exalted, and falling upon the wicked, by the righteous anger of God, would grind them to powder. What does this short parable signify? When Christ was a man upon earth, those who rejected him sinned, yet not beyond the reach of pardon; but when he was exalted to God's right hand, those who continued to reject him perished eternally. The everlasting anger of God is represented by this expression, "It will grind him to powder." That blessed Savior who might, like a stone, be a support and defense, will become, if we refuse to believe in him, the instrument of our destruction. If we build upon him all our hopes for eternity, he will not fail us—but if we neglect him, he will crush us beneath the weight of his righteous indignation.

**September 9**

**Matthew 22:1-14. The parable of the man without a wedding garment.**

There is one circumstance concerning this parable which renders it peculiarly solemn. It is the last parable recorded, that our Lord related in public. There are others, which he related to his apostles in private, but there are no more written in the Bible which were spoken in the presence of the chief priests and the multitude.

This parable contains a description of all the different kinds of characters that were assembled round the Lord in the temple. Each of us who hears this parable now, may find in it his own character.

There were some who made light of the invitation to the wedding, and went to their farms and to their merchandise. These persons represent the worldly-minded and the indifferent. The great mass of hearers are of this class. They do not oppose the Gospel by argument; they do not persecute Christians by violence; but they treat serious subjects with levity, and give their hearts and minds to the world. They have various tastes; some are engrossed with business, others with society; some with learning and accomplishments, others with domestic duties and delights—but they all agree on this point,—they neglect the invitations of the Gospel.

There were certain persons described in the parable, who took the servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. These, we know, must represent persecutors, such as the chief priests and scribes. The punishment that would soon be inflicted on the murderers of the Lord was plainly indicated by these words, "But when the king heard thereof, he was angry, and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed these murderers, and burned up their city."

The servants represent prophets, apostles ministers, and teachers, in all ages, who endeavor to persuade sinners to come to Christ.

The guests who accepted the invitation, signify all those who make a profession of religion.

The most remarkable character described in the parable is the man who had not on a wedding garment. It is the custom in the East, when royal feasts are given, to provide each guest with a robe of honor, and it would be considered a great insult, if any of those who came were to refuse to wear it. This man had neglected to put it on. The servants may not have observed the omission, or if they had observed it, they still permitted this rebellious guest to remain seated at the table. But when the KING came in to see the guests, he immediately expostulated with the transgressor. And what answer did the man return? What

excuse did he make? None. He was speechless. Now every sinner has many excuses to offer for his transgressions, but he will not be able to bring them forward when he stands before the Son of God.

The wedding garment signifies that righteousness which Christ has promised to bestow on all who believe in him; it is the linen clean and white, spoken of in the Book of Revelation, (19:8)—it is the righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ. Every one might obtain this precious gift. It is offered to all. To refuse this gift is an insult to the King of kings. Are there any here who venture to appear before God in their own righteousness—in that righteousness which the prophet Isaiah compares to "filthy rags?" Are there any who know not they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, and who will not ask for the white clothing that Jesus offers to bestow? (64:6.) You may escape the observation of your fellow-guests,—you may elude the vigilance of the servants—but when the KING comes in to see the guests, you will be detected and cast out. All our religion will prove utterly worthless, if we stop short of true faith and real conversion. That unhappy man might as well have stayed away altogether from the feast, as have come there without a wedding garment. He would have had less trouble—less disappointment—less shame—and perhaps less weeping; for of all the lost, surely none will weep so bitterly as those who imagined to the last they were going to heaven.

## **September 10**

### **Matthew 22:15-22. Christ replies to the Pharisees and Herodians respecting paying tribute.**

Full of Satanic are and Satanic malice, the Pharisees approached the Lord, to ask him a question which they imagined he could not answer without exposing himself to danger. It was this. "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?" Caesar was the Roman emperor who had conquered the Jewish nation. Could there be any doubt whether it was right to pay tribute or taxes to the monarch who ruled over them? There could be none, because God has commanded submission to rulers. But the Pharisees understood the law of God so ill, that they considered it was wrong to submit to a heathen governor. This was a false notion. It is true the Jews would never have been conquered by the heathen if they had been faithful to God; but being conquered, it was their duty to submit. We read in the prophet Ezekiel, that the Lord was once angry with the Jews for breaking their covenant with the king of Babylon. (Ez. 17:15.) The Pharisees did not venture openly to express their rebellious thoughts, for fear of incurring the displeasure of the Romans; yet they were so base as to wish to induce the Lord to endanger his life by uttering the very sentiments which they inwardly approved. In this malicious design they were assisted by the Herodians. These persons were called Herodians after Herod, the governor the Romans had appointed. They were not only willing to submit to the Romans in lawful, but also

in unlawful matters. If the Roman governor gave a command contrary to the law of God, they would obey the governor and disobey God. We perceive, therefore, that the Pharisees and the Herodians had fallen into opposite errors. But the Lord's answer was like a two-edged sword. When Jesus said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," he reproved the secret notions of the Pharisees, and when he said, "Render to God the things that are God's," he reproved the avowed doctrine of the Herodians.

It is interesting to observe how the attempts of man to perplex the Son of God only drew forth new treasures of wisdom from his lips! How valuable is this rule, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's!" It shows us that though all things belong to God, yet that some are more peculiarly his own. There are certain rights which God has given to kings. These rights we must render to them. Parents have certain claims upon their children, and children upon their parents. God does not require parents to neglect their children in order that they may devote all their time to his worship. It was very sinful in the Jews to refuse to support their aged parents, and to bring the money they ought to have bestowed on them to the priests, saying, "It is Corban, or a gift." (Mark 7:11.)

But if it is sinful not to render unto men the things which (by God's appointment) belong to men, how much more sinful it must be not to render unto God the things that belong to God? Yet it is in this point that we are the most negligent. The world thinks it but a slight fault to neglect their Creator. How many parents there are who render to their children the love that is due to them, but who render no love to God! There are children to be found who honor their parents, but who dishonor God; servants who obey their masters, but who disobey God; masters who act justly towards their servants, but deceitfully towards God; brothers and sisters who live in harmony with each other, but at enmity with God. Such persons may say, "I have done my duty; I have done nobody any harm." But what will God say to them? Will he not remember that they have trampled upon His rights? Will not broken Sabbaths, heartless prayers, neglected Bibles, rise up to condemn them? God has greater claims upon us than any other being can have. He created man in his image, bestowing upon him a reasonable soul and an immortal spirit. Therefore we are God's, because we bear his image, as the tribute money bore the image of Caesar. But God has not only created us; he has redeemed us. When Satan had taken us captive, Christ redeemed us with his precious blood, and now he says to each of us, "You are not your own; you are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Cor. 6:20.) Have we given ourselves to the Redeemer? Is it our chief desire to do his will and to promote his glory? Or do we ungratefully spurn his authority, seeking our own pleasure and doing our own will?

**September 11**

### **Luke 20:27-38. Christ replies to the Sadducees respecting the resurrection.**

Here is another instance of precious truth being uttered in answer to frivolous questions. What light is thrown upon the eternal state by these two sentences! "They are equal to the angels! All live to him."

The Sadducees did not believe that there would be any resurrection of the dead, because they did not understand how it could be. When they applied to Jesus they described a case which might have occurred under the Jewish law. The land of Canaan was divided into small inheritances. If a man died without a child to succeed him, God enjoined that his brother should marry the widow, and that if a child were born, he should succeed to the property of the deceased brother, and be considered as his heir. The Sadducees imagined that they had proposed a difficulty that the Lord could not solve; but by a word he exposed their folly. He declared that departed saints are "equal to the angels of God." Angels are not divided into families as men are; and glorified saints will not be connected in heaven with the relations they had upon earth. They will have connections, but not of an earthly kind. The pastor will rejoice to find again the flock he fed below. As Paul says to his converts, (1 Thess. 2:19,) "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" The godly parent will find himself united in spiritual bonds to the children who were born the second time, in answer to his fervent supplications. The friends who bore each other's spiritual burdens up the hill of Zion, will walk together by the waters of life that gladden the city of their God. Spiritual bonds can never be dissolved. Now is the time to multiply these bonds. Some who knew upon earth few of the sweet ties of kindred will be bound by numerous sacred everlasting ties in heaven.

