

A Devotional Commentary on the Gospels

Arranged for family devotions,
for every day in the year

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(1802-1878)

January 1

John 1:1-5. *The Word.*

Who is the Word spoken of in these verses? He is the Son of God. He is called the WORD, because he makes God his Father known to us. How is it that *our thoughts* are made known to our fellow creatures? By our *words*. Thus the unseen Father is made known to men by his Son Jesus Christ. No man can know the *Father*, but by the *Son*. The Son and the Father are distinct persons, for it is written in the first verse, "The Word was *with* God;" that is, the Son was *with* the Father. Yet the Son and the Father are *one God*, for it is added, "The Word was God."

But even if we had not found this sentence, "The Word was God," we would have known that he was God, by the things that are said of him in the following verses.

First, it is declared that he was from the beginning with God. Now God is the *First*, and if the Son of God is from everlasting, then he is *First*, and he must be God.

Again it is declared that *all* things were made by him. Thus we know the Son is the Creator of the world. He cannot then be a creature; for no creature can "create." God alone can create.

Then again it is said, He is the "Life." He gives life. All the angels in heaven cannot give life to the smallest insect, or even to the lowest flower—but the Son can give life to the creatures he has made; not only *natural* life, but *spiritual* and *eternal* life.

Lastly, it is declared that he is the Light of men—a brighter light than the sun, a light which shines into the heart and enlightens the dark mind.

And what is MAN called? Observe the name that is given to him. He is called

"Darkness." In verse the fifth it is written, "The light shines in darkness, and the darkness comprehends it not." Ever since Satan, the prince of darkness, tempted Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, the minds of men have been dark; they have neither known what is right, nor loved what is good. Christ came into the world to bring light to the dark minds of men. But alas! how few receive him! *Most people are so much pleased with the trifles of time, or so much taken up with the cares of the world, that they turn away from the Son of God.* This blessed book which we hold in our hands tells us about Him. Does not each of us wish to be happy forever? Then let us listen attentively, and let us entreat God to give us faith that we may believe and be saved.

January 2

John 1:6-11. *The Witness.*

Before the Lord Jesus came into the world, God sent a man called John to be a witness to him. He is called the Baptist, and was *not* the same John who wrote the history we are now reading.

John the Baptist was a faithful preacher, a burning and a shining light, but he was not that *light*; he was not the Son of God.

He was only a man; but he loved the Son of God, and he desired that all men *through him*, that is, "through his preaching," might believe in Jesus. It is the desire of every faithful minister, that through him men should believe in Christ. God does make men the instruments of turning the hearts of their fellow-creatures to God. Many of the children of Israel did John turn to the Lord their God. It is not *ministers* only who turn the hearts of sinners; but other Christians also. There is an account of a poor gipsy woman who, by her conversation, converted no less than twelve people. What an honor it would be to us if God should cause any one to believe in Jesus through *us*—through what we said or did! May our light so shine before men, that they, seeing our good works, may glorify our Father who is in heaven!

In the ninth verse it is said that Jesus lights every man that comes into the world. This means that Jesus is the *only* light—just as there is only *one* sun in the sky to give us light—so there is only *one* Savior to save us. But Jesus does not light those who never heard of him. The heathen sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. Neither does he enlighten all who have heard of him. He shines around *us*—but if we are *blind*, he does not give *light* even to *us*.

How striking it is to read that his own *world* did not know him when he appeared, that his *own nation* the Jews, his brethren according to the flesh, did not receive him! "He came unto his *own*, and his own received him not." As if a mother were to appear among her children, and they should deny that she was their mother.

How many people are there now who are not ashamed to say, "I do not pretend to be religious," which means, "I do not pretend to love God," as if they had nothing to do with God, as if he had not made them, and did not feed them, and watch over them continually. What would we think of a child who would say of an affectionate parent, "I do not pretend to care for him?" What would a parent feel, who heard a child speak thus? There is no parent who feels so tender an interest in his children, as Christ felt for his people the Jews. Remember the tears he shed over Jerusalem, when he uttered those touching words, "How often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not!"

Are there any here who now refuse to receive the loving Savior into their hearts? Let me entreat you no longer to grieve him by treating him thus. You are the work of his hands. He longs to make you happy. Open your hearts to him, and receive him as your Lord.

January 3

John 1:12-13. *The sons of God.*

We know that when the Lord Jesus came into the world, the greater part of men despised and rejected him; but there were a few who received him. They believed in him; that is, they received Jesus into their *hearts*. And now observe what a glorious privilege God bestowed upon these believers. He gave them "power to become the sons of God." He adopted them as his sons and heirs. It is written in Romans 8:15, "You have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father;" and again, "If children, then heirs." God will bestow upon his adopted children his riches in glory. "He who overcomes shall inherit all things. I will be his God, and he shall be my son."—Rev. 21:7.

But what is the *reason* that *some* believed in Jesus? Were they by nature better than others? Were their hearts softer, so that they *could* not reject their dying Savior? No—they were by nature like others—but they were born of God. As it is written in the thirteenth verse, "Who were born of God;" that is, of the Spirit of God.

We are also told what they were *NOT* born of. Let us consider each of the expressions—

"Not of blood," that is, they did not believe because they were of the blood of any good man, such as Abraham. Many who were of the blood of Abraham did not believe in Christ! Neither were they born of the will of the flesh. They did not believe, because it was the will of their flesh, or of their nature to believe. They did not choose Christ from their own power. If they had been left to themselves, they would have refused him; for the natural man does not receive the things of

the Spirit of God. 1 Cor. 2:14. Neither were they born of the will of man. They did not believe because it was the will of any *man* that they should believe. Such people are not converted as a minister most desires to convert, or as he thinks it most likely will be converted. It is the will of *God* that makes a man believe.

If *we* have been born of God, we see that it was *not* because we were of the blood of any pious parents or ancestors; it was *not* because it was the will of our *flesh* to believe, for we were *dead* in sins. It was *not* because it was the will of *man*. No pious minister or friend could have made us believe. But if we have been raised from the death of sin, it was the power of *God* that raised us. Therefore to God be all the glory!

If we have *not* been born again, then let us go to God, who alone can convert us, and entreat him to put forth his *great* power to make us believe that we may become the children of God and heirs of the kingdom of glory. *For it is dreadfully true, that until we believe in Christ, we are the children of Satan, and not the children of God. Who can bear the thought of being the child of the devil, and an heir of wrath!* Yet what does the Apostle Paul say to the Ephesians? He says of himself and of them, "We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." But we *may* be born again; we *must* be born again. Then we shall belong to the family of God, and be the heirs of heaven.

January 4

John 1:14-18. *The testimony of John.*

In the beginning of this chapter we read of a great wonder, that the Word was with God, and yet was God. We cannot understand how this could be. In this passage we read of another wonder, yet we are so much accustomed to hear it, that we almost forget to consider the greatness of the wonder, "The *Word* was made *flesh*." God became man; he "dwelt among us."

When we look around us at this great world, and at the heavens spangled with stars, and think that *He* who made all these things became a weak man, who ate, drank, and slept like ourselves—do we not feel amazed? We may well inquire *why* God became a man, and dwelt among us?

It was to save us from everlasting misery. We are told in verse 14, "He was full of grace and truth." He came to bring grace to sinners, to pardon their sins by his free grace. He came to suffer all he had said he would suffer. He had said he would suffer our punishment, and he was full of *truth*, and suffered it *all*, showing that God hated sin, and that he would punish it with death.

Now, John the Evangelist, when he speaks of Jesus, breaks out into an exclamation at the remembrance of his *glory*. He says in verse 14, "We *beheld*

his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father." John had really seen Jesus. As he says in his First Epistle, speaking of Jesus, "that which our eyes have seen, which we have looked upon."

"We beheld his glory." *What* glory does he here refer to? Does he refer to the glory which shone on the mount, when "his face shone as the sun, and his clothing was white as the light?"—Matt. 17:2. Perhaps it is to this glory he refers, or perhaps it is to *the glory of holiness* which always shone in Jesus, and which the world could not see; for they saw "no beauty in him, that they should desire him."—Isaiah 53:2. But those who believed in him saw this glory. Do we see it? Has the Spirit opened our inward eyes, so that we see Christ to be worthy of all our love?

There was a man who saw this glory, and pointed Jesus out to others. His name was John the Baptist.

He spoke of Jesus long before he saw him. At last he saw him, and said to the people, "This is he of whom I spoke. He who comes after me existed before me; for he was before me." Jesus was six months younger than John the Baptist, therefore John said he came *after* him. Yet he was *before* him, because he was with his Father *before* he came into the world.

Who is speaking in verse 16? Not John the Baptist, but John the writer of this history. He speaks in the highest terms of love and praise of our great Savior. How happy are they who can say with John, "Of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace." In Jesus there is a full store of grace, sufficient for every believer. And do we not need these graces? Do we not often lament our lack of patience, meekness, kindness, and charity? Jesus is willing to bestow them *all* upon us. Moses was a great lawgiver; but he could not bestow grace. Moses appointed many forms and ceremonies, to *represent* the way of salvation, but Jesus brought salvation. Therefore it is written, "Truth came by Jesus Christ."

The Father dwells in light which no man can approach unto; but he spared his Son from his bosom that we might behold him. Though we have not seen him ourselves, we have heard enough about him to make us love him. If our hearts were not like stones by nature, we would have loved him from the first moment we heard of him; and yet perhaps there may be some here who had lived twenty or thirty years in the world before they *began* to love him; and there may be others who do not love him *yet*. May the Lord soften their hearts.

January 5

Luke 1:1-4. *The Preface to Luke.*

The holy Evangelist Luke writes a short preface before his history of the Lord

Jesus Christ.

This preface is a kind of letter to Theophilus, for whose use especially he wrote the history. Let us inquire who Luke was, and who Theophilus was. Luke is not mentioned in any of the Gospels; but Paul speaks of him in his epistle to the Colossians, as, "the beloved physician," 4:14. There is reason also to suppose he was not a Jew, but a converted heathen; yet he had the honor of writing a part of the holy Word of God. Theophilus was probably a governor; therefore he was called "most excellent," as dukes are now styled "your grace," and kings "your majesty." Theophilus, though a nobleman, had been instructed in religion by some of God's servants; but Luke wished him to know the history of the Lord still more perfectly. He says in the fourth verse, that he had written this account that "you (Theophilus) might know the certainty of those things wherein you have been instructed."

It appears that other people had written histories of Christ. These people had not been directed by the Holy Spirit, as the Evangelists had; neither had they themselves witnessed the events they had related. They had written from "report," and their accounts contained errors. It is happy for us that these erroneous accounts have not been handed down to us, but only the inspired histories of the four Evangelists.

Luke himself had not been an eye-witness of the events he records; yet we cannot say he wrote from "report," for he was directed by the Spirit of God. He had enjoyed great opportunities of knowing about Jesus—he declares in v. 3, that he had had perfect understanding of all things from the "very first," or from the very earliest part of our Savior's life. Still his history would not have been reckoned a part of the holy Bible, if the Holy Spirit had not directed him what to write. This book has always been read in the assemblies of Christians, and called the word of God.

Let us thank God for this part of his word. How many interesting events and parables are related by Luke, which we would never have known, had he not written! *How we ought to value everything that concerns the Lord Jesus!* When we love a friend, we desire to know everything about him, and to hear what he did even when he was a child! When we have lost him, we think over his dying words, and lay them up in our hearts! How much more should we delight in knowing all that concerns the best of friends! When we consider who he was—the Lord of Glory, we can compare no earthly friend to him; all which relates to him is wonderful.

It is affecting to hear how the poor heathen, when first converted, value the word of God! Before the missionaries in the South Sea Islands could print the Bible in the language of the people, the poor natives eagerly listened to all that was read aloud on the Sabbath, and many wrote down upon the leaves of trees the texts they had heard, and studied them wherever they went until they knew them by

heart. We are without excuse if we remain ignorant of the history of our Lord. Let us not, however, forget for what purpose we read—that we may learn to love Jesus. We are apt to become fond of human creatures whom we know intimately. How much more might it be expected that hearing of Jesus would make us love him; for he is far more excellent than any creature, and far more full of love to us than our dearest friend. Yet our hearts are naturally so much hardened against God, that unless the Holy Spirit soften them, we shall not love him. May that Spirit be with us, while we read day after day the history of our blessed Lord.

