

## THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD LABOURERS

Sometimes known as the "Parable of the Penny", this story of Jesus in Matt. 20. 1-16, has been explained in a variety of different ways, but not often is it observed that its interpretation is closely connected with the incident of the rich young ruler recounted in the previous chapter. The division is at an unfortunate point; the passage from verse 16 of chap. 19, to verse 16 of chap. 20, is all one account and should have constituted a chapter by itself. It tells of the rich young ruler—some think there is evidence that he was Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary—who came to Jesus asking what good thing he should do that he might have eternal life. Jesus told him to sell all that he had, to give to the poor, to take up his cross and to follow Him. At that the young man, we are told, went away sorrowful, "for he had great possessions". And Jesus took advantage of the incident to warn his disciples with what difficulty a rich man must enter the Kingdom of God, a warning that puzzled them greatly, so greatly that they asked "Who then can be saved?" To their still material minds it seemed inconceivable that if the rich, with all their advantages, could not attain the Kingdom, any other man should do so. But Peter, with his habitual quickness of mind and impulsiveness of speech, came out with a blunt enquiry as to what *they*, who had given up all for His sake should have therefore, and by then it was becoming apparent that some sound instruction was necessary; so Jesus told this story of the man who hired labourers to work in his vineyard and what happened to them at the end of the day.

We shall miss the point of the parable, therefore, unless we bear in mind that it is intended to teach the disciples the truth regarding this matter of ultimate rewards in the heavenly Kingdom. *Here* is a rich man who was debarring himself from entrance because he would not give up his riches; *there* were other men who would attain to glory and power in that Kingdom because they had given up their scanty possessions. But there was something else beside. They had "followed" Jesus: the rich men had failed to follow. The sacrifice of worldly possessions was not of itself enough; there must also be the willing acceptance of the life of labour "with Him" if the desired end was to be reached.

And above all things, the idea of, and the thought of, personal advancement in front of one's fellows must be eradicated from the mind; there can be no ruling over one another, no taking precedence or assuming superior glory, in the Kingdom. All will be brethren, and there will only be one Master, Christ. The story of the request made by the mother of James and John, that they should be given special favour in the Kingdom, comes immediately after the parable and probably not without design. The princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them, said Jesus, but it shall not be so among you. So the parable of the vineyard came readily to the Saviour's lips in furtherance of His purpose to show His disciples the better way.

"For the Kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard." It is vintage time; the husbandman has tended his vines assiduously throughout the growing season with the help of his own regular servants—he had a steward according to vs 8 and therefore must have had servants in house and field—and has brought his crop to fruition. But the vintage must be gathered quickly and he needs additional temporary help, and so, as morning dawns—6 a.m. in the East—he goes to the marketplace where the casual labourers congregate and engages sufficient men to complete the work. It is important to the right understanding of the story that this point be appreciated; *the householder engaged all the labourers he needed*, at the normal time for starting work. Other employers would be there too, engaging men for their requirements, until the demand was satisfied, and then, just as in later and, to us, more familiar days, the unfortunate ones who had not been engaged would resign themselves to another day of idleness and loss of wages.

But the particular employer who occupied the centre of the stage in this little drama which Jesus, with His consummate skill, was working out for the benefit of the enthralled disciples, was not as other employers. He left his own duties and went out into the market place again about nine o'clock and, probably

as he anticipated, found men standing about idle, not having been hired. He had no need of them, but—he sent them into his vineyard to labour, and they evidently went gladly. At noon, when the work of the day was half-way through, he went again, and found more men idle, and sent them in similarly. *Came three o'clock in the afternoon* and the sun swiftly dropping down the western sky, and yet a little knot of men, renewed hope in their faces, wending their way to the householder's vineyard for three hours' work before the night came in which no man could work. Truly a strange but a welcome employer to have this altogether unusual concern for the unemployed and hopeless.

The disciples must by now have been wondering toward what this story was leading them. They were of the working classes themselves, and they had no illusions about the characters of employers. Enough is known—from sources quite outside the Scriptures—of the economic conditions of our Lord's time to establish the fact that what in certain circles to-day is glibly termed the "reservoir of labour"—meaning the permanent proportion of unemployed among the workers—was just as much a part of the system then, and an employer who went out of his way to employ, and pay, labourers he did not really need was just as much a rarity then as it is now. *No wonder the disciples were interested.* But Jesus had not finished the story yet.

Five o'clock came; the eleventh hour. In sixty more minutes the sun would sink suddenly below the western horizon and darkness would drop down, quickly and completely. The day's work was virtually over; and yet here is the householder, once again in the market place, asking the few remaining stragglers why they stand there all the day idle. *"Because no man hath hired us"* they answer, perhaps resentfully, perhaps wonderingly. A strange question to ask; he knew very well why they thus stood. But the rejoinder was stranger still. *"Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive."* They needed no further encouragement, and an hour later were standing before the steward, probably thankful for the small moiety of payment they expected for one hour's more or less nominal labour. They received, each one of them, a full day's wage!

By now more than one or two of the other labourers were convinced that this householder was not altogether accountable for his actions. A whole *denarius* for one hour's work; such a thing was unheard of! It looked as if

some of them who had been fortunate enough to start earlier in the day would take small fortunes home to their families. They stepped up in their turn, covetous eyes seeking to discern what their fellows were getting, and—*"they received every man a denarius"*.

Of course, there was disappointment, and *expostulation, and talk of injustice.* The householder was called to the scene, and listened to their complaint. Quietly he told them that none of them had suffered loss; all had received the amount for which they had bargained, the amount they had expected, the amount which, if commonly accepted observation be true, was the normal day's wages for a labourer at the time. True, they had worked longer and harder than had the late comers, but it was their good fortune that they had obtained work and in the ordinary way the others' misfortunes that they were workless. Their material needs were the same; their families at home needed food and clothing in equal measure, and the householder had recognised that fact by giving to each, *not according to his accomplishment, but according to his need,* and without injustice or hardship to any one of them.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like that, said Jesus to his listeners. They sat round him, chins supported in cupped hands, flowing robes gathered closely, seeing in the mind's eye *that coming day in which they would sit, each on a throne, twelve men on twelve thrones in all, judging the tribes of Israel, and the rich man who could not find it in him to sacrifice wealth and position now, bereft of it then, taking his place amongst the crowd.* A group of men, some having worked long and hard, others for a little time only, all receiving the same at the end, without distinction in position or reward. *The Kingdom of Heaven is like that!* What Kingdom of Heaven is this?

Evidently from the fact that the parable is given in consequence of the disciples' question regarding future reward for present sacrifice, it has reference to the spiritual phase of the Kingdom of God in the next Age, the Messianic Age, when the Church of Christ, glorified and associated with Him in the spiritual realm "beyond the Veil" will have ceased from their labours in the vineyard of this Age and appeared to receive their "hire", the "reward" of their consecrated walk before Him. The householder, of course, is the Lord Himself, going out himself to find disciples who will serve His interests in this world. His "going out" thus continues during the whole of this Gospel Age, from Pentecost until the

setting up of the earthly Kingdom, but the third hour, sixth hour, and so on must refer, not to the early, middle and late centuries of the Age, but to stages in the lives of individuals at which the call comes to them. Quite obviously no one has laboured from Pentecost until to-day, for life does not last so long. But some there are, and such there have been at every point of time throughout the Age, to whom the call came in youth or early life, and who heard and obeyed the call and laboured zealously and faithfully until old age ended their labours. These are they who were sent into the vineyard "early in the morning". Others receive the call in middle life; these are they who respond to the householder's invitation at the third or the sixth or even the ninth hour. And some are already in the evening of life when they give themselves in whole-hearted surrender to the Lord Christ; they come in at the eleventh hour but the Lord has work for them to do and a work to do in them.

So it will be, then, when the hope of every true believer is realised, and the "General Assembly of the Church of the Firstborn, whose names are written in heaven" has become an accomplished fact. We shall meet our fellows and our companions of the pilgrim way, those that have gone before us into the glory land, the saints and martyrs and prophets and apostles of earlier times, and we shall find that we are all equally citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, thinking no more of station or rank, of preferment one above another, but all rejoicing together in the wondrous companionship and over-lordship of Christ our Head, the heavenly Bridegroom. "With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought; they shall enter into the King's palace." The "penny" which each one will receive is the prize of eternal association with the Lord Jesus Christ in the glory of His Kingdom, and before the presence of the Heavenly Father; and, associated with that for the duration of the Messianic Age, the inestimable privilege of working together with the Saviour for the conversion of the world.

Some will ask what there may be in this happy state to correspond with the "murmuring". Is there to be murmuring in heaven, amongst the redeemed and glorified saints? The idea is both absurd and unthinkable. Jesus meant something quite different from that. His story showed the disciples what *they* were making of the calling to which he had called them, and was yet to call others. *They*

were the men who were manifesting the spirit of self-assertiveness, who wanted to be greater than others in the Kingdom, who even quarrelled among themselves as to which of their little band should be greater than the rest. That is the spirit, said Jesus in effect, which would lead you at the end to murmur against Me when I finally apportion the crowns of life, in the Kingdom. It was a warning, and the subsequent history of the disciples shows us that, though in some cases the lesson was long in being learned, at the end it was learned, and well learned.

Conrad Noel suggested (in his "*Life of Jesus*", 1937) that this parable was given to define the "economic" basis of life in what he called the Divine Commonwealth and what we call the Messianic Kingdom. He sees here an expression of the Divine intention that all men shall take their place in the world's work and labour according to their ability, and receive of that provision which the world affords, according to their need. There is no doubt that the principle is there. Jesus may very well have intended some such thought as a secondary teaching, applicable, not to the Church, the members of which will then be exalted to the heavens, but to the world of men, engaged in learning those new laws of life which are to be promulgated during the Messianic Age; for "*Out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem*". It is perfectly true that in that day men will have to learn the same lesson that the disciples of Christ are learning now. All, whether in heaven or on earth, who enter into everlasting life in that perfect condition which lies beyond the dethronement of sin and death, will give of their best and rejoice with their fellows in absolute equality of citizenship. Each will seek the welfare of other; all will be servants of all, and in that blessed relationship, hallowed for all time by One who Himself came to serve and minister, will enter into their reward.

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There is no beautifier of the complexion, or form, or behaviour, like the wish to scatter joy and not pain around us.

R. W. Emerson

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There is nothing in the world so much admired as a man who knows how to bear unhappiness with courage.

Seneca

judgment; this entire Messianic Kingdom is a process of trial and judgment to those who are its subjects; by its close all will have come to the crisis of decision and made their choice—for God and His ways, or against.

That decision and that outcome is necessary, and it is final and irrevocable, because in a manner we as finite terrestrial beings cannot begin to understand, life, continuing life, eternal life, can only come to us through Christ. He is the centre and pivot of all creation and on Him all things depend. "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1. 17). That is why the New Testament insists that acceptance of the Lord Christ and union with Him is essential to salvation, a dogma that would seem unnecessarily severe were practice of the good life and the repudiation of evil all that was necessary. The whole living creation is a unity, each individual constituting a personal identity in his own right, an identity preserved by God through death of the organism in one world to resurrection in a new organism in another world, and yet the sum of all created individuals all joined together to constitute a harmonious living union animated by the life which comes from God, through Christ. Said the Apostle Paul to the

Christians at Ephesus, in the endeavour to expound this truth, "he has made known to us . . . the mystery of his will, according to his purpose . . . a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1. 9-10).

This is as far as human mind can penetrate. The possibilities and certainties of the distant future are hidden from us until in the fulness of time we have powers of thought and perception the range of which can take in the scope of those transcendent worlds which lie beyond and above the terrestrial. We can only rest ourselves in that conviction which possessed the great Apostle's Spirit-filled mind when he declaimed "what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived; what God has prepared for those who love him, God has revealed to us through the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2. 9). There is a spiritual understanding of a life and a world yet to be in our experience, which is impressed upon our minds, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and becomes conviction, whilst as yet we cannot visualise its nature and appearance. Says the Beloved Disciple (1 Jno. 3. 2) "It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is".

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## THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

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Publicans - sinners - Pharisees - scribes ! They were all in the audience which listened while Jesus unfolded his story of the self-willed young man who in his arrogance turned away from his home and kindred, tasted to the full all that this world had to offer, and returned at last, chastened and repentant, to the father whose love had never wavered. So human a story it is and so true to everyday life that it has never lost its appeal. Each generation for nearly two thousand years has told and re-told the story; of all the parables of Jesus this one must be the best known to the man in the street. The individual who is neither interested in the New Testament narratives nor claims to know anything about them will readily use the term "prodigal" in everyday conversation with a very definite idea of its meaning. There is something in the story of the returned son's acceptance by his overjoyed father because he came in repentance and contrition that rings true in most men's minds. This is how God must act if He is really God; that is the

sub-conscious thought. If the story had ended with the father sternly turning the returned prodigal away from his doorstep with the admonition "you have made your bed; you must lie on it" there is little doubt that it would never have gained the immortality it now possesses. It is not just that the story has a happy ending; it is because, deep down in the mind of every man, there is embedded the consciousness that this is how a man ought to act. No matter how far he has strayed from the right way, how deeply he has fallen into things shameful and vile, his Father in heaven has never faltered in His love for His erring child and stands waiting for his return—nay, goes out to meet him on the way back. That vital truth colours and illuminates all true Christian theology.

The fifteenth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel sets out in sequence three parables illustrating the Lord's words in Luke 19. 10 "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost". These are: the story of one lost sheep out of one hundred; one lost piece of

silver out of ten; one lost son out of two. The shepherd went out to seek his sheep, and there was joy among his friends and neighbours when he had found it. The young girl searched diligently for the missing coin from her betrothal string, and there was joy among her friends and neighbours when she had found it. But the father did not go out to seek his son; he let him have his way and go whithersoever he wished, but he waited and watched until the lost one began himself to seek the way back, and then he went out gladly to bring him in. And there was more than rejoicing; there was a feast, and music and dancing. Is there a hint here that when man goes out in his own self-will to live his life without God, he is allowed to do so without let or hindrance, but God is always watching and will reach out to reclaim the wanderer just so soon as that self-will shows signs of breaking down? God will coerce no man's will; none will be saved except by the exercise of his own free will, voluntarily and intelligently coming to Christ by repentance and justification by faith, and so into a condition of reconciliation with God. But it is only the first step back that the wanderer must take for himself; after that he finds his father hastening to meet him.

So this young man collected his assets, "*the portion of goods that falleth to me*" (Luke 15. 12) and went his way. In the ordinary way both he and his elder brother would have laboured in the house and on the farm in subordination until their father's death, and then would have inherited half the property each, and each set up on his own. This younger son was impatient, and he did not want to spend all his life on a farm. He wanted to see the world while he was young, and taste some of the world's pleasures which only money could buy and anyway could only be enjoyed by going away to the big city. He mortgaged his future for the present, giving up a life of honest labour which would have laid the foundation for future prosperity, for a brief time of pleasure and indulgence which would come to an abrupt end when his capital was exhausted. Then he would be poor indeed; but of that day he did not stop to think.

There has never been a nation, never a generation since the world began, in which this same drama has not been enacted time and time again. The sequel has always been the same. "*He took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.*" That is always the second stage. Then comes the third "*When he had*

*spent all . . . he began to be in want*". That is the point at which his new-found friends all left him—directly the money ran out. There has been no change in two thousand years—it still works the same way. Now the wanderer is friendless, destitute, hungry and desperate. Now he begins to think of the home he left and the many advantages he had, which he then so lightly esteemed; what would he not give to be back there and have them now! He looks on his old home and his old life in a very different light from that in which he viewed it formerly. That subordination to his father against which he had so chafed; that obligation to take his share of the household duties and farm work which had so irked him; that day-by-day routine so necessary for the orderly conduct of communal life together; he began to see now why these things had to be. He began to realise that he was one unit in a community and could not repudiate his duties and place without prejudicing the welfare of that community. He might have had words come into his mind which were afterwards put on record by the Apostle Paul "*No man liveth unto himself and no man dieth unto himself*". The thought of responsibility came into his mind and it was a thought that had never occurred to him before. And it was then that a great illumination came to him. "*He came to himself*", and there and then he determined to go back home.

How many of us realise that in those five words in verse 17 "*When he came to himself*" is summed up the whole secret of the Divine permission of evil? All too often Christians—even dignitaries of the Church—confess, in reply to questions, that they cannot understand the reason for the existence or permission of evil; it is a profound mystery. It is really nothing of the kind if the Bible is read carefully from Genesis to Revelation and the full import of the Eden story allowed to sink in. "*I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it*" ruminated the Preacher (Eccl. 3. 10) and there is the answer. God did not ordain that man should fall into sin, and the story of Eden shows that man sinned entirely of his own volition; but evil having thus entered the world, God in His wisdom does not restrain it immediately, because it is, under His providence, yielding to mankind lessons of experience just as the prodigal's life of dissipation did to him. The reign of evil has been under Divine control from the start and will persist only for the period God has

ordained, for He has declared "*As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord*" (Num. 14. 21) and the day will certainly come when "*the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together*" (Isa. 40. 5). These promises, and many like them, cannot be ignored; the integrity of the Word of God is bound up with them, and they must surely be fulfilled. Evil and sin will one day be banished from God's creation and all things and all creatures will be at one in Christ. Unto him shall every knee bow, and every tongue confess, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2. 10-11), and that means that not one soul can continue in conscious life into the eternal ages without being reconciled to God. It is literally and terribly true that "*the soul that sinneth, it shall die*" (Ezek. 18. 4; Matt. 10. 28).

It was when the wanderer had repented and started on the way back that his father went out to meet him. The son had the right idea; he was not going to claim the privileges of sonship; he realised that he had forfeited those. He was going to ask merely to be put on the same footing as the servants. He would labour and be obedient, and take his place in the community, but he was not expecting to be reinstated in his former position just as if nothing had happened. The father, for all his love and tenderness, made it plain later on that the returned prodigal could not resume his former position purely on the basis of repentance. When the elder son, coming to the house at the close of day, reproached the father for having received the waster back, he received the answer "*Son . . . all that I have is thine*". (vs. 31). The whole of the father's property would now revert to the elder son, for the younger had already had his share. Whatever the younger son might gain in property in later life must be by his own efforts.

There is something here that demands serious thought. The repentance of one who comes to God is a great thing and there is joy among the angels of heaven over one such sinner that repenteth, but repentance of itself does not fit the converted sinner for his ultimate place in God's eternal creation. The Divine purpose in creating mankind does not envisage human destiny confined to the alternatives of playing a harp or blowing a trumpet to all eternity. Man is created to fill a definite place in creation and has to be fitted and prepared for that place. His experience with sin and evil is only one aspect of that preparation, and after repentance and

reconciliation with God there must be instruction in righteousness and a determined co-operation with God in rooting out the effects of sin from the character, so that at last the man stands as did Adam before his fall, perfect and sinless, but with the advantage, which Adam never had, of experience.

So although the young man came home to a welcome and a feast and merry-making, he came also to hard work and a re-tracing of his steps. He had got to prove himself, to show that his reformation was genuine. He had got to make amends for his misdeeds and to learn that "*what a man soweth, that shall he reap*". But in all the slow process of rehabilitation he had the supporting consciousness of his father's love. He knew that unless it was by his own deliberate wish, his father would never let him go.

That is how God is dealing with man. "*God will have all men to be saved*" said St. Paul in 1 Tim. 2. 4 "*and to come to a knowledge of the truth*". Israel in Ezekiel's day had the Divine message "*I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye*" (Ezek. 18. 32). The story of Jonah, and the Divine purpose to save Nineveh because the Ninevites repented; of Sodom, and the promise to avert the judgment if only ten righteous men could be found in it (Gen. 18. 32), shows that God is actively working to save men, and will save those who come to Him by belief in Christ. But belief in, and acceptance of, Christ is not merely a lip-service verbal assent to his claims, but a coming so completely into harmony with all that He is and all that He does that in all respects the life is transformed and a character built that will stand sinless to all eternity. Such a character is not built in a day. That is why we who are Christ's now have to give diligence to make our calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1. 10), and why God has appointed a day (Acts 17. 31), the thousand year day of the Messianic Age, to reclaim all from among men who can be reclaimed, before the eternal ages of glory of redeemed mankind commence to run their endless course.

The elder brother? He was angry, jealous, resentful that the sinner had been received back home. It was not that he himself would be any the poorer. The entire property was still to be his at the father's death. The younger son still had to make his own way in life. But the elder in his passion for righteousness could not find it in him to admit the younger

*2 different words  
and connotations.*

to take any part nor lot in the happiness of the family home. The youth had sinned; he should be punished for his sin and the punishment should be everlasting. He should be banished for ever from the father's home, repentance or no repentance.

Jesus meant that word for the Pharisees who were listening, those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and relegated the publicans and sinners, whether repentant or not, to Gehenna—Hell. Unhappily the same spirit is still abroad to-day. So many worthy Christians want to see the sinners well and truly punished, rather than that God in His mercy and wisdom should come out to meet them halfway and lead them to a better life. Like the disciples who wanted to call down fire from heaven upon the unbelieving Samaritans, they forget

temporarily of what spirit they are of; a little quiet reflection should be enough to realise the truth of the Lord's words on that occasion "The Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them".

There is a hymn which runs:

*"But men make his love too narrow  
By false limits of their own;  
And they magnify his vengeance  
With a zeal he will not own.  
"For the love of God is broader  
Than the measure of man's mind  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind."*

Those are true sentiments. "It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

### THE SPIRIT OF HOSPITALITY

Among the qualifications for elders Paul specifies "a lover of hospitality", and under his general exhortations to Christians he lists "given to hospitality" (Rom. 12. 13). Peter says, "Use hospitality one to another without grudging", while Heb. 13. 2 reads, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares". The deliverance of Lot out of Sodom depended upon his hospitality to the angels. In Biblical times the practice of entertaining strangers was a very necessary one, when there was no other provision for lodging travellers as there is in modern society.

Hospitality is usually associated with providing food and lodging, but it is by no means limited to this. If we really entertain others we do more than put a meal in front of our guests. We shower love and attention upon them. We do our utmost to make them welcome and to make them feel at home. Indeed so important are these other factors, especially under present-day conditions, that we should not consider it hospitality without them; neither indeed would it be, for this is the very spirit of hospitality.

But the spirit of hospitality is expressed not merely by inviting others to our houses, for this is often done for baser motives. We can invite them into our fellowship and into our

Do our hearts ache for the injustice and oppression that comes before our notice every day? Do our minds cry out in protest at some flagrant example of misery or cruelty inflicted perhaps by heartless men or soulless institutions and governments? Do we long for the wisdom and the power to go out into the

affections, making room for them and their convictions in the spirit of liberty, even though at temporary inconvenience and sacrifice to ourselves. The spirit of hospitality will create in us an earnest desire that we may be able to give some blessing and help to others on their earthly pilgrimage. It will make us generous, not only in what we give, but in what we allow in our judgment and in our treatment of those from whom we may differ in matters of interpretation. We shall have the spirit of Jesus who taught us to pray, "Forgive us, as we forgive".

The hospitality of the widow was put to the test very sorely when Elijah told her to first bake him a cake out of her last scanty handful of meal upon which the lives of her son and herself were depending. But her compliance in faith with this request brought a reward beyond her dreams. The Shunammite woman, whose hospitality freely provided a little chamber for the prophet Elisha, was also greatly blessed by God, who is no man's debtor, and never overlooks the least service done to those who belong to Him. The spirit of hospitality in our hearts, in seeking to give freely of our love and service, will most surely receive generous recompense from the Giver of every good and perfect gift.

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world bringing happiness and health where now there is sorrow and sickness? These are the things that must possess our inward being like a burning fire if we will be of those who in the next Age will come forth armed with all wisdom and power to do these very things.

## **THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST JUDGE**

Luke 18. 1-8

There is a peculiarly modern ring about this story of the man in high office who cared nothing for morality and right dealing. He was there to dispense justice, to defend the innocent and restrain the evil doer. He had a double responsibility; he was accountable both to God and to man. The laws he administered were based on the Divine principles upon which God had made the world and man upon it; they were accepted and professed by men as the true basis of ordered society. It was his duty to put them into effect and enforce them, with all diligence, showing neither fear nor favour, and he had no intention of doing anything of the kind. There is no suggestion that he was dishonest or hypocritical either with himself or with others. He acknowledged his position quite frankly in verse 8. "*I reverence not God, nor regard man*". He administered his office in the way that best suited his own convenience without any regard to the merits of the cases he handled or any thought of responsibility to the mandatory power, of God or of men, from which he derived his authority. Like so many in positions of influence and power to-day, he knew of no reason why his administration should be guided by moral principles or the standards of truth and justice. He enjoyed the benefits and privileges of his position, used his power as he pleased, and governed his actions entirely by expediency. He was not particularly immoral; he was just amoral. And far too many men are like that in this present time of declining religious faith and belief.

A good many have asked why this particularly unpleasant individual should be used by Jesus to illustrate our Father's attitude to the prayers of his disciples. Surely, say some, a better simile could have been found. It might be said in reply that the fact that Jesus did use this picture to point the lesson is sufficient basis to expect some very definite truth embedded therein, for which we do well to seek, and having found, to consider. It is clear that, as in other certain parables, Jesus is teaching by contrast. If this admittedly unrighteous judge is found rousing himself at last to do his duty in consequence of the appellant's importunity, then *how much more* will God, who is not unrighteous, and unlike

this judge, is actively working to give sin-sick humanity the relief they crave, ready to grant deliverance to those who come to him. There is a supplementary question which follows hard on the heels of this answer; if God is indeed so solicitous to save, why is He so long in doing it? That question, and its answer, is also in this parable, but has to be considered in its right place, at the conclusion of the story.

The unjust judge, then, gave no heed to the poor widow's complaint. She may have had justice on her side and might well have been grievously treated by her adversary at law; the judge neither knew or cared. Her complaints went unheeded; her case was never brought up for trial. The judge, to use a modern expression, "couldn't care less". But after a time he was made to care. This widow would not take no for an answer and she would not go away. She knew that justice was available and she knew that she was entitled to justice, and justice she intended to have. She kept on importuning the judge, and at last, tired of seeing her waiting at his door and irritated at the continual repetition of her plea, he bestirred himself to look into her case, to set the machinery of the law in motion, and award her the judgment she sought. Not because he cared one jot for the rights or wrongs of the case; he was completely honest about that. All he wanted was to be rid of the woman and left in peace.

Now the really important factor in this story is the widow's fixed belief that she must eventually obtain her desire, not because the judge was upright, but because her cause was just. A man so candid as this one about his attitude could not but be well-known to his prospective litigants and no one would expect justice or consideration from him, any more than do men in similar cases to-day. The widow pursued the course of action she did on the basis of one fixed principle; the law entitled her to relief and the law must eventually be upheld. It was that fixed inward conviction which sustained her as day after day she renewed her apparently unavailing plea. Eventually her faith was justified and she received her desired judicial award.

"*Continuing instant in prayer*" says the Apostle in Rom. 12. 12. That expression



"continuing instant" has the meaning of dogged perseverance, a tenacious grasp of the thing desired which will not be loosed. Strong, steadfast, immovable. Rotherham translates the first verse of this parable "*as to its being needful for men always to pray and not be faint-hearted*". The essential nature of prayer is communion with God. We commune with God not because of the things we want of him, but because we want to be one with him; in common-union. We desire oneness with God because we have entered into full heart sympathy with his guiding principles for all creation. We, like God, desire above all things to see righteousness universal and evil eliminated, and our desire is because we have come to realise that condition of things to be the only possible basis of enduring life. Therefore "Thy Kingdom Come" is the most fundamental prayer of all and the essence of all prayer. It is because we believe and are persuaded that this ardently desired consummation to the Divine Plan will surely come to pass that we continue in prayer before God. We know in whom we have believed and are persuaded that he is able. Our constantly reiterated prayers serve to strengthen and crystallise our conviction that these things will surely come to pass, just as with the litigant widow the more she pressed for justice the more sure she became that it would be hers eventually.