But Christ knew that the Sadducees denied not only the resurrection of the body, but the immortality of the spirit. Therefore he brought forward a proof of the eternal life of the pious dead; and he brought it out of those five books of Moses, in which alone the Sadducees professed to believe. God would not have said to Moses, when he spoke from the burning bush, "I am the God of Abraham," if Abraham had ceased to exist.

How glorious is the idea that all the saints are actually in existence! All those holy men whom we have read of in the Scriptures, all whom we have heard of, all whom we have known and loved,—they LIVE. They not only live; but are equal to the angels. We delight to think of our absent living friends, to imagine how they are now engaged, to hope they sometimes think of us, and will some day return to us; but while we are indulging these tender thoughts, they may be in pain and trouble; they may be entangled in sin, and wandering far from God. But with what confidence may we think of the pious dead! When we hear the sweetest strains of music, we may think, "Those sounds give but faint ideas of their feelings, as they pass from bliss to bliss." But though we know not the degree of their happiness, Jesus did. He had but lately left the blessed company above, and

now he was going to die that they might live on forever, and that their number might continually increase. Once Abel was the only redeemed saint in heaven, but at length there shall be a multitude that no man can number, who will join in Abel's song, and say, "Salvation to our God, which sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." (Rev. 7:10.)

Ten thousand times ten thousand sung  
Loud anthems round the throne,  
When lo! one solitary tongue  
Began a song unknown;  
A song unknown to angel ears,  
A song that told of banished fears  
Of pardoned sins, and dried up tears.  
Not one of all the heavenly host  
Could those high notes attain,  
But spirits from a distant coast  
United in the strain;  
Until he who first began the song  
(To sing alone not suffered long)  
Was mingled with a countless throng.  
And still as hours are fleeting by  
The angels ever bear  
Some newly-ransomed soul on high  
To join the chorus there;  
And so the song will louder grow,  
Until all whom Christ redeemed below  
To that fair world of rapture go.  
O give me, Lord, my golden harp,  
And tune my broken voice,  
That I may sing of troubles sharp,  
Exchanged for endless joys;  
The song that never was heard before  
A sinner reached the heavenly shore,  
But now shall sound for evermore.

## **September 12**

### **Mark 12:28-34. Christ replies to a Scribe concerning the greatest commandment.**

It is not surprising that the Scribes admired the Lord's answer to the Sadducees, because they believed in the resurrection. They showed their admiration by exclaiming, "You have well said." Yet they did not give up the hope of entangling the divine Teacher by questions; and one of them made this inquiry, "Which is the first commandment of all?" The Scribes often disputed with each other on this

subject, and some asserted that to offer a certain sacrifice, and others that to keep a certain fast, or to repeat certain prayers, or to bestow certain alms, was the service the most acceptable to God. How much the Lord's reply must have surprised them! Instead of selecting any one command as greater than the rest, he pointed to the root of all acceptable obedience, Love. He made only one distinction, and that was with regard to the objects towards whom love is to be exercised. These objects are "God and man;" and as God is infinitely greater than man, love to Him must be infinitely more important than love to man. Yet where love to God is found, love to man will always follow; but it will be a love very different from that selfish, capricious, and partial love which unconverted men feel for their friends and relatives.

The Scribe, who asked the question with the evil design of tempting the Lord, (as Matthew declares,) was convinced by the answer, and expressed his sentiments with cordiality and candor. He did not speak hypocritically when he said, "Well, Master, you have said the truth." No other of our Lord's tempters ever showed such readiness to receive instruction, and such frankness in avowing his convictions. He, who knew his heart, encouraged him by this commendation—"You are not far from the kingdom of God." He did not say, "You are in the kingdom of God." He did not say, as once he said to a weeping penitent, "Your faith has saved you." He did not say, as once he said to a dying thief, "You shall be with me in Paradise." Yet what he did say was very encouraging. In a world in which so many are as far from the kingdom of God, as the east is from the west, it is encouraging for a sinner to hear that he is not far from it. It is God alone that can draw a soul even to its borders—and it is our hope that if he bring it thus far, he will bring it farther still. To perish at the very barrier that separates death from life would be dreadful indeed. The shipwrecked mariner who perishes in the waves when in sight of the shore, seems in a more pitiable case than one who had not so nearly reached his native land and his beloved home.

Are we convinced that without love all the services we can offer to God are worthless? Even a human creature would not be pleased with our gifts, if he KNEW that we did not love him, and that we presented them only with the view of gaining a reward. And will God be pleased with interested services? How much has he done to win our love? He has given his only-begotten Son to die for our sakes. Is not that enough to melt the hardest heart? There can be no greater proof of the natural wickedness of the human heart than this—it finds it difficult to love God—to love the most lovely Being, the most gracious Benefactor.

Let none of us be satisfied with feeling we ought to love God. As soon as a spark of real affection for our heavenly Father is kindled in our hearts, then we are in the kingdom of God—then we are safe, then we are happy. Not so happy as we shall be when we love him more; but happier than the most prosperous worldling who does not love him. Our love can never entitle us to eternal life; Christ's blood can alone do that; but it affords a proof that we are the children of God, and that we shall dwell with him forever! for "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither

have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that LOVE him." (1 Cor. 2:9.)

### **September 13**

#### **Matthew 22:41 to end. Christ questions the Pharisees concerning himself.**

We have already admired the wisdom of the Lord's answers. We have now an instance of the wisdom of his questions. Though his enemies could not perplex him, yet he could easily perplex them. But his questions were not like theirs, frivolous; they were important. There is no subject more important than who Christ is. The Pharisees thought they knew, but they were profoundly ignorant on the subject. They knew, indeed, the meaning of the word "Christ." It signifies "anointed"—one set apart by the anointing of oil as priest and king. Jesus was the Christ, anointed of the Father with the Holy Spirit, the oil of gladness, to be priest and king forever. In the second Psalm there is a prophecy of this anointed one. "The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed (or his Christ.)" The Pharisees had read the Scriptures, and they knew that the Christ would come into the world, and that he would be born of the family of David. But they did not know that the Christ was the Son of God, as well as the Son of David. Therefore Jesus brought forward a passage from the Psalms, in which David calls the Christ his Lord. It is this, "The Lord said unto my Lord." (Ps. 110:1.) That is, "The Lord the Father said unto my Lord the Son." How could David's Son be David's Lord? This was a mystery hidden from the Pharisees. It is the great mystery of godliness. "God manifest in the flesh." It has been revealed to us. We know that from everlasting the Son has been with the Father in glory, and that in the fullness of time he was born into the world—the infant of a humble daughter of the royal David.

Thus he is at once David's Son and David's Lord. The Pharisees did not ask him to explain the passage he had quoted; for they were contented with their ignorance, and loved darkness better than light. But they will understand it when it is too late. The prophecy shall be fulfilled. "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit on my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." Part of it has already been accomplished. Christ is now sitting at the right hand of God, but he has not yet come to make his enemies his footstool. With what dismay will those who once rejected him behold the Son of God when he appears in his glory! "Every eye shall see him, and they also that pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." That is, some of all kindreds shall wail, because some of all kindreds have rejected him. It was not the Jews only who said, "We will not have this man to reign over us;" it was not the Romans only who pierced him with a spear; there are many belonging to Christian nations who have crucified him afresh and have trodden him under foot. (Heb. 6:6; 10:29.) All who do not love him are his enemies, and shall be made his footstool. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. How terrible it must be to be trampled beneath

his feet! Yet those who have trodden under foot the Son of God shall, if they do not repent, be trodden under foot themselves—for he has declared, "I will tread them in my anger, and trample them in my fury." (Isa. 63:3.) In that day he will save his people, and while he makes his enemies his footstool, he will exalt them to his own THRONE, for he has said, "To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in MY THRONE." (Rev. 3:21.)