January 6

Luke 1:5-14. *The Angel's visit to Zacharias.*

Luke said in his preface, that he had perfect understanding of all things from the very *first*; so we find that his history begins very early indeed, and describes events that happened before the birth of Jesus.

John the Baptist was born six months before Jesus. In this chapter we have an account of his parents. His father was a priest named Zacharias. His mother Elizabeth also was of the family of the priests, the descendants of Aaron.

Zacharias and Elizabeth "were righteous before God." How could they be righteous? Is it not written, "There is none righteous; no, not one?" God, who knows all hearts, has made this declaration. But when a man believes in Christ, he becomes righteous, for the righteousness of Christ becomes his. Jesus bore *our sins* that we might obtain *his righteousness*. But it may be said, "How could Zacharias and Elizabeth believe in Christ? Did they not live before he came into the world?" They did. But they believed in the *promise* of a Savior; and thus they became partakers of his righteousness. It was in this way Abraham was righteous. It is written, "He believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness."

Faith is the means by which sinners receive the righteousness of Christ. It has often been compared to the *hand*; and righteousness to a *treasure*. As the hand grasps the treasure, so faith lays hold of Christ's righteousness.

Zacharias and Elizabeth were pardoned sinners. Therefore they were sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Though still subject to sin, they indulged in no sinful *habits*. They were not satisfied (as hypocrites are) with observing those commandments that it was convenient to obey, while they neglected those that were more difficult—but they walked in *all* the commandments of the Lord blameless. We shall soon have a proof that they were still subject to sin; for we shall soon read how Zacharias was overtaken by unbelief.

Zacharias and Elizabeth had no child; and the lack of children was considered by the Jews as a heavy affliction. Yet at length they became the parents of one of the greatest prophets that ever appeared in the world. All the circumstances connected with this event were very remarkable.

As Zacharias was a priest, it was his office at certain times to burn incense in the temple. The priests were so numerous, that they could not all live at Jerusalem. They were divided into twenty-four courses; and each course came up to Jerusalem in its turn, to serve for one week in the temple. It was determined by lot every morning who was to enjoy the privilege of burning incense that day at the golden altar. The priest, on whom the lot fell, went alone into the temple both morning and evening, to burn sweet spices as an offering to God, while the people remained in the court repeating public prayers for a blessing upon all nations.

On the day when God purposed to speak to Zacharias, he caused the lot to fall upon him. The most minute circumstances are under his control, and are often the beginnings of very great events.

When Zacharias beheld the angel standing by the altar, he was troubled. We always find that men are troubled at the presence of angels. Yet Zacharias had no reason to fear, for the heavenly messenger came not to destroy him, but to bless. He said, "Your prayer is heard." What prayer? Was it for a son that Zacharias had prayed? Or was it that the Savior might soon come into the world? Both these blessings were soon to be bestowed. A son was to be born to Zacharias, to prepare the way for the Savior that was to be given to men. Well might a father rejoice at the birth of such a son! His very name showed that God would bless him and make him a blessing. The word "John" signifies "the grace or favor of God."

When a child has been born, it has very seldom been known whether he would become a curse or a blessing. There has often been joy at the birth of children, who have lived to do great harm, and even to break their parents' hearts. When Cain was born, Eve rejoiced; saying, "I have gotten a son from the Lord," little thinking how wicked a man he would be. Other children have been born undesired; perhaps the family was already numerous and badly provided for; yet some of those unwelcome little strangers have lived, not only to rejoice their parents' hearts, but to save souls from eternal death. Did Christians know when a faithful minister was born into the world, how much they would rejoice! We cannot tell, when we look upon a helpless baby, what it will become; but we may offer up our earnest prayers that it may be a blessing and not a curse.

January 7

Luke 1:15-17. *The Prophecy concerning John the Baptist.*

How happy was Zacharias to hear such a character of his promised son from the lips of an angel! His son was to be "great in the sight of the *Lord*." It would not be a blessing to have a son great in the sight of the world. Those who are great in the sight of the Lord are despised by the world. Men said of John the Baptist, "He has a devil," and they counted the apostles as the offscouring of all things.

The angel said that John was to drink neither wine nor strong drink. He would be filled with the Holy Spirit, and many of the children of Israel he would turn to the Lord their God. Why then was John to drink no wine? Because he was a Nazarite. A Nazarite was a person separated unto the Lord in a very singular manner. Sometimes the Israelites made vows thus to separate themselves for a week, or a month, or a longer space of time. During that time they tasted neither wine nor grapes; and they allowed the locks of hair on their heads to grow long. Some children were made Nazarites from their birth. Samuel was thus devoted to the Lord by his praying mother; and Samson by the appointment of an angel. John the Baptist was also a Nazarite from his birth. Jewish ceremonies have ceased since the Lord Jesus has made known his Gospel. But though we ought not to become Nazarites, we ought, like them, to be devoted to the service of God, and separated from the sinful pleasures of an ungodly world.

The angel also declared that the child soon to be born would go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah. If we read the history of the prophet Elijah, we shall see a great resemblance between him and John the Baptist.

They were like each other in *spirit*. Both were faithful and courageous. Elijah prophesied in the court of the wicked king Ahab, and his more wicked queen; and by his boldness endangered his life. John reprov'd King Herod so faithfully for his sins, that he was imprisoned, and at length murdered at the request of the cruel Herodias. In *spirit* therefore John resembled Elijah.

He came also in the *power* of that great prophet; and, like him, he had great success. At one time Elijah thought there was not a single pious prophet in all Israel; and he complained to God, saying, "I, even I, only am left," but such *power* accompanied his instructions, that before he was taken up to heaven, there were numerous young men, called sons of the prophets, all over the land, training up for the ministry. John the Baptist also had great success; and some of his disciples were numbered among the apostles of the Lamb.

But the most delightful part of the angel's message to Zacharias was the promise that the Savior should soon come. He spoke of the Savior as the Lord God of Israel; for he said, "And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the *Lord their God*; and he shall go before *him* in the spirit and power of Elijah."

The Son of God was coming into the world to shed his blood to save sinners; yet it was necessary that one should go before him to turn the hearts of men towards

him. What a proof this is of the wickedness of the human heart! It is turned against God! Satan, in the garden of Eden, turned the heart of Eve against her best friend. Now everyone is an enemy of God, until he is converted. God sends his faithful preachers to turn our hearts towards himself. Have not some tried to persuade us to turn to the Lord? Have they succeeded in persuading us? It is an dreadful thing to hear sermons, and to disregard what we hear. Time is passing swiftly away—Jesus will come again in power and great glory. If, when he comes, he finds us unprepared, we shall be shut out of his presence forever!

January 8

Luke 1:18-23. *The Unbelief of Zacharias.*

Zacharias was so much astonished at the message of the angel, that he wanted to see some sign or miracle to prove that the angel came from God. Why was it wrong in Zacharias to desire a sign? Because he had already had one. The glorious appearance of the angel, which had filled him with fear, was a sufficient sign. God does not wish us to believe things without *any* proof. If he were to send a prophet to speak to us, he would give us some sign to show us that the prophet really came from him. When Moses spoke to the Israelites in Egypt, he gave them two signs; his rod was turned into a serpent, and his hand was made white with the leprosy, (Exod. 4) God is angry when men will not believe, after he has given them a sign. It was sinful in Zacharias not to believe after he had seen the glorious angel. Thus we find that though he was righteous before God, he was still subject to sin.

Unbelief is a great sin; for it is an insult to the truth of God. The angel rebuked the unbelieving priest, saying, "You shall be speechless." This gentle chastisement would at once remove the doubts of Zacharias, and remind him of his sin. In this way, God deals with his own people, when they forget what a great God He is.

Zacharias at length came out of the temple. It was now expected that he should bless the people in those beautiful words recorded in Numbers 6:24-27, beginning, "May the Lord bless you and keep you;" but he could not speak, and he made signs to show the people what he had seen in the temple.

Each division of priests remained to serve in the temple from one Sabbath to the next; in a few days, therefore, Zacharias returned to his own house among the hills. What a history he had to unfold to Elizabeth! For he was able to inform her in writing. What a proof she beheld of the power of God in the silence of her husband! We should take notice of God's dealings with others. "Whoever is wise, and will observe these things, even he shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."—Psalm 107:43.

How humbly and gratefully Elizabeth behaved on this occasion! She acknowledged the goodness of the Lord in having condescended to look upon her affliction; for she had been exposed to much reproach on account of having no child. When troubles are removed, we are apt to overlook the Lord's merciful hand! Perhaps we have been suffering under some trial; the unkindness of a relative, the dread of sickness, or the pressure of poverty—God removes the trial, and we forget how much it weighed us down before, and so we omit to thank the Lord heartily.

A holy minister named Rutherford, in one of his letters, written two hundred years ago, says, that one of the things which most showed him his own wickedness by nature, was his feeling more disposed to call upon the Lord in trouble, than to thank him when delivered. Let us think over the things that troubled us a few years ago, and bless the hand which has lightened our load.

January 9

Luke 1:26-33. *The Angel's visit to Mary.*

God appointed that his Son should be born six months after John. So six months after the angel had spoken to Zacharias, he came to Mary. She was a poor woman, of a low, poor city, called Nazareth. She was indeed descended from King David, who had lived more than a thousand years before, and she was engaged to be married to a man called Joseph, also descended from King David. It had been prophesied that the Son of God would be born among David's family. Isaiah calls the Savior "A branch out of the stem of Jesse," (Isaiah 11:1,) for Jesse was the father of David. Jesse was like a tree, of which Jesus was a branch.

It seems probable that the angel visited Mary when she was alone. He said, "Greetings!" bidding her rejoice because a wonderful favor was about to be conferred on her.

The Roman Catholics pretend that the words "highly favored" mean "full of grace;" and say, that Mary can now impart grace, and that the angel worshiped her. But we know that Mary was but a creature, and even a sinful creature, and that it is idolatry to treat her as the Lord.

Mary was full of humility; and God loves to honor the humble. She was alarmed at the greeting of the angel; but she was told not to fear, and was informed of the wonderful event about to happen.

The Savior so long expected was to be her son. He was to be called "Jesus," which signifies Savior, and is the same name as Joshua. The angel said this Savior would be a great king. Perhaps you will inquire, Was he not equal with

God? was he not King of kings from everlasting? Yes—but the angel spoke of his greatness in his human nature. As a *man*, he was to be king; therefore it was said that "the Lord would give unto him the throne of his *father* David." He was to be King over the house of Jacob, that is, over the Jews, the descendants of Jacob. The words that were afterwards written over the cross were true, "The King of the *Jews*." But is he not King of the Gentiles also? Yes; he is—and the day shall come when *every* tongue will confess that he is Lord; and when *every* knee will bow to him. (Phil. 2.)

Of his kingdom there shall be no *end*. Other kingdoms have come to an *end*. Nebuchadnezzar saw in a dream an image which represented all the kingdoms of the world—and he saw a little stone overthrow this image, and this stone become a mountain. (Dan. 2.) The stone represented Christ. He will bring all kingdoms to an end; and then he will be King over all the earth. (Zec. 14:9.) Then there will be no more war, nor famine, nor misery; men will obey Christ's laws, and live in holiness and peace.

That day has not come yet. Very few people have submitted to Christ; very few seek to do his will. Christ is a king against whom his subjects have rebelled. But do you not think that a king loves his faithful subjects at such a time? How dear to him is their obedience, when others scorn him! Does our King and Savior count us among his faithful subjects? Then he will acknowledge us when he comes in glory. This song shall soon be sung in heaven by believers—"We give you thanks, O Lord God Almighty, who is, and was, and is to come; because you have taken to you your great power and have reigned." (Rev. 11.) Then He will give reward to those who fear his name, small and great.

January 10

Luke 1:34-45. *Mary's visit to Elizabeth.*

The angel had told Mary of the great power and glory of the Son she should have. He next told her of the *holiness* of his nature. His body was to be miraculously formed by the power of the Holy Spirit; though born of a human mother. Jesus had flesh and blood like ourselves, (Hebrews 2:14;) and he was subject to all our bodily weaknesses; he needed food and sleep; he suffered pain; he shed tears and sweat drops of blood; but he was without sin; (Heb. 4:15:) he was "holy, harmless, undefiled." (Heb. 7:26.) Such was the child of whom Mary was to be the mother! Were such wonderful tidings ever delivered to any human creature, as were then spoken to Mary? Yet she believed. Her faith was greater than that of Zacharias; and she received no rebuke from the angel.