This is where the other question has to be answered—Why is God so tardy in replying? We know why the widow had to wait so long, but we cannot give that reason in the case of the reality which the parable illustrates. There is no unrighteousness with God, and he is diligent to oversee the interests of the disciples. "*The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears are open unto their cry*" (Psa. 34. 15). Why then the apparent delay? Perhaps Rotherham's comment on verse 7 is enlightening on this aspect of the parable. "*Slow to smite his foes, he seems also slow to save his friends*". Rotherham's own translation of verse 7 gives a new slant to Jesus' words "*Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry unto him day and night, though he bear long with them?*" where Rotherham has it "*though he bear long with regard to them*". Here we come up against that longsuffering of God, his patience and forbearance with sinful man so often exemplified in history. He would have spared Sodom if so few as ten righteous men could have been found there (Gen. 18. 32). He gave the Ninevites every opportunity

and spared them when they repented at the eleventh hour. Even though it means prolonging the reign of evil, and of human misery and death, he defers his arising in judgment until in his wisdom He sees that the iniquity of man is come to the full. So he "bears long" with regard to the cry of his faithful servants because He is working in his own inscrutable way for the salvation of "whosoever will" among his rebellious creatures. That is why there is apparent delay. And that is why faith tends to die. Jesus knew that too. Even although God will avenge, and the faith of those who have waited will be abundantly justified, Jesus knew, as He told his disciples later on, "*because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold*" (Matt. 24. 12). So here, at the close of the parable, He gave voice to the sad question "*Nevertheless when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*" (vs. 8). We need not deduce from these words that Jesus doubted whether at his Return there would be any at all holding still to the faith; the whole tenor of his teaching implies his knowledge that there would be the faithful watching ones ardently waiting for his appearance, not taken by surprise when the event occurred, and ready in every sense of the word to be "changed" in a moment (1 Cor. 15. 51-52) and so associated with him to all eternity. What Jesus did foresee was that in the Time of the End faith in the world at large would be at a very low ebb precisely because of the apparent victory of evil and impotence of righteousness. In the days of the First Advent everybody believed in God, even though in many cases their lives bore little evidence of any real endeavour to walk in his ways. In the days before the First Advent everybody believed in God; and so did nearly all men subsequently until the approach of relatively modern times. Of all ages in world history the last two or three centuries have been by far the most agnostic and atheistic. Faith in God is to-day rapidly vanishing from the earth and from the human standpoint it would almost seem as if the Christian cause is lost. Materialistic writers already talk of the need of a new religion founded on modern knowledge and devised to suit modern needs, to replace Christianity which in their view is archaic and out-worn. Vast sections of the earth's surface are ruled by political systems which have no use for God and openly say as much; by their actions most of the remaining governing powers, whilst still paying lip service, show that they too have little inten-

tion of upholding the principles of Divine rule which God originally instilled in the heart of man. So men conclude that God, if He exists, is either impotent or indifferent.

It is at such a time that God acts. "I tell you" said Jesus "that he will avenge them speedily". When the iniquity of the nations has at length come to the full; when the great Clock of the Ages strikes the hour fore-ordained of God and the time of his Kingdom has come, the prayers of the faithful will be answered, in that revelation of the Son of Man in the glory of his power which will at one and the same time overthrow the powers of evil and introduce all men to the beneficent rule

of the Messianic Kingdom. "Every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together" (Isa. 40. 4-5). This is the thing that must be, that shall be, because it is the right thing, and because evil is inherently unstable and must one day consume away by its own corruption.

The Christian whose faith holds firm in God because he knows that God is, and knows that God is good, is the one who will endure unshaken through the dark days in full confidence that at the last, God will avenge him of his adversary.

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## PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

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One of the most tremendous statements in the New Testament is that in 2 Pet. 1. 4 where the Apostle Peter holds before his readers the prospect of becoming "*partakers of the Divine Nature*". The very idea of the creature sharing the nature of the Creator must appear at first sight so presumptuous that some careful consideration of Peter's words would seem to be very desirable. There comes readily to mind the vivid Biblical contrast between the ambition of Lucifer who aspired to "*be like the Most High*" (Isa. 14. 14) and the serene humility of One who, in taking upon Himself human nature, "*did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped*" (Phil. 2. 6 RSV) and there ought to be a very natural reluctance on our part to read anything into Peter's words which is alien to the relationship which must always exist between the created being and the One who both gives and sustains the continued life of that being.

Nevertheless the words do stand and must be accepted. The word "partaker" here means to share a thing in common, to be, as we would say, joint-participants. Thus it is used in 1 Pet. 4. 13 of those who are "*partakers in Christ's sufferings*" and 1 Pet. 5. 1 "*a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed*". Again it is rendered "*communion*" in Paul's words relating to the celebration of the Last Supper "*the bread which we break is it not the communion*" (participation in) "*of the body of Christ*" (1 Cor. 10. 16). Exalted therefore as the idea may be, there is already something here which the triumphant Christian in the resurrection life does share with God.

It remains therefore to determine just what Peter meant by the expression "Divine nature". Scripture usage does not help a lot, for

the word here rendered "divine" occurs only three times (the others being "divine power" in 2 Pet. 1.3, and, as a noun, "the Godhead" in Acts 17. 29). Like a good many New Testament expressions, the word came from Greek religious thought and was already in everyday use long before Peter used it, "Divine" and "divinity" were terms applied to the attributes of the gods and goddesses of Greece a thousand years before Peter was born. Therefore to every Christian in his day the power of God, however and wherever exercised, was Divine power; the providence of God was Divine providence; the wisdom, the justice, the love, of God, because they were of God, were Divine. And the nature of God was Divine - the Divine nature.

What then is meant, in this connection, by the nature of God? This word *phusis* occurs quite a few times and is used in the same sense as we refer to a person's nature - good, bad, kindly, mischievous - today. It defines the attributes and actions characteristic of a person. Thus we have Rom. 2. 14 "when the Gentiles do by *nature* the things contained in the Law;" Rom. 1. 27 "the men, leaving the *natural* use of the woman;" Eph. 2. 3. "we... were by *nature* the children of wrath even as others;" Gal. 4. 8. "Ye did service unto them which by *nature* were no gods." Thus the Divine nature in this text refers to the elements of God's character, which are all benevolent and beneficent, goodness, righteousness, mercy, forbearance, patience, and, we must not forget, the active characteristics of creativeness, integrity, consistency, far-sightedness, and so on. When Peter holds out before us the prospect of becoming joint-participants in the Divine nature he is telling us that we shall, in all these and many more, be like

er proportion do so between the ages of 15 and 30, by far the larger part of these lose their enthusiasm and discard their profession of faith by the time they reach the middle forties. That is very largely because after the first flush of conversion is over there becomes evident the lack of any real guidance as to what it is all intended to lead. Some go as missionaries and others find an outlet for their ardour in some kind of church activity or social service and the rest are swallowed up again by the world. The dim vision of possible participation in the eternal songs of an everlasting heavenly choir seems a poor climax to the spiritual life which began with the tremendous experience of conviction of sin, repentance, conversion, and reconciliation to God.

The prophets of old soared into their loftiest heights of understanding and gave voice to their most eloquent appeals when their eyes were fixed on the future. The Apostles laid down their clearest definitions of Christian doctrine when they were enabled by the Spirit to range in thought backward to the beginning, and forward to the climax, of the Divine Plan. The whole counsel of God must include a wide and comprehensive view of the eternal purpose of God, and if in our evangelistic work we are really to accomplish that to which we are called, that eternal purpose

must be closely integrated with the call to repentance and reconciliation which admittedly lies always at the foundation of all our work. It is the glory of the Truth that we can speak positively of things which lie beyond the veil of the future, where so many others can only wander in a vague and misty land. It is that same certainty which can give our message the force it had in early days—if only we are truly positive about it. *"He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."*

So much of Christian evangelism to-day holds out as the great attraction of repentance and conversion a kind of deliriously happy life, here and now, in which the possession of Christ evokes an eternal sunshine around all one's affairs. The idea of a calling to sacrifice and suffering is not always stressed as it should be. In the teaching of Jesus it was stressed. *"Through much tribulation shall ye enter the Kingdom."* Perhaps we are on much safer ground if we take Isaiah's words to mean exactly what they say and go out, in the power of our faith and knowledge of the Divine Plan, to preach good tidings unto the meek, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to comfort all that mourn, to give beauty, joy and praise for sadness, mourning and heaviness, *because earth's dark night of sin is nearly at an end, and the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!*

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## **THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD**

Luke 16. 1-12

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"There was a certain man," said Jesus one day, "which had a steward." By no means an unusual statement to make; all rich men had stewards, servants who had been with the family for many years and could be trusted with the duties of the position. The office dated back to very early times, for Abraham himself had a steward, "Eliezer of Damascus" (Gen. 15. 2), and to that steward was entrusted the task of going five hundred miles into Aram-Naharaim to seek a suitable bride for Isaac, the son of Abraham. The responsibilities of the steward were heavy; he administered the whole of his master's estate, saw to his business matters, controlled the routine of the house, supervised the other servants, and had charge of the children until they came of age. (This latter fact is alluded to by Paul when he says in Gal. 4. 1-2: "The heir

as long as he is a child . . . is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father." The word "governors" is the one used elsewhere in the New Testament for "stewards"—*oikonomos*).

But this particular steward, continued Jesus, was dishonest. He neglected his lord's interests and wasted his resources, so that at last he was required to make up his accounts and relinquish his position. And the unjust steward was afraid, afraid for the future. He had made no friends, none to whom he could turn in this hour of adversity; he had lived a life of ease and self-indulgence and forgotten how to labour that he might sustain himself. He had been proud and haughty and now was appalled at the thought of living as a dependent upon the charity of others. "What shall I do?" he asked himself despairingly. "I cannot

dig; to beg I am ashamed." And in searching for a way out of his plight the baseness of his nature came to the top and he saw a way of making himself friends at the eleventh hour, friends who by reason of the obligation under which he would place them might at least give him food and shelter.

In order to understand the story aright we must examine its background. The setting is an agricultural one. The "debtors" who owed oil and wheat were evidently tenants of the lord's land and, as was the custom, paid their rent in kind—an agreed amount of the produce of the land. The previous expression of the steward, "I cannot dig," indicates the same thing; apparently the only manual work which was open to him in the particular community was agricultural. The scene of the story is in the country and not in the city. It would have been the steward's duty to adjudge equitable rents to the tenant farmers who leased the land, and the "hundred measures of oil" and "hundred measures of wheat" probably represented the yearly amount due. (In English measure these equalled approximately 750 gallons of olive oil and one thousand bushels of wheat.) It is sometimes suggested that the steward was executing a good stroke of business for his lord in that he secured payment of some apparently hopeless debts by offering a liberal discount for immediate settlement. Nothing of the kind! The steward, knowing he was shortly to leave his lord's service, was deliberately reducing the tenants' rents and altering the legal documents, the "leases", which stipulated the annual amount to be paid. The word rendered "bill" in "take thy bill, and write fifty" and again in verse 7, refers to such legal contracts which were usual in Jesus' day, as in our own. There is no doubt that the steward had the legal right to adjust the rents when his lord's interests demanded it; but in this instance his action was dictated by his own interests and to his lord's hurt. It may have been legally permissible, but was morally unjustifiable. In this way he hoped to place these tenants under an obligation to him so that he might reasonably expect some consideration at their hands when his stewardship terminated. He evidently did not intend to work for his living if he could find someone to give him hospitality in return for services rendered.

"And the lord" (the steward's master) "commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely"—shrewdly, according to Weymouth and the Twentieth Century versions—"for the children of this world are in their

*generation wiser than the children of light.*" The master was broad-minded enough and sufficient of a "business man" himself, to admit that the unjust steward had shown his own self quite capable of sharp business deals when his own interests were involved. There is no indication that the notice of dismissal was rescinded; he was a rogue, albeit a clever rogue, and he had to go; but the master did at least commend him for his shrewdness as he went.

But Jesus did not commend the man. To think that He did so is completely to misunderstand the parable, and waste a lot of time and ingenuity attempting to demonstrate that the steward was doing a legitimate and right thing. Jesus called him "the unjust steward", and Jesus, by His silence as much as by His sequel to the parable, pronounced His own condemnation upon this and all similar actions which are so often justified by the glib saying "business is business".

The story was ended. Turning now upon His disciples with a swift transition of thought, He said, perhaps with a vehemence greater than was His wont. "And yet I say unto you, make friends for yourselves out of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when it fails, those friends may receive you into everlasting habitations". The verse has been paraphrased a little in order to bring out its meaning. Jesus probably spoke in Aramaic, the language of Galilee—at any rate, "mammon" is an Aramaic word—and the account was written by Luke in Greek. This verse has suffered a little in the process and is not altogether easy to follow in the Authorised Version. The conjunction "and" (*kai* in Greek) often has the meaning of "and yet" or "and so" when rhetorical emphasis is involved, as in this case, and "of" is *ek*, "out of". "Mammon" is a word indicating worldly wealth or riches of any kind, and the expression "when ye fail" is more correctly rendered "when it (i.e. the mammon of unrighteousness) fails".

The disciples, then, were to do, not what the steward had done, but what he had not done. He had the "mammon of unrighteousness", worldly riches, power, and opportunity, entrusted to him, but he had not used it to make for himself true friends who could be relied upon to stand by him in the day of adversity. He had used it for his own selfish ends instead. Then when the day that it failed him came, he was compelled to resort to very questionable tactics to ensure his future comfort, with no real guarantee even then that his end would be achieved. Now that,

said Jesus in effect, may be all very well for the world. They order their daily lives in that way and they fully expect to do such things or have such things done to them and they call it "business". In their own day and generation they are shrewder than the children of light; but it is a shrewdness that will avail them nothing in the day when this world, and the fashion of it, passes away. But I say to *you*, you whose lives are given over to a higher and a holier purpose, use the possessions, influence or worldly opportunities you may have in such fashion as to win for yourselves friends in the heavens, so that when the worldly mammon fails, as fail it must at last, you will be welcomed with joy into an everlasting home.

Whilst the disciples were thinking that out, Jesus drove home the principle which His story was intended to illustrate. "*He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much*" (vs. 10). The extent of our faithfulness to the exceeding great privileges and responsibilities which God intends His consecrated children to hold and administer in the coming Age when the saints "reign with Christ" is measured by the degree of their faithfulness toward God in the administration of such worldly "mammon" as we may be possessed of now. If we have not placed it all on the altar and henceforth used it in the interests of God and His Kingdom, then we are not likely to be any more faithful when the day for "greater works" has dawned. "*If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?*" How could we expect God to do so in such case?

"It is required of stewards", says Paul in 1 Cor. 4. 2, "that a man be found faithful". He was thinking of the stewards of his own day—perhaps even of this very parable, which must have been quite well known to him. We, the disciples of Jesus, are all stewards, and it is required of us all that we make good use of our stewardship while we have the opportunity, and not wait until the end of the day of grace before we commence thinking about

it. The Parable of the Talents tells us that, as also the story of the rich young ruler who wanted to gain eternal life but not in a fashion that was going to cost him anything. And that story is repeated so often in these latter days. It is so easy to spend a few years in the first flush of enthusiasm for "the Truth", learning the doctrines of the faith and becoming familiar with the Holy Scriptures, accustomed to the routine of regular meetings and even perhaps the discharge of our duties falling to elders in the church, and then, having attained that stage, begin to devote increasing attention to a "career"—as if any earthly career matters to the child of God—or to success in business—as if any earthly business counts for aught in the sight of the Great King—or to any other of the hundred and one earthly interests which the Devil is always so industriously placing in the pathway of the consecrated. Jesus, knowing all this, told His disciples "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts (desires) of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful" (Mark 4. 19). How true are those words, exemplified in the lives of Christians who for a time did "run well" but failed at the last.

To-day more than ever we need to take this parable to heart. There has been so much disappointment and disillusionment. So many things expected have not come to pass. As with Peter and the others after the Crucifixion, there is a tendency to go back to the fishing-nets and make the best of the world as it now is, hoping as we do so that we can fit into our place in the Kingdom when at length it does come.

And of course—we cannot. Unless we have been constantly and tirelessly faithful in all respects to the unseen things whilst they remain unseen, we shall not see them when at length they become revealed to the watching ones, and faith is swallowed up in sight. If we do not make heavenly friends *now* by our use of the earthly mammon, we shall not be of those who, when *it* fails, will be received with joy into the everlasting habitations.

This world is too big a ship for us to guide. I know from the way she swings from larboard to starboard that there is a strong hand at the helm. Be patient. God's clock strikes but once or twice in a thousand years; but the wheels all the while keep turning. Over the caravansary of Bethlehem, with silver tongue, it struck one. Over the University of

Erfurt, Luther heard it strike nine. In the rockings of the present century it has sounded eleven. Thank God! It will strike twelve.

*Author unknown*

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Whoever helps us to think kindly of another aids the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Daniel could not have failed to reflect that he was re-tracing the very steps of his forefather Abraham, in the reverse direction. This was the road by which Abraham had come from Ur of the Chaldees, following the river Euphrates past Babylon and up to Haran, and, when his father Terah was dead, down through Syria into Canaan. Abraham, obeying God's call, had left the luxury and glitter of that pagan land for the simplicity and purity of a pastoral life in the place to which God had led him. Here had he lived and died, his son Isaac lived and died, and the twelve tribes of Israel grown into a nation. Now this young lad was called upon to leave the hills and valleys, the tree-clad mountains and rushing streams, the vineyards and olive-yards, the orange groves and pomegranates, of this hallowed country where God had put his name and planted his chosen people, for a land of great and luxurious cities, gigantic temples and magnificent palaces, wide rivers and straight-cut canals, busy with the trade and commerce of many nations. Instead of the chaste and dignified worship of God Most High he was to witness every form of debased idolatry, the allegiance and reverence of the

people given freely to images of gold and silver and wood and stone—objects that could neither see, nor hear, nor speak. Like his friend and teacher, Jeremiah (10. 4-5) he might say of their idols "They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not; they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good". Abraham was called to come away from this place and be separate from the unclean things: Daniel was called to go back among them. Surely the ways of God are mysterious and past finding out! Daniel must have wondered what purpose God could have in sending him to such a place, what usefulness a life spent in these surroundings could have for him. And as the towering walls of the world's greatest city loomed up before him the lad's young heart must have been lifted to God in earnest supplication that, in the unknown life which he must now face, his faith and loyalty might never give way.

(To be continued)

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## PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

Matt. 25. 1-13

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Jesus had nearly finished telling his disciples how they, or their successors, were to recognise the imminence of his Second Advent. A long series of signs had been unfolded to them as they sat together on the Mount of Olives, signs which manifestly required fervent expectation and constant watchfulness if the joy of realisation was to be attained. Jesus had not given them any indication as to whether his return was to be expected in their own lifetimes or not; He had, in fact, said that He himself did not yet know "of that day and hour". Only the Father knew, therefore it was incumbent upon all who would not be taken by surprise "at his appearing" to be watchful. "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."

In order to emphasise that injunction Jesus gave a set of five parables, each one drawn from a different sphere of life but all designed to inculcate, from their various viewpoints, the need for watchfulness. The five are, first, the parable of the days of Noah (Matt. 24. 36-42; Luke 17. 25-37); second, the parable of the goodman of the house (Matt. 24. 43-44; Luke 12. 39-40); third, the parable of the faithful and evil servants (Matt. 24. 45-51;

Luke 12. 42-48); fourth, the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25. 1-13); and fifth, the parable of the talents (Matt. 25. 14-30). There are in fact two more parables of watchfulness, one being that of the man taking a far journey (Mark 13. 34), which may be merely another version of the parable of the talents, and the other, that of the men awaiting their lord's return from the wedding (Luke 12. 36-38), which is very much akin to the story of the ten virgins and may owe its inspiration to the same source. Jesus may have told both stories on the same occasion and one been preserved by Matthew, the other by Luke.

The lesson that is common to all these parables is watchfulness. "Watch, for ye know not what hour your lord doth come." In a very special sense this watchfulness is necessary at the end of the Age, when the time is at hand for the fulfilment of "all things written". That this particular parable is intended to be of special application to the time of the Lord's union with his Church at his Second Advent is clear from the opening word "then". "Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom." When is this

"then"? It is necessary to go back into the preceding chapter for the answer. It is at the time when verse 37 has become true and the statements of verses 38-51 apply. As the days of Noah *were*, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man *be*. For as in the days that were before the flood" . . . and so on; "Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened . . ." Although the principle of watchfulness is one that has been sustained throughout the Age, the setting of the parable, that of the bridegroom returning to his house after the marriage at the bride's home, is one that renders it especially appropriate to the time of the "marriage of the Lamb", and there is no doubt that Jesus intended it to be so received.

What then did Jesus have in mind when, in the course of a quite long discourse enriched with a number of eloquent illustrations on watchfulness, He looked round upon his circle of hearers and told them that the Kingdom of Heaven in *that day*, the day of the Second Advent, would be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. First must be considered the manner in which Jewish marriages were conducted in the time of our Lord. The actual ceremony was performed in the house of the bride's father, the bridegroom being escorted thither accompanied by a triumphal procession consisting principally of his men friends. After the marriage had been solemnised there was a ceremonial meal which formed an important part of the proceedings and which was continued until nightfall. Then the bridegroom, accompanied by his bride, set out for his own home, at the head of a joyous procession. In the meantime—and this is where this parable has its place—the female relatives of the bridegroom, and their friends, had assembled at the bridegroom's house awaiting the news that he had set out on his journey back. If the celebrations at the bride's house had become protracted, as was possibly often the case, they may have had to wait for several hours after dark before the expected message arrived: "the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him". The waiting girls and women then set out with their torches to meet the oncoming procession, and so returned to the bridegroom's house, upon which the wedding feast commenced, a feast which in more ancient times was kept up for seven or even fourteen days, although in our Lord's time it was usually restricted to three.

To disregard an invitation to such a feast, or to be late for its commencement, was considered an unforgivable insult. There is an

allusion to this fact in the parable of the marriage of the king's son (sometimes called the parable of the wedding-feast) in Matt. 22. 1-14. The failure of the "foolish virgins" to be ready at the critical moment placed them in the same category as the man who, for whatever reason, failed to don his wedding garment. They all, with him, were excluded forever from the privileges and joys of the feast.

Apart from this parable the only clear allusion to this marriage procedure that is found in the Scriptures is in the account of Jacob's marriage to Leah. That story as recorded in Gen. 29. 21-27, shows that the seven days of the feast followed the actual marriage. A more detailed account of the same custom is found in the Book of Tobit, a book which dates from only a few centuries before the Lord's own day and therefore probably reflects fairly accurately the manner in which the ceremonial was performed in his day. In chapter 20 of Tobit there is the account of the marriage of the Israelite youth Tobias to the Israelite maiden Sara, and of the fourteen day wedding feast that followed the ceremony. And another reference, not so detailed but evidently having the same basis, is that which is enshrined in our Lord's own words "*ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he shall return from the wedding*".

So the ten virgins in their waiting may very well picture all who now wait for the consummation of their hope in Christ. The great event to which they were looking was not the arrival of the bridegroom at the house of the bride's father to claim his bride, but the return to his own, or to his father's house, with his bride, for the wedding feast. If this teaches anything, it is that our minds should be directed, not so much to the *moment* of the return of our Lord from heaven to gather his saints, but to the heavenly wedding feast which *follows* the union of Christ and his Church, the entry into the Father's presence and the "shining forth as the sun in the Kingdom of the Father.

"While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." There was nothing blame-worthy in this—provided that they had made all necessary preparations so that when aroused by the call they could immediately go out to meet the coming one. But some had not made their preparations. They had not been careful to secure a sufficient supply of oil for their lamps. These "lamps" were torches, a mass of rags soaked in oil and tied to the top of a long stick or pole. They were

kept alight by pouring oil every now and again over the mass from a vessel which was carried. With these torches they escorted the bridegroom, and it was this "torchlight procession" which was the reason and purpose of their vigil.

And the foolish virgins missed, not only the triumphal reception of the bridegroom, but also the joys of the subsequent feast! This is the climax of the parable. Even whilst the call was fresh in their ears and their more prudent companions were setting out to meet the coming one they found themselves without oil. There had been plenty of time to have accumulated a sufficient supply, but now, at the last moment, they were without, and their hastily lighted torches, quickly lapping up that with which they had originally been soaked, were already "going out". There was only one thing that could be done; haste to the sellers of oil—it might be an unusual proceeding to knock up the shop-keeper in the middle of the night but probably the occasion would be held to justify the proceeding and anyway business was conducted on considerably more informal lines than at present—and hope to be back in time to meet the procession before it arrived at the bridegroom's house. They were evidently unfortunate in their quest—perhaps the shop-keeper was not very accommodating after all and they had to wait until early morning before he would open for business—for when at length they did arrive back the feast had been in progress for some time and . . . the door was shut.

The unbelievable thing had happened. They were too late; they were outside. The story tells that they knocked for admission, but—although it does not say so—probably without any real hope, for they knew the custom, and it was doubtless without surprise that they heard the fateful words "I know you not".

That is the end of the parable. It closes on this note of finality. Whatever happened to the foolish virgins afterward, one thing is crystal clear. They never entered the wedding feast. Their omission debarred them for ever from those joys. And, turning to his disciples pondering over this simple little story, perhaps familiar to some of them in their own experience, Jesus drove home the lesson He wanted to impress. "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh."

To-day, that injunction is more than ever vital. In the early years of our Christian walk,

especially when the movement with which we may have been associated was prosperous and thriving, it was easy to be zealous and active in the Master's service, alert to observe every sign or fulfilling prophecy and eager to absorb more and more of the knowledge of the Truth. In later years there is a growing tendency to take things for granted, to slip back into the comfortable condition of the so-called "established Christian", and regard the promise of his coming as of less importance than was at one time thought, or at least to be still a long way off. One tends then to forget that the Father is very busy even now calling out of the nations a people for his Name, selecting and training individuals for the mighty work of converting the entire world in the next Age, and that if we aspire to be included in that company and be assigned to that service we cannot afford to relax our vigilance one iota. If the final call, when it comes, finds us unready, it will pass us by, and by the time we have gathered to ourselves our lost zeal and faith and endeavoured to make up for lost time, it will be too late. The door will be shut; the "marriage of the Lamb" an accomplished fact, and the "General Assembly of the Church of the Firstborn" a completed body. Whatever may then happen to us in the future, to whatever sphere of life and activity the Divine providence may assign us, it will always be true that we have missed the prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus, because we were unready.

Our hearing and reception of this call does not depend upon our head knowledge to an undue degree, for the Lord is looking primarily for qualities of the heart. It is needful that we are made aware of the significance of the times in which we live; without that we are likely grievously to err in our reading of the Divine Plan and Will for us. (It is important that we hold a clear understanding of the object and the manner of our Lord's return; else we shall be deceived by looking for the wrong thing even although we are looking at the right time.) But above all things we need to attain and maintain that Christian maturity of character, that inflexible resolve to do and dare all things for Christ, that resolute enmity towards all the manifestations of evil that now surround us, that stamp us as being "of Christ", that proclaim us as being "his". Thus, when the call comes, we shall not only know him; He will also know us; and with joy and triumph we shall both meet him in the way, and enter in with Him to the marriage.



## **THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING GARMENT**

Matt. 22. 1-14

This is one of the "dispensational parables", drawing a contrast between the two great ages of this "present evil world" during which God is preparing his agencies for the work of world conversion which is the purpose of the third age, the "new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 13. 13). There is personal instruction for the individual Christian, in the fate of the man who rejected the proffered wedding garment; there is also illumination on the outworking of the Divine purposes in this description of an invitation that was rejected by those to whom it was at first offered, so that the honour passed to others who did accept it.

A certain king negotiated the marriage of his son and invited guests to the resultant marriage feast. That is the basis of the story and the outworking of the sequel shows that the son and his marriage form no part of the parable proper; they serve merely to explain the reason of the feast being held. The story really begins when the king's servants went out to call the guests to the feast. They refused to come. Not only so, some of them ill-treated and even slew the servants, wherefore the king sent his army and destroyed those men's city. Determined that his feast should be replete with guests he commissioned his servants to go out again, this time to the open streets and gather in all who would, without discrimination. So the banqueting hall was filled. At this point, conformably to the customs of Jewry in the First Century, each guest was provided with a white festal garment so that inequalities of social status, as evidenced by distinctions of dress, would no longer be apparent and all the guests would mingle on a common level. One man, arrogant, refused to don the garment, whereupon he was expelled from the festivity, the warmth and light of the banqueting hall, and thrust into the "outer darkness" of the cold Syrian night. That was the story, and its intent and meaning was so obvious to the Pharisees and priests in whose hearing it was spoken that they once again took counsel, how they might limit or destroy Jesus' influence (ch. 22. 15).