## **September 14**

### **Matthew 23:1-12. Christ warns the people against the pride of the Pharisees.**

This is the last discourse recorded which our Savior uttered in the presence of his enemies. How alarming it is! Surely those sins must be very dangerous which called forth such warnings from the meek and gentle Savior! The first part of the discourse was not addressed to the Pharisees themselves, but to the disciples and to the multitude. The Lord warned them against imitating the example of their teachers. With regard to their instructions, this was the rule laid down. When the Pharisees sat in Moses' seat, that is, when they read the books of Moses in the synagogue to the people, then they were to be regarded. We know that their FALSE interpretations were not to be received; for our Savior on one occasion censured them for teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. (Matthew 15:9.) Therefore we perceive how we ought to understand the words in verse 3—"All, therefore, whatever they bid you observe, that observe and do." All the instructions they gave, which agreed with the word of God, the people were bound to observe, however wicked their teachers might be.

The Lord next commanded the people not to imitate the example of the Pharisees. "Do not you after their works." We are apt to imitate those we admire. The people admired the Pharisees exceedingly, for they could not detect their motive. It was PRIDE. All they did was to be seen of men; therefore all they did was abominable to God. The phylacteries (those strips of parchment on which texts of Scripture were written) were harmless in themselves, but the Pharisees wore them with the wicked desire of gaining admiration from men by an appearance of piety. The borders, or fringes on the garments, were even commanded by God in the law. In Numbers 15:38, the Israelites were desired to put fringes (or borders) on their garments, and upon the fringes a ribbon of blue, in order that when they looked upon it they might remember all the commandments of the Lord. Christ did not reprove them for wearing these borders, but for wearing them in order to be seen of men; neither did he censure them for sitting in the most honorable places at feasts or in the synagogue, but for LOVING to sit there.

It is natural for men to wish to be noticed and admired. Even Christians feel this desire, but they do not cherish it; no, they abhor it, and pray against it, and strive

to overcome it. Whenever we feel mortified because we have been overlooked, or elated because we have been noticed, we should bewail before the Lord the pride of our hearts. Why is pride so offensive in God's eyes? Because it leads men to desire to be in the place of God. Pride is never satisfied. Were a man to gain the admiration of a hundred persons, he would wish to gain that of a hundred more, and his desires would never stop until he was the object of universal homage, until he occupied the throne of the Almighty. It is not wonderful that God abhors a sin that aims to dethrone himself, and to render his whole creation miserable. The happiness of the universe depends upon God being seated upon his own throne, and upon all his creatures submitting to his government. God must humble every one that he would save. If we are to be saved, we must be humbled. People little know what they are doing when they cherish pride in children. Many of the common modes of education are calculated to feed this dangerous passion. The desire to be first is encouraged by numerous expedients, when every means ought to be used to check the love of distinction in the young heart. Nothing can so effectually subdue it as the Gospel of Christ. There man learns that he is a polluted being, and that nothing but the blood of the crucified Savior can wash out his stains. Do we believe this humbling doctrine? Then let us remember the words of the apostle Paul, "I beseech you that you walk worthy of your vocation with which you are called, with all lowliness and meekness." (Eph. 4:2.)

## **September 15**

### **Matthew 23:13-15. Christ denounces three woes against the Pharisees.**

The first sermon recorded which the Lord Jesus preached is called the Sermon on the Mount. It began with eight blessings, such as these, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek." But now we are reading the last sermon recorded, and we find in it eight woes. They are denounced against the Pharisees. The Lord warned his disciples against their evil doctrines and example in his first public discourse, saying, "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall in nowise enter the kingdom of heaven." He shows in this his last discourse what their righteousness was—a mere pretense, an outward show, a cloak to secret wickedness. After each woe he uttered, he described a crime.

The first crime described is "shutting up the kingdom of heaven against men." This is the contrary of what Jesus came to do. He opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. He opened it by his death. All faithful ministers stand at the open door and invite sinners to come in. But the Pharisees taught men false ways of salvation. When they saw real penitents they frowned upon them, and endeavored to shut them out. We find in the prophet Daniel this encouraging promise—"Those who be wise shall shine as the brightness of the skies, and those who turn many to righteousness as the stars forever." (Dan. 12:3.) But

what will become of those who have turned many from righteousness! What anguish will they feel when they find among their companions in torment, many whom they once perverted and corrupted!

But if the Pharisees had been openly wicked they would not have been as guilty as they were. They pretended to be very pious, and made long prayers in public places, while secretly they devoured widows' houses. It seems that dying men often left the property of their widows to their charge, little suspecting how the trust would be abused. How could they dare to injure the widow and the fatherless when they read continually in the law of Moses these words—"You shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any way, and they shall cry at all unto me, I will hear their cry, and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless." Ex. 22:22-24. Christ is acquainted with every secret sin. He detests sin most when he sees it covered by a cloak of hypocrisy. Therefore he said to the Pharisees, "You shall receive the greater damnation." There are degrees of misery. Hypocrites shall be punished more than open transgressors. The sins which they have so carefully concealed from men will be publicly exposed at the last day, and the secrecy with which they were committed will be found to add to their enormity.

Everyone would acknowledge that to devour widows' houses is a sin; but everyone would not understand at first that it was a sin to compass sea and land to make proselytes. It is not a sin to compass sea and land to make converts—no, that is a righteous act. Missionaries go to the farther ends of the earth to tell perishing sinners of a Savior. They go, and by the blessing of God, they make some of them the children of heaven, such as they are themselves. What is a proselyte? He is a man who changes his religion, whether for a better or a worse. The Pharisees took great pains to persuade the Gentiles to observe the ceremonies of the Jewish law; for it gratified their pride to add to the number of their own followers. They did not desire to save souls; for while they were so zealous in making proselytes, they shut up the kingdom of heaven against men. The bad instructions they gave to a proselyte rendered him worse than he was before, and even worse than themselves. We should have hardly thought it possible that any could be worse than the Pharisees, did we not find these words written, "And when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." There are degrees of wickedness as well as of misery. Some are more the children of hell than others. It is even possible to make another worse than we are ourselves. How dangerous it must be to listen to false teachers! If we attend to them we may become worse than they are. How dreadful is the name here given to a wicked man! "The child of hell!" Yet all who are not the children of heaven are the children of hell. The world is divided into these two classes. Could the children of hell see the place to which they were going, they would tremble, and shrink back with fear. But God sees it, and in his love he warns them not to proceed in their dangerous course. He does more. He is willing to

make them "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints of light;" for he is able to deliver them from "the power of darkness." (Col. 1:12, 13.)

## September 16

### **Matthew 23:16-28. Christ denounces four more woes against the Pharisees.**

Our God is the God of truth. There was no truth in the Pharisees. They taught lies, and they acted lies. In the passage we have just read a woe is denounced against them for teaching lies. They taught the people that the gold of the temple was more holy than the temple itself; and that the gift on the altar was more holy than the altar—whereas it was clear that it was the temple that sanctified the gold, and the altar that sanctified the gift.

What could be their motive for teaching these errors? No doubt it was the love of money. They hoped to induce the people to bestow much gold, and to offer many gifts as sacrifices, that by these means they themselves might grow rich. The love of money has in all ages led men to teach falsehood. Roman Catholic priests gain money by the masses they repeat for the dead. They tell the people that the souls of their relations are in torment, and that they can release them by repeating prayers or masses on their behalf; but they will not repeat these masses, unless money is given to them. One mark of a faithful minister is his indifference to worldly gain, or to filthy lucre, as the Scriptures call it. Like Paul he can say, "I seek not yours, but you." (2 Cor. 12:14.)

The Pharisees not only spoke lies, they acted them. They pretended to be so very pious, that they would not omit paying tithes to the priests of the smallest herbs; while at the same time they omitted paying to God the greatest duties they owed to him, such as judgment, mercy, and faith. And why? Because men could see them when they gave their tithes, but God alone knew the state of their hearts.