What a prospect lay before her! Many would disbelieve her story, and treat her with contempt. Yet Mary was willing to bear the trial. She said, "Be it unto me according to your word." God often makes those suffer most deeply whom he

designs to honor most highly. When God intends that people should do much good to souls, (and this is one of the highest honors,) he often permits suspicion to be cast upon their characters; but at length he clears their innocence.

Mary had heard from the angel of the mercy shown to Elizabeth; and she went immediately to see her.

How interesting it is to hear what happened when these two holy women met! There was a great difference between their ages. Elizabeth was very old—Mary was not old—it is probable she was very young. Yet she was far more highly honored than her aged relative. The old are often envious of the young; but the pious Elizabeth was ready to do honor to Mary. When she saw her, she spoke by the power of the Holy Spirit, and acknowledged her as the mother of the Lord.

It must have comforted Mary to find that Elizabeth also believed in the things that were coming to pass. How it must have rejoiced her, to hear her say, "Blessed is she who has believed."

These words do not apply to Mary alone; but to *everyone* that believes. What ought *we* to believe? All the promises of God.

He has promised to cast out none who come to him, but to give them everlasting life. If we believe this promise, we shall come to him. If we *have* come to him, how *many* precious promises belong to us! God has promised to hear our prayers, to make all things work together for our good, to deliver us out of every temptation, and to give us, even in this life, peace which passes all understanding. Those who trust in these promises find there is a performance of the things that were told them. It was a good answer that was once given by a poor woman to a minister who asked her, "What is faith?" She replied, "I am ignorant—I cannot answer well—but I think faith is taking God at his word."

January 11

Luke 1:46-56. *The Song of Mary.*

This beautiful song shows us what was Mary's state of mind at this time. We must remember that there was much to try her in her present circumstances, for many people would not believe her account of the angel's visit, and would treat her with scorn. Yet she was filled with joy, because she enjoyed the favor of the Lord. She said, "My soul magnifies the Lord—and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior." How great was Mary's faith! Faith enables us to rejoice in the midst of trials. Paul had this faith when he said, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed."

Mary knew that whatever men thought of her *then*, that all generations would "call her blessed," as the mother of the Savior. Do we not think her blessed? Surely we do. Let us not forget that *we* may be blessed also; for Jesus said that "Whoever shall do the will of my Father, which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Matt. 12:50.) And at another time, when a woman said how blessed his mother was, Jesus answered, "Rather blessed are those who hear the word of God, and keep it." (Luke 11:28.)

It is sad to think what a wrong use the Roman Catholics have made of the words of Mary. They not only call her "blessed," (and she *is* blessed,) but they worship her, as if she were equal to him, "who is over all, God blessed forever." (Rom. 9:5.) No—Mary was but a creature like ourselves; though she was made, by the grace of God, a holy creature, and was honored in so remarkable a manner.

We see in her song how great a value she set upon the blessings of redemption. She would not have done so, if she had not felt her need of a Savior. How she delights in praising God! She calls him *mighty*—"He who is mighty." She calls him *holy*—"Holy is his name." She speaks of his *mercy*—"His mercy is on those who fear him."

What does she mean in verse 51, when she says, "He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts?" Pharaoh and his proud captains once desired to destroy Israel—this was "the imagination of their hearts," but God drowned them in the Red Sea. Thus God at last will destroy *all* the enemies of Christ and his people.

From this song we may learn to *what* people the Lord is merciful; "He fills the *hungry* with good things." He fed the poor Israelites, when they were hungry, with manna. But it is another sort of hunger which Jesus delights to satisfy. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness." Such hungry souls shall never be sent empty away. If a beggar is sent empty away from *one* house, he can go to another; but if God were to send us empty away, and refuse to give us everlasting life, there is no other being to whom we could go. *Will* he send us empty away? No—he will *not*, if we feel our need of pardon; but if we imagine ourselves *rich* in goodness, He will give us none of His goodness or righteousness. Only those who know they are poor blind miserable sinners, will obtain anything from the Savior. Let us go *now* to his throne of grace to ask for mercy, and to obtain help in this our time of need; let us go with lowly hearts, feeling our unworthiness and confessing our sins, and He will not send us "empty away."

January 12

Luke 1:57-66. *The birth of John.*

When Elizabeth's son was born, her relations and friends came to rejoice with her. Worldly people, when they are prosperous, are often envied by their friends—but pious people, when they have received any great mercy, generally have friends who *really* rejoice with them.

How richly were Elizabeth's friends rewarded for their sympathy! During their visit they witnessed a wonderful proof of God's power.

It appears that Elizabeth knew what the angel had told Zacharias; for she said that the child was to be called "John," or "the grace of God." The friends, by signs, asked the father what the child should be called. We see by their making signs to him that he was deaf as well as mute. He asked for a writing tablet. These tablets were often spread with wax, and written upon with a piece of steel. Zacharias wrote, "His name *is* John," not "he *shall* be called John;" but his name *is* John, for the angel had already given the child that name. As soon as he had written these words, his tongue was loosed; and he made that use of it for which it had first been given him—he praised God.

The angel had sentenced him to be mute until the day that the things he had told him of, would be performed, (verse 20.) That day was now come.

We perceive in this event how God can bring good out of evil—Zacharias by unbelief had become mute; but his gaining his speech again, must have helped others to believe.

His friends related the things they had seen; so that people all around wondered what sort of a man John would become. Thus many were prepared to pay attention to his preaching when he grew up. We shall hear little of the childhood of John; but we know that he was holy from his birth. How acceptable to God is the offering up of our early years! as the poet says—"A flower, when offered in the bud, is no small sacrifice."

How bitter is the remembrance of a childhood and youth of wickedness! Paul could never remember without grief that he had once persecuted God's people.

Let not those who are young imagine that if they are at *length* converted, it will be of no consequence having long resisted the gracious offers of God. It is delightful to be able to sing with David, "You are my trust from my youth." Those who have not turned to God until their youth was past, often think within themselves, "*O that I could pass my time over again! Had I loved God sooner, what sins I would have avoided! what sorrows I should have escaped! how much good I might have done! how much glory I might have brought to God!*"

It is wicked, because we know that God is willing to receive the returning prodigal, to go far from him, not intending to return until all worldly pleasures are exhausted. Yet many who would be ashamed to treat an earthly friend in this

manner, act thus towards their best, their heavenly Friend.

January 13

Luke 1:67-80. *The Prophecy of Zacharias.*

What great mercy God showed to Zacharias! Not only He restored his speech, but He enabled him to prophesy. Zacharias in his song does not speak so much about his own son, as about the Savior whom his son was to serve. This shows that his heart was fixed upon spiritual blessings, and not upon his own earthly comfort, or honor.

In the beginning of his song, he speaks of the Savior under the name of "A horn of salvation," (verse 69.) Why does he give him that name? With its horn an animal destroys its enemies. Christ came to destroy the devil and his works. Why then is He not called a horn of destruction? Because he *destroys* his enemies in order that he may *save* his people—therefore he is called "a horn of salvation."

In the latter part of his song, Zacharias calls the Savior by another name, "The dayspring," (verse 78.) The world sat in darkness and the shadow of death until Christ appeared. They were like travelers, who had lost their way among dangerous cliffs and precipices, and were suddenly overtaken by the darkness; so that they dare not stir, lest they would fall into some deep pit. All at once the sun arose "to guide their feet into the way of peace."

Our native land once sat in this darkness, and was filled with idols, until missionaries came and preached the gospel. But even now that Christ's name is known in every town and village, each soul sits in darkness until the "Dayspring from on high" shines into the heart.

In the midst of his song, Zacharias addresses his own infant son, saying, "And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High." At the time he uttered these words, John was a helpless infant; but his father knew how great he would become. Very little is related of his childhood. In the last verse of this chapter it is declared that he grew like other children; and also that he became *strong in spirit*. We know what it is to become strong in *body*. But what is it to become strong in *spirit*? It is to have faith in God's word, and to resist in God's strength the temptations of Satan.

The apostle John in his first Epistle says, "I have written unto you, young men, because you are strong, and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one," (2:14.) Believers who are strong in spirit are called "young men." How then did John become thus strong in spirit? No doubt it was by secret prayer and meditation in the deserts. It is written that "He was in the deserts until the days of his showing unto Israel;" or until the time when he began

to preach publicly, which he did either at twenty-seven or thirty years of age. Those who teach others must be prepared by learning first of God.

And what did John the Baptist teach? His father declares in his song what he taught, (76, 77) "You shall go before the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto the people by the forgiveness of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God."

It was 'salvation through Christ' that John proclaimed. None of the old prophets showed the way as clearly as the holy Baptist. But we have heard it still more clearly described by Jesus and his apostles. Have we rejoiced in hearing that sins are pardoned through the blood of the Lamb? None ever rejoiced in hearing these tidings, except those who knew that they *needed* pardon.

If a man were to enter this room with a pardon from the governor in his hand, we would feel neither joy nor gratitude. We would say, "There must be some mistake; we have never been brought to court, nor convicted, nor sentenced to death. What is the use of this pardon to us?" The reason that most people hear the Gospel with such indifference is, that they do not know that they are condemned by God's law. They say, "Our sins can easily be forgiven; they are neither many nor great; others have sinned more than we; surely we shall escape punishment." But when a sinner feels that he deserved to die, then he thanks God for his *tender mercy*, in having sent the Savior into the world.

January 14

Matthew 1. *The Angel's visit to Joseph.*

Matthew wrote his gospel before any of the other evangelists. He wrote it for the Jews especially; and therefore he very often refers to the Old Testament, (held in such reverence by the Jews,) and shows that Jesus fulfilled what the prophets had said. Luke and Mark, who wrote for the Gentiles especially, often *explain* Jewish customs, but Matthew always alludes to them, as customs well understood. Matthew himself had been a tax-collector, before he was called to be one of the apostles of the Lord. His other name was Levi. Luke speaks of him by that name. Luke 5:27.

Matthew begins his history with an account of the forefathers of our Savior—to show that Jesus was descended from Abraham, and from David, as God had promised the Messiah should be. This account is called a genealogy. It is *Joseph's* descent, and *not* Mary's, which is here recorded. Luke in his third chapter gives us another genealogy. That genealogy is a little different from Matthew's; it must therefore be the genealogy of Mary. It is true the name of *Joseph* is mentioned there also; but the names of women were never inserted in public registers.

There is one seeming contradiction between the two genealogies. Matthew says that *Jacob* was the father of Joseph. Luke says that *Heli* was the father of Joseph. We must conclude that Heli was the father-*in-law* of Joseph, and the father of Mary. How easily the difference is explained to an honest mind! And yet it has been taken up by unbelievers and brought forward as an objection against the Christian religion. How much at a loss must those be for an objection, who lay hold of such a one as this!

We will now proceed to the interesting history itself—Joseph is not blamed for his suspicions of Mary, for it appears he had no proof that a miracle had been wrought. Still the kindness of his heart made him unwilling to expose her publicly. God in his great mercy sent an angel to tell him the whole truth. Thus our gracious Father will keep us from falling into errors through ignorance, if we desire earnestly to know what is right.

Mary probably suffered much grief from Joseph's suspicions—but God cleared up her innocence. Every person who is falsely suspected may trust in His fulfilling His promise in Psalm 37; "Commit your way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass—and he shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday." When falsely accused, we should not make a loud and angry defense; but commit our cause to God, and He will defend us.

The concluding words of the angel are very remarkable. They are written in verse 21, "You shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins."

The name "Jesus" means God the Savior. Observe, however, the nature of this salvation. It is not a salvation *in* sin, but a salvation *from* sin. "He shall save his people from their sins." If we knew what sin was, we would feel what a great salvation this is. Sin has ruined this world; and it will ruin each of us eternally, unless we are saved from it. There is only one who is able to save us. That is Immanuel—God with us. Jesus, the Son of God, came down to dwell with us that he might save us from dwelling forever with Satan. How does he save? By shedding his own blood as an atonement for sin, and then by washing all who believe in him in that blood. Therefore his people sing this song of praise to his name—"Unto him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever! Amen."