Once it is realised that God is working to a plan, and that the successive ages and dispensations of world history are epochs marked out in that plan, the interpretation of this parable is not difficult to find. The first call, to

those invited guests who refused to come, was the call of God to his chosen people of old, Israel, selected at Sinai to be a "*kingdom of priests and a holy nation*" (Exod. 19. 6). After Israel's rejection of the call, a rejection made absolute at the First Advent, a second invitation went out, this time to those who by reason of their acceptance of the call became the Christian Church of this present Age. In this framework the first ten verses of the parable fall easily into place.

The king "*sent forth his servants, to call them that were bidden . . . and they would not come . . . he sent forth other servants . . . but they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise*" (ch. 22. 3-5). In these few words is enshrined the story of Israel's unbelief and hardheartedness. Called to be a covenant people, to declare God's glory to all men, recipients of Divine favour, they rejected all out of hand. The scathing words of the Lord to Isaiah when the youthful prophet received his commission of service were true of Israel all through their history. "*The heart of this people has become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted*" (Isa. 6. 10 LXX). The writer to the Hebrews shows that there is a "rest" awaiting the people of God, but they to whom it was first preached—Israel—entered not in because of unbelief (Heb. 4. 6). The parable is exact even to the sending forth of the servants twice to call in the originally invited guests; one very plain feature of Old Testament history is the distinction drawn between Israel before the Babylonian Captivity and Israel afterwards. That seventy years in Babylon marked a climax of the first Israelitish Age and a judgment involving the destruction not only of their city and Temple but of their whole national existence. Their restoration in the 6th century B.C. gave them a fresh start and a new succession of prophets, the "other servants" of the parable, but the second set of servants fared no better than the first. The post-exilic prophets were given only the same scanty and half-hearted attention that was the lot of the pre-exilic prophets, and most of them suffered or were put to death in much the same manner. "*Which of the prophets*

have not your fathers persecuted?" was the scornful accusation of Stephen at his trial before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7: 52). The parable of the vine-dressers in the previous chapter (Matt. 21: 33-44) has the same succession of two consecutive sets of servants, in that case followed by the sending of the vineyard owner's son, who was killed by the wicked vine-dressers. The application is the same in both cases and it is an obvious one.

So the "king was . . . wroth, and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city" (ch. 22: 1). At this point the history of the parable passes into prophecy; these words came terribly true forty years after Jesus' death, when the Roman emperor Titus besieged, captured and destroyed Jerusalem, and scattered the nation to the four corners of the earth. And simultaneously with the rejection of that people which, though "bidden, were not worthy" (vs. 8) the next section of the parable came into the picture with the going forth of the king's servants into the highways to call in all who would come.

That invitation had its commencement in history when Peter baptised Cornelius, the Roman centurion who is the first recorded Gentile convert to the Divine call in Christ (Acts 10). Not many years afterwards the Apostle Paul, preaching at Athens, gave formal testimony to the fact that God was now calling upon all men everywhere, without distinction of nationality, to repent (Acts 17: 30). "Of a truth I perceive" Peter had said to Cornelius "that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10: 34-35). Now in his own ministry Paul declares the same truth. Writing to the Ephesians, he says that the Gentiles "are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. 2: 19). So the servants went out "witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea . . . and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1: 8). For nearly two thousand years those servants have been going forth—and they go forth still.

So the wedding feast was furnished with guests. This is not a feast of the future, beyond the skies. This feast is here, on this earth and in this life. It has been proceeding ever since the first Christians entered into heart communion with their Lord and began to feast at his table. It is the feast which Israel could have enjoyed in their own day, and failed to enter because of unbelief. "It remaineth that

some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief . . . there remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God . . . let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" (Heb. 4: 6-11). That is the verdict of the writer to the Hebrews on the matter.

Here the dispensational aspect of the parable comes to an end. The remaining picture is an individual one. Of the guests who have been gathered one is unworthy. "When the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment" (ch. 22: 11). This was the greatest insult guest could offer host; the man preferred to display his own finery rather accept the covering provided by his host. And when taxed with his offence, he had nothing to say. "He was speechless."

What is the wedding garment? Clearly the free gift of justification by faith, consequent upon our acceptance of Christ, by whose righteousness the gift comes. "By the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." . . . "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5: 1-2: 18). This is the common covering which renders us all alike acceptable to God despite our own imperfections and shortcomings, and hides the defects which are impure in God's holy sight. "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" cries Isaiah (64: 6), but "wash you, make you clean; put away the evils of your doings . . . though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow" (1: 16-18). We come to God in faith, accepting the finished sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, even though we may not with our limited human minds understand just how his death is efficacious for our redemption. But some there are who come, not having accepted Christ in that sense, trusting more in their own endeavours to maintain a standing before God, maintaining that man needs no personal Saviour to reconcile him to God, that a profession of good works and good intentions is all that is necessary. There are "both bad and good" (ch. 22: 10) gathered into the feast, but the king's inspection speedily discerns those who have spurned the wedding garment and trust rather in the "filthy rags" of their own righteousness; and He commands his servants to expel all such from the feast.

*"Cast into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (ch. 22. 13). This is the class of text which used to be related to the final destiny and punishment of the wicked and on that account this parable used to be considered a word picture of the separation of righteous and wicked, and the final doom of the latter. There is however no justification for identifying "outer darkness" with the ultimate penalty of sin. The expression occurs only three times in the New Testament, all of them in Matthew's Gospel. In none of these cases is the ultimate fate of incorrigible sinners in question. Jesus in Matt. 8. 11-12 said that many would come from east and west and sit down with Abraham and other men of faith in the kingdom of God, whilst the "children of the kingdom" would be cast into outer darkness where is weeping and gnashing of teeth. In Matt. 25. 30 the unprofitable servant who had wasted his talent suffered the same fate. In all three instances the idea is that of rejection and separation from the purpose of God in this present Age through unworthiness, unfitness. The ultimate fate of the individuals concerned is not in question and is left undecided; what is certain is that they are unfit for inclusion in the band of disciples which God is selecting from both Jew and Gentile during the present and past, that He might use them in his plans for world conversion in the next Age. Separated from the body of believers because of unworthiness now, cast into outer darkness

in the sense that they have been excluded from the light and joy of that spirit-filled society which ultimately becomes the "light of the nations", such will eventually realise what high privilege they have missed—hence the typically Eastern hyperbole "weeping and gnashing of teeth".

For it is very true, as Jesus said in conclusion of his parable *"Many are called, but few are choice"* (not "chosen" as in the A.V.). The Greek here is *eklektos*, which means the valuable or choice part of a thing. Jesus did not say that God would call many and then arbitrarily choose only a few of them; what He did say was that of all to whom the Divine call comes in this Age, in whose hearts the Word finds some lodgment, only a few, after the testings of a lifetime, prove worthy, worthwhile, choice. Because God is seeking characters of sterling worth to be his ministers in that day when He sets before mankind the final decision, the choice between good and evil, He is rigorous in excluding the unworthy. They are not necessarily lost; they revert to the mass of unsaved mankind from which they came, to listen afresh in a future day to the appeal of the Gospel, but they have lost for ever the opportunity of sharing with those who live and reign with Christ a thousand years (Rev. 20. 4) and who in the course of that reign will labour with their Lord in the conversion of all nations. That is the lesson of this parable.

### Psalm 23 through Indian eyes

*This is a Red Indian version of the 23rd Psalm, now in the Indian section of the museum at Banff, Canada. There is no information as to how old it is but it is evidently a paraphrase written by a red-skinned disciple of the Lord Jesus in speech familiar to his fellows. The old, old story, clothed in words comprehensible by each nation and in every age, has always the same appeal and will never die.*

\* \* \*

The Great Father above is the Shepherd Chief. I am his and with him I want not.

He throws down to me a rope and the rope of his love and He draws me to where the grass is green and the water is good and I go and lie down satisfied.

Sometimes my heart is weak and falls down but He lifts is up again and draws me into

a good road. His name is Wonderful.

Sometimes, it may be soon, but may be long, it may be a long, long time, He will draw me into a place between the mountains.

It is dark there but I will not draw back, I will not be afraid, for it is there, between those mountains that the Shepherd Chief will meet me and the hunger I have felt in my heart all through life will be satisfied.

Sometimes he makes the love rope into a whip but afterwards He gives me a staff to lean on. He spreads a table before me with all kinds of food. He puts his hand upon my head and all tired is gone. My cup He fills until it runs over.

What I tell you is true, I lie not. These roads that are away ahead will stay with me through this life and afterwards I will go to live in the Big Tepee and sit down with the Shepherd Chief forever.

was faithful to Marduk the god of Babylon for at least the greater portion of his life; but here he evidently acknowledged the power of Daniel's God and also the integrity of Daniel's credentials as a representative of that God. In token of that recognition he bestowed high honour upon the man who had interpreted his dream.

Daniel was made a chief ruler in affairs of

State; his three companions also were promoted to high office. Honour and wealth were at their command, the plaudits and flatteries of men, and every attraction the luxurious world of Babylon had to offer. The time had now come when the value of the earlier training and self-discipline to which these young men had been subjected was to be put to the test.

*(To be continued)*

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## **PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN**

Luke 10. 30-37

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*"A certain man went down to Jericho, and fell among thieves . . ." (Luke 10. 30).*

A simple story! The lawyer's verdict, given in response to Jesus' question, has been endorsed by countless voices throughout the age, so much so that the unknown benefactor has become the symbol of neighbourliness and disinterested kindness. Often is the phrase "good Samaritan" used by people who have no idea of its origin. Proof positive is this that deep down in every human heart there lies consciousness that the attitude taken by that traveller on the Jericho road represents the true duty of man.

Who is my neighbour? The story was given that the answer to that question might be thrown out in bold relief. It is the natural question of any man who wants to serve God in God's own way. It is a tacit admission that there is a "fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man" which ought to influence and guide all human relationships and actions. And this is a right feeling. The plans of God provide for a world in which all men are brothers and each willingly takes upon himself the responsibility of his brethren's welfare. The work of the Millennial Age is to lead men to this appreciation, and it will only be as a man comes willingly and intelligently into harmony with such attitude of mind that the old process of sin, working in his members, will be destroyed and he receive new, and everlasting, life. Speaking to the Athenians, St. Paul said of God "*In him we live, and move, and have our being*" and writing to the Christians at Rome he declared "no man liveth to himself". Both these principles have been rejected by men to-day, and the measure of that rejection, both in the affairs of nations and the lives of individuals, is revealed by the chaotic state into which the world has fallen. Not until men live *in God and for each other* will they find peace, security or happiness. The attainment of those blessings demands

the payment of a price, and that price is assessed in terms of service for one's fellow-men, and no one will find the rest for which his soul longs until he has come to that knowledge and paid that price.

Jesus was suddenly confronted with a "lawyer". We must not take the term to mean that this man was a kind of First Century practising solicitor or barrister, such as would be indicated by our present usage of the word "lawyer". It means that he held the position of a "Doctor of the Law", an ecclesiastical distinction which placed him upon a higher level even than that of a Rabbi, and implied that he was qualified to pronounce with authority on matters concerning the laws of God. We are apt also to draw the wrong inference from the statement that he stood up and "tempted" Jesus unless we remember that this word in the New Testament has the significance of "proving" or "testing". It is very clear that this man came forward with the express intention of putting the principles of Christ's teaching to the proof, or as we would say, applying the "acid test", of Mosaic Law, to these new and revolutionary tenets which were being advocated by the prophet of Nazareth.

The lawyer may or may not have been sincere in his interrogation; the narrative does not make that aspect of the matter very clear, but the fact that his further questions showed him to be a man amenable to reasonable argument may justify us in concluding that his attitude was that of an ordinarily honest and sincere man who had been brought up and indoctrinated in the elements of Mosaic law until that law had become the background of his mental processes. This new teaching, perhaps, intrigued and interested him; he was not at all sure how it would work out in practice but if it could be shown to be a logical development of the Mosaic code then he would be prepared to give it further con-

sideration.

And Jesus shattered this whole meticulous intellectualism by returning an answer that compelled the lawyer to admit ignorance of one of the principal features of that law with which he, with others, imagined himself to be expertly familiar. "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind*", said Jesus, "*and thy neighbour as thyself*". A most familiar passage and one that this Doctor of the Law must have expounded to others times without number. But under the keen gaze of those searching eyes he was compelled to admit his lack of real knowledge. His mind still bemused by the torturous arguments with which his training had made him familiar, he tried to steer the conversation into more familiar channels of debate, and "*willing to justify himself*", anxious to hold the advantage in argument with this unlearned Nazarene, put the supplementary question in appropriate form for argument. "Who is my neighbour?" he asked.

Jesus answered that question by telling a story. To what extent the lawyer benefited by this unorthodox method of teaching truth we do not know; certain it is that many of the bystanders, men and women in humbler walks of life, must have gained enlightenment and inspiration thereby. "*Truth, embodied in a tale, may enter in at lowly doors*", wrote Tennyson; the profound wisdom of that remark is well worthy of serious consideration by those whose privilege and responsibility it is to teach Divine truth.

A certain man went down to Jericho. On the lonely mountainous road which has only recently lost its dangers he was set upon by robbers who, from behind the rocky crags towering high above the winding track, descended silently upon him, robbed him of his possessions and clothes, beat him savagely into unconsciousness, and departed leaving him to die. Travellers were few and far between, and quite possibly before the next one came that way the vultures would have had their feast. But it was not so to be this time. By chance, said Jesus, while his listeners sat enthralled, there came a certain priest that way, who, when he saw him, passed by on the other side. The lawyer must have shifted uneasily at this. He was not himself a priest but his interests and theirs lay in the same direction and he was not certain just how far the implied rebuke was going to point to his own self. But he could not but listen as Jesus continued; and Jesus must have put much more detail into the story than

is preserved for us in the Gospel narrative. The priest would of course justify himself in his action. The man was probably dead, and he, a priest, must not defile himself by touching a dead body. His consecration to God required that he keep himself ceremonially clean for the Divine service. And perhaps this man had committed some crime for which this was God's retribution, and he must beware lest by relieving the man's distress he be found to fight against God. So he might have reasoned, as he hurried on his way, casting furtive glances at the beetling crags above him and trusting that the robbers were by now well away from the vicinity.

Not long, perhaps, after the figure of the priest had disappeared in the distance fresh footsteps sounded on the road. Another traveller appeared, a Levite, a man devoted to the service of God just as was the priest, but in matters which in everyday life did bring him into closer contact with ordinary people. He might quite possibly have been possessed of some degree of medical skill, for that was a not uncommon function of the Levites, and in any case his daily duties would have certainly given him many opportunities of relieving human suffering. At any rate, he did cross the road and look at the injured man. Here was clearly a case within his own province. The man was a son of Israel. He was afflicted and in distress, and the Levites' traditional duty was to succour and assist the people. His first impulse might have been to render first aid and do something to set the injured man on his journey again, but other and more selfish counsels came into his mind. The robbers might still be about and the longer he stayed in that place the greater was the risk of becoming another victim. He had a duty to his own people not to bring himself into a position where he might be rendered physically incapable of serving them on his return home; this man might be an Israelite, and in distress, but he was not of the Levite's own parish, and "*charity begins at home*". After all, the man should have taken precautions against robbery if he intended travelling with possessions in such a notorious place; he should have waited until he could join a company of travellers. A Levite whose profession forbade him to accumulate property could hardly be expected to defend the rights of property in others and the man had really only got what he deserved. So he might have thought, unctuously, as he left the unconscious man, with a couple of backward glances, and went his way.

We can be quite sure that the world has

never known a better story-teller than Jesus of Nazareth. His listeners must have seen, quite plainly, that desolate road, the unfortunate traveller lying outstretched by the wayside, the pitiless heat of noonday pouring down on the sun-baked rocks, the still air hanging lifeless and heavy, high up in the blue sky, a pair of vultures hovering, waiting their time . . . and then, sharply, breaking the stillness, the "clip-clop" of a donkey picking its way among the stones of the road.

The vultures disappeared; the donkey and his rider came into sight. The newcomer betrayed, by the cast of his features, his non-Jewish blood. He was a Samaritan, a member of that mongrel race which had descended from the Assyrians and Babylonians with which Samaria had been colonised in the days of Sennacherib, the apostate Israelites, the Phoenicians and the Canaanites who had occupied the land during the time of the great captivities. As Jesus came to this part of his story, more than one of his listeners would turn and spit on the ground in disgust at the mention of the hated name; but they turned back to listen again.

The stranger took in the situation at a glance. Without hesitation he stopped his beast, alighted and went across to the injured man. With a dexterity that betrayed complete familiarity with this kind of thing, he bound up the man's wounds, set him upon his own beast, and, supporting him thus as he himself walked beside the donkey, took him to the *khan*, the wayside rest-house halfway between Jerusalem and Jericho. **There his interest might well have ended; the man would be safe, and would recover in a few days, and could reasonably be expected to arrange for his own welfare; but no, the Samaritan produced money from his own pocket—the "two pence" were two *denarii*, adequate for several days board and lodging—and gave assurance that he would be responsible for whatever further expenditure was necessary to restore the man to health. He was not one of the Lord's chosen people; he was not a member of the consecrated nation: he was a man of the world, a Samaritan!**

*And this man, says Jesus, is the man who has kept the commandments and is worthy of eternal life.* We miss the point of the story if we take it as merely a commendation of the man who does good works. The lawyer wanted to know what he must do to gain eternal life; what was the commandment that really mattered; what obligation did this new teaching that Jesus brought propose to lay upon man. The story was the reply, and the

lawyer readily saw, as Jesus meant him to see, that the Samaritan was the one who had rightly interpreted every man's duty to his fellowmen and to his God. The men whom Jesus wanted for followers and disciples were to be as this Samaritan—prepared to demonstrate their essential harmony with God Who "so loved the world that He gave" by rendering such service as they are able to a world in distress, instead of, like the Priest and the Levite, making excuse to avert their heads and pass by on the other side. The Samaritan did not stay with the man; having done what he could, he proceeded upon his own business, but he had challenged, and overcome, the powers of evil in the world by working some positive good.

This is the issue before us, Christians of to-day. It is so easy to close our eyes to human distress and take refuge behind the knowledge that God has provided the Millennial Age to "wipe away tears from off all faces". We know quite certainly that in no event shall we be able to effect any substantial improvement in the world's affairs, and that time and energy spent in the endeavour is worse than wasted. The Scriptures are definite, and so, too, are the signs of the times, that this world is incapable of self-reformation and that its only hope lies in the coming—and the speedy coming—of that Kingdom whose interests we serve and to whose Ruler we are consecrated. But when we have admitted and said all this, there remains the fact, the solid, inescapable fact, that it was the Samaritan, and not the Priest, who was the true son of God. And we as Christians have to find the way, as the Samaritan found the way, of continuing the work our Lord did on earth, by "doing good to all men as we have opportunity", interweaving this with our supreme mission of undergoing training and preparation both by study and experience for our future commission of world conversion in the days of the Kingdom.

The Samaritan was able to render this good deed and still go about his business. We can do the same, and in the effort find that our sympathetic outlook upon human distress, our closer contact with the infirmities and failings and sorrows of suffering humanity, will of itself shape our characters surely and definitely into the likeness that God desires for us. It is not given to all to expound from the platform, to speak with ready tongue to those who as yet "know not God", to spread abroad the knowledge of the Divine Plan. It is possible for each of us to perform little deeds of kindness, unselfish acts, to be known as

one who, being a Christian, interprets that Christianity as did its Founder, in "going about doing good", and so bring glory to his Name more certainly than any amount of platform intellectualism can do.

The "Inn of the Good Samaritan" is still there, on that road between Jerusalem and Jericho. Travellers still stop there in passing. Scholars say that there is every reason for thinking that the present inn stands on the site of the one that existed in the time of our Lord, and must have been well known to the men and women who listened to his story. *The inn is still there*; is it a witness and a reminder? There is no sepulchre of Jesus

with marbled or crystal coffin containing his remains to which people may make pilgrimage, and before which they can adore. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem almost certainly is not the true site of the garden tomb. Jesus our Lord desires no empty homage of that nature. But the Inn of the Good Samaritan is still there, a building and a courtyard upon which men may gaze, and, gazing, remember the story of old that enshrined the whole teaching of Jesus regarding the duty of his disciples to their fellowmen. *"Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye did it unto me."*

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## A VOICE FROM THE PAST

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I Believe that the world will never be completely converted to Christianity by any existing agency before the end comes. In spite of all that can be done by ministers, churches schools and missions, the wheat and the tares will grow together until the harvest. And when the end comes, it will find the earth in much the same state that it was when the flood came in the days of Noah (Matt. 13:24-30; 24. 37-39).

I Believe that the widespread unbelief, indifference, formalism and wickedness which are to be seen throughout Christendom are only what we ought to expect in God's Word. Troublous times, departures from the faith, evil men waxing worse and worse, love waxing cold, are things distinctly predicted. So far from making me doubt the truth of Christianity, they help to confirm my faith. Melancholy and sorrowful as the sight is, if I did not see it I should think the Bible was not true (Matt. 24.12; 1 Tim. 4.1; 2 Tim. 3.1, 13, 14).

It is not often that worldly success comes to a Christian without degrading his high standard of character. David was "a man after God's own heart", but that was when he was a shepherd, sincere in his simple faith. In the later years of his life, when great sins made possible only by his exalted position had left their mark on his character, God told him he was a "man of blood", and for that reason, despite his service of the past, he was unfit to build the Temple of God. With all David's fame and achievements he failed to accomplish the dearest object of his life, and it was the corrupting influences of riches and power

I Believe that the grand purpose of the present dispensation is to gather out of the world an elect people, and not to convert all mankind. It does not surprise me at all to hear that the heathen are not all converted when missionaries preach, and that believers are a little flock in any congregation in my own land. It is precisely the state of things which I expect to find. . . . This is a dispensation of election, and *not* of universal conversion (Acts 15.14; Matt. 24.13).

I Believe that the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is the great event which will wind up the present dispensation, and for which we ought *daily* to long and pray. "Thy Kingdom come," "Come, Lord Jesus," should be our daily prayer. We look backward if we have faith, to Christ dying on the cross, to His resurrection from the dead, and we ought to look forward no less, if we have hope, to Christ coming again (John 14.3; 2 Tim. 4.8; 2 Peter 3.12).

*Dr. J.C. Ryle. 1816-1910. Bishop of Liverpool.*

upon an originally noble character that caused his failure.

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For the production of one single ear of corn we should need the same sun, the same sky, the same earth, and the same conditions as is needed for all the harvests of the world. If only one soul were to be redeemed, the same propitiation would be needed as is demanded by the entire population of a lost world. The sacrifice of Christ removes from the mind of God every hindrance of the pardon, the restoration, and the justification of every sinner.

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## **THE PARABLE OF DIVES AND LAZARUS**

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Luke 16. 19-31

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"Ye cannot serve God and Mammon" said Jesus. The listening Pharisees derided him when they heard that saying; they had, in their own opinion, long since learned how to make the best of both worlds. It is likely that the complacent smiles were quickly swept off their arrogant faces when Jesus proceeded to relate the story of Dives and Lazarus.

The account is preserved only in the 16th chapter of Luke's Gospel. There was a certain rich man, said Jesus, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate.

So far the story ran true to everyday experience. Beggars squatting at the outer portals of rich men's houses were a familiar enough sight in the days of Jesus. They existed on such bounty as the householder chose to give them, supplemented by the charity of passers-by. This particular beggar was like so many of them, a pitiable wreck of a man, clothed in rags, disease-ridden, his only companions the carrion dogs which were always prowling about the city and like him existing on such scraps of food as came their way. The Pharisees in the group listened to these opening words with barely concealed indifference; the situation was one with which they were thoroughly familiar and which they considered a normal feature of society. No reason existed for trying to change it or mitigate its evils. So they listened with only detached interest.

But the next words brought them up with a jolt. The beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom; the rich man also died, but he was not carried into Abraham's bosom. He was buried and found himself in Hades.

Eyebrows contracted and lips were pursed at this. There is a story in the Babylonian Talmud, a story with which those Pharisees were certainly familiar, of somewhat similar character, but in that story the Pharisee is taken into the joys of the presence of God and

the publican is condemned to the torment of thirst. It is fairly evident that Jesus, who also must have been familiar with the same old legend, deliberately based this parable upon that story but reversed the respective fates of the two characters. Knowing that, it is easy to see that this parable is intended to show up the utter unworthiness of the Pharisees and the nation they represented, their ultimate loss of all the good things they enjoyed as the "chosen nation", and the reception into Divine favour of those previously outside the pale.

The Jewish background of the story is very noticeable. There is no mention of God the Father nor of Christ the Son; no reference to Heaven the home of the faithful in Christ, the earthly Messianic Kingdom which is to be the "desire of all nations", or the Atonement, by means of which salvation comes to man. Instead, we have Abraham, Moses and the prophets, angels, "Abraham's bosom", and Hades, all essentially matters of Jewish interest. The Hades of the parable is not the Old Testament Hades (*Sheol*—the grave) but the Hades of Rabbinic speculation, modelled after Greek thought rather than Hebrew. There is no reason therefore for thinking that the parable has anything to do with the future life or with the respective destinies of righteous and wicked after death. There is nothing said about the moral standing of the two characters. Lazarus is not said to be righteous nor Dives wicked. (The name "Dives", often applied to the rich man but not appearing in the A.V., is the Latin for "rich man" and comes from the early Latin Bibles in Britain). And even if Lazarus is conceded to be righteous there is no justification for assuming that the expression "Abraham's bosom" is synonymous with Heaven.

The rich man pictured the Pharisees and, by extension, the whole of the unbelieving Jewish nation. For more than a thousand years they had been the chosen people of



God "to be a light to the Gentiles, to declare his salvation to the ends of the earth". By virtue of the Covenant made at Sinai they were guaranteed all possible material blessings, "blessed in basket and in store", safety from their enemies, and the privilege of being God's Royal Priesthood to administer his blessings to all men. They, and they alone, were to be the true children of Abraham through whom the promised blessing to all families of the earth should come. In symbolic language, they were clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. In that position the Pharisees boasted themselves. "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man". That order of things came to an end when Jesus declared "Your house is left unto you desolate" and when, having rejected and crucified the Lord of glory, the favoured position of Israel came to an utter and disastrous end in the overthrow of the nation directly after the Crucifixion, and its dispersal among all nations. Truly "the rich man died and was buried".

Lazarus, on the contrary, enjoyed an improvement of status. His life of misery came to an end and he found himself transported into "Abraham's bosom". The allusion has two explanatory instances in the Gospels. To lie in the bosom of a superior or a friend was a mark of great favour; the custom of reclining at meals with each person's head in the bosom of his neighbour implied that the one next to the host was to be envied. At the Last Supper it is John who is found to be "leaning on Jesus' bosom" (Jno. 13. 23). Jesus himself, in his close relationship with the Father, is said to be "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father" (Jno. 1. 18). So with Lazarus; he is translated, not to Heaven, but to a position of close relationship with Abraham. That fact makes it fairly obvious that Jesus is alluding to the truth He uttered in such plain terms when on another occasion He said to these same Pharisees, again as representing their nation, "the kingdom of God is taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21. 43). Lazarus, then, is in-

tended to picture the despised and outcast Gentiles who at last enter into the high calling of God, as they did do under the preaching of the Apostles, becoming spiritual children of Abraham (Gal. 3. 7-8). The eleventh chapter of Romans makes it clear that the fruitless olive branches were broken off and wild olive branches (i.e. the Gentiles) were grafted in. Lazarus in Abraham's bosom pictures the Christian Church of all nations and peoples classed as children of Abraham and hence, as Galatians declares, "heirs according to the promise".