Are there not some like the Pharisees in these days? They are careful to perform religious services when the eye of man is upon them; but they are indifferent when the eye of God alone observes. They attend church regularly because men see them there. But do they pray in secret regularly? They are very careful of their words, because men hear them; but they are very careless about their thoughts, because God alone sees them. What can better represent such characters than cups clean outside and filthy within, than sepulchers beautifully ornamented containing dead men's bones?

How different is the description that the Holy Spirit has given of the saints! Paul says, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." (1 Cor. 4:7.) The saints are despised by the world, and valued no more than an earthen vessel; but in their hearts a treasure is hid—it is Christ, the hope of glory. (Col. 1:27.) In the sight of

God, who sees the heart, they are precious as gold and silver. It is true that they are not without sin; but God has promised to refine them, as gold and silver are purified from their dross. (Mal. 3:2.) But the wicked are compared to the dross of silver, and to the baser metals. God said to Ezekiel, "Son of man, the house of Israel has to me become dross; all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver." And what would God do to these impenitent, unbelieving, unconverted people? "Because you have all become dross, behold therefore, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver, (that is, the dross of silver,) and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it to melt it; so will I gather you in my anger and in my fury; and I will leave you there, and melt you." (Ezek. 22:18-20.) Afflictions do not refine hypocrites; but destroy them. God leaves them in their troubles, and permits them to perish. But if our hearts are right in the sight of God, he will never leave us. His promise to everyone who sincerely loves him is, "I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him." Are there any here who never cry earnestly to God for a clean heart, and a right spirit? What will you do in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ? (Rom. 2:16.)

## **September 17**

### **Matthew 23:29-36. Christ denounces the last woe against the Pharisees.**

This is the last of the eight woes that the Lord denounced against the Pharisees. Eight times he uttered these words, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." Eight times he described their hypocritical character. The last instance of hypocrisy mentioned, is the building of the tombs of the prophets. This was a hypocritical act in the Pharisees, because it was not done from love and reverence to the martyred prophets, but merely from pride and ostentation. If they had revered the ancient prophets, they would not have persecuted the living ones. It is very probable that they really thought that they would not have been partakers with their fathers in the blood of the prophets; but they did not know their own hearts. It is very easy to deceive ourselves respecting our own characters. When we read of wicked actions, it is natural to think that we would not have committed them, had we been placed in the circumstances of those we read of. But this is not the way to come to a knowledge of ourselves. Let us not inquire how we should have treated the apostles or the reformers, had we lived in their days, but let us rather inquire how do we behave towards despised saints in these days? Do we love all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Are we ready to relieve their wants, and to defend their characters? When the saints are praised and admired, it is easy then to speak in their favor; but when they are despised and calumniated, then it requires faith to take their part, and to share in their reproach.

With what honor the Son of God mentioned those holy men who had been slain in former times! What a title he bestowed on Abel, when he called him "righteous Abel!" The waters of the flood had not washed out the stains of his blood from the earth. We know the names of very few of those prophets who were slain between the time of Abel and of Zachariah, but all their names were known to Jesus at the moment he was speaking—all their spirits were happy in his Father's presence, and all their blood was crying for vengeance from the earth. And upon whom would that vengeance descend? Upon that generation to whom Jesus then spoke—upon that generation who would exceed all their fathers in wickedness, by slaying the Son of God, and by refusing the offer of pardon that his apostles would proclaim. Jesus declared, "All these things shall come upon this generation." But not upon that generation alone. The sufferings of the Jewish nation are not yet ended. To this day they are wanderers on the face of the earth, even as Cain was who slew his brother Abel.

Can parents bear the idea of entailing a curse upon their children? Long after they are sleeping in their graves their offspring may be suffering the consequences of their sins. A family is plunged from the height of affluence into the depth of poverty; disease sweeps away the fair blossoms from a flourishing tree; public crime inflicts a dark blot upon a reputable name—and men know not the cause of these visitations. Sometimes they are sent, like the afflictions of Job, and the temptations of Abraham, to try the faith of God's dear children, and as tokens of a Father's love—but sometimes they are the memorials of sins perpetrated long before—of sins unpardoned and unrepented of. The cruel treatment of a fatherless child, the treacherous robbery of a master, the bitter persecution of a saint, are often visited upon the unrighteous descendants of those who committed the guilty acts. God fulfils his own word by visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate him.

But He will never let his wrath burn against the righteous son of ungodly parents. No, if the son repents, he shall obtain mercy. The good king Josiah, though the son of a very wicked father, was spared when God was going to pour torrents of wrath upon his kingdom. Because his heart was tender, because he humbled himself, and wept and prayed, therefore God said, "You shall be gathered to your grave in peace." Pious children who have ungodly parents yet living, may pray for them, and may obtain mercy for them also. Far from punishing the children for their parents' sake, he may bless those parents for their children's sake. "For he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repents him of the evil." (Joel 2:13.)

**September 18**

**Matthew 23:37 to end. Christ laments over Jerusalem.**

Could the most feeling heart bewail the calamities of his friend more tenderly than the Lord here bewails the dreadful end of his enemies? It was not because he loved them not that he had addressed the Pharisees in these terrible words, "You serpents, you generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell?" Those whom he now called serpents, he would have treated as the hen her beloved brood. When that careful bird observes a hawk or a kite hovering in the air, she calls her little ones to take refuge beneath her sheltering wings. The Lord Jesus descried afar off the woes that were about to light upon the heads of his guilty nation, and he gave them warning of their approach; but they would not heed his words, nor accept his invitations. And now the time was come when hope had nearly expired. "Behold," said the Lord, "your house is left unto you desolate." But though he said "Behold," the Jews beheld no desolation. The temple was shining in all its splendor; the walls of Jerusalem were standing in all their strength; the feast of the Passover was thronged with guests; the land was flowing with milk and honey; where was the desolation? It was near at hand, even at the door. The Son of God heard its step upon the mountains, and saw its shadow upon the hills. Before the voices of those children who sang his praises in the temple should become tremulous through age, the enemy would cause the sound of melody to cease in the Lord's house. How long has the silence continued! Visit Mount Moriah, where once the temple stood. Behold that stately building, crowned with domes and minarets. It is not a Christian church. Is it a heathen temple? No, it is a Mohammedan mosque, the pride of the Turks, the masterpiece of their architecture. Neither Christian nor Jew may now tread upon the spot where the Redeemer stood and taught. And thus it shall be, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. Then there shall be a great and glorious change. It is described in this last verse. "For I say unto you, you shall not see me henceforth, until you shall say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" When the Savior comes the second time, he will meet with a very different reception from that which he received the first time. He expired amid curses, but he shall return amid blessings.

How wonderful are the dealings of God with the Jewish nation! Instead of casting them off forever, he has only cast them out for a time. He says to them, by the mouth of his prophet Isaiah, "In a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you, says the Lord your Redeemer." (Is. 54:7, 8.)

Are there any among us with whom the Lord has dealt in the same merciful manner? Some, who in their youthful days hardened their hearts against the Gospel, after wandering long in forbidden and dangerous paths, have been permitted once more to hear the joyful sound, and have heard it the second time with altered feelings, and a new delight. When God had spoken to them in their prosperity, they had replied, "I will not hear;" but when he had destroyed their earthly delights, they welcomed the messenger of mercy, and exclaimed, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

**September 19**

**Mark 12:41 to end. Christ commends a poor widow.**

The time was drawing near when the Lord Jesus would leave the temple, never to return. Before he left it, he sat for a while in the court called the women's court. The inner court was called the court of Israel, and there no one was permitted to sit down; but in the women's court sitting was allowed. Under the pillars that adorned the court eleven chests were placed, and upon each chest was written the purpose to which money cast in it, would be applied. None of them were for the relief of the poor; all were set apart for the supply of the various sacrifices and services of the temple.

The people presented their offerings within the view of Jesus. Many who were rich cast in much. It is probable these rich men were Pharisees. The Lord had lately upbraided them for their covetousness. He did not now applaud their liberality. He knew that though they gave much, they kept more. He saw also their motives, and he was acquainted with their secret practices. But while he passed over the rich, his eye rested upon a certain poor widow, who cast in two mites, which made a farthing. It is said in one place that two sparrows are sold for a farthing—that farthing was the fourth part of a penny; this farthing was the FORTIETH part of a penny—the fortieth part of the wages of a day-laborer.