January 15

Luke 2:1-7. *The birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

It is very interesting to observe the providence of God with regard to the *place* of Christ's birth.

The prophet Isaiah had said that the Savior should be born in Bethlehem, (v. 2.) Yet Mary lived in Nazareth, about seventy miles distance from Bethlehem. God could easily have commanded Mary to go to Bethlehem—but instead of doing this, he caused circumstances to happen which induced her to go there.

The great emperor of Rome, who possessed all the chief countries in the world, and among the rest, Canaan, the land of the Jews, desired at this time to number his subjects. He sent forth an order to have their names *enrolled in a census*. Joseph being descended from King David, went to the city of Bethlehem, (whence David came,) to have his name enrolled, and Mary his wife accompanied him.

Caesar Augustus, the Emperor of Rome, little knew that by this decree he was causing a prophecy concerning the Son of God to be fulfilled; for he knew nothing of the true God, or of his word. But we, who read the history, ought to admire the ways of God—how easily he can bring everything to pass which he has determined to do; for he is "great in counsel" (or in making plans) "and mighty in work," Jer. 32:19, (or in bringing his plans to pass.) It is therefore very unbelieving in us to trouble ourselves about the future, for there is nothing we can desire that God could not easily cause to happen; and if he does not bring it to pass, it is because the thing we desire does not agree with his own wise and gracious designs.

When Mary arrived at Bethlehem, she was obliged to lodge in a stable; for the inn was full, many people having come to have their names enrolled also. Thus it happened, that her holy baby was born in a stable, and laid in a feeding trough.

Are we surprised that the glorious Son of God should thus be received into this world? Let us remember *why* he came. Not to *enjoy* himself, but to *save* us. In order to save us, two things were necessary. That he should obey the law of God, which we had broken, and that he should suffer the punishment due to us for breaking it.

In order that he might do these things, he was always placed in suffering circumstances. Poverty and contempt nursed him in his infancy. The most splendid palace on earth would have been too humble an abode for him whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain. But instead of opening his infant eyes in a palace, he opened them in a stable. It was wonderful condescension in him who was equal with God, to dwell with *men*, but in the stable he was surrounded by *animals*. What must the angels who had worshiped him in heaven have felt when they saw him thus degraded! Yet this treatment was not to be compared to that which he afterwards endured on Calvary. As he walked through this world at each step his way became rougher; his *first* bed was a *feeding trough*, but his *last* was a *cross*. And it was men, whom he came to redeem, who treated him in this manner. And have we not *all* treated him in the same, casting him out of our

thoughts, and crucifying him by our sins? Yes, we are all guilty before God, and Jesus alone is righteous. But he is not righteous for himself, but for *us*; neither did he suffer for himself, but for *us*. He was *cast out*, that we might be *brought in*. He was *rejected of men*, that we might be *accepted of God*.

January 16

Luke 2:8-14. *The Angels' appearance to the Shepherds.*

In the circumstances of our Savior's birth, there was a great mixture of lowliness and glory. Jesus was laid in a feeding trough; yet angels announced his appearance. But to *whom* did angels announce it? not to princes, but to shepherds; thus showing that God had chosen the poor of this world. Through all our Savior's life, there was the same mixture of lowliness and glory—he lived with fishermen, yet was sometimes visited by angels; he had a sorrowful countenance, yet once it shone brighter than the sun; he was poorly clothed, yet, on one occasion, his clothing was whiter than any launderer on earth could whiten it; he was so *weak* that he could not bear his cross, yet so *strong* that he could raise the dead from their graves.

Christ's people are like their master—they are often poor and afflicted, yet there is a glory about them that makes them as the sons of God; for their minds are filled with nobler thoughts than those which occupy the kings of the earth. While princes are thinking of their sumptuous feasts, their high titles, and glittering crowns; the children of God are meditating upon the wedding supper of the Lamb, the thrones of light; and the God of glory.

How much astonished the poor shepherds were, with the appearance of the angel, who turned the darkness into day! How much his *message* must also have surprised them! He told them that the Son of God was now come into the world, and was in the city of David, (or Bethlehem.) Was not this news hard to believe? But what the angel added made it harder still; for he said that this glorious baby was lying in a feeding trough. Immediately, however, God confirmed his words by causing a multitude of angels to appear in the heavens; not *two* or *three* witnesses, but, perhaps, two or three million.

These angels were not *silent* witnesses; they sang a song, whose very words are handed down to us. It is the only song sung by angels upon *earth* that we ever heard. In the book of Revelation some of their songs in *heaven* are recorded; such as "Worthy is the Lamb to receive honor, power, and glory;" and "You have created all things, for your pleasure they are and were created." But here we read of a song to which poor shepherds listened. It is a short song, but contains much; for it explains the *purpose* for which the Savior was come into the world, and the *reason* he was sent.

The purpose was to bring glory to God, and peace on earth. The reason he was sent was because God had good-will towards men. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men."

Has not Christ's coming brought glory to God? Since Christ came into the world, how many redeemed sinners have glorified God for the gift of his Son! But what are these praises compared to the songs of believers and angels throughout eternity! Never will they cease to praise the God of love for sending his only Son to die for wretched men. But we may ask, "Is there peace on earth?" Not yet; but there *will* be. This earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, and then war shall cease; the swords shall be turned into ploughshares, and the spears into pruning-hooks, (see Isaiah 2;) because the Prince of Peace shall reign.

And are these God's gracious promises to men? Let us not doubt the Lord's *good-will* towards us. It hurts a tender parent, if he perceives that his children doubt his *good-will* towards them—he tries to convince them of it by numerous acts of kindness; and he is much disappointed if he cannot succeed in winning their confidence. Has not the Lord done enough to convince us of his good-will? Ought we not always to say, "If God spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all, will he not *with him* freely give us all things."

January 17

Luke 2:15-20. *The Shepherds' Visit to Bethlehem.*

We find that the shepherds believed the news they had heard. They did *not* say, "Let us go and see *whether* this thing is come to pass;" but they said, "Let us now go and see this thing which *has* come to pass." They believed *before* they had seen. "Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed." They spoke also as if they felt grateful for having heard the tidings; for they added, "which the Lord has made known to us." Truly they had reason to be grateful—for God had shown them very great favor. Let us not forget that we also are among those to whom the Lord has made known the birth of his Son. There are millions on this earth who have never heard of the love of God, in sending a Savior; but we have heard of it from our infant days. Do we, like these shepherds, long to see our blessed Redeemer?

How much Joseph and Mary must have been delighted at the entrance of the shepherds! Though overlooked by the world, the holy child was honored by these poor men. Even now there are only a few who acknowledge him as their Lord and Master, and these few are generally poor, like the shepherds of Bethlehem.

These good men did not keep the things they had heard and seen, a *secret*. The angel had said that he brought glad tidings which should be to *all* people; therefore the shepherds *told* the news to *all*. Like them, if we believe in Christ

ourselves, we shall speak of him to those who know him not.

How did the people *receive* the tidings the shepherds brought? They *wondered*; but probably they soon forgot what they had heard—while Mary "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." This is the way in which sermons should be heard, and in which the Bible should be read. All who get good from what they hear, keep it, and ponder it in their hearts. But how many cast from their minds what they hear!

There are *two* comparisons used in the Scriptures to show the careless way in which people hear the word of God. One of these comparisons is contained in Ezekiel 33:31-32. The Israelites listened to the preaching of Ezekiel as people listen to one who can play well on an instrument, and who can sing a lovely song. It is not necessary to think of the music we have heard; it is enough if it pleases us while we are hearing it—but we should not listen to sermons in this manner, and think it enough, if they amuse us.

The other comparison may be found in the first chapter of James's Epistle. It is there said that some listen to God's word as a person looks in a mirror, and then goes away and forgets what he has seen. Such listeners soon lose the good impressions they have received, and continue worldly-minded, and ungodly.

There is a beautiful description in the first Psalm, of the right manner of receiving the word. The godly man is represented as meditating in God's law, day and night.

One verse of God's holy word laid up in the heart, will do us more good than a whole chapter hastily read, and little considered. Are there any passages of the Scriptures which are dear to our hearts? Has any verse strengthened us in the hour of temptation; or comforted us in the day of trouble? Have we laid up any in store against the day when we shall walk through the valley of the shadow of death, when flesh and heart will fail, and when no mortal arm can sustain our sinking souls?

January 18

Luke 2:21-32. *The Song of Simeon.*

We read that when the Savior was eight days old, he was circumcised, and named Jesus. It was not necessary that he should be brought to Jerusalem for that purpose; but at the end of forty days, when he was nearly six weeks old, he was brought to Jerusalem, for two purposes.

His mother was then first permitted, after the birth of her son, to enter the temple. She went there with an offering of thanksgiving. If she could have afforded it, she

would have brought a lamb of a year old; but being very poor, she presented two doves, or pigeons. (See Lev. 12.) In the second place, Jesus as a firstborn son was presented to the Lord; for, ever since the slaying of the firstborn of the people of Egypt, and the passing over the firstborn of Israel, God had claimed all the firstborn as his own. (Ex. 13.) The firstborn of cows, sheep, and goats were offered in sacrifice—the firstborn of other animals were not offered, but money was presented in their place, and this money was used in buying sacrifices. Neither did God allow firstborn *children* to be offered in sacrifice; but he permitted them to be redeemed with money.

Mary accordingly came to the temple to present her firstborn son to the Lord. When was so acceptable an offering made to the Father! His only beloved Son was brought to his Father's house, and given into his Father's bosom. The priest supposed that he was redeemed by money; but this holy child could not be redeemed by money; he was a Lamb without blemish, and upon the altar of the cross he was soon to be laid, a willing, a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

When Mary brought her child into the temple, a most interesting event took place. An aged prophet appeared, and acknowledged the infant Savior as his Lord.

Prophets had almost ceased to prophesy for many years before Jesus came into the world. Malachi, who had prophesied four hundred years before his coming, was the last whose name is recorded. But at the time of Jesus' coming, the spirit of prophecy was again shed upon some holy people. We have read the prophecies of Elizabeth, and Mary, and Zacharias, in the first chapter of Luke, and we now read the prophecy of Simeon. God had informed him that he would not die until Christ came; and He had also let him know the precise moment when the parents had brought the divine infant into the temple. Simeon entered and found Joseph and Mary doing for their child after the custom of the law, that is, presenting him to the Lord before God's priest. At this interesting juncture, the aged believer first beheld his Savior, took him in his arms and blessed him; for his faith was so strong that he was able to believe that the infant of the poor woman he saw, was the Lord of glory.

The words that he uttered as he held the child are very beautiful. We perceive that it had been his earnest desire to see his Lord with his bodily eyes before he died. This was a very natural desire; and some people who do not really love Christ might desire the same; they might desire it from *curiosity*, but Simeon desired it from *affection*. And why did Simeon love the Savior? Because he valued his great salvation; he was waiting for the "consolation of Israel," (the name given to Christ in verse 25.) He was a penitent sinner, and it was a consolation to him to know that God had provided a Savior. He calls Jesus "his salvation," in verse 30. "My eyes have seen your salvation." He rejoiced also to think that *other* men would be saved through Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles; for he said, (verses 31, 32,) that God had given him to *all* people, a light to enlighten

the Gentiles, as well as the glory of Israel.

This shows the love to *others* which dwelt in Simeon's heart. He longed that *all* should know his Savior. It is recorded of a celebrated minister, named John Howe, that in his latter days he greatly desired to attain such a knowledge of Christ, and feel such a sense of his love, as might be a foretaste of the joys of heaven. After his death, a paper was found in his Bible recording how God had answered his prayer. One morning, (and he noted the day,) he awoke, his eyes swimming with tears, overwhelmed with a sense of God's goodness in shedding down his grace into the hearts of men. He never could forget the joy of these moments—they made him long still more ardently for that heaven, which, from his youth, he had panted to behold. How happy thus to see Jesus by *faith* before we die! *then* we too shall behold him some day with our bodily eyes; for though we die without that sight, we shall be raised again to gaze upon our glorious Redeemer, coming in the clouds of heaven!