In the meantime the rich man is in Hades, "in torments". This used to be a "key" text to urge the reality of the "everlasting fires", but critical study soon shows that this position cannot reasonably be maintained. The word rendered "hell" here is "hades", the death state, not "gehenna", which is final doom. Hades is a temporary condition, for the time will come that Death and Hades are to be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20. 13-14), i.e. be themselves destroyed or brought to an end. Another and a most important consideration is that the sojourn of Dives in Hades begins to have a remedial effect; the one who in his lifetime gave evidence of inherent selfishness and lack of consideration for others in that Lazarus only got the crumbs which fell from his table is now displaying concern for the fate of his brothers. "I have five brethren; that (Lazarus) may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment." He still calls Abraham "Father" and the latter still calls him "Son" (vs 25) which does not look as if the rich man's case is hopeless. The word rendered "torment" in vs 23 and 28 "in hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments" is from "basanos" which properly denotes a touchstone or stone (basonite), used for testing gold. Genuine gold, rubbed on this particular kind of stone, left a characteristic mark, hence the word at first indicated a trial or test of genuineness. Since judicial trials in ancient times almost always employed torture to extract confessions, the word when used judicially came to mean "torture", hence the translation "torment" in this instance.

That it need not carry this meaning is shown by other occurrences of the word in the New Testament, such as:

Matt. 8. 6. "Sick of the palsy, grievously *tormented*".

Matt. 4. 24. "Sick persons. . .divers diseases and *torments*".

Mark 6. 48. "He saw them *toiling* in rowing".

Matt. 14. 24. "Midst of the sea, *tossed* with waves."

The rich man, then, during his sojourn in Hades, is undergoing a severe, harrowing trial which nevertheless must come to an end sometime because Hades itself is but a temporary condition. That is an apt symbol of Israel's "Hades" experience during the period between the First and Second Advents. Scattered among all nations, deprived of citizenship and country of her own, she has been the victim of oppression and cruelty in every land. But God has declared that He will eventually restore Israel to a destined place in his purposes where she shall fulfil her original destiny to convey Divine blessing to men. "*Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee . . . and the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.*" (Isa. 60. 1-3).

The word "tormented" in vs 24 and 25 is from "*odunomai*" which signifies anguish, pain or distress of any kind, as in:

Luke 2. 48. "Thy father and I have sought thee *sorrowing*."

Acts 20. 38. "*Sorrowing* most of all."

Rom. 9. 2. "Continual *sorrow* in my heart."

1 Tim. 6. 10. "Pierced through with many *sorrows*."

So the rich man in his distress beheld Lazarus enjoying the felicity of communion with Abraham and cried out for some small moiety of relief. "*Send Lazarus that he may . . . cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.*" And Abraham had to tell him that what he asked was impossible. "*Between us and you there is a great gulf (Gr. Chasma) fixed*" a chasm which effectually precluded any passage from the one side to the other.

It was not that Abraham *would* not relieve; it was that he *could* not.

What is the gulf? The immutable purpose of God! When the Most High decrees judgment, none can set it aside. From the day that the unreasoning crowd cried "His blood be upon us and upon our children" (Matt. 27. 25) the Jewish nation entered into a condition from which they cannot and will not be delivered until in the outworking of the Divine Plan the "fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. 11. 25). When, at the end of this Age, the Christian Church is complete and joined to her Lord in Heaven, and the "residue of men" (Acts 15. 17) are ready to "seek after the Lord", then will God "*build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down*" (Acts 15. 16) and manifest a restored and purified Israel nation in the midst of the earth to play its own destined part in the evangelising of the world.

The parable does not go that far, for there is still one lesson, the most solemn lesson of all, to be taught, and Jesus would fain leave the Pharisees with that word. The rich man was concerned about his brethren; he wanted one from the dead to go to them that in the wonder of that happening they might find conviction. "*They have Moses and the prophets*" said Abraham "*Let them hear them*". True enough; Israel always had Moses and the prophets, and Christ said that if they had rightly heard Moses and the prophets they would have believed him, for in those writings lay the evidence of his Messiahship. The rich man dissented; even though his brethren rejected Moses and the prophets—and he did not dispute the fact of their having done so—yet a visitation from the dead would convince them. That gave the opportunity for one of the most telling phrases which ever fell from the lips of Jesus. "*If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rise from the dead*" (vs 31). The whole history of Israel, from the First Advent until now, is evidence of the truth of that word. Jesus rose from the dead; they still did not believe!

The parable ends with the rich man still in

Hades. But Abraham called him "Son" and he called Abraham "Father"; and Hades will one day pass away. So there is a bright gleam

behind the dark horizon of the picture. There is still hope.

## A NOTE ON MATTHEW 12.40

*"For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"* (Matt. 12. 40).

On the surface it seems a simple statement relating to our Lord's lying in the grave, between his death and his resurrection. The somewhat unusual expression "the heart of the earth", does provoke the question as to whether some other and less obvious meaning is intended.

This is the only one of the some hundred and fifty instances of "*kardia*" in the New Testament where the word does not refer to the human heart. In English usage "the heart of the earth" implies a considerable depth below the surface; a body interred in a cave tomb only just below ground level hardly merits the term and it is this which usually gives rise to the query. But what did the term really mean on the lips of Jesus?

The Old Testament speaks of the "heart of the (Red) sea" (Exod. 15. 8) and the "heart of Egypt" (Isa. 19. 1) where the obvious meaning of the term is "midst". The Hebrew for "heart" is *leb* or *lebah*, appearing some 450 times in reference to the human heart, but also translated in the A.V. fourteen times "midst" where this is the obvious meaning. Thus we have "midst of heaven" (Deut. 4. 11) "midst of the sea" (Psa. 46. 2. Prov. 30. 19 Ezek. 27. 4) and Absalom caught by his hair "in the midst of the oak" (2 Sam. 18. 4). More relevant to the point at issue is Jonah 2. 3 "thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas". Perhaps this is the source from which Jesus took his allusion. Both in the Hebrew Bible and in the Septuagint Greek, which latter was in general use in Jesus' day, this reference to Jonah's immure-

ment in the "midst" of the seas uses the word "heart". Jesus normally spoke in Aramaic, which was the contemporary form of Hebrew, but whichever language He used, it could well be that He was thinking of Jonah's expression "the heart of the seas" and repeated it for his own case except that it then became "the heart of the earth". Nothing more than a preview of his own death and burial precedent to his resurrection would appear to have been in His mind.

The "three days and three nights" has also provoked much discussion and not a little controversy. The accepted Christian tradition as well as customary reading of the New Testament allow for parts only of three days including two nights, from three o'clock on Friday to dawn on Sunday. Various reconstructions have been worked out to extend this period to a full seventy-two hours but these of necessity come up against two apparently unassailable facts; one, that 14 Nisan of A.D. 33, the year of the Crucifixion, ended on Friday 3rd April at 6.0 p.m.; two, the fixed conviction of the Early Church was that the Resurrection took place on Sunday morning. Much more can be said on both sides of the question than will be attempted here, but it is possible that the expression "three days and three nights" in the Greek New Testament is analogous to the Old Testament Hebrew "evening-mornings", metaphorically indicating any period extending over parts of the stated number of days. We use a similar colloquialism today in saying, for example "I shall be away for three days" although in fact we leave at midday on Wednesday and arrive back at 3.0 p.m. Friday. Nothing more than this may be intended by the New Testament narrative.

As long as the devil can keep us terrified of thinking, he will always limit the work of God in our souls.

Every day is crowded with minutes, and every minute with seconds, and every second with opportunities to develop fruitage.

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## **THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN**

Matt. 13.33

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*"The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."* (Matt. 13. 33.)

Despite its brevity, this parable enshrines one of the deepest of the truths concerning the Kingdom which Jesus Christ came to preach and to establish. We are inclined to place so much stress upon the preparation of the "people for God's Name" to be His instruments in the future Age of world conversion that we are liable to overlook another very essential work of preparation which also must make progress during this Gospel Age, and it is this aspect of the Kingdom of Heaven which is made prominent in the parable of the leaven. The Gospel Age has been set apart in the Divine Plan not only for calling and preparing the "Ministry of Reconciliation" which is to effect the work of writing Divine law in the hearts of men during the Messianic Age, but also to allow the leaven of Christian teaching to permeate society and prepare mankind for the demands that will be made upon it during that Age.

Note first the aptness of the allusion. The leaven is added to the meal and is necessary if the meal is to become good, wholesome bread. It does not of itself, however, convert the meal into bread. The fiery experiences of the baking process alone can do that, but the permeation of the mass by the leaven is essential before the baking may be commenced. There is a slow, invisible, nevertheless effective leavening of the dough which, when completed, allows the heat of the oven to do its beneficent work. So it is with the Kingdom, said Jesus. There is a preliminary stage in which the "raw material", so to speak, of that Kingdom is being acted upon by an influence similar to that of leaven upon meal, and results in the whole of that "raw material" being made ready for the experiences which will effect for it its ultimate destiny.

But is not leaven employed in the Scriptures as a symbol of sin? It is so employed when in Matt. 16. 6 Jesus warned his disciples to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees". In this warning He used the same characteristic of leaven to describe the insidious subtlety of those who were like dead men's sepulchres, fair on the outside but inside full of dead men's bones. Again, Paul in 1 Cor. 5. 7, referring to a scandalous affair in the Corinthian church, urged that church to expel a certain openly profligate offender in the words "Purge out therefore the old leaven that ye may be . . . unleavened". Note that in this passage the picture is that of the sinner himself, remaining within the fellowship of the church, being the leaven which will permeate the entire church with its influence, in this case a baneful influence. The individual's expulsion from the community was commended in the words "Purge out therefore the old leaven".

The children of Israel at the Exodus were to purge their houses of leaven and to eat unleavened bread seven days. The idea here was evidently to symbolise their utter separation from all that was of Egypt and a new purity consequent upon their adoption into the family of God and their redemption when the destroying angel passed over the land. Although at this feast, the feast of the Passover, leaven was forbidden, it should be noticed that at the feast of Pentecost, seven weeks later, leaven had to be associated with the offerings. (See Lev. 7. 13; 23. 17.)

One may conclude, then, that leaven is used in allusion to its power of permeation, in symbol of both good and evil influences. In the case of the parable there should be no room for doubt. The Kingdom of Heaven is like this leaven, said Jesus; this is a feature of the Kingdom I am preaching, the Kingdom which I am commencing now and which will one day be worldwide.

What is the nature of this leavening work?

It is not intended to convert the nations. That work is to be carried out during the Messianic Age. It is at the most a work of preparation, of laying the foundations of that greater work which shall once and for all abolish sin in all its aspects and bring in everlasting righteousness.

Is there Scriptural evidence that such a work of preparation is to proceed during this Age? By all means there is. "Go ye into all the world," said Jesus, "and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16. 15-16). "This gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness" (Matt. 24. 14). And more personal to each of us "They may by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Pet. 2. 12). This last Scripture gives the clue. There is a work to be done by the Church in the flesh, during this Age, which is not to be productive of immediate results, but will have its fruitage in the coming Age. Whilst the chief and foremost business of every Christian is the playing of his or her part in the calling and preparation of those who are fellow-workers in the body of Christ, there is also this secondary work amongst men in general which is likened to the influence of leaven—its results not immediately discernible, but none the less vitally necessary to the final work of the future.

Jesus himself gave further instructions on this matter. "Ye are the salt of the earth" He said (Matt. 5. 13). Salt is a preservative. It must be intimately mingled with that which is to be preserved and it must retain its freshness to be efficacious. If the salt lose its savour, it is henceforth fit for nothing. We are the salt of the earth! It is very unfortunate that the expression has passed into an everyday proverb which implies that the "salt" of the earth are the "choice ones" of the earth, whereas Jesus meant nothing of the kind. His meaning is that by virtue of an intimate mingling with the people of the earth, his disciples by their conduct and teachings would be a preservative and wholesome influence in the world, maintaining a witness and an example of Kingdom standards, which

however unheeded at the time, would yet serve to save the world from utter depravity and make it ready in some small way for the coming Day and its standards. Noah and Lot were such preservative influences in their own days, preachers of righteousness in a world of unrighteousness.

"Ye are the light of the world," said Jesus (Matt. 5. 14). Something of a rather different nature from salt! We are to be an enlightening influence, a light that cannot be ignored even although men persist in shading their eyes from its brilliancy. The light of the world in a literal sense is of course the sun. Did Jesus mean that our Christian life and witness should be as obvious a fact as the existence of the sun itself, so that, whether men hear or whether they forbear, they cannot deny the fact that there have been prophets among them? (Ezek. 2. 5.)

But Jesus has not finished with his disciples yet. A still more tremendous thought comes from his lips. "A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid" (Matt. 5. 14). We then are to be as a city set on an hill—impossible for us *not* to be in the public eye. To what extent do we approach to any attempt at fulfilling this ideal? The idea of a city is that of an ordered and regulated way of life; to be set on an hill adds the thought of a Divinely set and ordained way of life. Men, looking upon the Christian community upon earth, are to see it as a city set upon an hill—a compact community proclaiming and living by standards which have been given by Heaven and which are to be manifested to all men. Men may not acknowledge the authority of that city; they may avoid it in their travels and build their roads to swerve round the hill instead of going up and into the city; but they must always be conscious that the city is there, standing by a system of authority and rulership which one day it will have power to extend over the whole world.

So then, they who by virtue of their position as footstep followers of the Lord Jesus Christ have become as leaven in this world have the duty and privilege of working silently, unobtrusively, until the leavening process

is complete and the world stands ready to be introduced to the reign of Christ in power. For two thousand years they will have been manifest to men as the salt of the earth, as the light of the world, as a city on an hill, and then at length, their work of witness completed, they will come forth in glory and power to fulfil their historic mission of world conversion. It is then that the fruit of the leavening work will be manifest. "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it

after many days". (Eccl. 11. 1). It is upon the basis of this "witness" that the greater invitation to the fountain of life will be based and the grand work commence. It is because men will have already heard and known—and seen—something of Kingdom standards that some of them will break out, as the prophet declares they will break out, into the rapturous words "Lo, this is our God: we have waited for him, and he will save us" (Isa. 25. 9).

### JOSHUA AND THE COMPUTER

During the past twelve months or so there has been a gay little story going the rounds of sundry Christian periodicals on both sides of the Atlantic concerning a NASA computer at a USA space research station which suddenly and most unexpectedly came up with proof that a day really was missed in Joshua's time when, as the Book of Joshua has it, "the sun stood still". The Chief Engineer of an American engineering concern, a consultant in the U.S. space programme, is supposed to have described how a computer at Green Belt, Maryland, was put in operation to determine the positions of the sun, moon and planets at all times up to a thousand years hence so that precautions could be taken to prevent orbiting earth satellites "bumping into them" (!). Whilst thus engaged it came to a halt and indicated that there was "a day missing in elapsed time", which was determined as being 23 hours 40 minutes at the time of Joshua and 40 minutes in that of Hezekiah. This was supposed to "prove" the truth of the Bible.

Several copies of the story—with variations of detail—from different journals reached the BSM office but a quick examination soon showed that the story was an obvious fiction. It took half an hour to verify that the engineering company named did not exist. The most distant earth satellites are not more than 23000 miles away whilst the moon and the sun are a quarter million and 92 million miles distant respectively, so the danger of "bumping into them" would appear to be remote. A number of other allusions in the

story suggested measurable ignorance of space science on the one hand and the Old Testament on the other. It was clear that the article need not be taken seriously and it was not deemed worthy of mention in this journal. Since, however, after twelve months it seems still to be in active circulation this brief note has been compiled for the record.

So far as we can trace, the story seems first to have been broadcast from a Texas radio station, reported in some local newspapers, then picked up and repeated from one Christian journal to another.

A few months ago the publishers of the Christadelphian journal, "The Testimony", conducted their own investigation, with usual Christadelphian thoroughness. An enquiry to NASA, the U.S. Government Space Authority, elicited the information that they knew nothing of the "space consultant" responsible for the story and that none of their staff or scientists had been engaged on any such operation as was reported. The author himself, when finally found, was described as disavowing the article as published and that anyway he could not remember where he had obtained the information upon which he had based it.

There the matter rests. It seems a pity to spoil a good story, but the interests of Truth are paramount, and in fact a good deal of harm can be done to the Faith by the injudicious reciting of alleged "proofs" which can fairly easily be discredited by anyone having knowledge of related facts. And the historic veracity of the Old Testament remains intact;

## **THE PARABLE OF THE POUNDS**

Luke 19.12-27

Matt. 25.14-30

It was immediately following his visit to the house of Zaccheus that Jesus told the story of the nobleman who travelled to a far country leaving his servants to trade for him during his absence. Luke relates the narrative in his 19th chapter, vss. 12-27. The parable was given for a purpose; it was because Jesus knew that his earthly mission approached its close, the people were looking for an immediate establishment of the Messianic kingdom, and He would prepare them for the realisation that a time of waiting and preparation must interpose between his First Advent and the promised Kingdom which is to be set up at his Second Advent. Those who would sincerely be his servants must discharge with faithfulness and loyalty a commission with which He would entrust them.

There is a considerable degree of similarity between this parable and that related in Matt. 25. 14-30, known as the Parable of the Talents. They both appear at the same time in Jesus' ministry. The one in Luke's account was spoken in the house of Zaccheus not many days before Jesus' death; the setting of the Matthew account is not so easy to determine and the fact that four parables having to do with the Second Coming—those of the faithful and evil servants, the wise and foolish virgins, the talents, and the sheep and goats—all occur together suggests the possibility that Matthew grouped them for that reason without regard to the time of their utterance. In such case the two parables may be versions of the same incident; at any rate the teaching and application is identical.

The purpose of the parable is stated. It was given "*because he was nigh unto Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.*" (19. 11.) These men gathered at Zaccheus' house were not unbelievers. They may, most of them, have been a bit dubious as to the Messianic authority of the quiet young man in whose honour the feast was being held, but of one

thing they were sure; if indeed he was the promised One that should come, then certainly the kingdom of God predicted by the prophets, a kingdom in which Israel would exercise authority over all nations, was at hand and would appear in their own time. That would be the acid test of his claims. And there seems to be no doubt of a prevalent impression that this coming Passover was to be decisive; something in the attitude and sayings of Jesus had convinced many apart from his disciples that this time would be the climax of all that He had been doing and saying for the past three and a half years. Jesus alone knew that the long-awaited kingdom was not to appear then, at least not in the way they expected. Hence this parable, to prepare their minds for the fact that another phase of the Divine Plan must be initiated and run its course before their hopes could be fulfilled.

*"A nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return"* (19. 12). It may be true, as scholars have suggested, that Jesus took as the background of his story the journey of certain rulers of his own time to Rome to be formally invested with the dignity of a tributary kingship, and since such occurrences were common in that day the allusion would be clear enough to Jesus' hearers. What was not so clear was the underlying intimation that even Israel's King Messiah must go away to receive his kingdom from higher hands before returning in glory and power to exercise authority. It was all in the 7th chapter of Daniel, had they been sufficiently careful to read aright. "*I saw in the night visions, and one like the Son of Man . . . came to the Ancient of days . . . brought near before him, and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away"* (Dan. 7. 13-14). The writer to the Hebrews shows that Jesus

must first suffer and die as a sacrificing priest after the order of Aaron, ascend on high and enter into the presence of God, then be invested with the authority and power of the kingdom, that he might appear unto men the second time as a kingly priest after the order of Melchisedec, for their salvation (Heb. chaps. 3-4-5, 7-8-9). The Jews of our Lord's day had no idea that the call of the Christian Church was to follow the ending of their own period of Divine dealings and that not until that Church is complete and ready, together with finally purified Israel, for its work of world conversion, can the Second Coming and the Kingdom of God upon earth become reality.

So the nobleman went away, but before doing so, entrusted his own servants with money with which to trade on his behalf during his absence. There is a difference drawn here between his servants and his citizens. The latter had rejected him as their prospective king and had even sent a message of protest to the distant authority conferring the kingdom. One wonders how many of the Lord's hearers at the feast identified the rebellious citizens with Israel of their own day, and the servants with those who in after years would be the real custodians of their Lord's interests. The parable takes no further notice of the rebellious citizens; it is concerned, not with Israel but the Christian Church between the two Advents. So each servant received a pound wherewith to make profit for his lord.

The "pound" of the parable is the "mina" which on the basis of the relative costs of living between the First Advent and to-day was worth the equivalent of one hundred and fifty pounds or four hundred dollars. The corresponding parable in Matthew gives the servants five, two and one talents respectively and on the same basis the talent, if of silver, had a buying power of two thousand pounds in present-day English money. The precise values and minor differences of detail are not important; the principle illustrated is that each of Jesus' disciples in this Age is awarded opportunities of some kind or other whereby he may advance the cause of the Kingdom.

Those opportunities or abilities may be of an outwardly spectacular nature such as the flair for public speaking or writing, of a more unobtrusive kind such as talent for organising or administration, or the very worth-while gift of a sympathetic and unselfish nature which leads to all manner of services to others in the direction of consolation, encouragement, incitement to faith, and a constant waiting on God in prayer on behalf of others or in the interests of his work. All these things are given to us in their variety that we might use them to the honour and glory of God and in the advancement of his interests in the out-working of his purposes.

The sequel comes, of course, at the Second Advent, when the King returns in all glory and power to take his rightful place as mankind's king and rule "*with judgment and with justice henceforth even for ever*" (Isa. 9. 7). "*We must all appear before the tribunal of Christ*" says Paul "*that every one may receive the things done in the body*" (2 Cor. 5. 10). It is not always noticed that Paul is not speaking of mankind in general in that verse but solely of Christian disciples, the Church, who in the whole of the 5th chapter of 2nd Corinthians are shown as in process of preparation for a "ministry of reconciliation" the members of which are ambassadors for Christ to all who do not believe. This tribunal of Christ is the same thing as the cross-examination of the parable when the returned master takes stock of his servants' success in trading.

There was one servant who was slothful and indifferent. He took the money but did nothing with it, and when called upon for his account returned the money unused. That man had, as we would say, "a chip on his shoulder". He resented the idea of making profit for another man, even though that other man be his lawful employer and provide the money wherewith to make the profit. In his surliness he libelled his master, accusing him of being hard and harsh, claiming the benefits of work he had not himself done. "You gave me one pound; I give you back one pound. We are quits, and you have your



rights." And in his self-justification he quite failed to see that in hoarding unused the opportunity his lord had given him he had prevented someone else from making use of it. If he had no intention of using his lord's money himself he could at least have deposited it with the money-changers in the Temple, the "Stock Exchange" of the time. They would anyway have turned the money to profitable use for the period of deposit and the lord would eventually have received back his capital plus accrued interest. That points a very vital moral. Our own personal failure to rise up to our privileges and opportunities in our Lord's service may have repercussions outside ourselves; the service or work of others may be hindered or thwarted thereby. In this, as in so many things, it is true that *"none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself"* (Rom. 14. 7).

Those who had traded were commended. In one parable they, having been faithful in few things, were made rulers over many things. In the other they were made rulers over cities commensurate with the degree of profit each one had made. If this teaches any-

thing respecting conditions in the spiritual world to which the Church will eventually attain, it must be that there is variety in that world as there is in this and that there will be "differences of administrations" (1 Cor. 12) according to the spheres of activity for which each one is best qualified. The predominant truth inherent in the parable is that the future life is not static; it is not just an endless existence in a state of beatitude and contemplation of God. There is work to be done; activities to be undertaken; for all we know heights to be scaled and objects to be achieved. Perhaps creation itself is endless, and long after the work of God through Christ and the Church in the reconciliation of all of mankind who will heed the call to repent is complete, and every creature on earth is bowing the knee to the Name of Christ, those servants who have faithfully traded with their "talents" or their "pounds" now will be serving just as faithfully and just as zealously, upon an immensely enhanced scale, in spheres that we cannot even begin to visualise, in those "ten cities" and "five cities" to which they will have been appointed by their lord.

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### A NOTE ON PHIL. 2.5-7

*"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant"* (Phil. 2. 5-7).

The expression in verse 6 *"thought it not robbery to be equal with God"* is a rather crude and meaningless translation. It is better rendered in the R.S.V. *"did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped"* or as Rotherham has it *"Not a thing to be seized accounted the being equal with God"*. Even so, the Apostle's meaning is not easily grasped until the text is set against the background of the subject. The entire passage constituting the first part of Phil. 2 is primarily an exhortation to humility and selflessness. The example of Jesus is held up as one to follow. Jesus who, though in the likeness of God, emptied himself of that glory (this is the

meaning of the phrase 'made himself of no reputation') and took upon himself the likeness of man, for the suffering of death.

That part of the passage is probably easy enough to follow. Not so easy to understand is the statement that in this same connection the Son, prior to his taking human form, "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" or seized. The Greek here definitely implies the idea of seizing or attaining "equality with God" by force. The oneness always subsisting between the Father and the Son is clearly defined for us in the New Testament but it would be an utterly incongruous and improper thing to conceive that relationship as being attained or maintained by force. The meaning of St. Paul's words must be sought in another sphere.

The Apostle made this allusion in the interests of teaching humility and loyalty to God.

## THE PARABLE OF THE SHEEP AND GOATS

Matt. 25. 31-46

The opening verse of this parable indicates the time of its application. It refers to the period of Christ's reign over the earth, from His assumption of power at the commencement of the Millennium to the cleansing of the world from the last trace of evil. "*When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats*" (Matt. 25. 31-32). Jesus cast this parable against the background of Daniel's vision (Dan. 7. 9-10) in which that prophet saw the "Ancient of Days" seated upon a throne of splendour with myriads assembled before Him for judgment, one "like the Son of Man" coming with the clouds of heaven to be brought before Him, and the kingship of earth being formally committed to that Son of Man and his companions, the "people of the saints of the Most High" that they might possess the kingdom for ever. Meanwhile the evil powers and institutions of the old world were being destroyed in a great holocaust of fire. Jesus knew himself to be that "Son of Man" and his disciples and those that should afterwards believe on His Name to be the "people of the saints of the Most High" that were to be joined with Him in that Kingdom, and in this parable He set down the purpose and the character of his kingship over the nations during the Age of his glory.

The disciples must have understood this parable more clearly than any other parable. They were so accustomed to this view of the Messianic reign. How often in the Temple services would they join with intense feeling in the inspiring strains of the twenty-fourth Psalm "*Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty...*" How they must have conned over the mystic vision of Zechariah "*Behold the man whose name is the BRANCH... he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne*" (Zech. 6. 12-13). Jewish literature of the date of the First Advent is full of such references, and Jesus himself must have been thoroughly familiar with them. It is thought that the very phraseology of this parable was suggested to his mind by passages in the Book of Enoch,

a book with which He would certainly be well acquainted: "*On that day mine Elect One shall sit on the throne of glory and shall try their works... and I will transform the earth and make it a blessing... for I have provided and satisfied with peace my righteous ones, and have caused them to dwell before me: but for the sinners there is judgment impending with me, so that I shall destroy them from the face of the earth*". "*And the Lord of Spirits seated him upon the throne of his glory, and the spirit of righteousness was poured out upon him, and the word of his mouth slays all the sinners... and they shall be downcast of countenance, and pain shall seize them, when they see the Son of Man sitting on the throne of his glory*" (I Enoch 45. 3-6 and 62. 2-5). Another passage in the same work, quoted by Jude, runs "*And behold! he cometh with ten thousands of his holy ones to execute judgment upon all, and to destroy all the ungodly; and to convict all flesh of all the works of their ungodliness which they have ungodly committed, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him*" (I Enoch 1. 9; compare Jude 14-15). Here is a reference that parallels the various sayings of Jesus regarding the "angels" or messengers that will be with him at his coming, the members of his Church, raised from the sleep of death, or changed "in the twinkling of an eye" as the case may be, united with him and revealed with him to the world in glory.

The vision of the Great White Throne of Revelation 20. 11 is parallel to that of Daniel 7 and to this parable. In Revelation there is the same standing of the nations, the "dead, small and great", before the Throne, the same judgment and separation between good and evil, and the same condemnation of sin and sinners. These three passages between them afford a wonderfully vivid picture of the work of judgment that is carried on throughout the Millennial Age, a work that divides and separates men into two classes, those who choose righteousness and life, and those who choose unrighteousness and death.