There is very little recorded concerning the poor widow; neither her name, nor her parentage, nor her history, nor her abode. But she was well known to Jesus. He knew not only what she put into the treasury, but also that she had nothing remaining. He knew all her circumstances in this life—the depth of her poverty, and how she fell into it. It may be that she was the victim of one of those proud Pharisees, who devoured widows' houses. He knew not only her circumstances, but her heart—the feelings with which she approached the treasury and cast in her mites. It may be that she had just received some great deliverance, and that she testified her gratitude by her gift. It may be that, like the aged Anna, she derived her chief consolation from attending the services of the temple, from listening to the psalms sung continually within its walls, and from joining in the worship which accompanied the daily offerings. It is probable that she had heard the Savior's gracious words within that sacred place, and had found salvation through faith in his name. She must have been a believer in the promises of God, or she could not have presented an acceptable offering. For it is written, "Through faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." (Heb. 11.)

The believing poor still present their farthings to the Lord—their mites are still precious in his sight. They may not be noticed by men, but they are not overlooked by God. He knows where all the money comes from that enters into his treasury; and he can distinguish the guinea which dropped out of the overflowing coffers of a rich man, from the last farthing of a poor one. There are

some in our days who have displayed the same faith that actuated the widow. There was a man who spent his all in going from city to city, from country to country, to plead for the souls of the poor. Wherever he went, he stirred up his fellow-Christians to form town-missions, which might penetrate into every dark abode of ignorance and misery. He died in the midst of his years and of his labors, and left not enough to procure his winding-sheet, much less to sustain his infant family. But God raised up friends who honorably buried him, and comfortably provided for his widow and her babes. Our gracious Lord is faithful, and never forsakes those who put their trust in him. We may feel assured that the widow who cast in all her living into the treasury, was not permitted to pine with need the day after. And every one who has faith to act as she did, will be approved as she was, and sustained as she was, and at the last day acknowledged as she will be.

## **September 20**

### **Matthew 24:1-2. Christ foretells the destruction of the temple.**

These words record a very remarkable event—"Jesus went out, and departed from the temple."

That was a memorable moment when the Lord Jesus departed from the temple, never again to enter it—that temple into which he had been carried as a babe in his mother's arms, and where he had been blessed by the aged Simeon; from that temple where, as a child, he had astonished the doctors by his wisdom—from that temple where he had healed so many sufferers, and spoken peace to so many penitents. Never more would he honor it with his presence; his enemies might have it to themselves, to repeat within its sacred courts for a few more years their hypocritical services. On another altar he would bleed, even the altar of the cross; to another temple he would ascend, even to the temple in heaven, to stand before the altar there, with the golden censer in his hand. (Rev. 8:3.)

Had the disciples known their Master as well as they might have known him, they would not have directed his attention to the splendor of the holy house. How could they expect that the King of Heaven would admire earthly magnificence! The world's glory must have appeared dark indeed to Him who had dwelt in the palace of eternal light!

A little while before, he had called his disciples unto him. For what purpose? Was it to show them such an object as the world admires? A monarch gorgeously arrayed, or a building beautifully adorned? or even a prospect of surpassing loveliness? No! it was to show them a sight pleasing in God's eyes—a poor widow devoted in heart to his service. For what a different purpose the disciples came to their Master!

Instead of admiring the temple's magnificence, Jesus uttered this astonishing prophecy—"There shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down." For nine years before the Savior's birth, Herod the Great had kept eighteen thousand workmen continually employed in repairing the temple, and since his death the Jews had continued to improve it. It was built upon a massive rock, and was composed of stones, some of which were sixty feet in length. Who could believe that such stones would be thrown down! Yet in about forty years after the prophecy had been uttered, the place where the temple stood was a ploughed field; for the Romans caused the foundations to be dug up in search of hidden treasures.

God knows the fate of every building which now attracts human admiration. The mosque of Omar, that stands where once the temple stood, has its appointed time. All the edifices that human hands have reared, since the tower of Babel was begun, shall perish—they may be demolished by the conqueror, or swallowed up by an earthquake, or gradually crumbled away by the hand of time—but if they escape all these enemies, they shall at length be consumed in the flames; for God has declared, "The earth, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up. Seeing, then, that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God?" (2 Pet. 3:10, 11.) But there are some things which shall endure. Though every stone in the temple has been thrown down, the poor widow that cast her mite into the treasury still lives. Her love still lives. It led her once to offer two mites, and now it leads her to offer never-ending praises. When we behold a splendid building, let us remember that a poor tattered believer is more glorious in God's sight than that pompous fabric. Men may think him unfit to enter the magnificent gate, or to tread upon the marble floor; but God has prepared for him a building not made with hands, eternal in the heavens—a building that shall endure when all earthly palaces and temples shall melt with fervent heat.

## **September 21**

### **Matthew 24:3-14. Christ foretells the signs of the end.**

How interesting was the scene upon Mount Olivet when the Savior sat there instructing his disciples concerning things to come! The prospect he beheld must have filled his heart with sad thoughts. It was Jerusalem, that crowned the opposite heights—Jerusalem! the city over which he had wept only a few days before—Jerusalem, that city in which he had done so many miracles—Jerusalem, that city in which he was so very soon to be tried and condemned.

When we look upon a place which we have often visited, we think of past events; but when Jesus looked upon Jerusalem he thought not only of the past, but also of the future.

The disciples did not leave their Master to meditate alone upon that mount. Four of them approached and proposed some important questions. The names of these four are recorded by Mark—they were James and John, Peter and Andrew, the fishermen of Gennesaret. The inquiries they made were these—"When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the world?" What things did they refer to in their first question? A little while before their Lord had said, when gazing on the magnificent buildings of the temple, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." It was natural that the disciples should desire to know when these wonderful events would happen; they said, "When shall these things be?" Had they asked no other question, it would have been clear that the whole of the Lord's answer related to the destruction of Jerusalem; but they added a second inquiry, "What shall be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the world?"

The Lord answered both these inquiries as he sat upon Mount Olivet. It is difficult for us to know certainly what part of the answer relates to the destruction of Jerusalem, and what part relates to the second coming. Before Jerusalem was destroyed, there were many wars and persecutions; and there are wars and persecutions still. What mournful signs these are, of the coming of Christ! When he was born at Bethlehem, the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will towards men." This song would have led us to expect that wars would cease now that the Prince of peace was come. But eighteen hundred years have rolled away, and violence still prevails upon the earth. The joyful song in the fields of Bethlehem is very unlike the mournful discourse upon the Mount of Olives. Yet both are true. When the Babe that lay in the manger shall sit upon his throne, the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord. Meanwhile there must be trials, and afflictions, and temptations. Jesus has faithfully warned us beforehand. He has told us that many will be offended, and that many will be deceived, and that the love of many will grow cold. When we read these prophecies we should offer up such a prayer as this—"May I never be offended, or deceived, or cooled in my love!" When we hear of any who have turned back from following the Lord, let us think of the touching words he once spoke to his apostles, "Will you also go away?" Surely none will feel so much ashamed to see him again as those who professed to walk with him a little way, and to love him for a little while, but whose feet grew weary, and whose love waxed cold! O how they will wish that they had never heard his name, nor listened to his voice!

## **September 22**

### **Matthew 24:15-23. Christ directs his disciples when to flee from Jerusalem.**

These warnings proved exceedingly useful to the first Christians. They remembered the words, "When you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place; then let

those who are in Judea flee into the mountains." Nearly forty years after these words were uttered, the Roman armies stood in the holy place; that is, in the holy city of Jerusalem. These armies were prophesied of under the name of "the abomination of desolation." The world admires great conquerors, and their gallant troops, but the Lord abhors deeds of injustice and cruelty. The Roman name shines bright in the page of history, but it is a blot in the word of God—"the abomination of desolation."