All true believers may now say, with Job—"But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and that he will stand upon the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! I will see him for myself. Yes, I will see him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought!" Job 19:25-27

January 19

Luke 2:33-35. *The words of Simeon to Mary.*

Both Joseph and Mary marveled at the things spoken of Christ by Simeon. The things that made them marvel were that he should be "a light to enlighten the Gentiles," as well as the glory of Israel; for God's goodness to the Gentiles was a mystery long hidden from the Jewish nation. But we happy Gentiles have experienced it, and some among us have found Christ to be a light to enlighten our darkness.

Simeon blessed Joseph and Mary—and then he addressed Mary in particular, and prepared her for all the shame and sorrow that her Son should undergo; for what he had said before might have led her to think that joy only was to be his portion, and that all men would immediately do him honor. But this was not to be the case. So great would be the agonies of the Son, that a sword would pierce through the mother's heart. And was not the soul of Mary thus pierced, when she beheld her Son expiring on the cross?

Simeon's words concerning the child demand attentive consideration—"This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel." Let us inquire into their meaning, for all that concerns our Savior is very important to us. How was he the fall of many in Israel? Does Christ make men fall? Simeon here compares Christ to a stone over which many stumble and fall. Paul says, in 1 Cor. 1:23, that

Christ was to the Jews a stumbling-block, or something over which *they fell*. How was it they fell over him? Through pride. They would not believe that their own righteousness was worthless in God's sight, and that Christ's righteousness alone could be accepted. This is the account Paul gives of Christ's rejection by the Jews. His words are, "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their *own* righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God—for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believes." Rom. 10:3, 4.

And what is the reason that any still refuse Christ? Is it not because they do not feel their need of his righteousness? Is it not because they feel satisfied with their own performances, and imagine that God is satisfied also? And when they are told that they are sinners, they answer in their *hearts*, if not with their *lips*, "We are not such great sinners as others are!" People in this state of mind fall over Christ as over a stumbling-stone—they cannot receive him, because they do not desire his salvation. Peter, in his Epistle, says that Christ was to such people, "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to those who stumble at the word, being disobedient." 1 Peter 2:8.

But Simeon said also that the child was set for the rising again of many in Israel. Many of those who fell over him *at first*, afterwards believed, and rose from sin and death by Christ. Many of the priests who joined in crucifying the Savior were *afterwards* obedient to the faith. Acts 6:7.

The poor penitent sinner rises by Christ; that is, he finds in him a rock on which to set his feet; he finds in Christ one who can forgive his sins, and save his soul; then he can say with David, "He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings." Ps. 40:2.

Simeon next declared that Christ should be set for "a sign which shall be spoken against," (verse 34.)

We should observe that the words, "Yes, a sword shall pierce through your own soul, also," are between *parenthesis*; they might be left out without hurting the sense. Let us read the sentence without them, that we may better perceive the meaning, (verses 34, 35.)

"A sign which shall be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Had Christ *not* been spoken against, many who despised him would have followed him. The people applauded him until they heard the scribes and Pharisees speak so much against him; then they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him."

True religion is still spoken against. People must often give up the favor of the world, if they would be faithful to Christ. For a *time*, perhaps, they may profess to be religious, and lose nothing by it—but something soon occurs to try them, and

to reveal the real state of their hearts. Is a young person willing to lose an opportunity of a good settlement, or a tradesman the favor of a rich customer, or a gentleman the respect of his acquaintance, sooner than disobey his Lord? Then their *faithful* thoughts are revealed. Christ is now like a king disgraced; only those who *really* love him will be faithful to him. But when he comes in his glory to take possession of his kingdom, he will not fail to remember those who are now cast out for his sake.

January 20

Luke 2:36-40. *Anna the Prophetess.*

We have read of Simeon's blessing the infant Savior—and we now hear of another witness, even Anna, an aged prophetess.

Anna, it appears, had led a very holy life. We do not know her exact age; but if she had been a widow eighty-four years, and if she had been married for seven years, she must have been at this time above a hundred years old, even supposing that she had married at a very early period of life. It is said that "she departed not from the temple." By this, we understand that she lived so near the temple, as to enable her to attend all its services. When, at nine in the morning, the lamb was offered on the altar, Anna was there; and again at three, when the evening lamb was sacrificed, Anna was not absent. She delighted in the psalms continually sung in the holy courts; she listened to the daily blessings of the priest. There are now many aged Christians, who, like Anna, dwell near some house of God, and delight in attending the services; and, even when their power of hearing has failed, they yet take pleasure in joining in the prayers of God's assembled believers. How sweet for them to think that they will soon ascend, where "Congregations never break up, and sabbaths never end."

We hear also that Anna "*served* God with fastings and prayers." She not only fasted and prayed, but she *served* God when she fasted and prayed. She might have fasted and prayed, and *not* have served God; because she might have done these things in a self-righteous spirit, as some of the Jews did, whom God reproves in Isaiah 58, because they fasted and prayed, and yet were living in their sins.

It is said that Anna fasted and prayed "*night and day*"—no doubt she was occupied also in many good works, yet she lived in a constant habit of prayer. We are encouraged to pray without *ceasing*, and to *continue* in prayer—and this is what Anna did.

In one of Paul's Epistles we read a description of such a widow as God approves, and we find that such a widow both prays constantly, and does all kinds of good works. It is written in 1 Tim. 5:5, "She who is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusts

in God, and continues in supplications and prayers *night and day*." It is also written that a widow should be "well reported of for good works—if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the believers' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work." From these we see that a person may at once pray constantly and do good works also.

We are not told whether Anna came in by the Spirit, as Simeon did, or whether she had been called by some person, or whether she came in accidentally; but we are told that when she did come in, she knew the infant Savior as her Lord. "She gave thanks."

With what fervor Anna must have thanked the Lord! None could sincerely thank God for Christ in an indifferent, cold manner. Could we thank a person for saving our lives in the same manner as we thanked him for doing us any trifling service! Surely, if we thank our deliverer at all, we must thank him warmly. Have we ever given our warm thanks to God for sending Jesus into the world? If we have only thanked him *coldly*, we have insulted him by our thanks.

Anna not only thanked God, she also spoke of Jesus to "all who looked for redemption in Jerusalem." It is evident that there was a little company of people there who were looking for redemption from *sin* through the promised Savior.

How much refreshed Joseph and Mary must have been by the prayers and exhortations of Simeon and Anna! It is said by Luke, that they returned to their own city Nazareth; but we find from Matthew's history, that they did not return *immediately*; they went first to Bethlehem, afterwards into Egypt, and at length settled in Nazareth.

And now we turn from the aged believers to the holy child. There is but little said of him, but that little shows how holy a child he was. He "grew and became strong in spirit." Not only his limbs increased in strength, but his affection towards his Father became strong. It is a great mystery how this could be, for he was God; but we know that he had not only a human *body*, but also a human soul; and it was this *soul* that became strong. It is also written that he was "filled with *wisdom*"—his *human* mind received more and more knowledge by degrees, like the mind of another child. "The grace of God was upon him;" that is, the "*favor*" of God was upon him. God looked upon his human nature with favor, for as the *Son of God*, he was always *infinitely* beloved by the Father.

How different was he from other children, who generally grow more wayward and willful as they grow older! Even if good impressions are made on their minds at six or seven years old, how often do they wear off when they become twelve or fourteen! their hearts seem to grow harder, and to love worldly things more. Was not this the case with some of us! Do we not often look back with sorrow upon the days of our childhood? Have we not reason to say with David, "Remember

not the sins of my *youth*, nor my transgressions?" Perhaps some are now removed from us, whom we pierced by our heedless or perverse conduct. What would we give to recall the time and to act differently! but we can only express our penitence to God, and plead for his pardon.

January 21

Matthew 2:1-8. *The wise men's arrival at Jerusalem.*

We find from Matthew's account, that our Savior returned to Bethlehem after he had been presented to the Lord in the temple. Perhaps his parents intended to bring him up in Bethlehem, as it was the city of David their forefather. But God did not choose that his Son should be brought up in a renowned city, but in the despised city of Nazareth; and we shall see that he caused events to happen which obliged him to leave Bethlehem.

While the Redeemer was yet an infant, some wise men came to Jerusalem, inquiring for the King of the Jews. Who were these wise men? They were heathen by birth, but it is not known from what land they came. They must have heard of the true God; perhaps some Jews had instructed them. They had seen a star in the east, probably some light which they had never seen before. But how did they know that this star was the sign of the birth of the King of the Jews? We must conclude that God *told* them *why* the star appeared; but whether he told them in a dream, or by what other means, we are not informed. Many nations were at this time expecting some great deliverer to arise; for the Jews knew from the prophets that such a deliverer would come, and as they were scattered over all countries, they had the opportunity to make their expectation generally known.

These wise men, when they came to Jerusalem, *openly* asked for the expected king, supposing that the Jews, who were God's own people, would know more about him than they did, and would be glad to receive him. Had these wise men known of Simeon and Anna, they would surely have inquired of them; but they inquired of the chief men of Jerusalem, and these knew nothing of Jesus.

"When Herod the king heard these things he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." (ver. 3.) This Herod was a very wicked man—he was an Edomite; that is, he was descended from Esau, but he had become a Jew in religion; and he had been appointed king over Jerusalem by the Romans, who had conquered the Jews. Herod shed much blood during his reign, and caused his own wife and two of his sons to be slain. He was afraid lest some person should take the crown from him, and therefore he was much alarmed when he heard the wise men inquire for the King of the Jews.

We may ask, "Why were the people in Jerusalem alarmed also, and why were they not rather glad at the thought of having another King?" Perhaps they were

afraid of Herod's filling the city with confusion and blood in opposing the new King. Herod was so artful, that, instead of telling the wise men of his fears, he pretended to assist them to find out where the child was. For this purpose he adopted a very wise method—he desired the chief priests and the scribes, who studied the Old Testament a great deal, to tell him where the expected Savior would be born. They examined the writings of the prophets, and found that it was declared in the prophet Micah, that he would be born in the town of Bethlehem.

Only one thing more remained to be done; to find out how old the child must be. Herod supposed that the star had first appeared at the time the child was born—he inquired of the wise men when it had appeared, and discovered that it was more than a year ago. He told the wise men to go to Jerusalem and to seek for a child of that age, promising, when they had found him, to come and worship him also. He completely deceived the wise men by his hypocrisy; but what would all his plans avail against the Lord, who searches the hearts? The Lord, who sits in the heavens, laughs at all such attempts to injure him, as it is written in the *second psalm*, verse 2-4.

Herod is an instance that a man may *believe* the word of God, while he *hates* it. Herod *believed* that the prophets had spoken truly, and had known the place where Christ would be born; he *believed* that the Messiah would come; and yet he desired to destroy him, and thought it possible to effect his purpose. What madness this appears! It is the faith of devils—like Herod, they believe, and tremble. James 2:19. Let us beware of having *such* a faith; a faith that will make us afraid of God, and yet not make us love him, or delight to please him. This faith will only make us miserable. How different was the faith of Simeon and Anna, of the poor shepherds, and of the wise men! They were filled with joy on account of a Savior's birth. Have we ever rejoiced at the thought that Christ has been born into the world?

January 22

Matthew 2:9-11. *The wise men's journey to Bethlehem.*

Herod had not been able to give the wise men exact information respecting the place where the King they sought would be found—he had only told them that he was in Bethlehem. But God did not leave them to search in vain. As they were on the way, the star they had seen in their own country appeared again, and stopped over the very house where the Savior was. This star could not have been like the stars we behold in the height of the heavens, for one of those stars could not point out any particular house—it must have been a light, floating in the air.

No doubt the house in which Mary dwelt was a poor one, but the wise men were not discouraged by its lowliness, from worshiping its glorious inhabitant. How

often now does Christ dwell with the poor tenants of a humble abode! How seldom is he found ruling in the mansions of the great, or the palaces of kings! Yet even among the rich, noble, and wise, there are a few who love their despised Savior. These men from the East seem to have been rich, as well as wise; for they brought treasures with them from their native land, and laid them at their Redeemer's feet. What must have been their joy at that moment! If the sight of the star caused them to feel exceeding great joy, what transport the sight of the Lord himself must have occasioned! The luxuries, the splendor, the honor they had enjoyed in their native land, can never have given them the satisfaction they felt when gazing on the glorious infant.