The basis of the selection, feeding or not feeding the hungry, clothing or failing to clothe the naked, and so on, is an allusion to the very practical ideas held by thinking men in Jesus' day as to what constituted fitness or unfitness for eternal life. Such "good works" have always been features of the religious life of true Jews. There is a

parallel to the Lord's words in the "Secrets of Enoch" (not to be confused with the Book of Enoch just now mentioned, and usually known as 2 Enoch to distinguish it from that book), a work which was known to pious Jews during His lifetime, or at any rate shortly thereafter. The book itself is of no particular value to Christians; it presents the truths of religion as they appeared to orthodox Jews of the First Century and was to them what many theological works are to us to-day; and was strongly coloured with Greek and Oriental philosophies. But the passage in question is interesting: it describes Enoch's visit to Paradise, in the third heaven (compare Paul's use of this term when writing to the Corinthians) and his guides say to him "This place, O Enoch, is prepared for the righteous who endure every kind of attack in their lives from those who afflict their souls: who turn away their eyes from unrighteousness, and accomplish a righteous judgment, *and also give bread to the hungry, and clothe the naked, and raise the fallen, and assist the orphans who are oppressed, and who walk without blame before the face of the Lord, and serve him only. For them this place is prepared as an eternal inheritance*". The likeness of these words to the parable is obvious. The following reference to the sinners is also highly significant. They are said to be *cast into hell in the third heaven*. That is a fitting description of that death which comes to sinners in or at the end of the Millennial Age, the third heaven of which Paul spoke. "And I (Enoch) said, Woe, woe, how terrible is this place! And the men said to me: This place, Enoch, is prepared for those who do not honour God: who commit evil deeds on earth . . . *oppressing the poor and spoiling them of their possessions . . . who when they might feed the hungry, allow them to die of famine: who when they might clothe them, strip them naked . . .* (2 Enoch 9 and 10). If in fact Jesus was familiar with the book and did take these passages as the basis of his parable it is easy to see how readily his hearers would grasp his meaning, and connect the "sheep" and "goats" who "did" or "did it not" with the final judgment upon righteous and evil men. At any rate the similarity of thought shows that the sentiment portrayed was one that was quite familiar to Jewish ears.

In the parable the "sheep" are those who manifest the practical Christian virtues toward their fellows—feeding the hungry and thirsty, sheltering the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and delivering those in bondage. It has been pointed out that of the seven obligations laid upon the Christian in the New Testament only one—visiting the fatherless—is omitted in this parable. The reason is not hard to discern—there

will be no fatherless in the Millennium! All will have been restored to conscious life by the Redeemer, Jesus, and all may thenceforth become sons of God by reconciliation to him. But there will be many hungry, naked and in prison, at first. Men, returning from the grave, will have the same characters and dispositions that were theirs at death, and the result will be that, although physically whole, many will still be mentally and morally sick, in prison by reason of bondage to their past vices and depravity, naked as respects fitness for the new world into which they have come, and whether they realise the fact or not, hungry and thirsty for the blessings of life and knowledge that the Kingdom is designed to give them. There is a link here with the Parable of the Good Samaritan; it will be remembered that Jesus gave that parable in answer to a question "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" and the Samaritan who undertook the care and healing of the distressed wayfarer was the one shown to be worthy of such. So it will be in the Millennial Age; the man who is making progress toward perfection and harmony with God will be actively employed in helping and assisting his fellows in every conceivable way; the selfish and the sinner will be indifferent to such service and Jesus in the parable points to this as a touchstone by which the true state of the heart can be indicated.

The question put both by sheep and goats "*When saw we thee an hungred, or athirst . . .*" and so on, is a rhetorical one, put into the mouths of the characters in order to throw into prominence the essential principle of these "good works"; inasmuch as ye did it—or did it not—unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it—or did it not—unto me. Our Lord's concern for those He came to seek and to save is such that every service or disservice rendered to them He feels as if rendered to Him. More; since He gave his own life, at the cost of great suffering, for the salvation of men, and is to establish his thousand year reign on earth for the purpose of persuading as many as can possibly be persuaded to "turn from sin to serve the living God", it follows that every service or disservice rendered to men in that day is either a help or a hindrance to the execution of the King's plans, and therefore can be aptly said to be done, or not done, unto him. No one in that Age can escape working, either for or against the purposes of God—and all will be judged accordingly.

"*Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'*" (vs. 34). This "kingdom" is not the same as the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. *That*

is a kingdom in which all men are under discipline, and all, good and bad alike, are present in that kingdom and must perforce remain so until they have come to a full knowledge of the truth and made their choice between "life and death, good and evil". *This* is a kingdom entrance into which is granted only to the proved righteous, to those who have passed the test and are in no sense unclean. It thus corresponds to the Holy City of Rev. 21 and 22, into which nothing unclean or that defileth will ever enter. It is the kingdom of the earth *after* the Millennial Age, which men inherit as kings in their own right, living, moving and having their being in God the Father and conducting their own affairs on a basis of equality with each other in harmony with the laws of righteousness.

*"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels'"* (vs. 41). Here we have the antithesis to the Holy City, the lake of fire of Revelation 19 and 20, symbolic

of utter destruction. The allusion is, of course, to the valley of Gehenna outside Jerusalem, where perpetual fires destroyed the refuse of the city. Jesus took the illustration from the apocalyptic literature of his day, and his hearers would realise quite naturally what He meant. The final verse of the parable perhaps makes this more clear *"These shall go away into everlasting punishment"*, where "punishment" is *kolasin*, disciplinary restraint, and not *timora*, which is the word that indicates penal infliction in the sense of the English word punishment. *Kolasin*, derived from the verb *kolazo*, which means to lop or prune trees, hence to check, curb or restrain, is very descriptive of the purpose of God with irrecoverable sinners. "They shall be as though they had not been"; they will be "cut off from among the people" and so the expression "everlasting" (or enduring) punishment can be accurately rendered "final cutting-off". That cutting-off is as permanent and everlasting as is the eternal life of the righteous mentioned in the same verse.

## Into the New Year

Back of us lies the travelled road; before us the uncharted pathway of the New Year. We wish one another a Happy New Year, and happiness should be increasing each year if we know its true meaning and go the right way to secure it.

How should the worth of the passing year be estimated? Surely not in material things, but in spiritual values! Have we grown richer in the fruit of the Spirit? Do we know Christ better than we did a year ago? Does He mean more to us, and things less? What do we plan for this year as the chief end of effort? Are we determined that it shall be a year of closer accord with the Master and the purpose of God in us? Shall life be lifted above self-regard to the joyous plane of living for others? If we have found the real meaning of life then living should be a worth-while thing to the last moment, even though it be marked by pain and disappointment, by loss and sorrow, as for most of us it must be. If we have learned the real values we will not need to hide from ourselves the fact that we are growing older by the count of weeks and months, for the real values are eternal. We are not hurrying toward an hour when everything must be dropped, but rather toward the time when hope will be realised, faith may lay hold of its richest treasures, hope come into its full inheritance. For us, life is not narrowing toward the grave, it is broadening toward eternity. There are songs for the thoughtful in the passing of the year,

remembering God's leading in the old, and laying triumphant hold upon his promises for the new.

The infallible recipe for happiness, then, is to do good, and the infallible recipe for doing good is to abide in Christ. Joy is a fruit, and like all fruits must be grown. The Christian graces come under the law of cause and effect. No one can get joy merely by prayer, although that contributes; it is one of the fruits of Christian life, and must be grown. No man can make things grow; he can arrange circumstances and fulfil conditions, but the growing is done by God. Causes and effects are eternal arrangements, but man can place himself in fulfilling conditions of growth. No violent over-strained exertions are necessary to a noble life, nothing greater than simple faithfulness.

One thing more. If seeking to lose our lives in the service of Christ means practically living for others, let us live by the day. Some of us try to grasp too much of life at a time; we think of it as a whole instead of a day. The only way to make a radiant day is to make each hour bright with the lustre of approved fidelity, keeping the days as they pass pure with useful, holy living. Each day is one white page open before us, to fill in as a record of duty or victory. Let us remember our God, and remember those in need about us, to stretch forth a helping hand, and keep our heart open toward Heaven.

(The "Herald of Christ's Kingdom")

*From which issue?*

den attack. Three hundred men, and three hundred only, drank with their heads up and their eyes fixed upon the distant scene, drawing up water in their hands and lapping as a dog would lap. Instinctively they were ready for an emergency.

By these three hundred will I deliver, said the Lord. Send the rest back! This must have been the moment when Gideon's faith was tested to the uttermost. Three hundred only against that mighty host? Four hundred and fifty Midianites to each Israelite? Was such a miracle even possible? We have to remember that in Gideon's day there was no precedent for this victory. All past conflicts, whether or not the Lord had been concerned, had seen the participation of Israelite warriors in their thousands. The initial invasion of the land under Joshua, the subsequent victories of Othniel over the Hittites, of Ehud over the Moabites, and Barak over the Canaanites, all were achieved by large and well-equipped forces of men. Now the Lord told Gideon that he was going to disperse what was in all probability by far the largest force Israel had yet to face with

a paltry three hundred men. And as if to challenge his faith the Lord said "*Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand*".

The upshot of the story shows that God had chosen a fit man. Without hesitation Gideon acted. The use that he made of his three hundred men and the manner in which he routed the enemy, and all that came after, belongs to a succeeding story. There is no break in the narrative at this point; that goes on immediately to tell of Gideon's strategy and attack, but there is the attainment of a definite critical stage at this point. Here, at the waters of Harod, the Lord steps out of the affair, having done all that is necessary for Him to do, and leaves the execution of the matter to Gideon. All the Israelite leader had to do was obey instructions and victory was assured. God had already delivered the Midianites into his hand. The details of that victory, and the events which followed in consequence, and how it affected the life of Gideon and the welfare of Israel in later times, must be the subject of another chapter.

*To be continued.*

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## THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN

Matt.  
21. 33-44

It was within a few days of His crucifixion that Jesus spoke this parable. There is not much doubt that He intended it to be prophetic—prophetic of his own death and prophetic of the Divine condemnation soon to fall upon those responsible for his death. But behind that there was a deeper purpose. Not many days hence a good many would be saying, sadly, to themselves what in fact two disciples did say aloud to the supposed stranger on the road to Emmaus "*We trusted that it had been he that should have redeemed Israel*". Jesus meant to leave, in this parable, an explanation of the event soon to be consummated which would take the discouraged believers back to their own Scriptures, the books of the prophets, and to their own national history, and reveal to them that all this had been known and foreseen beforehand; that no other outcome was possible; that so far from being an irretrievable disaster, this crushing anti-climax to all their hopes was in fact the only manner in which those hopes would ever be fulfilled. So Jesus gave them the parable of the wicked husbandmen.

A familiar picture, this. A vineyard, leased by its owner to a group of men who would render him an agreed proportion of the fruits by way of rent. This was a common practice in Israel and

usually worked very satisfactorily. In this instance the results were not so satisfactory. When the owner's servants came to collect the expected harvest they met with a hostile reception, were beaten, stoned and killed. The owner might have been justifiably incensed but it seems he was a man of long patience, not easily moved to anger. He sent more servants, giving the husbandmen another chance. Those servants were treated in similar manner to the first. So he sent his son, saying, so the story goes, "*they will reverence my son*". But when the son appeared at the entrance to the vineyard and announced his mission, the husbandmen conspired together and killed him, so that they could seize the vineyard for themselves.

So far the little company around Jesus had listened with close attention, as every Eastern crowd will do when a story is being told. Swiftly Jesus threw out the question among them "*When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?*" Some of them at least must have had a glimmering of what lay behind this everyday story, but even so, common honesty demanded the obvious and only reply. "*He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other*

husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons." And in so saying they condemned themselves out of their own mouths and gave opportunity for one of the most scathing denunciations ever to fall from the Master's lips.

Rightly to understand the force of that denunciation it is necessary to go back to the beginning of the story and look at it through Jewish eyes—and eyes of the Jews of the First Advent at that, when national feeling was at its zenith and national pride had not been crushed by centuries of Gentile oppression. "There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen." As the simple yet vivid description fell from the lips of Jesus the minds of his hearers must inevitably have gone back to God's words to their fathers through the prophet Isaiah (5. 1-7) "My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill. And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein . . . he looked that it brought forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes . . . for the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant, and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry." Right at the beginning of the story Jesus' listeners realised that He was talking about them. They knew full well that their nation was symbolised by a vine or a vineyard in prophetic lore, and they must have listened with an added intensity to discern what the story was to unfold of good or ill for Israel.

Now the time of the vintage was come. The vineyard had been well planted with good vines, it was furnished with a winepress; there should be a good return for the owner. He had made rich provision for his tenants and could reasonably expect his due. He met instead with disloyalty, ingratitude and rebellion. That is how it was with Israel, not only in the days of Jesus but almost all through their history. Brought out of Egypt by the mighty power of God, constituted a nation at Sinai under the terms of a Covenant which made them not only the chosen people of God but also custodians of a destiny which was to make them a light to the nations to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth, they nevertheless miserably failed to live up to their calling. When God sent His servants the prophets to recall them to a sense of their duty and their destiny, they ignored and persecuted and slew them. "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" demanded Stephen of the

Sanhedrin before which he was on trial for his own life "and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One" (Acts 7.52). "The Lord hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear" declared Jeremiah (Jer. 25.4). "They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tried, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; they wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth". So runs the damning indictment of the writer to the Hebrews (Heb. 11. 37-38). Surely the wicked husbandmen did indeed beat, and stone, and kill the servants sent to them to collect the fruits of the vineyard.

But, said the householder, they will reverence my son—my beloved son, Luke's account of this parable has it (Luke 20.13). So the Son of God came to earth. God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. He came to his own—but his own received him not. (John 1. 11). They looked upon him and they said "This is the heir; let us kill him and the inheritance will be ours". There is a terrible truth underlying those words. The Messiah had come to claim his right, the kingship of the nation, to lead them into the light and life of the Kingdom of Heaven. The entrenched forces of priestly and aristocratic power were determined to preserve the traditional framework of Rabbinic theology which held the nation in bondage. Like the citizens in another parable they said "We will not have this man to reign over us", and when they realised that the power he possessed could only have come from above they resolved on the most desperate act of their desperate course—they resolved to get him out of the way by putting him to death. None of the prophets of old, not even Moses whom they professed to obey, had ever come back from the dead to denounce their apostasy. No reason existed to think that this one, even though the most influential of all the prophets, would survive where Moses had failed. "Let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." So it came about then, in Peter's biting words, "him ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain".

Now comes judgment. In Matthew's account Jesus makes his listeners pass judgment upon themselves. "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard to other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons" (Matt. 21. 41). There could not be any doubt as to the outcome, either in the story

or in the application. The fearful words of Moses in Leviticus 26 detailing their fate if they apostasised from their covenant with God is enough for that; no man of Israel was ignorant of the prediction, but most men of Israel trusted that by payment of formal lip-service to the name of Moses they could escape the threatened retribution. But now they are brought face to face with reality. There was to be no escape. Sin merited judgment, and judgment must inevitably come. And when they realised that, some must have cried out, as Luke says they did, "*God forbid*".

Jesus was talking still, talking with an earnest vehemence which compelled attention. "*Did ye never read in the Scriptures, the stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the headstone of the corner; this is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes?*" They knew that quotation well enough. So often had they heard Psalm 118 sung and chanted in the Temple service and their teachers expounding it as a song of rejected Israel's eventual triumph over the Gentiles. This was a new slant on an old theme. They were the builders and the stone was one which they had rejected. Uneasily they remembered the burning words of Isaiah, denouncing the arrogant men who ruled Jerusalem in certainty that the refuge of lies and falsehood they had erected would always protect them; how God had laid in Zion a tried and choice corner stone on which he who believed could rely. (Isa. 28, 15-16). They thought of Zechariah's vision of the unfaithful shepherds who were to be cut off and replaced by governors of Judah ruling in Jerusalem in the strength of the Lord their God (Zech. 11, 12), and they shivered and once again they muttered "*God forbid*".

The compelling voice went on, and now it was inexorable in its cadences of judgment. "*Therefore I say unto you, the Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.*" That nation is the Church of Christ, called out from among all nations to be a people for God's purpose. There can be no doubt whatever that there was an opportunity extended to Israel at the First Advent which, had it been accepted, would have changed the whole course of human history. Whether God, in His incomprehensible omnipotence, foreknew that they would reject and had planned accordingly, is quite beside the point. The opportunity was theirs, but they rejected the Prince of Life and desired a murderer to be granted unto them, and the opportunity passed them by for ever. Within a very few weeks the faithful few who did accept Christ were being given their commission to be his witnesses not only in Jerusalem and all Judea, but to the

uttermost parts of the earth; that work of witness has progressed ever since and resulted in the development of a nation which has brought and is bringing forth the fruits thereof.

St. Paul puts all this into theological language in Romans 11 when he likens Israel to the unfruitful olive branches which "because of unbelief" were "broken off" and Gentile Christians, being wild olive branches, grafted on in their place. But he goes on to show that the original branches, "if they abide not still in unbelief" shall be grafted in again, "and so all Israel shall be saved". That can only mean that in a then far future day, after God's work with the Christian Church is complete, He will turn again to the once apostate people of Israel and find them in chastened and repentant mood, and so receive them again, that they might, at the last, find a place in the administration of the Divine purpose. So we are presented, at the last, with the picture of the glorified Church of this Age, "changed" to be with Christ, resplendent in the heavens, and purified Israel, waiting before God, both being agents in God's hand for the extension of the knowledge of His glory over the earth just as the waters cover the sea. James saw this vividly when at the memorable conference at Jerusalem which is recorded in Acts 15 he declared that God was first visiting the nations to take out of them a people for His name—the Christian Church;—after that He would rebuild the dwelling place of Jacob—Israel—and re-establish it; all this in order that the residue of men,—all mankind as yet unreconciled to God—might seek after the Lord. Here is world conversion in very truth, to be undertaken and effected after, and not before, the salvation of the Church has been achieved and the purified nation of Israel has been made ready.

But the priests and Pharisees listening to Jesus knew nothing of all this. They heard only the solemn words of doom, "*Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken, and on whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder*", and they were coldly furious. Arrogant in their fancied security and determined to maintain their privileged position, they sought means to lay hold on him, plotting to get rid of him and the annoyance and inconvenience of his words. They scorned his warnings and predictions, little knowing that within forty years more their own folly would have brought the armed might of Rome against them, sweeping away their city and their polity, and driving them captive among all nations until the Times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled. The words of the parable came terribly true.

## The Parable of the Costly Pearl and the Buried Treasure

Matt. 13. 44-46

Two of the shortest recorded parables, together occupying only three verses! Their teaching and intent are identical, the one being merely a reiteration of the other, against a different background. One wonders why they are so brief; surely Jesus must have rounded out his stories in much more comprehensive form than is here written down; perhaps their very brevity as recorded is intended to emphasise one plain, clear-cut truth without the distracting effect of side issues.

The Kingdom of Heaven, He said, is like a treasure buried in a field and discovered by a man, who promptly goes away and realises on his assets in order to raise the capital necessary to buy the field. We need not stop to reflect upon the morality of the man's action; Jesus used stories based upon real life to illustrate his teachings, and this is how many men would behave under such circumstances. In any case we are entitled to assume that the then owner of the field was not the man who put the treasure there, and a good argument could be put up for the discoverer's right to the treasure. The whole point is that he saw something in that field which other men, including the owner, did not see, and he was prepared to sacrifice all that he possessed in order to acquire it.

The other story concerns the world of trade. A merchant man, in the market for valuable pearls, found one that was superb and excellent above all that he had seen or heard of before. Such was his professional appreciation of the technical merits of this particular pearl, such his estimate of the commercial possibilities inherent in its possession, that he did not hesitate to invest the whole of his financial resources in this one single pearl, and count himself a happy man to have obtained it.

The very brevity of these two parables creates some small difficulty in being at all dogmatic as to their intended application. The fact that they point to the giving up of all things in order to obtain a much to be desired end is plain; but two very obvious and definite interpretations at once suggest themselves. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave up all in order to "seek and to save that which was lost", and however much one may question the intrinsic value of this sin-sick and dying human race which He came to save, it is not possible to deny that He saw something in man which He regarded as of value and suffered even the death of the cross in order to obtain it. We also, Christians who have

set to our seal that God is true, and on that basis have given ourselves to the Lord Christ, we also have found a treasure which involves the willing and eager selling of all that we have, that we might obtain that treasure.

Perhaps the parables are intended to bear both interpretations. "As He is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4. 17). It is quite in accord with the economy of the Scriptures to have one passage serve more than one purpose. The known fact that many of the prophetic passages have two applications, one to the generation to which they were spoken and another to the great climax at the end of human rulership and the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth, is a case in point. The value to us of these two parables is doubled if we see in them, first, a picture of our Lord renouncing his Heavenly glory and coming to earth to save man, and second, a picture of every man who answers the call to surrender and gives up all else that he may win Christ.

The two parables certainly take us deeply into the realms of Christian theology. There were certain heresies in the days of the Early Church, to some extent still persisting to-day, which taught that Christ had no pre-existence before his advent upon earth, that He first knew life in the same way as other men by being born a man of Adamic generation; only after his death was He exalted to the Father's right hand. Had such indeed been the case, then Christ gave up nothing and "sold" nothing in order to redeem man. In fact He had nothing wherewith He could redeem man, for as the Psalmist says of all men and any man "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him" (Psa. 49. 7. The understanding of the Apostle Paul was to the contrary; writing to the Philippians he gives evidence of very clear vision. "—Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that . . . every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2. 5-11 RSV). The Revised Standard Version is quoted here because

to repeat to say or do over again, or repeatedly



it expresses so much more accurately St. Paul's meaning than does the Authorised Version, which, it has for years been admitted, presents a very poor rendering at this place. The definition in human terms of the relationship between the Father and the Son, and the Divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ, has always been a difficulty, as witness the theological wrangles on this subject throughout the Christian era; but this passage in Philippians taken side by side with the two parables under discussion do at least demonstrate very clearly that the One who "IN the beginning . . . with God" (John 1. 1) partaker of the Divine glory, divested himself completely of that superlative state, and, again in the simple language of John "was made flesh and dwelt among us". "The Son of Man" He said himself "is come to seek and to save that which was lost" and in his coming He gave evidence that in lost humanity, degraded and sinful and rebellious though they be, there is something worth saving, something that to him is as treasure hid in a field, needing only to be dug up and cleansed; a pearl of great price, needing only to have its lost lustre restored and be set in a frame of beauty suited to its intrinsic merit. One of the great lessons we Christians have to learn—and sometimes it is very difficult to learn—is that God has faith in the possibilities of man and will yet have that faith vindicated in the emergence of a sinless undying world in which all that is of sin and rebellion will have passed away. "Are there few that be saved?" asked the disciples of Jesus. He gave them to understand that those who eventually attain to joint-heirship with himself (Rom. 8. 17) will indeed be a "little flock" because of the stringent conditions of the calling; outside of that there is the greater call the fruits of which yield the picture of multitudes coming to God and all the ends of the earth turning to him, when the ransomed of the Lord will return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isa. 35. 10; Rev. 21. 3-5). The old theology declared that the few, the very few, would pass the Divine scrutiny and be admitted to heaven; the vast majority of God's intelligent creatures would be rejected as wastage and pass into the hopeless eternity of hell. God is not so inefficient a workman as that! He will work continuously and patiently with each refractory individual until it has become abundantly clear that by no means whatever can that individual be truly and sincerely converted to live for, and give loyalty and allegiance to, the Saviour Christ. Only then will He let go and leave the sinner to the wages of sin—death.

So the purpose of God will be achieved in a triumphant and gloriously successful ending to the

mission of One who sold all that He had to win mankind for himself. What of the other application of the parable?

Perhaps the best avenue of approach is through the Apostle Paul's words, again in Philippians, expressing his own attitude of heart to his calling "*Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him*". (Phil. 3. 7-9 RSV). Here is expressed the utter devotion to God and God's service which is demanded of every believer who would come "into Christ". There is a world of difference between the one who believes in Christ and his message and endeavours to live in conformity with it, and the one who not only thus believes but comes to Christ in full surrender and dedication of life, possessions, abilities, all, to his service as He shall direct. Only these latter will at the end "reign with Christ" (Rev. 20, 4) and be associated with him in the direction of the mighty evangelical work of world conversion which is to characterise the coming era of Christ's reign, when human power and kingdoms have passed away. It is only "if we suffer with him" now that "we shall reign with him" then. That word suffering does not mean wholly nor even primarily the idea of physical pain as so many believe; it means endurance. He that "endures to the end, the same shall be saved" whether the endurance be in the realm of physical ill-health, literal persecution, or the insidious wearing-down processes of the world, the flesh, and the devil battling against our faith. So the Kingdom of Heaven in this aspect consists of those who have "forsaken all, and followed thee" and in consequence, "in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory", will be associated with him in that glorious reign (Matt. 19. 28). The "regeneration" is the time of giving new life, the Millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ at his Second Advent. It is not without significance that Jesus' words above quoted were spoken at the time the rich young ruler "went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions". Here was one who came in sight of the buried treasure, the costly pearl, but he was not prepared to sell all that he had to obtain the coveted possession. And he went away a disappointed and unhappy man.

In that lies the lesson. We have the opportunity of giving ourselves in full surrender to God, without reserve or condition, to be used in his service as He may direct. Home service, foreign service, prominence, obscurity; it may be any of these, or a combination of them as life goes on. We do not

know. We only know that God calls us, again in the language of the great Apostle (Rom. 12. 1) to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, acceptable unto God, your reasonable service. And be not

*conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind". In so doing we shall be following the example of One who himself sold all that he had, and bought that field".*

## COLD OR HOT

*"To the church of the Laodiceans write, I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot" (Rev. 3.14-15).*

Salter, travelling through Turkey a few years ago, visited Laodicea ("*Introducing Turkey*" 1961). From before the First Advent, he says, Laodicea was the principal market in the Roman world for the exchange of western and oriental monies, retaining its importance in banking business and

remaining "rich and increased with goods" until the time of the Crusades. Near the town there is a hundred feet high cliff down which a hot mineralised stream flows into a pool, built more than two thousand years ago, where the water, at a temperature of 99 deg. F, was a place of resort for the cure of various ailments. But often there is snow on the surrounding ground. Here possibly is the source of the allusion in Rev. 3.

## DESTROYERS OF THE SANCTUARY

*"A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees; but now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers." (Psa. 74. 5-6).*

This sublime lament might well have been composed in Babylon at the time of the captivity. It seems clearly to refer to the destruction of Solomon's Temple. There is no event in Israel's earlier history which the words can fit. The Psalmist laments the destruction of the Divine Sanctuary by fire, its profanation by pagan symbols, and concludes on the despairing note, "*we see not our signs; there is no more any prophet; neither is there among us any that knowest how long*". Looking around him at the ruined house of prayer and calling to mind its former glories, he breaks out into the bitter reflection just quoted. In the days when this Temple was built men achieved honour and glory by virtue of their labours upon the great cedars and stately olives which were cut down and shaped to their uses in this house; but now fame and reward is to him who leads his comrades in the work of destruction. "Ichabod" has been written over the portals and the glory has departed.

What would have been the thoughts of those men who hewed the timbers for the Temple, had they known that in generations to come their work would become the prey of the invader, suffering total destruction at the hands of God's enemies? I Kings 5 tells of King Solomon writing to his friend Hiram, King of Tyre, who had jurisdiction over the forests of Lebanon, "Command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon . . . So

Hiram gave Solomon cedar trees and fir trees according to his desire . . . and Solomon had threescore and ten thousand that bare burdens, and fourscore thousand in the mountains . . . so they prepared timber and stones to build the house". What a mighty work this must have been, this felling and transporting of cedars and firs of Lebanon to Jerusalem that the House of God might be built!