But some may inquire, "How could the Christians escape from Jerusalem when the Romans had entered the city?" God showed his faithfulness by providing a way of escape for his own people. When the Romans first attacked the city, they were repulsed—they fled, and they did not return to the city for several years. The Christians took advantage of their defeat to flee to the mountains. They found a place wherein to dwell in safety; a little town called Pella, beyond the river Jordan, hidden among the hills, was their refuge. It is believed that not one Christian was in the city of Jerusalem at the time of its dreadful destruction. Does not the escape of these Christians afford a striking instance of the manner in which God preserves his people? When he destroyed the world by water, he saved Noah; when he destroyed Sodom, he saved Lot; and when he will destroy the world by fire, he will save his people. As it is written in Ps. 32, "For this shall everyone that is godly pray to you in a time when you may be found—surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come near him."

It was the time of the Passover when the Roman armies, headed by the great Titus, returned to attack Jerusalem. Two millions of human beings were then enclosed within her walls. And what human beings! Many of them were ferocious robbers. Two wicked men, named Simon and John, were at open war with each other, and kept the city in continual tumult. Through their means most of the provisions were burned, and the inhabitants speedily reduced to famine. The robbers broke into houses, and insisted upon the inhabitants delivering up their last morsel. During the whole period of the siege no regular meal was taken. Each ate his morsel alone, in fear and trembling. One unnatural mother was induced by hunger to roast her own child, and to eat part of it. The odor of her meal attracted the Jewish soldiers to her house; they compelled her to produce her strange food; but when they beheld the dreadful spectacle, they retreated in horror, for now they clearly saw that God had abandoned the city, and that no hope remained to its wretched inhabitants.

The pen of Josephus, an unbelieving Jew, has described the calamities of the siege; and he has wound up his account by these words—"If the misfortunes of all from the beginning of the world were compared with those of the Jews, they would appear much less upon the comparison." This is an unbeliever's testimony to the truth of the prophecy, "There shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time." If those days had not been shortened, the whole nation must have perished; but this could not be, because of the elect. Some of the Jews were chosen of God, and for their sakes the days

of tribulation were shortened; and the siege lasted little more than three months. But is the tribulation over? O no. The Jews are still wanderers upon the face of the earth; they are still despised, dejected, degraded. It is a dreadful thing not to listen to the voice of mercy. The Jews would not hear it, and they have been compelled to hear the voice of wrath. The Lord delights in mercy. Are there any here who have not yet accepted his gracious invitations? O what sorrows you might escape, if now you would turn to him!

## **September 23**

### **Matthew 24:23-31. Christ describes his second coming.**

What comfort it has been to believers during the last eighteen hundred years, to know that Jesus will return in a public manner! "As the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even unto the west; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." The inhabitants of all parts of the world will know in the twinkling of an eye that Jesus has returned, for they will see him coming in the clouds of heaven. Had it not been for this assurance, in what a state of agitation they would have been kept! They would have listened with eagerness to every report of his return, and would have thought it well at least to go and see whether it were true. But now they feel an unshaken confidence, that whenever he appears they shall see him immediately. They know also that wherever they may be at the time, they will be gathered to him, even as the eagles are gathered from distant parts to feast upon their prey. Whether they be dead or living when he comes, they shall behold the first bright beams of his chariot. Whether they be lying in their graves, or in the depths of the sea, they shall be caught up to meet him in the air—whether engaged in their daily toil, or partaking of their nightly repose, they shall be changed, and translated to join the blessed company.

And did the Lord give his disciples any information concerning the time of his second coming? Yes—he said it should happen "immediately after the tribulation of those days." To what tribulation does he refer? This is a question that has perplexed many attentive readers of Holy Scripture. Some consider the tribulation that the Jews have endured during the last eighteen hundred years is here spoken of. Are they not still in tribulation? Luke gives this account of our Lord's words—"Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." The Turks are still in possession of Jerusalem; their mosque still pollutes the holy mount where once the temple stood; but when the tribulation of the Jews is over, when they are restored to their own land, and their own city, their King will return to take possession of his ancient throne. He was born King of the Jews, he died King of the Jews, and King of the Jews he will return; but not of the Jews only, but King of kings, and Lord of lords. How glorious is the description of his return in Rev. 19:11! "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse, and he who sat upon him was called Faithful and true, and in righteousness he does judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of

fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written that no man knew but he himself."

Yet the glory of the second coming is not so wonderful as the humiliation of the first. It seems suitable to the Son of God to return in the clouds with a vast army of saints and angels; but it is amazing that he should have entered the world as a babe, have been laid in a manger, and nailed unto a cross. And why did he come in this lowly, in this ignominious manner? That when he came again to destroy the world, he might gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. All these scattered ones have believed in the crucified Jesus, and have been washed in his blood; therefore their garments are clean and white, and they are fit to enter into the presence of their Lord, and to dwell with him forever.

## **September 24**

### **Matthew 24:32-41. Christ foretells the suddenness of his second coming.**

What must have been the feelings of the disciples when they heard their Lord declare, "This generation shall not pass until all these things be fulfilled!" Though the Lord had directed them how to escape from Jerusalem, yet they must have felt compassion for their countrymen who would suffer the "great tribulation." What should we feel if we knew that London, now so prosperous and flourishing, would in the course of forty years be steeped in blood, and filled with carcasses! Thanks be unto God, we have heard no such evil tidings. Though now full of ignorance and vice, of poverty and misery, it may become enlightened and happy, through the spread of the gospel in all its dark alleys and crowded courts. But the disciples could entertain no such hopes concerning Jerusalem. They knew that if they were spared to see old age, they would hear of the destruction of their native city.

Before the beginning of this discourse, they had asked two questions; the first was, "When shall these things be?" This inquiry referred to the stones of the temple being thrown down. The other question was, "What shall be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the world?" To this question our Lord seems to refer when he says, "But of that day and hour knows no man; no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." How remarkable it is that the time of Christ's second coming should be concealed from the knowledge of every creature! Angels know not the time; they know not when they shall be summoned to attend their King in his chariot of clouds. Devils know not the time; they know not when they shall be immured in their dark prison, and no longer permitted to tempt the inhabitants of the earth, and of the sea. Wicked men know not the time; they know not when their day of grace will end. Righteous men know not the time; they know not when they shall be caught up to meet their Lord in the air.

When Jerusalem was destroyed, the righteous had to flee; but when Christ returns, it is the wicked who will attempt to flee, and will not be able. The same Almighty arm that will save the righteous, will arrest the wicked in their flight. How great will be their consternation when they find themselves suddenly separated from their pious relatives! The very day in which this event takes place, they will arise ignorant of what it will bring forth. Two men will be in the field, digging, or ploughing, or reaping. One may have just vented his profane oaths, while the other may have reproved him, and reminded him of the future judgment—when suddenly the angels may bear away the faithful laborer into the presence of his Savior, and leave his ungodly companion to taste the terrors of his wrath. Two women will be engaged in domestic labors; grinding at a mill, or employed in some other household work. They may both that morning have sung the same hymn, and have appeared to join in the same prayer; but while one was a humble believer, the other was a lover of the world. Christ will suddenly reveal their true characters, by taking one to dwell with him, and by leaving the other to sink into perdition. Should not each of us ask himself, "If the Lord were to come today, what would become of me? Has He heard me imploring earnestly for pardon, and his Holy Spirit? When He looks into my heart, does He see that I love Him?"

## **September 25**

### **Matthew 24:42-44. Christ counsels his disciples to watch for his return.**

Why did the Lord conceal from all the time of his second coming? We know not why he concealed it from angels or from devils, but we do know why he concealed it from men. It was that they may be watching for his return. He said, "Watch, therefore, for you know not what hour your Lord does come." He who made us is acquainted with all the secret springs of our nature. He knows that when we have a long time before us, we are disposed to loiter. There is a spirit of sloth and delay that steals over our hearts, which nothing overcomes so much as the idea that the opportunity for exertion may soon be past. Though our Lord may appear to tarry, we must never cease to believe that he will soon come. As it is written, "For yet a little while, and he who shall come will come, and will not tarry." (Heb. 10:37.) When we have been expecting a friend for a long time, we at length grow weary of waiting, and "give him up." We say, "Surely now he will not come at all." Yet sometimes he arrives just as we have given him up. We must never give up expecting Christ, for he has positively promised that he will come. But he has not promised to prolong our lives until his return. Millions have dropped into the grave during his absence, and it is very probable that we may descend into ours.