These men were very different from the shepherds of Bethlehem in their *circumstances*. The most remarkable difference between them was this; the shepherds were Jews, the wise men were Gentiles. They were the first Gentiles whose coming to Christ is recorded; their coming was a sign that Gentiles as well as Jews would be saved through him. How interesting this fact is to us who are Gentiles. Though Christ was born among the Jews, he is our Savior as well as theirs. And his name is *now* known by millions in the Gentile nations; and it shall be known by every nation under heaven; for *all* nations shall serve him, and all kings shall fall down before him, as it is written in Psalm 72.

But let us not read the history of these wise men without seeking to learn something from their example. What *earnestness* they displayed in their search for the Savior! They traveled far to seek him; they inquired diligently after him; they watched anxiously for the sign, when it had ceased to be visible, and rejoiced exceedingly, when it again appeared. Surely these wise men, by their conduct, condemn those who are living in Christian lands, unmindful of their Savior.

There are some who confess they know but little of him, and who yet seem unwilling to take any trouble to know him better. How would those wise men have valued our advantage! how dearly would they have prized one of our Bibles, one of our faithful ministers, one of our blessed Sabbaths! Some there are now among the poor heathen, who, by their eager desire to obtain a missionary, remind us of these wise men. An African chief sent two hundred oxen to a missionary settlement, hoping with them to purchase a teacher; such was his ignorance, that he thought he might obtain one by such means. Robbers seized upon his herd as it was being driven along. Though his disappointment was great, he did not abandon his project of obtaining an instructor. But while he was contriving some other method of gaining the precious blessing, God, in his gracious Providence, directed the steps of some missionaries to his land. These good men were traveling to a more distant spot, but they could not resist the chief's earnest entreaties; they took up their abode in his country, and soon enlightened its darkness with the glorious beams of gospel light. (See Moffat's Southern Africa, the beginning of the last chapter.) Did not that African resemble these wise men, and were not his hopes, like theirs, fulfilled? Here is

encouragement for all those who desire spiritual blessings. The Lord will give them the desires of their heart.

January 23

Matthew 2:12-15. *The heavenly warnings.*

Twice in a very little space God sent messages to his faithful servants in the dreams of the night. One dream was to warn the wise men not to inform Herod that they had found the infant King; the other was, to warn Joseph not to remain in Bethlehem. We perceive how easily God can defeat the plans of the wicked, as it is written in the fifth chapter of Job—"He disappoints the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their plans." There is a beautiful prayer in the liturgy, entreating God to exercise this power in our behalf. "Graciously hear us, that those evils which the craft, or subtlety of the devil or man, works against us may be brought to nothing, and, by the providence of your goodness, may be dissolved." We see how God dispersed those evils which Satan and Herod were working against the Son of God. Satan still stirs up wicked men to form plans against the children of God; and still the Lord, by his gracious providence, disperses these evils. Are we distressed at the thought of any malicious plan being formed against us, either by Satan or by our fellow-creatures? Let us pray to the Lord to defend us. No one can harm us, if we are followers of that which is good.

We have all heard of the Gunpowder-plot. What a diabolical scheme it was! The Roman Catholics had contrived a plan for blowing up the king of England, with his family and parliament, because they supported the Protestant religion; but God defeated their malicious design. One of the conspirators wrote a letter to Lord Monteagle, warning him not to go to the house of parliament, when the king next would open it. God gave such discernment to the king, that when Lord Monteagle showed him the letter, he suspected that a bomb-plot had been formed. Thus this dreadful evil was dispersed.

We find also many instances in the lives of God's servants, of the same gracious interference. The missionary Williams was saved from falling into the hands of four cruel heathen, who had determined to kill him. It was his custom to go at times to a neighboring island on Saturday to perform the Sabbath services. Four young men, who hated the Christian religion, offered to convey him to the island. They appeared as if they wished to show kindness to the missionary; but in reality they had agreed, when he was at a distance from the shore, to throw him into the sea. Williams accepted the offer. God, however, by a very trifling circumstance, rescued him from the snare. He had lately painted his boat with a peculiar kind of paint, that did not dry as quickly as he expected, and fearing to venture out to sea while his boat was in that state, he refused to go with those who desired to be his murderers. Thus was the wicked scheme frustrated. At

length, indeed, he fell by the hands of cruel savages; but not until his *work* was done.

If we knew all the plans that Satan formed against *us*, we would be filled with wonder at the deliverances we experience. But perhaps we may remember some instances in our own lives, in which we discovered that the attempts of *men* to hurt us were frustrated. What wonderful proofs of the Lord's watchful care over his people will be revealed in another world! Then shall they know those things that they know not now. Then it will be found that Job was not the *only* believer whom Satan sought to cast down by the weight of his sorrows; nor Peter the *only* disciple that he desired to sift by the force of temptations; nor the blessed Savior, the *only* child that he sought to cut off by an untimely death. *Then* it will appear how the Lord kept his people in the hollow of his hand from all the blasts of the enemy; and *then* there will ascend a chorus of hallelujahs from the happy redeemed, and from the glorious angels who were their appointed guard during the years of their weakness.

January 24

Matthew 2:16-18. *The Slaughter of the Babies.*

Everyone who reads this passage must shudder at the dreadful cruelty of Herod. There was a singular barbarity in ordering the *babies* to be slaughtered; little creatures who could not have offended him, and were unable to resist him. Who can bear to think of the anguish of the mothers in that terrible day! When the firstborn of Egypt were slain by the destroying angel, the cry was terrible. Can it have been less terrible when the *youngest son* of many a mother was murdered by the pitiless executioner? We know that the mother's heart clings closely to her helpless infant. Tears and entreaties were all in vain—not only the babies of Bethlehem were slaughtered, but the babies in all the places round about.

We might be disposed to ponder how any human being could perpetrate so atrocious a deed, did not the history of ungodly men disclose every kind of bloody act. This very Herod, just before his death, knowing how glad people would be when he expired, caused a number of Jews to be shut up in prison, and desired that as soon as he was dead they should be killed; for by this means he hoped that the relations of the slaughtered Jews would be *obliged* to mourn. This command, however, was not obeyed. Such a king as Herod cared not for the lives of infants in comparison to his own security. Though few in a Christian land would dare to commit such *acts* of cruelty as Herod did, yet are not the *feelings* of unconverted men as selfish as his? Are we not *all* by *nature* so selfish, that we care not what calamities come upon others, if we gain anything by them? For instance, are not people glad for a war, if it will promote their trade, though they know war brings misery upon thousands of their fellow-creatures?

How interesting was the fate of these infants! they died in the Savior's stead. Some have called them martyrs, because they died for Christ, though without their own knowledge. In the service of the Church of England they are spoken of as the *Innocents*. A baby may be called "innocent," because it has not yet committed any acts of sin; still it has a sinful nature, and would, if it lived, sin as soon as reason dawned. There never was but one truly innocent baby—it was the infant Savior.

Why is Rachel spoken of in the passage quoted by Jeremiah? Because Rachel was the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, and many of those babies were descended from her. She is represented in a poetical way, as weeping over her murdered offspring.

This was the scene on *earth*. How different were the scenes then witnessed in heaven! What a multitude of happy spirits then entered together into glory! David was comforted when he lost his little one, by the thoughts of beholding it again. He said to those who wondered at his cheerfulness, knowing, as they did, his affection for his child, "I shall go to him; but he shall not return to me." 2 Sam. 12:23. If David, who lived *before* the coming of Christ, was supported by this confidence, how much more ought parents who live *after* his coming to be consoled by such thoughts when they lose their darling infants! Do not *they* know how Christ loved little children, and how he took them in his arms and blessed them, and how he said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven?" The believing parent may feel assured that he shall see his child again among the cherub choir. Well may he love that Savior to whose grace he owes the happiness of his departed little one.

January 25

Matthew 2:19-23. *Joseph's return.*

What an important charge was committed to Joseph! The care of the infant Savior and of his mother. How honorable was the post he occupied! He was a shield from the darts of the enemy to the blessed child. God did not leave him without assistance in performing his allotted work. Joseph knew not how to protect his little family; he knew not when dangers awaited them, or when those dangers were removed.

In this chapter, God directs Joseph three times by dreams how to act; he tells him when to depart into Egypt, when to return to Canaan, and in what city to fix his abode. Does not this kindness shown to Joseph give us reason to expect that God will direct his people now, when they are perplexed and at a loss how to act? People who desire to act right, are often in much perplexity respecting the path of duty. They know not, in some cases, what plan it would be best to pursue; whether to settle in this village or in that town; to form an friendship with

this person or with another; to go, or stay, to consent or to refuse, to speak or to be silent. Though they consult the Holy Word for wisdom, yet they can gain no light upon their path; though they consult pious friends, they can get no certain advice; and though they pray to God, they seem to obtain no answer. What then are they to do? Would the Lord direct them by a dream, how happy would they be! but no such dreams as Joseph had, are given to them.

Is not the Lord, by their perplexities, teaching them *patience*? Is he not teaching them to *persevere* in prayer, and to feel more deeply their own weakness and ignorance? If they continue to look up to God, either some circumstance shall occur that shall show them the path of duty; or God will send some messenger (though not an angel) to point it out; or He himself will in some way or other make it clear to their minds. Or if He does not make it clear *before* the period of decision arrives, He will show them *afterwards* that their steps were ordered by Him. But no such guidance shall be granted to those who are not desirous to act uprightly. "The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble." Prov. 4:19. This is the *threatening*; but the *promise* is, "In all your ways acknowledge him; He shall direct your paths." Prov. 3:6.

Joseph, as we have already observed, was commanded in a dream to return to his own land. The angel said, "They who sought the young child's life are dead." It seems, therefore, that someone beside Herod sought to destroy Jesus; for the angel said, "*They* are dead." Perhaps this other person was Herod's eldest son Antipater; for he may have desired the destruction of the infant for the same reason as his father. This Antipater died a few months before Herod, but not a natural death. His father had unjustly suspected him of plotting against his life, and had him executed. Soon afterwards the bloody tyrant himself died in the most horrible torments—his illness began about the time of the slaughter of the babies; in vain he traveled about his kingdom to obtain a cure; no earthly hand could heal him; his disease grew worse and worse, until he became intolerably loathsome to all around him, and even to himself—he expired two years after the murder of the infants, eaten by worms!

Thus God often inflicts judgments on those who persecute His people. Several persecutors have died in the manner that Herod did, and others have been cut off suddenly in God's wrath. In this sudden manner a wicked Roman Catholic bishop of England once perished. His name was Gardiner. He had sworn that he would not eat until he had heard that two pious Christians had been burned alive. When the news reached him, he sat down to dinner, and with the first mouthful he took, he expired! Surely all people must have said, "This is the finger of God." True believers are dear to God as the apple of his eye—and those who dare to hurt or mock them, are abhorred by him.

Joseph and Mary must have been rejoiced to leave Egypt, the land of idols; for if David sighed after the services of the temple when absent from them, as the deer pants after the water-brooks, surely these pious people did so also.

It appears that they intended to live near Jerusalem, probably in Bethlehem, which was only seven miles distant; but when they arrived in Canaan, they heard that the Romans had appointed a cruel son of Herod's, called Archelaus, to be governor instead of his father; therefore they were afraid to remain near him. Joseph was then directed in a dream to go to Nazareth, where they had formerly lived. God chose that his Son should be brought up there, that he might be called a Nazarene. There is no prophet who has said *these very words*, but several have said that Jesus would be despised. The name Nazarene was very disgraceful, because Nazareth was a very wicked city.

And did Jesus bear so despised a name? Ought we to be proud, when our great Lord was so humble? We are disposed to be ashamed of the lowliness of our family, or circumstances, or education, and we are anxious to conceal such things from the world. This pride is very sinful, and comes to us from our first parents, who wished to be as gods. But Jesus has set his people an example of suffering contempt.

January 26

Luke 2:41-52. *Christ among the teachers.*

We only hear *one* story of our Savior in his childhood. We would like to hear many particulars concerning him in early life, but the Holy Spirit has caused us to know the things the *most* necessary, and it is more necessary that we should know what Christ said and did when he was a *minister*—than when he was a *child*.