I Kings 6 tells of the building and how these precious timbers were utilised. "He built the walls of the house within with boards of cedar, both the floor of the house, and the walls of the ceiling; and he covered them on the inside with wood, and covered the floor of the house with planks of fir . . . and the cedar of the house within was carved with knops and open flowers; there was no stone seen . . . and within the oracle he made two cherubims of olive tree, each ten cubits (about eighteen feet) high . . . and he overlaid the cherubims with gold; and he carved all the walls of the house round about with carved figures of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers, within and without . . . . And for the entering of the oracle he made doors of olive tree . . . and he carved upon them carvings of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers; and covered them with gold fitted upon the carved work" (vss. 15-35).

This was the carved work which these later despoilers attacked with their axes and hammers. Caring nothing for the labours of those who in times gone by had given their lives' best endeavours to creating these beautiful things for the glory of God, they wantonly destroyed that which they

## THE PARABLE OF THE WINESKINS

Luke 5, 31-37

Matthew Levi the tax collector was a proud man and a happy one this day. This was not the first time he had entertained his fellow collectors and his other friends to a feast in his house, but it was unusual for his regular guests to find themselves seated in the same room with members of a totally dissimilar social class, the Scribes and the Pharisees. And they were rather intrigued by the purpose for which they had assembled. They were there to do honour to the new prophet who had arisen in Israel. Tax collectors usually had no time for prophets; they left that department of life to the men whose business it was, the priests and the doctors of the Law. The business of a tax-collector in Israel did not usually permit of much else than observing one's financial obligations to the Roman government in paying all accounts promptly, and taking care to extract enough from the unwilling taxpayers to keep the business out of the red, with a suitable profit left over to make it all worth while. A tax-collector had to be a practical man and must not concern himself too closely with religion.

Apparently though their highly respected colleague was not keeping to tradition. His business was sound enough, sufficiently so to maintain his known standard of entertainment and hospitality, yet most inexplicably he had avowed himself a follower of the Nazarene prophet, closed down his business, settled his account with the Roman Chancellor of the Exchequer, and invited his erstwhile business associates to this feast where they were to meet his new Master. It might not have been so bad had they found themselves seated at the table only with this new young visionary and his personal disciples. They were all fishermen and peasantry and there would be no feeling of constraint with them. The real trouble was that Matthew had also invited some of the respectable religious fraternity, who in business life customarily suffered much at the hands of these same tax collectors, and in any case heartily despised them as willing tools of Rome. Both groups had come with equal curiosity to see and hear this new prophet about whom so much was being said, but there was a coolness between the two parties which led the respectable ones at length to voice their irritation in a question to the guest

of honour which exceeded all the bounds of breeding and good taste in view of the fact that they were there as the guests of a tax collector. "Why" they demanded of Jesus "do ye eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus regarded them gravely. He knew the sense of outrage that filled their hearts. For four hundred years past the Pharisees had preserved the ancient traditions of Israel and maintained that standard of rigid righteousness which had to be preserved if Israel was to remain separate and undefiled from Roman influence, and so be fit to receive Messiah when He should appear. The tax-collectors, having no regard for God or Moses, traitors to their own nation and its national destiny, made their bargains with Rome for the privilege of extracting what they could of taxation from their own countrymen. They were universally despised and hated. Yet Jesus and his disciples, ignoring all this, were content to accept their hospitality and treat them as though they stood on the same level in the sight of God as the Scribes and Pharisees themselves, when all Israel knew the latter to be the favoured ones in God's sight. Jesus looked into those eyes of outraged righteousness with his own eyes of infinite understanding, and smiled. He gave them his answer. It was a totally unexpected answer too. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

This was a poser. Some faces were thoughtful, others angry and frustrated. They could not dispute the reply without denying their own claim to righteousness. Jesus had put them in a position from which they could not extricate themselves. They ate in silence whilst they digested the implication of his words.

Some of those at table had been disciples of John the Baptist. They had much in common with the better minded of the Pharisees—it may be, were Pharisees themselves. Perhaps to tide over an awkward moment they put a question of their own; a little more sincerity in this one, and no suspicion of bad taste. "We, as John's disciples, are ascetics—so are the Pharisees; we, and they, lead pious lives and keep aloof from the common man. Your disciples are not ascetics; they eat and drink in the same manner as all men and generally mix with all men irrespective

of class or creed, careless of possible defilement or contagion. Why?" That is a fair paraphrase of their question. Jesus looked at their earnest faces with eyes of quiet gravity. "If you go to the wedding of one of your number", He said, "you who are the friends of the bridegroom do not abstain from food and drink and merrymaking while you are in his presence and the feast is proceeding. You enjoy to the full all that is provided. It is later, when the feast is over and the bridegroom has departed, and you yourselves are back in your customary place, that you resume the self-denial and asceticism of your normal life." Perhaps there was a gentle reminder here that despite their claim of asceticism and fasting, in contrast with Jesus' disciples, they were in fact doing themselves very well indeed at that moment in a manner far removed from fasting. Luke says that Matthew had provided a "great feast" and that a "great company" sat down to it. Fasting or no fasting, these Scribes and Pharisees and disciples of John were disposing of Matthew's best viands and choicest wines at an appreciable rate and enjoying themselves hugely in the process. They had probably, for so many years, taken themselves so seriously that the absurdity of asking such a question in the present situation did not occur to them.

But Jesus saw the absurdity and in the silence which followed his second reply He channelled their thoughts into position for receiving the principle He wanted to inculcate, a principle which is just as important to us to-day as it was to them, for we often fall short in precisely the same respect. "No man" He said, "*putteth new wine into old bottles, else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottle will perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles, and both are preserved. No man having drunk old wine straightway desireth new; for he saith, the old is better*". His gaze must have fallen upon the wineskins stacked in the outer room, waiting their turn for use at the feast, and his hearers must have looked at them too and begun to sense a glimmer of the truth He was about to expound.

The most common receptacle for wines and oils in Jesus' day was a suitably dressed and prepared goatskin. The rich possessed store jars, large earthenware containers with a wide neck, but although these were ideal for dry goods such as grain or dried fruits they were not so useful for wine which needed to be kept closely sealed. A goatskin, open only at the neck, could be filled with wine and the opening tied up tightly. Thus contained, the wine could be equally conveniently transported on donkey or camel back or hung up in the store room until required. One

precaution was necessary. Until the wine was matured and old, the pressure inside the skin was likely to increase. With a new goatskin this was nothing to be concerned about; the skin itself was resilient and to a certain extent elastic, and would stretch and accommodate itself to the increased pressure. A skin which had already done appreciable service, however, would eventually reach the limit of its stretch, and if then used again for new wine would be liable to rupture and lose its contents. Such a skin would however be quite suitable for wine which had already matured. The allusion was one which would be readily understood by all those present at the feast, and those among them who were sincerely desirous of giving heed to Jesus' words would immediately start casting around in their minds for a clue to his object in giving such an illustration. What did Jesus mean. What was his object in speaking thus?

The Scribes and Pharisees there present were men who had spent the whole of their lives in the study of a systematic theology which was already completely documented and defined before they commenced. Judaism comprised a rigid and dogmatic presentation of Divine Truth which, based upon the Mosaic Covenant and every revealed word of God recorded from ancient times, had been overlaid by a mass of Rabbinic interpretation and exposition. With all its faults, its shortcomings, and its insufficiency, it was, nevertheless, the Truth in which they had been brought up. It had sufficed for them. In that faith they had been born and in that faith they were prepared to die. It was old wine, and it was very comfortably contained in old bottles.

Now Jesus came with something new and revolutionary. True, He had said, "*Think not that I am come to destroy the Law and the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil*" (Matt. 5.17) but in that process of fulfilment He must of necessity cast a new light upon many old and long-cherished beliefs. He must needs show himself as the reality of which much that had gone before was the shadow. He was very definitely going to remove "*the handwriting of ordinances, nailing it to his cross*" (Col. 2.14) even although in so doing, He would in fact "*magnify the law and make it honourable*" (Isa. 42.21). Some at least of those Pharisees were sincere men; they wanted to know and do the will of God; but how so to present the unfolding purpose of God to their dubious minds as rightly to convince them of its truth? Jesus knew that He had come in humiliation to die as a malefactor on the Cross; they were expecting a victorious military leader who would expel the Romans and estab-

lish his throne in Jerusalem. Jesus knew that a long, long time must elapse before God's visible kingdom on earth would come; they expected it there and then. Jesus knew that Israel as a nation would reject him, and his call to discipleship would go out to all the nations to draw out a spiritual people for God's Name, a Church whose members would at the last be exalted to be with him in the celestial sphere; they expected to see Israel exalted forever upon earth above all the Gentiles and thus to rule all the peoples everlastingly with an autocratic even though righteous rule. How were they ever going to be persuaded that a new light was now to be shed upon the Divine purpose and those who would be God's ministers must be ready to advance in the light?

The Master knew that, in the main, they would not. The introduction of the new wine of his teachings into the old bottles of Judaism would, in almost every case, wreck the bottles and waste the wine. The message He preached was received, in the main, by the younger and fresher minds who were themselves more resilient and less hide-bound—fitting word—in the old traditions. Even though they must themselves become, in the course of time, as it were "old bottles", they were for the present fitting bottles for the Master's use. Some there were, old in years but new bottles in spirit, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Simeon, Anna, who did receive and retain the new wine without disaster. In every generation there are those to whom advancing years proves no handicap to progress in increasing light. There are always those who can weld the revelation of the present to the knowledge of the past and in that fusion perceive a clear vision of the out-working purpose of God. But in the main the old wine must remain in the old bottles and new bottles must be found for the new wine.

Perhaps all this is part of the tenderness and compassion of God for his servants. "He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are but dust". A faithful disciple has served his God to the limit of the light he had, throughout the span of a long life; why should his failing powers at the last be called upon to receive and assimilate conceptions and definitions of truth which, however superior to the older definitions they may be in the light of more modern knowledge and understanding, might seem to him, in comparison

with the things he was taught of old, the rankest heresy. It is not as though there is any finality to truth in this life, for the new wine of to-day becomes the old wine of to-morrow. He was a farsighted man who coined the oft-quoted phrase "*the heresy of to-day is the orthodoxy of to-morrow*". And no single vessel can contain the whole of Divine truth; as soon seek to scoop up the entire ocean in one little pannier.

Whenever Jesus talked like this He included a special word for the "hearing ear". This time was no exception. He left on record his own knowledge of the conflict which must take place in the minds of some before they can accept him and his claims and his message. "*No man,*" He said "*having drunk old wine straightway desireth new; for, he saith, the old is better.*" The determining word there, the one that implies so much, is "straightway". Many there are who come into contact with some striking advance in the progressive unfolding of the Divine purpose who will not have it at any price. "The old" they say "is better". Later on, when the force of the new presentation has begun to make itself felt, they look upon the new with a less unfriendly eye. Saul of Tarsus was one such. He would not accept the new wine straightway. He kicked, at first, against the ox-goad. But the New Testament abundantly manifests how completely the new wine of Christianity did fill that chosen vessel to the Lord, rigid and hard as it may originally have been in the unyielding mould of Judaism.

That is how the parable affects individuals, now as well as then. There is no doubt that Jesus meant it to have a dispensational application also. He knew that Israel would not accept his message, that the rulers would put him to death that the old order might remain. He was yet to pass upon them that irrevocable sentence "*The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*" (Matt. 21.43). He knew that new bottles, those disciples who in after ages, even to this present, would constitute the Christian Church, must be selected to receive and contain the new wine of his teachings and his mission. So it has been, and so it must be, for it is that same new wine which, so preserved in those new wineskins, is to be brought forth in the greatest feast of all, that all mankind may partake, at the end.

Those who would successfully govern the world must have both an inexhaustible capacity, and an insatiable appetite, for work. "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?"

"In the past we have suffered from theologians who have lacked the spirit of evangelism, and evangelists who could have done with a little more theology."—

*Rev. Percy Sowerby in a broadcast talk.*

## THE PARABLE OF THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT

Matt. 18, 21-35.

It must have been after that breath-taking declaration of Jesus "the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Matt. 18, 11) that the train of thought was set up in Peter's mind which led to his asking that question about forgiveness. "*How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?*" (18, 21). Forgiveness was very much an alien thought to an orthodox Jew; the law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth did not easily square with forgiveness of enemies or those who do injury to one. And the popular conception of the Son of Man was one that pictured Him as coming in the clouds and tempest to execute judgment upon sinners, not to reclaim and forgive them. A Messiah who would punish and destroy the Gentiles and the rebellious, and exalt righteous Israel to everlasting felicity they could understand; one whose mission was to convert and reconcile the wayward and the sinful, to seek and find the lost ones, was a new kind of Messiah altogether and such ideas must inevitably have started new trains of thought altogether in the disciples' minds. As usual, it was Peter the impetuous who put into words the questions which probably came to all their minds. "*How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?*" Even then the range of forgiveness was to be narrow; they were perhaps prepared to tolerate forgiveness of their own brethren whilst as yet the idea of forgiving enemies was not entertained.

According to Matthew, the parable of the lost sheep was spoken at this time. Luke in his Gospel groups the three parables of the lost, the lost sheep, the lost piece of silver, and the lost son (the prodigal son) together, but this does not necessarily demand that they were all spoken together. More likely they, and perhaps many others like them which have not been recorded, were spoken at different times in the Saviour's ministry. It may be that a fairly frequent repetition of this seeking and saving and forgiving aspect of Jesus' mission had given cause for enquiry in the minds of the disciples for some time past, and now, at last, it came out into the open. "*How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?*"

Jesus took advantage of the opportunity thus created. It was necessary that they come to understand this vital principle in the Divine purpose. The incident of the Samaritan villagers, upon whom they wanted to call down fire from heaven

and destroy them, in the manner of Elijah of old time, showed how far they were from understanding the purpose of the coming of Christ to earth. "*I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth*" God had told their fathers in times gone by but they had forgotten that. They were not really concerned with the Samaritans' conversion; only with revenge for the slight the villagers had offered the message of Jesus by rejecting His messengers. They still had much to learn. We ought to sympathise with them for the lesson is even now only very imperfectly realised. Far too many Christians still think in terms of the punishment of the wicked rather than their conversion and reconciliation. Jesus, looking upon the serious questioning faces around Him, knew that they were ripe for this advance in the knowledge of God and His ways.

First of all, a direct answer. "*I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.*" That came as a bit of a stunner. Peter had thought he was being pretty generous in going so far as seven successive acts of forgiveness. Jesus surpassed all expectation by naming a figure so fantastic in the circumstances that He might just as well have said "to infinity". At any rate, His ruling implied that forgiveness would become such a habit that they never would be able to stop forgiving, and that is most likely exactly the idea He intended to instil. Our God is a forgiving God, and we, to be like Him, must be forgiving also. Having made that point, Jesus proceeded to tell them by means of this parable exactly why men should be forgiving in their relationships with each other in the affairs and the wrongs and enmities of daily life.

A certain king had the auditors in to bring his financial affairs up to date. During the course of the ensuing investigation it was found that a debt of ten thousand talents owed by one of his servants had been outstanding for considerably more than the statutory period. The unlucky man was summoned into the king's presence and immediate payment was demanded. But the sum was so enormous that payment was impossible and the unfortunate debtor found that he, his wife and children, were to be sold into slavery and all his property confiscated in order to pay off at least part of the debt. This practice was a usual custom although in Israel the maximum period for which such unfortunates could be sold into slavery was

six years. But the man's life was ruined; he would have to start all over again at the end of the six years. In utter despair he fell on his knees and begged for mercy. "Have patience with me" he pleaded, "and I will pay thee all". Whether he honestly expected ever to be in a position to clear off the debt is not stated and perhaps he knew within himself that the amount was far too great for him ever to be able to pay, but in his extremity he could do no other than beg for mercy.

His hope was realised beyond his wildest dreams. "Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt." Not only did he grant his plea for time to pay, but he went even further and in compassion for the man's hopeless position he forgave him the entire debt and the servant went out from the king's presence lightened for ever from a load which had burdened him for a long time in the past but would never burden him again.

The story was half told; the other half is of darker hue. As the rejoicing servant went on his way he met one of his fellows who owed him a hundred denarii ("pence" in the A.V.). For the moment all thought of his own recent marvellous deliverance vanished from his mind; here was someone who owed him some money and he wanted that money. Laying hold of the other man, he demanded payment. "Pay me that thou owest." This debtor, however, was in no better position to meet his obligations than his creditor had been a few minutes before, and he asked for time and patience on exactly the same terms that the other had so recently desired of the king.

This time, however, the creditor was not so accommodating. Heedless of the fate he had himself so narrowly escaped, he invoked the full rigour of the law and had his hapless comrade cast into prison, there to remain until he should find some means of paying his debt.

The force of the Saviour's simile in this parable can be better appreciated if the import of the sums of money involved is realised. The "talent" was equivalent to three thousand silver shekels, and the silver shekel had just about the same intrinsic value as the silver in an English half-crown. One talent would therefore be worth intrinsically about £375. The Roman denarius was, on the same basis, worth about 3p and a hundred denarii amounted to £3. (In American currency the equivalent would be about one thousand dollars and eight dollars respectively). But this is not what these amounts meant to men in our Lord's day. The value of money has steadily declined throughout human history so that both the prices of goods and rates of wages have continuously increased, a pheno-

menon that is not by any means confined to this postwar era nor to be blamed in its entirety upon the activities of the trade unions. Whilst the intrinsic value of the shekel has remained at about half a crown since the days of the early Sumerians the number of shekels, or halfcrowns, needed to buy any given quantity of goods, or to pay the rent, or to fill the wagepacket, has increased to a fantastic degree. In the year 530 B.C., which would be just about the time of the death of Daniel in Babylon, one Nabu-nasir-aplu signed a contract to rent a house in Babylon from Itti-marduk-balatu for the sum of five shekels a year, equal to about 62p. (Landlord, tenant and house alike are dust these many years, but the contract remains, safely preserved in the British Museum). But since the wage rate for a working man at the time was about thirty shekels a year, about £3.75, the worthy Nabu-nasir-aplu spent one-sixth of his income on rent just as does the average working man to-day. Of course prices in Daniel's day were considered very high compared with earlier times—in the days of Abraham a house could be purchased outright for seven or eight shekels, less than one pound or three dollars, but since in those days a man was well paid if he got five shekels a year, house purchase was no less of a problem then than now. The intriguing thing is that the relation between current wage rates and the cost of living seems to have remained the same from Abraham's time to now but perhaps only the financial kings of this world can explain why this should be so.

Applying this to our Lord's day and the parable in question we have to set this ten thousand talents and hundred denarii against the background of their value to the creditors and debtors in the story. A labouring man could earn six denarii in a week's work—these servants would probably enjoy about the same financial status. A hundred denarii was equivalent to four month's wages; the same class of labour in 1972 would expect say £300 in wages for that same period. On the same scale the ten thousand talents represents a truly fantastic sum. To buy what one talent would purchase at the First Advent would require the respectable sum of thirty-six thousand pounds to-day, so that the servant faced with a debt of ten thousand talents was in the same position as a man to-day who owes someone three hundred and sixty million pounds, (nine hundred million dollars). No wonder he could not pay!

Why did Jesus name so fantastic a sum? No servant could ever in practice have accumulated so great a debt. "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all". If he paid over the whole of his

wages every week, leaving nothing for himself, and the king charged no interest, it would still take him 400,000 years to pay off ten thousand talents. Was it that Jesus indulged in the Eastern passion for exaggeration in order to heighten the dramatic appeal of the story? That is not very likely. More probably this tremendous sum was deliberately chosen in order to suggest the truth underlying the parable. This debt is one that no man could ever possibly pay. He is completely helpless unless One greater than himself extends a full, free forgiveness and sets him on his way, freed from his burden. And that, of course, is the meaning of the parable. The servant owing ten thousand talents is every man, standing helpless before God, completely unable to do anything that will justify him in God's sight and earn for himself the title of God's freeman. "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him" (Psa. 49. 8). All that the man can do is to ask for God's patience. "Have patience with me . . ." The publican, standing afar off in the Temple, smote his breast and cried "God be merciful to me a sinner". There is the key. God is patient and will wait while the slightest gleam of hope remains that the man can be restored to his upright standing. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job" says James (5. 11) "and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." So the provision is made; "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved". Repentance, conversion, reconciliation: and the ten thousand talents are remitted, the debt forgiven. "Being justified freely by his grace through the deliverance that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3. 24).

But the repentance must be sincere, the conversion sincere. Faith must be demonstrated by works (Jas. 3. 17-24). The man who has received "so great salvation" must needs reflect towards his fellows the glory that has come into his own life. Unless he in turn is prepared to extend mercy and forgiveness towards his fellows in everyday affairs, he has received the grace of God in vain, giving evidence that he has not properly understood or appreciated the purpose and the nature of his standing before God. So he loses that standing. In the story the freed servant threw his own debtor into prison, refusing to extend to him the same mercy he himself had received, and the consequence was that the king rescinded his former decree, summoned the unforgiving one into his presence, and reproved him, and then delivered him into that same prison into which the servant had cast his own debtor. In a moment he lost all, and his fate, because of the magnitude of his debt,

was final, hopeless.

"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every-one his brother their trespasses." (18. 35). That is how Jesus concluded the parable. A strange—in some ways paradoxical—ending to a story devoted to extolling the virtues of forgiveness. Does this mean that even God will be unforgiving at the last in token of revenge for the unforgiving attitude of some recipients of His favour? Are we, following such a lead, to withdraw forgiveness from those of our fellows who show themselves unworthy of our forgiveness? Elucidation of the subject would become a little confusing if we allowed ourselves to argue on that basis. The truth is that we must set this statement against the fundamental principles on which God builds His purpose. The statement says nothing about God's forgiveness; it does say that the unforgiving man forfeits all the benefits he had attained by virtue of God's forgiveness, all that he could have had of salvation and life, and having forfeited that, loses all. God "will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2. 4). He is "long suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3. 9). "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways . . ." (Ezek. 33. 11). That is the Divine wish, but it is contingent upon the willing compliance of the subject, and although God is patient and long-suffering and will not let go of the sinner whilst the slightest chance remains that he can be converted from his ways, the time must come when in His infinite wisdom God sees that the "point of no return" has been passed. The man will not and will never respond to the Divine Spirit, he will not and will never assume his rightful place in Divine creation, and so, with infinite sorrow, we must be sure, God lets him go to his chosen fate. The principle upon which God has built creation, the principle upon which alone that creation can endure, decrees such consequence in the case of such an one. The door to life stood open, but the man refused to enter in. That is what Jesus meant when He said that God would do to the unforgiving man just what that man did to his fellow. Divine forgiveness, reconciliation with God, eternal life, are for the repentant, and this man was not truly repentant. The everlasting continuance of creation requires that every man shall give as well as take. This man took, but he would not give, and so there was no place for him in all that God has made.



*hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised". And for ever after that day He discharged that commission in terms of going about doing good—preaching the gospel of the kingdom, yes, but at the same time accompanying that preaching by acts of goodness and benevolence, so that little children ran toward him and the afflicted and sorrowing brought their troubles to him. That is the example we are bidden to follow, and although it is not within our power to work the miracles that He worked, it is by all means well within our power to manifest his spirit of kindness and benevolence toward all who are in affliction and sorrow, and do what we can to lighten the weariness of the way for those who begin to find life well nigh intolerable. There are plenty such now, and there are going to be plenty more in the very near future. "Inasmuch as ye have done it*

*unto the least of these my brethren" says the king at the last "ye have done it unto me!" That parable relates to humankind in the next age, but the principle is equally applicable to us in this Age and day. The sincerity of our desire to help and lead mankind into the way of peace in the Age when we have all power is attested by the degree to which we try to do it in this Age, when we have little or no power. Until the fulness of time has come the misery of man must remain great upon him. Until the judgment of God upon a dying world order has been executed the misery of man must remain great upon him. But while these two factors continue to hinder the emergence of mankind into the life and light of the Millennial kingdom there is much that we can do to alleviate the lot of some, if only a few, of earth's children, and so demonstrate that we have indeed partaken of the spirit of our Father which is in heaven.*

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## THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL

Luke 12, 13-24.

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The man broke in abruptly, breaking the thread of Jesus' conversation with His disciples. He had a personal matter which to him was more important than all that Jesus had been saying. "Master" he urged "speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me". The total irrelevance of his request to the subject on which Jesus was dwelling shows that in this case at least the Master's teaching was falling on completely deaf ears. The man was not interested in what Jesus had to say to him; only in what He would do for him.

A very noticeable factor in our Lord's ministry is the unceremonious manner in which He dismissed those claims on His attention which came from unworthy sources. Although He never missed an opportunity of doing good when such action was in accord with the object and tenor of His mission He would not use His power or authority on unworthy objects. In this case He saw through the man and refused his request without hesitation. "Man" He said—what a world of scorn and contempt lies in the use of that epithet—"who made me a judge and a divider over you?" And without another word to him He turned to His disciples and began to talk about the evils of covetousness. "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of goods which he possesseth".

It is evident that the original suppliant was a covetous man; he had become involved in argu-

ment with his brother over the disposal of their inheritance and was hoping to introduce the authority of Jesus to favour his side of the argument. That was his only interest in Jesus; he called Him "Master" but he was not particularly interested in becoming a pupil, less still a follower who would give up the interests of this world and follow Jesus wheresoever He might lead. He was a covetous man and he meant to get all he could while life lasted and if the moral leadership of Jesus could be invoked to his advantage in this argument with his brother he was going to invoke it.

The remark about covetousness was only the prelude to some more positive teaching. Straight away Jesus plunged into His parable. The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully, so plentifully in fact that he was faced with the problem of the disposal of his gains. There were of course a number of alternatives. Having taken enough to provide himself with a comfortable living he could devote the remainder to the relief of the poor—there were plenty such in Israel and the need was always there. Or he could make a generous donation to the Temple treasury for the work of God. There would be no lack of worthy outlets for his surplus. But no; he intended to keep all that he possessed for his own selfish enjoyment. He decided to pull down his granaries and storehouses and build bigger ones, and there store all

that his land brought forth. Having done so, he would say to his soul, "*Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry*". The rich man was too covetous to part with anything that he had or to do good with it; he would hang on to it and look forward to a life of ease and indulgence.

But man proposes and God disposes. This man does not seem to have considered God in his calculations at all, but now God spoke to him. "*Thou fool*"—an epithet meaning one lacking reasoning power, unintelligent; perhaps our colloquial use of the word "idiot" is the best equivalent—"*Idiot, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?*" To that, of course, there was no answer. The one circumstance in life over which the man had no control was come upon him, and in the face of that fact all his planning and expectation was come to nought. There is an expression in use in this our expressive day "*You can't take it with you*" and that is the thought which came at last to this man who had laid up treasure for himself but was not rich toward God.

Let that last point be well considered. This man's fault lay not in the acquiring of wealth or of goods. To the extent that he diligently cultivated his lands and cared for his flocks and herds he did well, for the earth hath God given to the sons of men as a stewardship, to be wisely administered and made to bear increase. Slothfulness and idleness are never extolled in the Scriptures—rather the reverse. The unprofitable servant is reproved but the one who increased the money entrusted to him is commended. Up to the point where the man had increased his productivity tenfold he did well; the fault lay in the disposal of his gains. He failed to recognise his wealth as a stewardship from God. "*All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee*" sang the Psalmist but this man had forgotten that. The needs of his daily life were supplied, and well supplied; now came the question of an acknowledgment to God and some return made to God. There was nothing of that in the man's mind. He failed to admit that all he had gained came in the first place from that which God gave and that some return was meet. More than that, he also failed to realise that the purpose of man's existence is not merely to absorb food and drink and pleasure and thus enjoy the blessing of life without bearing any responsibility toward others or fulfilling some useful purpose in creation exterior to himself. "No man liveth to himself" said St. Paul. Each and every man is designed by God to live for a purpose, both now and in eternity, to fulfil

some useful function in the fabric of His entire creation. This man intended to live a life of idleness and idleness has no place in the Divine purpose. "*Ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure*" (Psa. 103.20-21) is a conception of the celestial world and its abounding activity for which we are indebted to the Psalmist; the same energy and zeal for the administration and orderly conduct of the material creation must animate men if they are to be adjudged worthy of what, in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats, is called the inheritance prepared for them from the foundation of the world. The keynote of creation is work—without fatigue, without sweat of brow, divorced from the unpleasant associations normally attached to the term, but work nevertheless, those activities necessary for the proper maintenance of the order of existence in which men have their being—and this man did not want to work any more. He had made his pile and he wanted to sit back and enjoy it.