The day of death is as uncertain as the day of his return. The young die as well as the old, the healthy as well as the sickly, the cautious as well as the adventurous. We all know that this day we MAY die. It does not require faith to

believe that we may die; for reason convinces us of this fact. Yet is it not remarkable that death generally comes unexpectedly—even to the old? They have lived so long, that they naturally imagine they shall live longer still. They have seen the arrow of destruction pass by them so often, piercing their companions, but sparing them, that their fears are quelled, and their hearts are lulled to repose. It often happens that just as men have made their plans for long life, they are visited by sudden death. A house has just been built, and a garden planted, when he that built and planted is called to dwell in another abode, and to walk in other regions. These unexpected removals say with a loud voice to the living, "Be you also ready."

But what if, instead of death, the Lord were to come? His return would create more alarm than death has ever done. When death attacks an ungodly man, his senses are often stupefied by disease; he is less capable of feeling alarm than when in full health. But when Christ returns, he will find his enemies lively and strong. A sick man usually entertains hopes of recovery until near his last hour; but when Christ returns, the wicked will see no way of escape. Friends surround the pillow of the dying man; some soothe and flatter him, some counsel and encourage him—but when the Judge appears, the wicked will be left to meet their dreadful fate, without one friendly arm to render aid, one pitying eye to shed a tear, one godly tongue to offer a prayer. Do we desire to escape the terrors of that dreadful moment? there is but one certain refuge. It is the Lord Jesus, who is now ready to hear our prayers, to forgive our sins, to bestow his grace, and to be our hiding-place in the day of trouble. If we neglect this precious opportunity, he will come on us as a thief, and we shall not know what hour he comes upon us. (Rev. 3:3.)

## **September 26**

### **Matthew 24:45 to end. Christ describes the end of faithful and unfaithful servants.**

This part of our Lord's discourse applied with peculiar force to the apostles. They had been made rulers over their Lord's household. But it also applies to all ministers, for they are all stewards of the mysteries of God. A sacred trust is committed to them; and if they neglect it, their condemnation will be very heavy. If the laborer in the field, if the women grinding at the mill, were ungodly, they would perish—but if the steward of spiritual things was unfaithful, how much more miserably would he perish! How happy are those ministers whom death has found watching over their household! It signified not, indeed, whether they died in their pulpits or in their beds; but it signified much whether their hearts were truly in their work. Faithful ministers, like Paul, feel continual sorrow in their hearts for their brethren who know not God. Like him they can also say, when they think of their children in the faith, "We joy for your sakes before our God." (1 Thess. 3:9.)

It is dreadful to think that there are some ministers whom Christ calls evil servants." They think in their heart that the Lord delays his coming. Then they begin to abuse the power committed to them, and to ill-treat the saints of God, their fellow-servants. Worldly-minded ministers have often been great persecutors. What are the pleasures, and who are the companions of such men? It is said in the parable, "They eat and drink with the drunken." They do not thirst after the river of the water of life, but after earthly delights—they do not love the society of the servants of God, but that of the people of the world.

Is it ministers only, who indulge the wicked thought, "My Lord delays his coming?" Thousands are emboldened in sin by that idea. They do not say with the scoffers mentioned in Peter's second epistle, that he will never come. They do not ask, "Where is the promise of his coming?" but they think "He will not come yet; we may sin on with safety; we shall have time to repent, and amend."

The Lord continually defeats such presumptuous calculations. Death opens the door without giving the slightest notice; his step is not heard—his form is not seen until he has seized his victim, and borne him beyond the reach of repentance or of pardon.

It is in this manner the Lord has punished presumptuous sinners in past times. He will do it in a more signal manner when he comes again. He will select a moment in which the hypocrites shall have no suspicion of his approach. He will come on a day when they are not looking for him, and at an hour when they are not aware of their danger. But on that day his people will be looking for him, and at that hour they will be trusting in him; for they will say when they see him, "This is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us—this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation." (Is. 25:10.) Were he to come today in his chariot of clouds, should we be able to say, "We have waited for him?" Would he come to interrupt our pleasures, or to crown our hopes? Would he come to make us weep, and gnash our teeth, or to wipe all tears from our faces forever?

## **September 27**

### **Matthew 25:1-13. The parable of the ten virgins.**

In this parable the open enemies of Christ are not mentioned. There are only two classes described—true believers and false professors.

It seems that the difference between the wise and foolish virgins was not discovered until the bridegroom's return was announced. Had the wise virgins been aware of the unprepared state of their companions, they would sooner have recommended them to supply themselves with oil. There are many false

professors who are not detected by true Christians. What do they gain by the deception? They gain a name to live; but they lose more than they gain; for they lose those moving exhortations which would be addressed to them, if their real state were known, and which might prove their salvation. They are permitted to remain undisturbed, because they are undetected. They learn to flatter themselves in their own eyes, and to believe that they are secure. But when the bridegroom returns, then their sad condition will be discovered.

What a succession of disappointments will they experience at last! It was a disappointment to the foolish virgins when they found that their lamps had gone out. It will be a bitter disappointment to many when they find that a form of religion will avail them nothing; and that they have no grace in their hearts. The oil seems to represent holy feelings, which the Holy Spirit alone bestows; love, faith, repentance, peace, hope, joy. It is possible to maintain a creditable reputation for piety without possessing any of the fruits of the Holy Spirit; but it is written, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

The first disappointment the foolish virgins met with was finding their lamps had gone out. The second was hearing their companions refuse to share any of their oil. Our Christian friends will not be able to help us in the day of the Lord! They will not be able to impart to us the grace which is in their own hearts. When the foolish virgins returned from buying oil, how great must have been their disappointment to find the door shut! Yet they still entertained hope, and entreated to be admitted. The bridegroom's reply was the last, and the greatest of all the disappointments they had sustained. Those terrible words, "I know you not," cut off every hope, and consigned to eternal despair.

And what does this parable teach? To watch—that is, to prepare for the sudden return of our Lord. He will come with the rapidity of lightning, and those whom he finds unprepared, must continue forever unfit to abide in his presence. He gives notice to the world of the suddenness of his second coming by the suddenness with which he often causes the arrows of death to overtake sinners. Some are cut off so suddenly that they do not even know that they are dying. They fall down in a fit, are stunned by a blow, or dashed to pieces by a fall, before they can say, or even think, "Is this death?" Others have a short warning of their latter end; they are filled with dismay; they know not what to do; they send here and there for some minister to pray with them, but before he can arrive they expire. Few, when they are first taken ill, know that their sickness is unto death; and their last hour often comes upon them with unexpected speed.

It is the height of folly to remain satisfied with having a form of religion; for, at any moment, we may hear the cry, "The bridegroom comes." Then the unconverted will suddenly discover that they are not prepared; but the discovery will be of no use then. How important it is to ascertain now whether we are born again of the Spirit, sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ, and meet for the inheritance of the saints in light!

**September 28**

**Matthew 25:14-30. The parable of the talents.**

There is one circumstance that renders this parable very remarkable; it is the last recorded as related by our Lord. The first recorded was the parable of the men who built houses, the one on the rock, and the other on the sand. There is a great resemblance between the case of the man who built his house on the sand, and the case of the servant who hid his talent in the earth. Both of them were men who heard their Lord's sayings, but who did them not. Would our Lord have selected these instances for his first and last parables, if the character described had not been common, and the error fatal? We ought therefore to give very earnest heed to the parable that has just been read, and to inquire whether the warning it contains applies to ourselves.