We find that his parents were accustomed to attend the passover at Jerusalem every year. The men were *commanded*, the women were *permitted* to attend this feast. At twelve years old it was the custom for boys to begin to accompany their parents—and at that age our Lord accompanied his parents.

The feast of the Passover continued seven days, during which time unleavened bread was eaten. The parents of Jesus fulfilled the days of the feast—that is, they remained *seven* days in Jerusalem, and then began to return homewards. There was a large company of people returning to Nazareth, distant about seventy-six miles from Jerusalem. The parents of Jesus at first supposed that the child was with some of their friends, until evening came—they sought him, and found him not. They returned with heavy hearts to Jerusalem, and found him in the temple. Altogether they had not seen him for three days; they had gone one day's journey and returned during another day, and they saw him again on the third.

What was Jesus doing in the temple? He was sitting in the midst of the teachers.

These teachers were men learned in the scriptures, who explained them to the people—but they were not in general pious men. Was Jesus *teaching* the teachers? Far from it. He was listening to them—for it was the custom for these teachers to instruct the young people, asking them questions, and answering their inquiries.

But we naturally wonder why Jesus did not *inform* his parents of his intention to remain longer in Jerusalem. No doubt he knew that it was his heavenly Father's will that he should *not* tell them, for he would not have caused them any useless sorrow. Probably God wished to remind Mary by this circumstance, that her Son had come into this world to do a great work, and that she must expect to find him continually engaged in it. All parents ought to be ready to give up their children for God's service, and to part with them to a distance, even as missionaries in a foreign land, if it be God's will. When the mother of the famous Wesley was asked, whether she was willing to part with her two sons, to go as missionaries to America, she answered, "Had I ten sons, I would rejoice that they should be so employed."

Mary gently reproached her son with having caused her and Joseph so much anxiety, (verse 48.) Accustomed no doubt to the most affectionate behavior from him, she was surprised at any conduct that *appeared* unkind.

Our Lord answered, "How is it that you sought me? Don't you know that I must be about my Father's business?"

This reply was full of the dignity that belonged to him, as the Son of God. In his obedience to his mother on other occasions, he set an example to *all* children, but in his conduct on this occasion, he acted as became the King of kings and Lord of lords.

But what was the business which our Savior said that his Father had given him to do?

We can discover what it was from other parts of the Scriptures! What did Jesus come down from heaven for? Was it for his own pleasure? No, it was to do his Father's work. This work was the salvation of sinful man. In order to accomplish this salvation, he fulfilled the law that we have broken, and suffered the punishment due to us for breaking it. He began to fulfill the law, as *soon* as he came into this world. While yet a child of twelve years old, he was intent upon his great work. Therefore he said to his parents, "Don't you know that I must be about my Father's business?"

Has God sent us on any business? Yes! He has appointed to each of us a work to perform. A glorious work it is—a work in which angels are always engaged, and of which they are never weary. It is *not* to accomplish our own salvation. That work Christ has done for all who believe in him. It is to promote the glory of

God our Father. Yet who that looked around him and observed men's actions, would imagine that they had this work to do? What are the things about which men seem most anxious? Does not each seem to say, by his conduct, "How shall I please myself?" or "How shall I enrich myself?" or "How shall I become famous?" How few behave as if their chief desire was to *please God!* Yet is it not very sinful to be careless about pleasing him, who sent his Son to die for us? When that excellent minister, Dr. Payson, was on his dying bed, he said, "Oh how often have I begun the day thinking, 'How shall I please myself?' instead of 'How shall I please God?'"

Yet Payson had led a very holy life, and God had converted many sinners by him; but when a Christian is dying he often sees his actions in a light in which he never saw them before. O that every one of us, now that life is before us, may seek to do our Father's business; for we know not how soon we may be called to render an account of the use we have made of our time upon earth.

January 27

Matthew 3:1-6. *John preaches in the wilderness.*

We hear nothing of John the Baptist during his youth, excepting that he was pious, and lived much in the deserts. When he was about thirty years old, he began to preach. He did not, however, go to the cities, but remained in the wilderness.

We may wonder how he found a congregation there. Probably his singular habits and his holy life had caused him to be much spoken of. He was clothed in a manner unlike other people; for he wore a sort of cloth made of coarse camel's hair, and a leather belt; and he ate locusts—little insects, about an inch long, which are fit to eat; he fed also on honey, which is abundant in the woods and among the rocks of Judea. Men went into the wilderness to see him, and these, bringing back a wonderful report of him, induced others to come, until at length crowds were collected to hear his sermons. God can easily draw people to hear his faithful ministers, if he wills. No doubt John was rejoiced to behold such multitudes of people, for he longed to point them all to the only Savior.

What was the subject of his first sermons? Repentance! What is repentance? Is it change of conduct *only*? No! people who have never repented, sometimes *reform* their lives. A person may see it to be his *interest* to lead a better life, and for that reason he may amend. Is it sorrow for sin? Sorrow is *part* of repentance, but there is a sorrow that is not repentance—sorrow for the *consequences* of sin is not repentance. Saul, the king of Israel, was sorry when he heard he had lost his kingdom by his disobedience, but he was not sorry for his *sin*, only for his *punishment*. True repentance is a change of mind and *heart*. A man who really repents, feels grieved because he has offended God, and he longs to serve God

better in time to come.

Can a person change his *own* heart? It is impossible; therefore we know that repentance must be the gift of God. Yet John told the people to repent, because he knew that God was willing to bestow repentance.

The chief object of John's ministry was to announce the coming of the Lord. This he did when he said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." No doubt he explained to the people the meaning of this declaration. We may understand its meaning by comparing it with other parts of Scripture. When Satan tempted our first parents to eat the forbidden fruit, he set up his own kingdom upon the earth; he became the god of this world. But God sent his Son to dethrone Satan, and establish his own kingdom. As soon as a sinner believes in Christ, he passes into the kingdom of heaven—or the kingdom of Christ. Paul, in his epistle to the Colossians, speaking of the Father, says, "Who has delivered us from the power of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."—Col. 1:13.

John the Baptist was like a herald who proclaims the approach of a glorious monarch, or like a pioneer who prepares his way through a desert. He knew that unless men repented of their sins, they would not receive the Savior with gladness. He did not preach in vain. Many felt convinced of their sins, and anxious to be cleansed from their guilt and pollution; then they were baptized in Jordan, confessing their sins.

But could the waters of *Jordan* cleanse their souls? The waters of all the rivers in the world could not wash out one spot from the soul! Why then were they baptized? It had long been the custom for the Jews to baptize *heathen* who had forsaken idols for the worship of the true God. But John baptized the *Jews*, as a testimony that *they* also needed purification. At length he pointed to Jesus and cried, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." It is the blood of that Lamb which cleanses from sin—and that blood alone. The believers in heaven are now clothed in pure and spotless garments. But was it *baptism* that made them white? Hear what the Scripture says, "These are those who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the *blood of the Lamb*."—Rev. 7:14.

January 28

Matthew 3:7-12. *John warns the Pharisees and Sadducees.*

Among the people who came to hear John preach in the wilderness, were many of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Curiosity drew them to hear that famous preacher. It will be well to stop a moment to inquire into the character of these men. They were called Pharisees and Sadducees, *not* because they belonged to foreign nations, (as we call some people French and some English,) but because

they had particular opinions on religious subjects; they belonged to two *sects* among the Jews.

The Pharisees professed to observe all God's laws concerning sacrifices, tithes, and ceremonies, and also many *other* laws which *men* had made; and they thought that by doing these things they would be worthy of places in heaven. Yet all the while their hearts are still full of the love of pleasure, or of money, or of selfishness! Such was the character of the Pharisees.

Are there any Pharisees in these days? There are none of us who do exactly the same things as the Pharisees did, but there are many who have the same kind of human righteousness—they wish to be religious, or at least to *appear* religious, and therefore they read the Bible, go to church, take the sacrament; and they think they are the better for these works, while their hearts are still full of the love of pleasure, or of money, or of selfishness. There is only one way of salvation—it is by believing in Jesus Christ; when we believe in him, our sins are forgiven on account of his sufferings, and our hearts are made holy by his Spirit. Are there any of us who are endeavoring to deceive God by a little outward service? Let us give up the vain attempt—God will not be mocked; unless we really wish to forsake *all* our sins, we are hypocrites, like the Pharisees.

But who were the Sadducees? They were unbelieving men, proud of their learning, and who thought themselves much wiser than common people. They believed that there were no angels nor spirits, and no rising again of the dead; and they sneered at those people who believed all the wonderful things written in the Bible. They only professed to believe the first five books of the Bible, called the books of Moses. Are there any Sadducees now? Alas! there are too many who resemble them. Such people are called infidels, or deists. They have written many wicked books for the purpose of turning the Bible into ridicule. Their writings are poison to the mind, and they have destroyed many souls. There are numerous proofs that the Bible is the Word of God. To mention only one or two; behold the desolation of Jerusalem and the scattering of the Jews—according to God's prophecies.

When these self-righteous Pharisees and scoffing Sadducees came to hear John preach—was he afraid of them, because they were rich and learned? Did he preach elegant sermons to please them? No! he spoke plainly and faithfully to them. He said, "You brood of vipers!" He called them the offspring of the serpent—or the children of the devil! He said, "Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" He knew that because they were rich and learned, few would dare to warn them of the wrath to come—therefore out of love to their souls, *he* warned them. He did not tell them there was *no hope* for them, but he told them there was *no time* to lose. He knew that when he called them children of the devil, they would answer in their hearts, "We are the children of the pious Abraham, not of the devil; we have Abraham to our father."

When ministers are preaching the truth, people are very apt to be making some excuse in their hearts. John told the Pharisees that they would not be saved because they were the children of Abraham according to the *flesh*, for God could make the stones into Abraham's children; and God soon *did* make the *Gentiles*, whom the Jews despised as though they had been stones, into the children of Abraham in the *spirit*.

Then John told them of their dreadful condition, while they were bringing forth bad fruit, or doing evil works. The axe, as it were, was ready to hew them down! Could we see death and judgment as near as they really are, we would tremble at the thought of continuing in sin!

Luke tells us in his gospel, (3:15,) that many people began to think that John was, perhaps, the long expected Savior—that is, the Messiah, or the anointed one. Did John wish them to think this? No! he wished no glory for himself; he said that *his* baptism was nothing compared to that which Jesus would bestow. John could wash the *body* with water as a *sign* of repentance, but Jesus could wash the *soul* with the Holy Spirit—Jesus could even cleanse it, as by fire. There is nothing cleanses like fire; *water* cannot cleanse the dross from the *gold*—but *fire* can. The Spirit of Christ can consume our sins—as fire consumes dross.

Then John showed the terrible consequences of not believing in this Savior. He compared Jesus (v. 12) to a thrasher, who separates the wheat from the chaff. We are accustomed to hear of the *meek and gentle* Savior—and so he is, for he wipes away the tear of the penitent, and binds up the wound of the broken-hearted. But he is also the *holy* Jesus—he cannot bear *proud* sinners, and at the last day his wrath against them will be so terrible, that they will call upon the rocks and mountains to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb! (Rev. 6)

January 29

Luke 3:10-14. *John instructs various classes in their duties.*

We have seen that John the Baptist was a very faithful preacher, one who spoke to the *rich* as well as to the *poor* of their sins. But we do not hear that the Pharisees and Sadducees took warning from his sermons—yet there were some people who did. The people (that is, the common people—as they are called) said, "What shall we do, then?" What did they mean by this question? Did they mean, "What shall we do to be *saved*?" No, that was not the question. We read, in the Acts, of a penitent jailer who said to the apostle Paul and his friend Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be *saved*?" And they replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." (Acts 16:31.) No doubt John would have answered the people in the same manner, if they had asked him the same question; he would have said, "Believe in him who comes after me."

But the people did *not* ask this question. John had just been exhorting them to bring forth *fruits* worthy of repentance, and had been telling them that every tree that brought forth bad *fruit* was cast into the fire. By fruit, you well know that he meant good works. John wanted the people to show by their conduct that their repentance was sincere. It must have gladdened his heart, when, after his sermons, they came to inquire *what* good works they ought to do.