So the rich man passed through the gates of death empty-handed, with nothing to show for all his years of labour. He could have laid up in store rich provision with God for the eternal future, stores of sterling character and understanding of the principles of righteousness and Divine government, that he might fill a useful place in the eternal world. He might have had stores of sympathy and compassion and experience of human folly and weakness, gained from the wise and beneficent administration, in this life, of the wealth he had acquired, qualifications which would fit him for use in God's future work of reconciliation and reclamation of men in the day of Messiah's Kingdom. But he had none of these. He came to God without anything to show for what God had done for him, a unit of creation that had yet to find his proper place in God's scheme of things.

Jesus drove the lesson home. "*Therefore*" He insisted, "*take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, nor for the body, what ye shall put on.*" Jesus did not mean that we are to give no consideration whatever to our bodily needs nor plan for the future; that would be the very negation of all His practical teaching. The Greek word employed here and in many like passages is not one that refers to taking thought in the sense of considering or reasoning, but one which means literally to be anxious for, or to have care or concern. Most modern translations render "take no anxious thought" or "be not anxious" and this is precisely what Jesus meant. We who are Christians must needs realise that God has the oversight of all our interests and will overrule circumstances

for our good; He can provide against the unforeseen events of life and we may give ourselves without distraction to His service in the security of that knowledge. That does not mean that we should live a hand to mouth existence without using any part of our present gains to make necessary provision for the future. Christian stewardship does demand that we so order our lives within the limits of our ability that we can expect to go on serving the Lord to the end. Neither does it mean that we should announce our intention of "living by faith"—which all too often turns out to be an excuse for sponging on the generosity of other Christians to avoid working at a regular occupation or undertaking any of the normal responsibilities of citizenship. It does mean that we should put the service of God and the interests of His work foremost in our lives, making all other things subsidiary and using all that comes to us in this world as aids to this supreme object.

Jesus' reference to the ravens and the lilies is liable to be misunderstood. The ravens, He said, neither sow nor reap, but God feeds them; lilies neither toil nor spin but are arrayed more magnificently than Solomon in all his glory. His words need carefully reading. God has designed creation so that the ravens can obtain their food and live their lives in a perfectly natural fashion, instinctively going to the place where food is to be gathered and finding it there. He has so ordered Nature that the lilies, as they grow, can absorb light and air and moisture, and the elements of the earth, to build the wonderful structure that is a flower. These things happen because the ravens and the flowers fit quite naturally into the place God designed for them, and so fulfil their function in creation. So with us. If we rest in the knowledge that there is a place for us in God's purposes and that nothing save our own unbelief or obstinacy or wilfulness can prevent our occupying that place

we can be as the ravens and the lilies, fulfilling our designed place in creation in complete orderliness and serenity, giving glory to God by the very fact of our being. Just as the ravens must go to find their food, just as the lilies must lift up their faces to the sun and push their roots deeper into the earth, so must we be diligent in sowing and reaping, toiling and spinning, to fulfil our own particular destiny before God, but always in the serene knowledge that He is overseeing all and we are doing His will. There need be no anxious thought then; we are units in His scheme and He is controlling all things, cognisant of every life which waits upon Him.

"Which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?" asked Jesus. He called this "that thing which is least" but the addition of eighteen inches to one's height would seem to be a pretty big thing. In point of fact the A.V. translators misunderstood this expression altogether. "*Helikian*" means extent of years, not extent of inches, and is rendered "age" in other translations. Which of them could lengthen his life by the shortest possible span? That was Jesus' question. No man can extend his life by worrying about it. No man can avoid entering at last into the portals of death. In the final analysis we have to trust God because we have no power of ourselves. He gave us life, all the things which are necessary to continuing life, and He alone knows the ultimate purpose of life. The things of the present are transient and must sooner or later pass away. The life that is in us is capable of eternal continuance, sustained always by God, who is all-powerful. We have to discover His purpose, and place ourselves in line to be fitted into that purpose. Everything else will fall into place. "*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God*" was the conclusion of the lesson "*and all these things shall be added unto you.*"

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### Note on Deut. 7, 9

"... the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deut. 7.9.)

How often does the eye skip over a statement such as that without realising the depths of meaning involved. A thousand generations; a very long time—and the reader passes on. But how long a time? A generation cannot be reckoned at less than twenty-five years. There have not yet been

a thousand generations of Adamic men on this earth. God's covenant and mercy is guaranteed in this text to extend into the distant future, a span of twenty-five thousand years at least. In other words, Divine care and protection is guaranteed all who are His throughout the whole of the history of sin and death and well into the illimitable future when sin has been done away and all who have at length attained the Divine ideal can stand before God in sinless perfection and need the protecting covenant and mercy no longer.

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## THE PARABLE OF THE TWO DEBTORS

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Luke 7.36—47

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This Pharisee was a righteous man, one who held sin and every manifestation of sin in a very correct abhorrence. One of his favourite texts was that spoken by the prophet Habakkuk (1. 13) "*Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil*"; in every affair of life he endeavoured to keep himself undefiled by contact with the sinful and the unclean. He believed in the coming of Messiah and the Messianic Kingdom and he was sure that when Messiah did appear He would look for those who had remained true to the Pharisaic traditions and could stand before Him in the integrity of their own righteousness, model keepers of that Law which was at the first given to Moses. Such men, the Pharisee believed, would be welcomed into the Kingdom; the sinful and the unclean would be unceremoniously ejected, and after that, life would never again hold anything to besmirch or defile the purity of God's own people.

Now he had invited this new young prophet of Nazareth to dine with him. It was not necessarily that he believed Jesus to be the Messiah. Rather he had been much more impressed with his bearing and his words than had his brother Pharisees and he wanted to know more. It looked very much as if this young enthusiast was in the tradition and spirit of the old Hebrew prophets and the Pharisee felt that he owed it to himself to explore the matter further. He probably prided himself a little that he was not prejudiced or bigoted or dyed-in-the-wool as were so many of his brother Pharisees. God had undoubtedly spoken in the past by his servants the prophets and history was witness to the fact that if Israel had taken a little more notice of those prophets the nation might not now have been reduced to its present straits. Moses had told their forefathers what would befall them if they forsook their covenant and Moses' prediction had undeniably come to pass. This young man without doubt possessed a clear understanding of the sinful condition of Israel and He was not afraid to voice his opinions; it could very possibly turn out that here was the leader for whom all right-thinking men were looking and if so it would be a good thing to get better acquainted with him right at the outset. So the Pharisee invited him home to dinner.

So far so good. He had brought in a few friends, Pharisees of the more liberal turn of mind like himself, and they were gathered round his table

reclining in the customary manner, facing the table, leaning on the left elbow, with the feet outside forming a kind of outer ring. The meal proceeded, servants flitting to and fro attending to the needs of the guests, whilst round the table grave question was followed by equally grave answer. Simon the Pharisee rubbed his hands with satisfaction; things were going well. His guest was certainly coming up to expectations.

There was a slight disturbance at the farther end of the room where it opened out on to the central courtyard. Simon did not take any notice. In conformity with custom his courtyard was open to anyone who wished to linger there awhile, in the shade, and perchance catch a glimpse of the prophet or just satisfy their curiosity by watching the feast. As befitted a Pharisee who took his profession seriously, there would be a certain amount of provision of plain food out there for whoever felt hungry, for hospitality to the traveller and kindness to the poor were incumbent upon Pharisees. But he pursed his lips somewhat as the slight form of a woman emerged from the group in the courtyard and came forward towards Jesus where He sat. It was not her sex which brought Simon's brows together in disapproval; it was his recognition of her identity, a woman known as a prostitute in the town. Had he consulted his own inclination, he would probably have ordered her away from the house, but to do so at this moment would have been a breach of etiquette to his guests and bring an element of dishonour upon his head. Frustrated and impotent, he watched as she knelt down behind the circle, right at the feet of the principal guest. This was altogether too bad; the woman had no sense of decency. Relying on the unwritten code which she knew Simon would not break, she was taking advantage of this opportunity to bring herself to Jesus' attention. He waited, tensely, for Jesus to notice her, his fine eyes to go hard and cold, his voice chill and severe, to condemn her and bid her remove her defiling presence from the house. The Prophet of God could so easily do what he himself could not do, and so he waited expectantly.

Jesus seemed slow to observe. He was still talking earnestly with the other guests. Simon, at the other side of the table, could give his attention only to the woman. Everything else was a blur; his eyes were fixed only on her, so near to Jesus' feet.

Shamelessly, like all such women, she had removed her veil and allowed her long tresses to fall down around her shoulders. She was weeping, sobbing uncontrollably with overpowering grief, in the intensity of her emotion grasping convulsively at the Lord's ankles. Perceiving that her tears were falling upon his feet, she bent her head to the floor and used her flowing hair to dry them; from the recesses of her clothing taking a small phial of perfume, she opened it and poured its contents over them, filling the room with a fragrance it had perhaps never known before. The buzz of conversation had died down now; the assembled guests were all looking, with various expressions of disapproval or repugnance, at that crumpled figure on the floor. Only Jesus appeared to be unconcerned at her presence. He went on quietly talking, making no movement either to encourage or discourage her ministrations.

Looking at his serene face, Simon was attacked by a sudden doubt. "This man" he thought to himself, "if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him; for she is a sinner". He could have understood and approved Jesus receiving this kind of homage from a devout woman, but—if He were indeed a prophet—if He indeed had that extra-human knowledge which was the hall-mark of the prophets of God—why did He not shrink from that defiling touch, refuse the offering of that perfume which itself was probably the reward of sin, command the woman begone? Had he made a mistake in his assessment and was Jesus not the man of God he had imagined him to be? Simon looked down at the woman, distastefully, then back to Jesus, to find those candid eyes fixed full on him. He waited, wondering.

The quiet voice broke the silence. "Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee". He felt instinctively that this was going to be a momentous word. On the one part he feared what was to come, on the other he felt there was something he had not yet grasped and he wanted to know what it was. There was something in Jesus' attitude which told him the situation was not so easily resolved as he would like to think. And he wanted to know; more than anything else he wanted to know what was the power behind Jesus. More humbly perhaps than he had ever spoken in his life before, he met Jesus' eyes and replied "Master, say on".

The room was very quiet now. The guests had all ceased eating and talking and were giving close attention. Probably more than one of them had had the same inward thought as had Simon, and were each looking upon Jesus with varying degrees of cynicism or speculation according to their respective measures of sincerity. Even the woman

had restrained her outward grief, and remained in her recumbent posture, listening intently to the calm voice.

"There was a certain creditor who had two debtors". A story! the atmosphere became electric. No surer means of obtaining rapt and earnest attention, "The one owed five hundred pence" (denarii) "and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?"

Simon was not quite sure what connection this hypothetical case had with the situation before him, but he was prepared to be honest. "I suppose" he said—the Greek word does not imply doubt or dubiousness, but the reaching of a conclusion based on the evidence presented, as though one would say "I consider the answer is thus and so"—"I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most". Came the answer, in tones of quiet approval, "Thou hast rightly judged".

Now for the first time Jesus turned himself about and looked directly upon the woman behind him. Who can doubt that she lowered her head in shame before that countenance of sinless purity? The level voice went on. "Seest thou this woman?" That was a hard one for Simon. He had been only too painfully aware of her presence ever since she entered his house and now Jesus was talking as if he could hardly have been expected to notice her. Yes, Simon did see this woman: he only wished he could truthfully say he did not. But the next words shattered him completely.

"I entered into thine house. Thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss; but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint; but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment".

A slow flush of embarrassment crept into Simon's face. His fellow-Pharisees were looking at him curiously. He realised, now, that he had under-estimated the man before him. Knowing him as one of the labouring classes, born and bred among the peasantry of Galilee, it had just not occurred to Simon that the courtesies normally extended to guests in his own walk of life were just as much in place with respect to Jesus. It was customary for the host to provide water and servants for the cleansing of guests' feet upon entry to the house; as a mark of special honour the host might even perform the washing operation himself. Some reluctance to treat this Galilean peasant as on the same level as his Pharisee friends must have caused Simon to omit this formality, doubtless excusing himself on the ground that the

peasantry were not so scrupulous in such matters and might even be embarrassed at the service. Every guest normally received a kiss of welcome from the host but somehow Simon could not bring himself to this act of close fellowship; there was, of course, always the question of his own friends' reaction to his too ardent espousal of the young prophet. It was true that he had omitted to have a servant anoint the visitor's head with fragrant oil, but that was pure forgetfulness in the stress and hurry of the occasion. The unspoken excuses faded from his mind again as he became conscious of Jesus' gentle regard and realised that all those excuses counted for nothing. The plain fact was that this woman, sinner though she be, had performed all the duties which he had neglected to fulfil, and performed them with an infinitely greater ardour and sincerity than he could ever have displayed. He looked again at the woman and was bitterly ashamed.

Jesus' voice was very gentle now. *"Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven: for she loved much; but to whom little be forgiven, the same loveth little"*. So He had known all the time! The realisation came in a flash to Simon. *"Her sins, WHICH ARE MANY"*. Jesus did not mitigate or seek to gloss over the woman's sinful state. He knew her for what she was the moment she entered the room and yet had made no attempt to restrain her in her act of love. So He was a prophet after all! Simon was conscious of a great relief on that score. He had not after all misjudged his man and perhaps his own lack of courtesy would be over-looked. But what was this about forgiveness of sins? Jesus had turned again to the woman, listening fearfully and perhaps only half comprehending what was being said. This time his eyes were ineffably tender. *"Thy sins are forgiven. Thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace"*. And she got to her feet and went out of the house to a new life.

It says much for the sincerity of those Pharisees there gathered that they did not break out at once into impassioned protest. They did not even question Jesus' words outwardly. They asked themselves, each man in his own mind, *"Who is this who even forgives sins?"* There was something in all this which was new to them and they were prepared to reserve judgment. It would seem that Simon had collected some most unusual Pharisees there that day and it might well be that they all learned a most unexpected and unusual lesson.

What of the wider implication? There is much in this incident to throw light upon that other statement of Jesus *"They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."*

(Luke 5. 31). Simon the Pharisee is not the only one who, priding himself upon his own rectitude and cleanliness of life, has come to God in a smug and self-satisfied attitude of mind which is none the less frightening although it is characterised by perfect sincerity. We do not necessarily have to demonstrate our repentance by floods of tears and an agony of self-reproach, as did the woman. A lot depends upon the individual temperament and intensity of feeling; some are less outwardly demonstrative than others. But we do all have to realise that of ourselves we have little wherewith to commend ourselves before God and we all come short of his holiness in a variety of ways. The woman's sin outraged and shocked the conventions and customs of the day and violated the written law; the Pharisees' selfrighteousness outraged the holiness of God and violated his moral law, and in the sight of Jesus there was no difference between the two kinds of sin. They both needed repentance, conversion and forgiveness. The difference was that the woman realised her need of forgiveness, was repentant, and went out a child of the Kingdom. In the eyes of Jesus the whole of her sin was as though it had never been. The Pharisee had not yet realised his need, had not yet come as a suppliant to the feet of the Saviour, and therefore was yet in his sins. Not for him had the golden vista of the Kingdom gleamed through the partly opened gates.

Perhaps it did in after days. It is noteworthy that in all this story there is no word of reproach for Simon, only the implied reproof at his omissions. It may well be that he, and maybe some of his fellows at that meal that day, became followers of Jesus and eventually followed the "woman a sinner" into the light of the Kingdom. That there were some such, even among the bigoted Pharisees, who thus espoused the cause of Jesus, we know; perhaps this was the beginning of the way for some of them.

As in so many instances, this story illustrates the Divine principle "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, wherefore turn ye from your evil ways, and live ye". The passion for the punishment of the wicked which characterised all good Jews and still characterises far too many good Christians has no counterpart in the counsels of God. He is much more interested in the reclamation of the wicked than their condemnation, and if there is any capacity for repentance at all He is going to explore that capacity to the full before He permits condemnation to come. *"The Son of Man"* said Jesus *"is come to seek and to save that which was lost"*. Both woman and Pharisee were lost; Jesus came to save both.

Neither Simon nor the woman appear in the

Gospel story again. It is sometimes suggested that the woman was Mary of Magdala, the one who loved her Lord with so fervent a passion that her faith held when that of all others had well-nigh failed, who became the acknowledged leader of the little band of women during the dark days after the crucifixion when even the disciples had fled into hiding. But there is no proof; only the fact that the character and temperament of Mary of Magdala as revealed in the Gospels harmonises very well with this brief picture of this repentant woman.

The incident in the house of Mary sister of Lazarus at Bethany, recorded in Matt. 26, Mark

14 and John 12, is a totally different one and must not be confused with this story in Luke. This one was at the beginning of our Lord's ministry and took place in Galilee; that one was just before his crucifixion and occurred near Jerusalem. The only similarities in the two stories are the use of a phial of perfume and the fact that the host's name was Simon, a very common name in Israel anyway. There is no foundation whatever for connecting the sister of Lazarus with the woman who came to Jesus on that memorable day, weighed down by the burden of her sin, and went out a free woman, rejoicing in the glorious liberty of the children of God.

### ***"In remembrance of Thee"***

*We come in remembrance, dear Saviour, of Thee,  
To Thee who for sinners was nailed to a tree.*

*We come, with our hearts full of sorrow and love  
To Thee, so beloved by the Father above.*

*With nothing to bring that could ever repay  
For the burden of guilt which Thy blood washed  
away,*

*But our hearts, once condemned, now purchased  
and free*

*We bring as we come "In remembrance of Thee".*

*Once again we remember how Thy loving hand  
For Thy people broke bread in that far distant  
land.*

*And Thy words "This is My body broken for you,  
Take eat." This, dear Saviour, we gladly will do.*

*And as we partake of the fruit of the vine  
Again we remember the shed blood of Thine.  
Are we able to drink of this cup you have poured?  
With Thy help in our weakness, Oh dear loving  
Lord.*

*So we come, loving Saviour, remembering Thee  
Thy suffering and pain and Thy love full and free.  
And as we partake with our hearts bowed in  
prayer,*

*May we strive to be faithful our crosses to bear.*

(D.D.S.)

### ***Take it to the Father***

*Take it to the Father, every little grief,  
All your cares and heartaches; He will send  
relief.*

*Tell Him all your sorrows, all your worries too;  
He gave His radiant angels charge concerning  
you.*

*He who is your Guardian slumbers not, nor sleeps,  
But above you always faithful vigil keeps.*

*Take it to the Father, all your pain and woe.  
Greater friend and comfort mortal cannot know.  
At His dear feet kneeling, holding nothing back,  
Your mistakes and failures, where you lost the  
track.*

*To the Heavenly regions; steep and dim the trail.  
You will find Him patient; His love cannot fail.*

*Take it to the Father, when earthly joys grow dim.  
When your loved ones fail you, take it all to  
Him.*

*He will soothe and comfort, take you to His breast;  
By His love enfolded you'll find peace and rest.  
Then from out your failures, joy and hope will rise,  
And you'll view the future, through the Father's  
eyes.*

(L.K.P.)

Illustrating how rapidly God's command to "breed abundantly" (Gen. 8. 17) after the Flood could be obeyed by the lower creation is the fact that two rooks imported into Australia in the year 1900 increased to half-a-million by 1950, and now present a major problem to farmers.

"Let intellectual and spiritual culture progress, and the human mind expand, as much as it will; beyond the grandeur and the moral elevation of Christianity, as it sparkles and shines in the Gospels, the human mind will not advance."

—Goethe.

## THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN

Luke 18, 9-14

The word "Pharisee" in ordinary language brings up thoughts of arrogance, pride, hypocrisy, cant, sanctimoniousness; the term "pharisaical" has passed into the English language under the influence of the New Testament which has played so great a part in the development of the language as now spoken. It is true that the picture of Pharisees displayed in the four Gospels is almost uniformly a deplorable one. With but a few notable exceptions, in their contact with Jesus they presented anything but a commendable sight. For them Jesus reserved his severest words of condemnation, and they in their turn were His inveterate enemies. Jesus did not hesitate to tell them that the outcasts and dregs of society would get into the Kingdom of Heaven before they did, and because of that saying they were coldly furious. He stripped away the shroud of respectability with which they concealed their inward corruption, showing them for what they were, and they never forgave him.

It had not always been thus. The community of the Pharisees had a noble and auspicious beginning. Five centuries previously, away back in the halcyon days of the Restoration from Babylon, among the pioneers who accepted the offer of *Cyrus of Persia to return and rebuild their own land* there arose a body of devoted and zealous men fired with the ambition to maintain the Mosaic Law and all Israel's religious institutions against any further recurrence of idolatry or of anything that might jeopardise Israel's position as the people of God, so to preserve his truth in the world. The stability of the newly-emergent State owed a great deal to those men at that time. It was largely due to them that the nation maintained so steadfast a witness to God through the fearful times of Greek and Syrian persecution which filled the intervening centuries before Jesus came. These men became known as Pharisees, separated ones, and separated they were to the service of God. But by Jesus' time all had changed. That erstwhile upright and God-fearing society of the Pharisees had degenerated into the hide-bound, power-seeking, bigoted sect with which we are familiar in the Gospels. There were some good Pharisees, but not many. For the most part they had long since abrogated their historic role as the teachers of the people and the guardians of true religion and now the people shunned and avoided them, whilst they on their part sought the company of the rich and

influential in Israel and despised the ordinary people. John the Baptist, with his usual forthrightness, had already called them a generation of vipers, and warned them of the inevitable end of their ways if they did not bring forth fruits meet for repentance. Jesus, in the burning words which occupy most of the twenty-third chapter of Matthew's Gospel, concluded his denunciation with the terrible words "*ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the condemnation of Gehenna?*" It would seem that our Lord's penetrating insight told him these men had come perilously close to the point where repentance and reformation were impossible because their very capacity and ability to repent and reform was well-nigh stultified and dead. When Jesus began to tell a story about a Pharisee, therefore, his audience knew within a little what to expect. They must have gathered around interestedly and composed themselves quietly to listen.

This story was not one of condemnation. It was aimed at the Pharisees, but its purpose was to awaken them, or some of them, if it were possible, to a realisation of their position before God. It was designed to bring them to the recollection of the standards which had inspired the creation of their fellowship so long time ago, to remind them that in theory at any rate they stood for the true and sincere worship of God and realisation of every Israelite's undone condition before God were it not for the Covenant whose provisions, faithfully carried out, would effect his reconciliation with God. Jesus called them back to first principles, and because He was thus calling them He refrained from condemnatory expressions. He just stated the truth of the matter from the standpoint of God and left each one who heard to make application of the story to himself. Even Matthew, recording the incident, appears to have grasped the position and softened the words in which he recorded it. He does not say, as he might well have said, "he spake this parable unto the Pharisees"; he used an expression which pointed unerringly to them but avoided the use of the name; "*he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others*".

"Two men" said Jesus, "*went up into the temple to pray*". Nothing very unusual about that; sons of Israel from near and far were constantly visiting the Temple at Jerusalem for that very purpose.



Its courts were perpetually crowded, and of all who thus came to the centre of Israel's worship there were many to whom it was a profound religious experience. It was the next sentence which rivetted attention and focussed all eyes upon Jesus. "*The one a Pharisee, and the other a publican!*" That last word was enough to make everyone sit up! Even to class the hated publican in the same breath with the Pharisee was enough to send eyes hard and cold, and lips pressed tightly together. The "publican" (*telones*, tax-gatherer) was just about the most disliked member of society in Jesus' day. The Roman system of tax collection had the merit of simplicity; they "farmed out" the risk. Any man, Jew or Gentile, could purchase the right of collecting taxes in a given area. The Roman government received a definite sum by way of purchase money, the highest bidder naturally securing the concession, and thereafter Rome was no longer interested. The successful tax-gatherer then had to set about the task of collecting enough taxes to re-imburse himself and show a profit. That they could and did do so is evidenced by the case of Zaccheus, (Matt. 19) who "*was the chief among the tax-gatherers, and he was rich*". Besides being hated by the unfortunate people who had to pay taxes, which is understandable, they were also hated by the Pharisees because of their collaboration with the occupying Power, the domination of which the Pharisees only accepted under duress. A Jewish tax-gatherer was therefore regarded as a traitor to his own nation and despised accordingly. But Jesus seemed singularly oblivious to these considerations, for he pictured the tax-gatherer as well as the Pharisee as having reverence for the God of Israel and inspired with the same desire to express that reverence in action.

Both men went up into the Temple to pray. They both acknowledged the same Law, at least outwardly, but that is about as far as the similarity went. The Pharisee, accustomed to the respect of men and sure of his standing before God, returned thanks that he was the man that he was. He could think of no element in his life capable of change for the better. He already was all that God could possibly want him to be. And he preened himself in the pride of that knowledge. The publican—tax-gatherer—came conscious of only one thing, his inadequacy in the sight of God. He had come short of the Divine glory; he knew that. He needed forgiveness; he knew that too, and in an agony of self-abasement he pleaded for Divine mercy.

The Pharisee was probably a very good man. There is nothing in the account to say he was not, and the brief picture given us is at least sufficient to show that Jesus intended his hearers to picture

the typical orthodox Pharisee—zealous for righteousness and the observance of the Mosaic law; bigoted almost to the point of fanaticism in his allegiance to the "traditions of the fathers", punctilious in the discharge of every duty which custom and ordinance required of a son of Abraham. He duly fasted on the third and fifth day of every week, and took care that his neighbours and business associates knew about it. He rendered the tenth of his income to the things of God as the Law required—verse 12 should read "*I give tithes of all that I acquire*" not "possess", as the A.V. has it; he tithed his income, not his capital. Like the rich young ruler on another occasion, he could say, referring to the Divine Law, "all these things have I kept from my youth up" but unlike that rich young ruler he did not add "what lack I yet?" for in his own mind he had no idea that anything was lacking. He had done all that God had required of him and now he looked to God to do the handsome thing and acknowledge the fact.

"*The Pharisee stood, and prayed thus with himself*". There is more than a suspicion here that the man was praying to himself; at any rate God does not appear to be much more than an opposite number in the conversation. There is no recognition of any shortcoming, no plea for forgiveness, no acknowledgment of the exalted majesty of the ineffable Divinity to whom all created beings owe their life and existence, no supplication for help in leading a better life, or guidance in approaching more nearly to the throne of God's holiness. He addressed Deity in the fashion he would accost an acquaintance across the street, not even with the courtesy and respect he would have accorded his own High Priest had he been in the presence of that dignitary. In fact it hardly seemed a prayer at all; rather more like a boastful statement of the position. "*God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax-gatherer*". He wanted to say out loud in the hearing of his fellows that which he liked to believe his fellows thought of him. As a Pharisee he was one of God's chosen ones and all others were inferior. One day, when the Messiah would have come, and the Romans had been expelled, his superiority would be manifest even more than now, for then he would be advanced from his present position of moral leadership to actual political leadership and not only Israel but all the Gentiles would bow down before him. After all, he and his brother Pharisees were the present successors of the tradition established in the days of Ezra when the first Pharisees stood in the breach to defend the nation against prevalent indifference to the things of God, and preserved the

Law and all that it implied for future generations. It was only right that God should acknowledge the services he and his had rendered and honour him accordingly.

Whilst thus he stood and congratulated himself the publican found courage to make his petition. He was under no illusion; he knew himself to be unclean in God's sight. He came with nothing in his hands and with nothing wherewith to commend himself in God's sight. His prayer was brief and eloquent in its simplicity. "*God be merciful to me a sinner.*" The Greek has the definite article, *the sinner*, as though he counted himself a greater sinner than other men, just as the Pharisee had counted himself greater in his righteousness than other men. He asked nothing of God; he came in repentance and threw himself on God's mercy.