Our Lord had related a parable very much like it a few days before, when on his way to Jerusalem. But on that occasion he was surrounded by Pharisees as well as by his own disciples—on this occasion he had no other audience than those disciples. He always adapted his instructions to his hearers. When he spoke to the Pharisees, he introduced into the parable a description of open enemies, who said, "We will not have this man to reign over us." But when he addressed his disciples only, he omitted all mention of those enemies.

We cannot be at a loss to discover what is meant by the talents intrusted to the servants. The Lord himself explained his own meaning immediately after he had related the parable; for he then described himself as seated on the throne of his glory, and inquiring whether those who stood round him had fed his hungry saints, and visited his desolate prisoners. The talents represent opportunities of doing good. The affliction sent to one is the opportunity granted to another.

There is one point that must never be overlooked in considering this parable. For what PURPOSE was it related? Was it intended to show a sinner how he might obtain pardon? No. There are other parables which show that. Those of the prodigal son, of the two debtors, and of the good shepherd, all show that it is through God's free grace, and Christ's precious blood, that pardon is bestowed. This parable is intended to teach, not how a sinner may obtain pardon, but how a pardoned sinner may serve God.

To whom much is forgiven, the same loves much. The same also does much. How easy, how pleasant it is to serve those we love! How we conjecture their needs and anticipate their wishes! How ready we are to run a risk, or to make a sacrifice to please them! How slow we are to say that we cannot do what they desire! Difficulties may stand in the way; but they are generally overcome by a loving heart. If true believers loved their Savior more, how much more good

would they do in the world! Paul declares, "The love of Christ constrains us." "Constrains" us to do what? Not to live to ourselves, but unto Him who died for us, and rose again. (2 Cor. 5:14, 15.)

We all need more of this spirit. The hypocrite has none of it. He lives to himself alone. But has the true believer enough of it? O, no! even the servant who had gained five talents will feel he has done too little for so gracious a master, when he hears the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord." He will see such a disproportion between his service and his reward, that he will be ashamed of his past negligence, and amazed at his Lord's munificence.

## **September 29**

### **Matthew 25:31 to end. Christ describes the last judgment.**

If we had been asked what future scenes we desired most to see unveiled before our eyes, should we not have replied, "The scenes of the last day?" The splendor of the occasion will be exceedingly great; yet it is not the splendor that will render the day important, but the sentences then pronounced. Through the ages of eternity that day cannot be forgotten. The lost spirits will date from that day their final separation from God, the source of all happiness. The glorified saints will date from that day their entrance into the full enjoyment of the light of his countenance. Do we dread to hear that word "Depart?" Do we long for that word "Come?" Let us attend to the account given in this wonderful passage, of the conduct which marks the righteous and the wicked while upon earth.

Those who first listened to this description of the judgment-day were the disciples of Jesus. They all professed to love him. But did they all really love him? There was a hypocrite among the twelve. It is written of him, "Not that he cared for the poor." And are there not some now who say, "Lord, Lord," but who do not really love Jesus? If they loved him, they would love his poor brethren suffering upon earth. They would take more pleasure in relieving them, than in pampering their appetites, adorning their persons, amassing large fortunes, and giving sumptuous entertainments. Those who really love Christ are kind to the hungry, to the stranger, and to the prisoner, for his sake.

There are some who do acts of kindness, but not for his sake. Are their actions pleasing to the Lord? Can he who searches the heart, be pleased with acts of charity done from a desire to obtain human praise? Such acts shall obtain no other reward than—human praise. Can he be pleased with deeds done from feelings of kindness, but without one thought concerning himself? Such motives meet with a reward on earth, but none in heaven.

Can he be pleased with works performed with a view of gaining heaven by our own merits? Assuredly not. For he has declared that we are not saved by works of righteousness which we have done, but by the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. (Titus 3.) What should we think of a man who owed ten thousand guineas, and who, though his creditors generously offered to give him his whole debt, refused to accept the obligation, promising now and then to present a farthing as payment? Yet this is the manner in which those act who are seeking to gain admission into heaven by their good deeds.

What, then, are the motives which please the Lord? Motives of gratitude and love to him. None but pardoned sinners can love Jesus; and they love him because he first loved them. The very words that he will address to them at the last day show that he loved them first, for he will say, "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world." God loved his children even before the world was made; even then he provided for their everlasting happiness. But did he prepare hell for the wicked? It was for devils, not for men, that hell was prepared. These are the words of the judge, "Depart, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." It is their own sin, not God's purpose, that plunges men into everlasting woe. Jesus has suffered the pains of hell, that we may taste the joys of heaven. He has not said to us, "You must be mocked and spit upon; you must be scourged, and crowned with thorns; you must be crucified in order to get to heaven." No! these insults and these pangs he has suffered for us. But he has asked us to show our love to him by relieving his poor brethren. It is a small request. Can we refuse it? When we see the destitute stranger, shall we turn away? When we hear of a suffering saint, or of a poor prisoner, shall we forget to visit him? If we do, how ashamed shall we be when we see Christ coming in his glory!

## **September 30**

### **Luke 22:1-6. Judas offers to betray Christ.**

We have lately contemplated our Savior sitting peacefully on Mount Olivet, surrounded by his disciples. What a different scene we now behold! It is an assembly of wicked men in Jerusalem. The high priest himself is the chief among them, and his palace is their place of meeting. It is probable that they held their consultation in the night, because in the day the high priest resided in his own chamber near the temple.

The night was a suitable season for the ripening of the designs of darkness. The murder of the Son of God was the purposed crime, but great difficulties lay in the way of its commission. The priests and scribes feared to apprehend Jesus in the day, because they expected to meet with opposition from the people; and they knew not where to find him in the night, for then he hid himself near Mount Olivet.

But as God helps his children to overcome their difficulties, so Satan helps his to overcome theirs.

The entrance of Judas must have astonished the assembly! Had he come to plead for his Master? Had he come to remonstrate with his enemies? Surely the expression of his countenance must have indicated the dark purpose of his heart. He came to make the basest proposal that ever passed human lips; he came to offer to betray the best of masters. We may well believe that man could not ALONE have resolved to commit such wickedness; for though man by his fall has lost all love to his unseen Creator, he is still disposed to love those fellow-creatures who show him particular kindness. But that evil spirit who once rebelled against the God whose beauty he beheld, and whose favor he enjoyed, had filled the heart of Judas. Can Satan, then, enter the heart of man? What a dreadful truth! Is there any calamity we ought to dread so much as the entrance of this wicked spirit into our hearts? If he come and dwell in us now, there is reason to fear lest we should go and dwell with him hereafter.

And how did the priests receive the base proposal of the false apostle? Were they filled with horror? Did they tremble at the traitor's words? It is written, "They were glad." Hell also was glad. How dreadful it is for men to rejoice with devils, and yet those who are glad at wickedness may feel assured that their joy is shared by the spirits beneath.

And what reward did Judas hope to obtain for his treachery? Thirty pieces of silver; a sum equal to three pounds fifteen shillings of our money. It was the price of a slave. It was the sum that the Jewish law sentenced those to pay who killed a slave by accident. How small are the bribes for which men will commit sin! When Satan attempted to entice the Son of God, he offered him all the kingdoms of the world. But he does not think it necessary to offer so great a bribe to sinful man. He finds that he can seduce him to commit wickedness by insignificant rewards. One morsel of meat was sufficient to induce Esau to sell his birthright. But does Satan really give even the reward he promises? No! it is seldom that sinners enjoy what they expected. Judas indeed obtained the thirty pieces of silver, but did he enjoy them?

It will rack the spirits of sinners in hell to calculate their losses and their gains. Even in this world the gains of sin are very small—even in this world the losses of sin are very great; but in the next world there is no gain left to the sinner; the laughter is all past, the sorrow alone remains. The shadow of his former pleasures will soon fade before his weeping eyes; the cheat of Satan will stare him in the face; the father of lies will be there to upbraid him with his folly, and the sight of heaven shining afar off will add to the tortures of his remorse. But though convinced of his error, the prodigal will not be able to arise and return to his God, and say, "I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight." No, the chains of darkness will fix him forever in his dismal prison, and the great gulf will separate him from all that is holy, and glorious, and blessed.

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