It is a good sign when people ask questions about their duties. John, by his answer, shows us what was the *chief* sin of the people. He said, "He who has two coats, let him impart to him that has none, and he who has food let him do likewise." The chief sin of the people was covetousness! These people were not all rich. Covetousness was the sin of the *poor*, as well as of the rich. As we read in Jer. 8:10, "Everyone, from the least, even to the greatest, is given to covetousness."

Is this sin still very common? It is. People's hearts are still wrapped up in their property—their money, their clothes, their houses, their furniture, or their lands, whether they have little or much. People are so fond of their property that they are reluctant to part with any of it. But the word of God tells us that we should be ready to give—that we should even *labor* that we *may* have something to give. (Eph. 4:28; Acts 20:34, 35.)

Perhaps it will be asked, "Is it wrong to have *two* sets of clothes?" No! the expression "two coats," need not be taken *literally*. What then does it signify? That those who have *more* than enough for themselves, ought to give to those who have *less* than enough. The Scriptures do not *forbid* our saving against old age or sickness; but they *command* us to give to those who are in need. God will never allow any one to languish in distress through following this command; he will raise up friends for them in the time of need. "Blessed is the man that considers the poor." (Ps. 41:1.) Cast your bread upon the waters, for you shall find it after many days. (Eccles. 11:1.)

There was a poor servant who gave all her money to her destitute parents; she was overtaken by sickness early in life; she became unfit for service, and had no means of support; but God put it into the heart of Thomas Scott to take her into his house, and, though not rich himself, with the aid of some of his friends, he gladly supported her all her days, thinking it a blessing to have so pious a person in his family. Where could she have passed her life in greater peace than beneath the roof of this faithful minister?

If young people spend their money in pleasures, in fancy clothing, or in useless things, there is no promise for them to depend upon. But if they delight in giving to the poor for God's sake, they shall never be forsaken!

The *publicans* also asked John what they must do. These publicans were not like the publicans of these days; they did not keep public-houses; they collected the

public taxes for the Romans. Their chief sin was DISHONESTY. They made people pay more taxes than the government required, and by their trickery they enriched themselves. In most trades and employments there is some temptation to dishonesty, and many people think that they may do whatever it is the *custom* to do. Let each of us inquire, "Is there anything I do in my employment, that I wish to conceal from my master—or my customers?" *That* practice is *dishonest*, however *common* it may be. If you really repent, you will stop being dishonest—though others should call you over strict and precise, and even try to injure you—because your conduct is a reproach to them.

Some *soldiers* next inquired what they must do. Does it surprise us to find that even *soldiers* had been moved by John's preaching? War is a terrible calamity. Were all men true Christians, there would be no war; yet John did not tell the soldiers to stop being soldiers, for the *guilt* of unjust wars lies rather upon those who begin and continue them—the kings and rulers—than upon the men who are hired to fight. John warned the soldiers against the sins most common in their profession. One of these was violence; the soldiers were apt to take things away by force—therefore John said, "Do violence to no man." They were also accustomed to accuse others falsely before the judges, perhaps for the sake of bribes; therefore he said, "Nor accuse any man falsely." They were also disposed to be discontented with their pay; therefore he said, "Be content with your wages."

Would we like to inquire of John the Baptist what *we* ought to do? He would not give us all the *same* answer—he would point out *different* duties to us according to our places in life—such as servants or masters, parents or children—or according to our trade or profession.

But need we wish that John the Baptist were risen from the dead, that he might instruct us? Let us look into the epistles of Paul and Peter, and we shall find directions to servants and masters, to parents and children. Servants are directed to be meek, honest, and submissive; masters to be just and kind; children to be obedient and respectful. Parents are commanded to bring up their children piously, and not to provoke them to wrath. Young men are instructed to be sober-minded; young women to be keepers at home. Older men and women are warned against the love of wine. (See the epistles to Titus, and to the Colossians, and the first epistle of Peter.) Thus we are all set on our guard against the temptations of our age and station in life.

No doubt if people had come *separately* to John, he would have given still more particular directions. *Each* of *us* has some particular sin into which he is very apt to fall—one is most disposed to anger—another to vanity—another to envy—another to idleness—and another to gluttony.

We never *deserve* heaven by leaving off our sins; it is Christ who has purchased heaven by his blood to bestow it on those who believe in his name. But if we do

really believe we shall bring forth good fruit—and forsake our sins. It is God alone who can change our hearts—but we must not *wait* until we *feel* right *feelings*, before we *begin* to *act* right. We must avoid everything that we know to be wrong, and entreat God to overcome the evil feelings of our hearts, (which we cannot subdue,) and to enable us to do that which is pleasing in his sight.

January 30

Matthew 3:13-17. *The baptism of Jesus.*

One of the most wonderful events ever transacted on this earth is recorded in this passage.

We behold the Son of God in great humility coming to be baptized by John, as though he had been a sinner—and we behold the Everlasting Father and the Spirit, honoring him with unspeakable honor. Well might John be surprised to see the Son of God apply to him for baptism! He objected to baptizing one so much greater than himself, saying, "I have need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" It appears, therefore, that John knew who he was; yet we read in John's gospel (1:33) that he knew him not; God therefore must have made John know him *at the time* of the baptism. It may appear strange that John would not have known him, as Elizabeth, his mother, was the cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus; but then we must remember that they had been brought up in distant parts of the land. God had wise reasons for not permitting them to be known to each other until this time. If John had known Jesus before as a relative, it might then have been supposed that he had been deceived by Jesus—but since that he had never seen him, no deception could be suspected.

How full of reverence and humility were John's words—"I have need to be baptized by you,"—*baptized*, not with *water*, (for Jesus baptized none in this manner,) but with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The angel had declared that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth; still John felt his need of the Savior's baptism. Does not this teach us that we *all* need this baptism continually? Though we have been baptized with water, though we have even undergone a change of heart, yet still we need fresh supplies of the Holy Spirit. If we *feel* our need, we shall come often to Jesus, that he may baptize us. Blessed Jesus, we have need to be baptized by you!

What was the Savior's *reason* for coming to be baptized? He condescends to explain it—"Thus, it is necessary for us to fulfill all righteousness." It was necessary that Jesus, when he was a man, should be baptized, for he came to do *all* God's commands, that by *his* obedience many might be made righteous. Whom did our Savior mean by *us*, when he said, "It becomes *us* to fulfill all righteousness?" Himself and John. It was necessary that John should do the will of God, and baptize him whose shoes he was not worthy to untie. True Christians

feel their unworthiness to do anything for their Master, but this feeling ought not to hinder them from doing God's work; for they would not be *fit* to do it, unless they *felt* their exceeding sinfulness.

Immediately after the baptism, the Savior came out of the water. We find in Luke's gospel, what he was doing as he came out; he was *praying!* When sinners were baptized, they confessed their sins; but he had no sins to confess.

After he had humbled himself by being baptized, his Father exalted him by sending the Holy Spirit down upon him, and by declaring, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

What must John the Baptist have felt when he beheld this scene! Here were no terrors like those on Mount Sinai; here were no thunders nor lightnings; no blackness, and darkness, and tempest—all was light, and peace, and love. It is wonderful to think, that a mortal man would have been permitted to witness such a display of the divine glory. But as John was appointed to direct men to the Savior, it was right that he should receive the strongest proof of his being the Son of God. And could he have received *stronger* proof than he did receive on the banks of Jordan? Impossible.

What exceeding love is expressed in the words, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!" This declaration must have comforted the heart of the man of sorrows—though the world hated him, he knew the Father loved him. Would it comfort us to think the Father loved us, and was well pleased with us? If we believe in Jesus—he *does* love us, and is well pleased with us for *his sake!* All believers are "accepted in the beloved!" What sweet words are those! They have sustained the people of God in a dying hour. How could any man bear the thought of entering God's presence, were it not for the assurance that the Father will receive him in the name of his own beloved Son!

January 31

Matthew 4:1-7. *The temptation of Christ.*

We have read of the great honor that Christ received at his baptism. Immediately afterwards, he was exposed to terrible sufferings and temptations. It is God's method often to prepare his people for great sufferings, by granting them great consolations beforehand. Jesus was "led up by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." He fasted forty days and forty nights. He was alone amid the wild beasts of the desert; as it is written in Mark 1:13, "he was with the wild beasts." This wilderness was probably the same as that through which Moses led the Israelites. We are told in Deut. 8:15, what kind of a place it was; a place "wherein were fiery serpents, scorpions, and drought, where there was no water." The prophet Jeremiah calls "it a land of deserts and pits; of the shadow of death,

that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt," (2:6.) But what was more terrible than all, when Jesus was there, Satan came to assail him with temptations. He had just heard the Father's voice; he had just been anointed by the Holy Spirit! Behold him now in this horrible place, with his more horrible enemy, Satan.

Now observe, that it is said that he was led up *by the Spirit*. It was his Father's will that he should meet Satan as an enemy in battle. He had come into the world to destroy his works, and to bruise this serpent's head, according to God's threatening to Satan in paradise. "The seed of the woman shall bruise your head." Satan probably hoped to overcome Jesus, as he had overcome Adam and Eve; but though he could not overcome him, he did give him pain; for it is written, concerning Christ, "He *suffered* being tempted," (Heb. 2:18.) It will be very interesting for us to consider his temptations, especially as Satan still offers the same temptations to Christ's people that he once offered to Christ himself. These temptations will show us how he tries to draw away those who have escaped from his chains.

The world in general are led captive by him according to his will; he finds it easy to keep them in his power; but O! what pains he takes to regain his sway over those who have left his service!

Let us consider the first temptation that he offered to our Savior. He said, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." Observe the *time* at which he made the proposal; when Jesus was *hungry*. Why did Jesus refuse to turn the stones into bread? Because his Father had engaged to provide him with bread; therefore he needed not to use his divine power in supplying his own needs.

Satan often attacks the people of God in times of deep affliction. When they are severely diseased, or when their children are dying, or when they know not how to provide themselves with food, or when they are disappointed or unkindly treated; then the malicious fiend insinuates hard thoughts of God into the mind. He would gladly make them believe that God has forgotten them, that their troubles will never end, that there is no way of escape, and that they must try to help themselves, even by some *wrong* means. If there seems a way of helping themselves by doing something not quite upright, not quite open, or honest, not quite according to the commands of God, Satan advises them to take that way, assuring them, that if they are too conscientious, they will never get out of their difficulties.

But how did our Savior overcome this temptation? He referred to the word of God, and answered from Deut. 8, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." What is the meaning of this passage? It declares that the word of God is more than bread; bread cannot keep us alive, when God chooses that we shall die; but God can keep us alive

without bread, when He chooses that we shall live. We know also that God can make us happy in the greatest affliction; but nothing can make us happy, if God wills that we shall be unhappy. Have we not seen people miserable in the midst of abundance, and happy in the midst of pains and losses? Let us never listen to Satan's wicked counsel, when he would induce us to sin that we may escape from suffering. He is deceiving us. When the sin is committed, we shall find ourselves in a far worse case than we were before.

The second temptation was exactly the opposite of the first. Satan took Christ to the pinnacle, or high tower of the temple in the holy city of Jerusalem. He there tried to deceive him by quoting Scripture; he referred to a passage in Ps. 91, "He shall give his angels charge concerning you;" but he left out the words, "To keep you in all your ways." Yet these are very important, and ought not to be left out. God will command his angels to guard the Christian from harm *in all his ways*, that is, in all the ways in which he *ought* to walk. Had Jesus cast himself down from the temple, he would not have been walking in God's ways, but in Satan's ways.

This is the manner in which Satan tries to deceive the Christian, when he sees him full of confidence in God. He then tempts him to presumption—he would persuade him that he need not watch and pray, but that he may go into worldly scenes, and receive no harm. He says to him, "Has not God promised to keep you from falling, and to preserve you to his heavenly kingdom? Has he not said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you?'" Thus he perverts the word of God.

This is a very dangerous moment for the Christian. Let him then remember what his Lord replied to Satan; these words from Deuteronomy, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God." We tempt God to forsake us, when we thus presume upon his promises. The apostle says, in 1 Cor. 10, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall." We have heard of Peter's sin—he ventured to follow Jesus into the palace of the High Priest, and to warm himself among the ungodly servants, thinking that he could never deny his Master; thus he tempted the Lord, and he *did* deny him.

What dangers there are on the right hand and on the left! One moment we sink into distrust; the next, soar into presumption. Let us watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation!

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