And God looked down from Heaven and saw those two men standing there! "*I tell you*" said Jesus "*this man*"—the publican—"*went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*". We hardly need the comment for ourselves as we read the story, for it seems so obvious. How could anyone justify the Pharisee in his arrogance and count him as more worthy in God's sight than the publican? Whether any of those self-righteous men who stood listening to the story saw the light in consequence we do not know; this talk of the exalted being abased and the lowly being raised up ran counter to all their traditions and anyway was inflammatory material. If the common people took it seriously their own positions might be jeopardised. And whoever heard of publicans being converted anyway? As lackeys of Rome they deserved only the same treatment as would be meted out to unbelieving Gentiles, Romans and all, at the last day, everlasting destruction in Gehenna. It is probable that when the group broke

up and Jesus had gone his way, the majority at least of the Pharisees who heard the story refused to accept the implication and continued in the blind arrogance which at the last swept them into the maelstrom of John's prediction. When Titus destroyed Jerusalem forty years later, the Pharisees disappeared for ever.

But the same mental attitude is met with so often among Christians. There is a type of mind which, whilst thoroughly loyal to God, takes pride in its exclusiveness and separation from "the world" and not infrequently from fellow-Christians who do not share the same outlook on the faith or the same conception of Christian service. "Spiritual pride" is a very real thing and an ever present danger to the disciples of Christ, for the very love and zeal for him which leads us to him at the first is liable to drive us into an excess of devotion which can bear fruit at the end in an unreasoning and unseeing bigotry which of itself stultifies our further efforts to do him service. We do well to remember our Lord's injunction, "*... when ye have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do*" (Luke 17.10). The difference between the best of us and the worst of us, great though it may seem in our sight, is very little in God's sight. Repentance and devotion mean much more to him than mighty works and lavish gifts. Jesus commended the scribe who said "*to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.*" (Mark 12.34) "*Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God*" Jesus told that man. The publican in this parable was not far from the Kingdom of God; the Pharisee, on the other hand, had not yet even realised his need for that Kingdom.

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Character never can be strong, noble, and beautiful, nor can conduct be worthy of intelligent beings bearing God's image, if Scripture truth be not wrought into the very soul by personal search and pondering. Let us not stay for ever in the primer of religious knowledge, amid the easy things that we learned at our mother's knee. There are glorious things beyond these: let us go on to learn them. The word of Christ can get into your heart to dwell in you and transform you only through intelligent thought and pondering.

In a remarkable statement, Paul tells us that experience worketh hope. Perhaps only a Christian Apostle could have made such a statement. In the case of the unconverted, it is probably true to suggest that experience, far from working hope, leads to little more than despair. Those who are living without Christ in this world can find little in their experience to stimulate a sense of hope. The wages of sin is death, and a life that is committed to evil can know little of joy, and certainly nothing of eager anticipation of the glories that are yet to be revealed.

## THE PARABLE OF THE DRAGNET

Matt 13, 47—50

The thirteenth chapter of Matthew is a collection of six parables, and of these there are two, that of the Wheat and Tares and that of the Dragnet, which are so similar in their main principles although set against different backgrounds that they are frequently assumed to bear the same meaning or to have much the same application. This is not necessarily so. In both parables there is a gathering together of two classes, the worthy and the worthless, a process of differentiation and separation, the acceptance of the worthy for preservation and the rejection and destruction of the worthless. At a time when Christian theology insisted upon the final separation of all created beings at death into two classes, destined for heaven and hell respectively, there was not much room for discerning any difference between the two parables. It is now being increasingly realised that God is working in successive ages of earth's history to effect, first, the selection from amongst all mankind of a dedicated community, the Church, to be associated with the Lord Christ in His future work of world conversion, and second, the reconciliation to God of all of mankind who can thus be reached in the Age which has been ordained for that purpose. On this account there is latitude for the discernment of shades of difference and application in these two parables. Whilst they obviously both have reference to aspects of the Divine purpose in separating between that which is good and that which is evil, and ensuring the permanence of the one and the elimination of the other, it may well be that each parable is intended to have its impact upon one particular aspect of this two-fold Divine Plan.

The Kingdom of Heaven, said Jesus, is like a drag-net that, being cast into the sea, gathered a full haul of varied fish, and was drawn to shore. The fishers proceeded to sort out their catch, gathering the useful and good fish into their baskets and throwing the worthless away. Just so, said Jesus, will it be in the end of the Age; there will have been a great gathering of worthy and worthless; the time for the cessation of gathering will come; the angels will proceed forth and effect the separation, and the worthless will be cast into a furnace of fire where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The words are few and simple; the parable as it is recorded is very brief; but there is deep dispensational truth hidden in its half-dozen sentences. This is obvious from the use of

the expression "the end of the world" (*aion*, age, meaning an age in human history or in the development of the Divine Plan, not necessarily the end of all things terrestrial). There are four significant elements in the explanation which Jesus gave for his disciples' enlightenment and to understand the parable aright we have to consider, first, what these elements stood for in the minds of the immediate hearers, versed as they were in the theology and expectations of Judaism, and second, what the same elements imply when set against the background of our own Christian understanding of the Divine Plan as it has been revealed in later times by the Holy Spirit. These elements are:—

- (a) The end of the age
- (b) The angels
- (c) The separation of righteous and wicked
- (d) The casting of the wicked into the fire.

The physical picture which forms the substance of the parable must have been commonplace enough to the disciples. Fishers themselves, several of them, or closely associated with the fishing activities carried on around the Sea of Galilee as the remainder of them must have been, they would all readily have entered into the Master's thoughts. So often had they themselves assisted in just such an operation, going out in their boats to extend their long net, usually between two boats, over a wide stretch of water and coming steadily towards land, sweeping into its confines all living creatures in its path. Then the strenuous task of hauling the heavy net, with its living load, out of the water and up the beach to a place where they could sit down and begin to sort their catch. With what satisfaction and delight would they watch the growing pile of good fish in the baskets; with what contempt toss the worthless ones down the beach towards the water, not caring whether they went back into the lake or not, so quickly were they forgotten and the attention turned to the better specimens which were the objects of their quest. Not every variety of fish was suitable for their purpose, but everything in the water that could possibly be taken must be gathered in, so that no creature which could by any means be found of use should be missed. The purpose of the operation was to gather in all the worthy, that only the truly and demonstrably worthless should be rejected.

But Jesus introduced a new set of ideas even while the disciples' minds were still busy with the picture He had drawn for them. Not the close of a day's work, but the end of an Age! Not fishermen, but angels! Not the casting back into the sea, but into a furnace of fire! These symbols belong to an altogether different range of thought; the simple story was, after all, only a means to an end; now they must perforce turn their attention to another background with which they were at any rate equally familiar, the knowledge and instruction that had been drilled into them from childhood concerning the coming Day when God would rise up to make an end of evil and evildoers, and usher the righteous into everlasting bliss. The usual tacit assumption of zealous Jews was that the separation at the Last Day would be in the main between Jews and Gentiles, the Jews, as the chosen people, to be ushered into eternal felicity and the Gentiles consigned to everlasting destruction. One of the purposes of this parable was to teach them that the distinction and the separation, when it did come, was not to be on the basis of racial origin but upon that of worthiness or unworthiness.

The disciples at that time knew nothing of that three-fold "end of the Age" which is so familiar to New Testament students to-day—the respective endings of the Jewish Age, the Gospel Age and the Millennial Age. They knew of one Age only, the Age in which they lived, and which they believed was to be brought to an end by the appearance of the Messiah and his holy ones, his angels, the destruction of all God's enemies in a furnace of fire, and the exaltation of his friends, his followers, to reign over the submissive nations of earth forever. That had been the expectation of Jewry for centuries past and when Jesus explained the parable in these terms this is how they must have understood those terms. They apprehended the matter correctly enough in principle but had only a very rudimentary conception of the reality towards which our Lord was pointing.

We should expect to see this parable in more detailed and possibly more accurate form than did the disciples, for we have the advantage of a much more detailed knowledge of the ages and dispensations marked out in the Divine Plan. That period of time which to the disciples was one Age, terminated by the "Last Day" and the destruction of all evil, has to us become three Ages, known generally as the Jewish Age, terminated by the ending of Jewish national existence forty years after the Crucifixion; the Gospel Age, terminated by the Second Advent, and the establishment of Christ's Kingdom upon earth; and the Millennial Age, terminated by the end of the incorrigibly sinful and

the entry into everlasting life of all redeemed and perfected humanity. The expression "end of the world" (*aion, age*) refers sometimes to one and sometimes to another of these Ages. Thus Heb. 9.26 "*Once in the end of the world hath he (Christ) appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*" refers obviously to the end of the Jewish Age, the time of the First Advent. So also must 1 Cor. 10.11 "*They are written for our admonition (the early Church) upon whom the ends of the world (ages) have come*".

At the other extreme we have 1 Cor. 15.24. "*Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father*" referring undoubtedly to Jesus' surrender of his Millennial Kingship at the close of his Mediatorial work, at the end of the Millennial Age. Then there are such words as Matt. 24.3 "*What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?*" and Matt. 24.14 "*This gospel of the kingdom must be preached in all the world for a witness, and then shall the end come*" clearly, whether the disciples realised the fact or not, applying to the end of the Gospel Age and the time of the Second Advent. To which of these three Age-endings shall the judgment of the Drag-net parable be applied?

The nature of the story affords an indication. It is a picture of the taking of fish, and fish in large quantities at that. The "fishers" are the angels, the "holy ones" who appear with the Messiah in returning glory. The general setting therefore would seem to be after the Second Advent has taken place, when the "angels" are equipped and qualified for their work. But who are these "angels" who appear so often in association with the returning Messiah at his Second Advent? The word, of course, merely means messengers; to the disciples, who knew of no Divine messengers save the glorious beings who constantly wait on the presence of God, the words of Jesus could only conjure up visions of celestial visitants coming with him to do his work. It could only have been after Pentecost that they realised the great truth that they themselves, if faithful, would be among that triumphant company that is commissioned to do the work of God upon earth during the next Age. This is an important matter. It is sometimes suggested that the angels of the heavenly courts are referred to in passages such as this, but that is mainly the consequence of traditional ideas regarding the angels of heaven, always engaged in what might be described as the extra-terrestrial works of God. When it is realised that the resurrected Church, "changed" to celestial conditions and fully equipped to engage, in association with the Lord, in the evangelistic work amongst men which

is to characterise the Millennial Age, fully and completely meet the requirements of the parable, the term "angel" takes on a much wider significance. The Apostle Paul declared that "the saints shall judge the world". The Revelator speaks of the Church as living and reigning with Christ over the nations for the thousand years, which is a synonym for the Millennial Age. It is clear then that the "holy ones" who at our Lord's Second Advent and throughout the entire thousand years of his Mediatorial reign are executing all his work for and amongst men, will be the "called, and chosen, and faithful" of this Age, raised to the glory of spiritual being, resplendent in their celestial bodies. To men on earth, of course, they will be as angels; angels of the highest possible order, the constant companions of the Lord himself.

The universal gathering-in of the dragnet, therefore, well symbolises the world-wide evangelical work of the Messianic Age in which "*the Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely*" (Rev. 22.17). None will then be able to escape the drawing power of Christ. He himself did say "*I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me*". "They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord" (Jer. 31.34). And the use of fish as a symbol of humanity in the mass is appropriate and Scriptural. "*Man also knoweth not his time*" says the Preacher in Eccl. 9.12 "*as the fishes that are taken in an evil net*". God is said to "*make man as the fishes of the sea*" in Hab. 1.14, and Amos 4.2 has a somewhat similar allusion. And more impressive, because nearer home, is the well known expression of Jesus in Matt. 4.19 "*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men*". It may well be concluded, therefore, that the towing of the dragnet through the sea pictures such a work in the future day, and its being brought to shore, with the consequent separation of good and bad fish, the final judgment upon each individual man and woman as to their worthiness of everlasting life in God's then sinless creation, or unworthiness through conscious and deliberate refusal to come into union with God and accept life from him, which refusal can only eventuate in the loss of life.

This latter alternative is pictured by the furnace of fire. What is this? Is it a refining and purifying fire, from which that which is thrown into it will be taken, cleansed and perfected? Or is it a consuming fire, burning until all that has been cast into it is consumed into ashes and is as though it had never been? Clearly the latter. There is no suggestion that the worthless fish are subjected to some remedial treatment that renders them accept-

able and fit for use after all. They are already beyond hope of being put to any useful purpose, and they are cast out to be destroyed, utterly and without hope. Here again is another pointer to the interpretation of the parable. It is only at the end of the Millennial Age that what might be termed the "wastage" of God's creation suffers the penalty of its failure to come into harmony with the Divine Will and reach up to the Divine ideals, and in consequence is utterly consumed. This is the fire of Divine condemnation on sin and sinners, and just as, in the picture, the fishermen cast the worthless fish away only when it was clear it could serve no useful purpose, so in the Age which God has appointed for the reconciliation of "whosoever will" among all men, none will be lost eternally until it has been abundantly demonstrated beyond all shadow of doubt that the continued conscious existence of such could bring nothing but misery to themselves and to others. None will be cast out until God has exhausted every power at his command to bring them into harmony with those laws which are both the rules which God has ordained for life and the principles by which alone life can be sustained.

"*There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth*". As in other New Testament instances where this figure of speech is used, it pictures the impotent rage and resentment of those thus rejected. It does not imply remorse or repentance; the same allusion in the Old Testament indicates the fixed enmity and hatred of the wicked for the righteous. It is only a figure of speech; that which is cast into the fire is in no position either to wail or to gnash teeth. It does serve to stress the fact that those thus barred from the light and life of the eternal state maintain their enmity and their rebellion to the last. Had there been any possibility of repentance and conversion in their hearts God would have waited, for an aeon if need be, to receive them to himself. But in these cases there is no such possibility, there is no hope, and the life that will not have God comes to its inevitable end. Some there are who maintain that there will be none such, that the drawing power of God will eventually succeed in reconciling all men, without exception, to himself, so that eventually all men will be saved. Should that indeed be the happy outcome all who love the Lord will rejoice, for that is the desire of the Father himself and no one of his followers can desire less. But if so, it can only be because all such have in the exercise of their own free will and of their own volition come to him in full loyalty and dedication of life. The Scripture reveals the principles upon which God is working and the relative destinies of those who

become righteous on the one hand and those who deliberately refuse to become righteous on the other; perhaps it will be found at the end that the number of those who steadfastly refuse to accept the appeal of the Lord Jesus is going to be very small, very small indeed. We can at any rate be

sure that if God allows any of his created sons to go into the darkness it will be because even He is powerless to keep him in the light—powerless in the face of the man's own will. For that is a fortress which God will never take by force; allegiance and loyalty must be of voluntary yielding or not at all.

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## THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

An Expository  
Talk

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The New Testament begins properly with the birth of One who is earth's rightful king and immediately the introduction is made commences the ministry of John the Baptist calling upon the nation of Israel to repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And thus a momentous change began in God's dealings with his chosen people. Throughout their history men of God had arisen among their own nation calling them back to their allegiance to the Lord God and the law of his servant Moses, but to none of those faithful prophets was given so vivid and so definite an announcement as was charged upon John. Though those ancient worthies had spoken of and looked forward to the day when God's kingdom would be upon earth, and of the glories of the King who would reign in righteousness, not to them the honour of heralding, and seeing that King. That so signal a message was given to John to announce was not unexpected when we recall the miracle of his birth and the prophetic words of his father concerning him and his destiny which caused the people to exclaim "What manner of child shall this be!" To him, the last of the old line of prophets, was deputed the honour of introducing Israel's king to his own people. What an honour! What a message!

John "*grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing to Israel*" and it may well be that by the time he had grown to prophetic manhood some of the prophetic words about John had been forgotten and a new generation had arisen; yet there was in Israel an air of expectancy that God was about to intervene on behalf of his people. That He did intervene at that time through the prophet John and his Son the King of Israel is the basis of the New Testament gospel, though not as supposed by the people. Though John was of priestly descent his mission did not begin at the temple or in the city. It was ever so with prophets—no code of practice governed them as kings, priests and judges were ruled; they arose any time and anywhere. Their

unconventional appearance on the scene of Israel's life often made for their rejection by the nation and John was no exception though many were baptised of him and his message stirred the rulers in Israel enough to send emissaries to hear from John himself his status and message.

What did the Jews understand by the mandate of John, or better, what should they have understood; and further, what should the Christian of to-day, looking back over the years, see in the phrase the Kingdom of Heaven? Because the Scriptures were read every Sabbath day the Jewish nation would know of the exhortation to impress upon their own hearts and minds the words of the Mosaic law and promises, and by that would know in themselves that they had failed as a people to reach that standard of righteousness which would give them the "days of heaven upon earth" (Deut. 11, 18-21), and thus they would reason that the prophets' call to repent was to encourage them back to their obligation to their God and Saviour. But there was more in it than that. And those who heard John would recall the words of Daniel that "*the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High*" and they would assume that the days were near when they would once more be in their proper status at the head of the nations. If they were expecting their own national ascendancy the course of events and the passage of time would prove that the kingdom was not at hand as they hoped. And the course of events has induced Christians to hold differing thoughts as to the meaning of the kingdom of heaven. Some Christians think of the kingdom *in* heaven, some apply the expression to the church of God or to missionary work, yet it must be clear that none of these ideas quite fit the story. Others believe that John was calling on all to repent, for the king, not the kingdom, was at hand. The king was there in their midst, yet He did not encourage Israel to believe that because the king had come the kingdom on earth was imminent. (In point of fact the

Me to be. Even the present distress *I will* yet turn into joy—all the baser passions *I WILL* transmute into the pure gold of perfect character. And *I WILL* rid the world of all that would defile and destroy, for *I will* not clear the guilty man who delights in his sin, now, or in future days. For “I am what I am” and “I will be what I will be” for the sake of fallen man. That is “My Name for ever and this is My memorial to all generations” (Exod. 3.15).

The scenic setting of the Revelation of the Ineffable Name was partly in the wilderness of Midian, and partly on the crest of Horeb, in the long-ago days of Moses; but it was revealed there for all time. That holy Name contained the germ of the whole plan of redemption—for the execution of the complete intention was embodied in that peculiar sacred Name. Later generations and latter prophets amplified the great theme, as its immensities and implications came to be understood. It set the tongues and hearts of Israel's saintliest men singing with hope and expectation, and inspired the most sublime literature the world has ever seen. That holy Name was Israel's richest heritage. ‘Yahweh’ was Israel's God exclus-

ively for a time. For a whole Age ‘Yahweh’ had neither blessing nor favour for any people save Israel. But that exclusive favour to Israel was a means to an end, for through them, when they were refined and purified God's love, like a mighty flood, was intended to flow to all nations. The people whom *Yahweh* gathered around his holy Name were to be vessels of his mercy to all. Thus that blessed Name—too holy for Jewish lips—stands both as pledge and promise of a wide-reaching Plan to bless all nations through Abraham's earthly seed. God's great purpose is outlined in a promise—the promise is concentrated in a Name. There was a revelation OF the Name; there was a revelation IN the Name. This Name is God's Name, to which Name He will ever be faithful. He revealed that Name to Israel, to hold in trust for a time, but its pledge and promise was for all. The NEED which *Yahweh* pledged himself to meet in Israel, was the NEED of all men everywhere.

*“Praise ye Yah, for good is Yahweh, Sing praises to His Name, for it is full of delight.”*  
Psa. 135-3. (Roth).

*To be concluded.*

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## THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

Mark 4, 3—23

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*“There went out a sower to sow”* (Mark 4.3)

So simple a beginning to a story but how full of potential instruction. In the sowing of seed there reposes infinite possibilities. On the one hand, arrant failure, if weather is unpropitious and the soil sterile; on the other, continuing growth and fruitage, further seeding, and increase through season after season that may never end. The deserts of the earth are the cemeteries of bygone plants and trees that once flourished but whose seeds eventually perished and failed to reproduce their kind; the lush pastures and thick forests of the earth are the descendants of countless generations of plants that fruited and seeded and brought forth anew year after year because the soil was good, and sun and rain played their part. All this was inherent in the word-picture Jesus drew for the multitude that this moment was gathered by the lake-side to hear His teaching.

The parable is evidently intended to illustrate the various degrees of receptiveness to the Gospel message displayed by different hearers. Here is

the reaction of every man who evinces any appreciation of the Word of God and the appeal of Jesus Christ whatever. Here are the varied results of the lodgment of the seed of righteousness in the hearts of men. This parable is fulfilled over and over again as generation succeeds generation, in all the years that have elapsed since Pentecost to the present. It is not, like some of the parables, a picture of some aspect of the end of this Age or the characteristics of the coming Kingdom of God. It is not a dispensational parable. It is the story of the impact of the Gospel upon the mind and heart of every one who gives heed, if only for a moment, to its message, and the ultimate consequence of that impact.

*“There went out a sower to sow”*. A simple approach, but how direct! The vision is flashed as in a moment on the screen, and we see the wide, ploughed field awaiting the seed, the pathway skirting its borders, the line of rocky boulders and large pebbles, cleared from the field, lining the pathway in ragged profusion, and the sower himself, striding along the narrow track, his hand

already in the capacious bag of seed slung across his shoulders. "There went out a sower to sow." His methods were not as the methods of to-day. To and fro across the field he must needs walk, scattering the seed handful after handful, trusting to wind and rain to spread it evenly and bed it down into the soft ground. No drills to turn up the ground and soften it to receive the seed; no great wheeled machines to accomplish the task in a fraction of the time human hands would require to do it. No mechanical aids at all; the seed was simply broadcast over the waiting ground and found lodgment where conditions were favourable. So it is with the message of Jesus; it succeeds best when it is sown without the artificial assistance of man's devising, publicity schemes and organised pressure groups and the like. As with Paul, who knew nothing among the Corinthians "save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" following the relative failure of his more intellectual approach to the philosophers of Athens, so with all who would be efficient "sowers". The simplicity of the Gospel is its greatest recommendation.

But as the sower walked along the edge of the field the winds carried the seed across the hard, beaten pathway he had just left, and there it lay, bleaching in the sun. He went on his way, and the flocks of birds, watching from a safe distance, swooped down quickly on that pathway and quickly devoured every visible shining grain before the return of the sower caused them rapidly to take flight and settle on the trees bordering the field, watching. There was nothing he could do about it. The seed had to be sown broadcast so that at least every piece of good ground received its quota, and in the process it was inevitable that some should fall on ground that was completely unreceptive. Perhaps in another season of sowing that same ground, softened by rain and broken up by man's labour, might receive the seed again and this time allow it to germinate and bear fruit. God does not limit his offer of salvation to one opportunity only; it is open for so long as there is any chance or possibility of response, and hearts that may at the first be hard and unyielding may eventually by the circumstances of life or the persuasiveness of God become soft and receptive and at the last produce the fruit of the good ground. But in the meantime, the word of God falls on the ears but leaves no lasting impression. Idle it lies, finding no real lodgment, no vibrating chord, until Satan, the arch-deceiver, by one of the many means at his disposal obliterates the transient impression which had been made and it is as if the word had

never been spoken at all. Like Israel in the days of Ezekiel "*Thou art unto them a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and that can play well upon an instrument, for they hear thy words, but they do them not*". The word spoken has vanished as surely as did the seed on the pathway after the birds had swooped.

Now he was coming back, a little farther from the path this time, but even so, much of the seed fell among the piles of rocks and boulders which separated path from field. It was safe enough there in the nooks and crannies; the birds were unable to reach it and there was a certain amount of soil and moisture which allowed the seed to germinate and grow. But later on, as the green stems began to show above the pieces of rock, the fierce heat of the sun dried up what moisture there was and the tender green shrivelled up and vanished away, for there was nothing in which the roots could spread and find sustenance. The seed was, after all, only seed. It had within itself the power of life but must take to itself the constituents of growth, the soil, moisture and air necessary to enshroud that life in a material entity which would ultimately play its part in the economy of the world. So often it happens that there is a conversion inspired by the enthusiasm of the moment, engendered perhaps by the emotional atmosphere of a revival meeting or the apparent attraction of finding a life of peace and satisfaction "in Jesus" without realising that such a life is going to involve more than just taking the word from him without doing anything about it or beginning to "grow up in him". Such will receive the word with every manifestation of appreciation and gladness. "This is what we were looking for" say they, and for a while they are very vocal in their expressions of joy and appreciation. But presently there is difficulty, opposition or persecution. Perchance they become disappointed or impatient. Things are not as they expected; the test of time finds them out; the life of consecration to God's service is too narrow, too onerous. It involves giving up things they do not wish to give up. They are like the man who, having put his hand to the plough, looked back, and so manifested his unfitness for the Kingdom of God. These, then, like the seed falling upon the rocks, endure for a time, but when the sun's heat beats upon them, they wilt and vanish away.

Turning the corner of the field, the sower trampled over a patch of weeds and thorny scrub. Unheeding, he scattered his seed over that patch and it germinated and grew, strong and healthy at first. But the weeds and thorns grew too, and faster and stronger than the wheat, and soon there



could be seen only a few pallid fruitless stalks half-hidden among the fast spreading thorns. Discouraging for the sower; the weeds and thorns had only been incipient and barely noticeable when he scattered the seed. Later on, after he had left the field for sun and rain to do their work, they grew so strongly and quickly that the stems and leaves resulting from the good seed became eclipsed and ultimately completely submerged. The nature of the ground may have had something to do with it; weeds normally grow in poor ground, soil that has become deficient in the essential constituents required to make good plants. Perhaps prolonged fertilising was what was wanted here, and a clearing away of weeds and thorns so that in another season seed might be sown that would have a better chance of maturing. At any rate God has provided a future Age for such a re-fertilising and elimination of all that offends so that the seed may be sown again in ground that then may be found more responsive. But this does not appear in the parable, for Jesus was talking about the Gospel as it is preached in this Age, the Age in which it is possible for the *"cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in"* to *"choke the word"*. So here must be seen those who attain a more advanced position at first. More resolute, more determined, they are not easily turned aside by opposition or persecution. They ride over the disappointments and disillusionments and become pillars of strength in the Christian community, and as the years pass by it seems impossible that they could ever fall away. Yet they do fall away. Some meet with success in business and become wealthy in the riches of this world; some attain high honour among men; some have their attention distracted by other aims and pursuits and interests. Imperceptibly at first, but none the less surely, their progress in the things of the spirit slows, and stops, and so they become progressively surrounded and hidden by those interests of this world upon which their hearts have become set, and at last, they are seen no more.

And now the sower is well into the field, his strong hands flinging handful after handful of seed over the soft, yielding soil, where it will lie and germinate, and grow stronger and taller, receiving nourishment from the soil along with the benefit of sun and rain, until at last it stands, proudly erect, a golden glory awaiting the coming

of the reaper. This is the kind of labour and reward that every witness for the truth as it is in Jesus desires to experience and receive. *"Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields"* He said *"for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages and gathereth fruit unto life eternal"*. That is the vision which inspires every one of the sowers as he goes out like that worker in the parable, ardently scattering the seed on ground which he knows to be good, and because he has that knowledge already sees in his mind's eye the harvest that will surely come. Despite the wayside, the stony ground, the weeds and thorns, there are still those who not only hear the word and receive it into sincere hearts, and allow the Spirit to do its great work, but throughout life, be it short or long, remain faithful to their covenant with God, in steadfast faith looking unto Jesus who is not only the Author but also the Finisher of their faith. These survive all the vicissitudes of storm and tempest, the gales of wind and the crushing hail, by virtue of their strong roots penetrating far down into the good soil and taking firm hold thereof, their long, shapely leaves reaching up into the air to receive the sun and rain which is God's gift, attaining at the last that full-fruited maturity which the Apostle Paul in Ephesians calls *"the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"* (Eph. 4.13).

To the end this parable talks of individuals, and the response of individuals to the message of the Gospel. Although it is true that the sowing in good ground eventually produces a company of dedicated and tried and approved believers associated together in one Church which is the Body of Christ, a means in his hand for the reconciliation to God of *"whosoever will"* in the Messianic Age, there is no reference to this or trace of it here. The sown seed comes to maturity because it was sown in good ground but there is no intimation of the ultimate purpose for which it was sown or the use to which the crop will be put. That belongs to a different sphere of thought. There is no question of reaping or harvest here. The end is reached when the sown grain has reached the stage of bringing forth fruit, thirty, sixty, a hundredfold, it matters not. After the full cycle of development has been traversed, the sowing of the seed of the Word has brought forth its fruit in the life of the individual, and that individual is ready for God's purpose.

"To find the Maker and Father of this universe is a hard task; and when you have found him

it is impossible to speak of him before all people."  
—Plato.